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How To Understand Your State Political Process
Once you have decided the focus of what your group wants to advocate for, you must understand the legislative process. While the legislative process basics are mostly the same in all 50 states and Washington D.C., all states differ in small, but important ways.

For example, states like California and New York have year-round state legislators, whereas in a state like Wyoming, the legislature meets once every two years for just 40 days. All states except for Nebraska have traditional bicameral legislatures, meaning they have two legislative bodies, normally one called the House and one called the Senate. For example, Ohio has 99 members in their house and 33 members in their Senate, while Nebraska only has one legislative body with 45 members.

You'll want to start by researching what your legislature looks like and how often it meets in your state Capitol. The National Conference of State Legislators is a great place to start. You will find several resources and information on your legislature and ways to advocate for them. You should also visit your legislature’s website to best familiarize yourself with their work, calendar, and the members who represent your campus.

**State Legislative Process**

If changed, the bill is sent back to the chamber of origin for approval or further consideration.

A vetoed bill goes back to the chamber of origin. If the veto is overridden, the bill moves to the second chamber for its reconsideration. If not, the bill dies.

**Get Involved**

The colors indicate when and how the public can affect legislation at different points in the legislative process above:
While each state's legislature is a bit different in the legislative process, most follow the traditional path for proposed legislation: a bill goes through committees requiring various approvals before it is voted on. Below is a chart that steps you through the general process, but make sure to check what your state's specifics are.

So, you are ready to start your advocacy campaign and push for state legislation. But you are not sure where to begin, if it is even politically realistic, or if your state has already begun to pass similar ideas.

Time to hit the internet and start doing some research. Start with these vital resources in your state, but always remember to ask others, including your administrative contacts and fellow students, how they keep up with your state news.

- **Swipe Out Hunger Staff:** That's right! Think of us, too! Swipe Out Hunger staff are always here to be a resource and to help you find the best strategy for your advocacy campaign. Got a question? Email us at Advocacy@swipehunger.org.

- **Check State Papers/Local News:** These are great resources to understand your local political environment. Search your local paper/news site for terms that are relevant to your issue such as “college hunger.”
  - **Pro tip:** If you search for your state representative, you will find at least one human-interest piece on the representative when they first were elected. These are perfect places to understand them and their interests.

- **Check Your State Rep's Website and Email Their Office** Look up your legislative session dates, the current makeup of your state legislature, and what issues they will be working on in the upcoming session. You can also email your state legislator and let them know you are a student advocate and would like information from them on any efforts to end college student hunger in your state.

- **Ask Your School’s Government Relations Team:** Most schools have a Government Relations team that advocates to local, state, and federal governments on behalf of the school administration. This is a great resource to get information on the current political environment. Sit down with your school's Government Relations team and ask them for advice and to partner, too!
- **Alumni/Former Swipe Out Hunger Leaders**: Former students are always a great resource. If your school has done anti-hunger advocacy in the past, make sure to reach out to former Swipe Out Hunger leaders and set up a 1:1.
  - *Pro Tip: Reaching out to Alumni* is a great idea regardless of your school’s history with advocacy and alumni who have worked with Swipe Out Hunger (even if they did not attend your school) can be a significant asset.

  If you want more tips about how to engage Alumni, e-mail advocacy@swipehunger.org.

- **City Council Members/Website**: When looking at legislation at any level, it is always essential to have as many champions in your corner as possible. Local representatives like City Council members can be a great asset on your team. Find your City Council member, e-mail them asking if they can help your movement to end student hunger. In larger cities, check out the City Council website for information on sessions, pending bills, and to find your area City Council representatives.

- **Google Alerts**: A simple Google Alert can be a straightforward way to stay updated and get an initial sense of your state's political environment. Set up an alert including your city, state, and with terms like "college student hunger," "college student food insecurity," "basic college needs," or "college basic needs policy."

- **Elected Official Social Media Accounts**: Like keeping up with your friends and family, social media is a helpful place to get updates on what is politically happening. Most elected officials use social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and local apps like NextDoor to update their constituents on the news, pending legislation, events, and more. This is a wonderful way to stay up to date and even communicate with your elected officials about the importance of ending hunger on campus.
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Choosing You Advocacy Solution and Focus
How do you know that a policy, rule, or program will end hunger on campus? With so many ideas and policies out there, you can't put all of your resources and attention behind them all, so picking which solutions to advocate for is an important process.

To help you answer this question, Swipe Out Hunger has created a checklist that you can use to help decide whether or not you should support and put resources behind the solution.

If your issue does not check every box, that's okay--no issue is perfect. But strive to check every box during the duration of your campaign.

**Components:**

Does the policy, rule, program, or solution...

- **Add more funding** to college/university budgets, rather than simply instating requirements?
- Ask for **sustainable systemic solutions** rather than one-time/short-term solutions, e.g. only focus on one-time pantry funding or gives a one-time grant?
- Recognize that **campuses need more resources** in the changes it calls for?
- Shed light on **underserved populations/institutions**, e.g. community colleges, former foster youth, DACA recipients, etc.?
- Ensure **students play a role** in advising and implementing the legislation?
- Implement well-rounded, supportive, and sound policies that **take into account school staff capacity** in the development of the bill?

Make sure your voice...

- Adds **value** in supporting it.
- Is **part of this conversation to help it move forward**.
- Has relationships / assets you can **leverage to reach your goal**.
- Is not duplicative of **other groups on campus** who are already seen as the “leaders” on this solution.
- Can attract other groups on campus to **collaborate with on this issue**.
Does your advocacy strategy and solutions...

- Have a **theory of change** and path towards enactment?
- Involve decision makers that represent you or your community?
- Within a **timetable that fits within your limits** (i.e. can this be passed in a year, 3 years)?
- Include multiple “stakeholders”?

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*Theory of change is process that will allow the change to happen. The goal of the theory of change is to help an organization better understand what it is trying to achieve via meticulous planning and evaluation

*Stakeholders are anyone involved in your work/community. This can be students, school admin, local community members)
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State Legislation and Hunger-Free Campus
"Our communities are ready for change,"
- Rachel Sumekh, CEO and Founder of Swipe Out Hunger

First, let's dispel the myth that all legislation is created in some evil laboratory or underground bunker where special interest lobbyists gather around and cackle about how they own elected officials. More often than not, legislation is thought up, written and lobbied for by people like you! That's right, there are no evil potions you need to create to pass state legislation. All you need is a passion and understanding of your issue, some advocacy chops, and knowledge about the legislative process.

The History of the Hunger-Free Campus Bill

In 2017, Swipe Out Hunger was called upon as the guiding author for a trailblazing piece of California legislation, the Hunger-Free Campus bill, that sent $7.5 million directly to public colleges across the state in its first year. The bill has been renewed each year since, resulting in more than $20 million to support California colleges and universities in their food security efforts. In 2019, the state of New Jersey replicated our Hunger-Free Campus bill, which demonstrates the promising yet untapped potential of governmental funds to be allocated for college students’ needs.

Hunger-Free Campus Design

What is the Hunger-Free Campus Bill? The bill takes different forms in each state, but essentially says that if a campus is running a series of common anti-hunger programs, they are eligible for state funding to support their work. Rather than requiring campuses to do something, it simply incentivizes them to take action.
The Hunger Free Campus Act is written to emphasize three main principles:

**Innovative Solutions to Student Hunger**
Hunger-Free Campus allocates funding to schools that not only take up the mission by helping students enroll in CalFresh (i.e. SNAP), but also helps schools furnish campus food pantries, partner with local food banks to distribute food on campus, and establish a Swipe Out Hunger program enabling students to donate unused meal credits to their peers facing food insecurity.

**Ongoing Sustainability**
Hunger-Free Campus was written to ensure sustainable funding for anti-hunger initiatives for years to come. Allowing the bill to be renewed and increased each year has allowed for universities, legislators, and students to advocate for changes in funding and approaches that best serve the community.

**Customized and Tailored Support**
The legislation allotted flexible funding to states, systems, and individual campuses to address the needs of their students. Not every student is perfectly served by one single program or solution. Hunger-Free Campus allows administrators to best choose how to address the issue on hunger on their campus and for their students.

Hunger-Free Campus seeks to foster greater food security on campuses and encourages innovative long-term solutions to end student hunger.

**Passing Your Own Hunger Free Campus Bill**
The Hunger-Free Campus Bill was the result of thoughtful, intentional coalition-building efforts. Here are tips to consider as you seek to write, advance, and pass your own Hunger-Free Campus or other state-based advocacy.

1. **Test and prove your policy proposal.** Policy change is often permanent and far-reaching. Show that your policy will have the intended impact by testing your model. This will enable you to have greater free rein to innovate, learn, and adapt your program. By the time you seek state or federal funding/support, you have the model down, proven data on the impact, and some momentum on the ground.

2. **Proceed with cautious optimism.** Many leaders join a coalition simply because of a relationship, despite their doubt a bill will pass or not. Naivety can be an asset: most times you have no idea how likely/unlikely it is to pass legislation. As you are met with pushback remember that if there is a will, there is a way.
3 **Take the lead of experts.** Experts can take a draft of a bill and make it sound like formal policy. They know which legislators sit on which committees and will remember to thank the legislator for their work after every discussion. Their expertise can advance a bill forward in monumental ways. Looking for an expert? Look no further than the staff at Swipe Out Hunger.

4 **Overcommunicate with your coalition.** A policy’s success is almost impossible without a coalition of partners. Involve a coalition of partners almost immediately, and in turn, they will attract additional allies. Engaging partners in the process means that when your legislation passes, your stakeholders will already feel invested and ready to bring it to life — it also means more people with whom to celebrate and recalibrate. You can engage stakeholders by creating a regular pace of information sharing, such as a biweekly update, inviting constituents to testify, and coordinating communication strategies. Building a strong coalition isn’t easy: Always remember to keep your shared mission at the center when organizational politics get in the way.