How To Schedule Meetings with Elected Officials
You’re ready to step up your advocacy and make your voice heard in the halls of power off-campus. Scheduling and holding meetings with elected officials can seem intimidating, but it doesn't have to be. There are a few essential tips to make sure you can successfully schedule a meeting with an elected official (city, state, or federal) and establish a relationship that will help turn your elected officials into an anti-hunger champion.

**Tips When Scheduling Meetings With Elected Officials**

- **Decide what kind of meeting to request.** You can request a basic meeting where you travel to the district office or schedule a site visit, i.e. have the official meet on your campus or at your campus food pantry. Site visits, can sometimes be more difficult to schedule because of the travel required. If you do schedule a meeting with an elected official outside of their office, choose a site that is easily accessible and plan a visit that maximizes the elected official’s time and interests. For example, if you can involve community partners and draw media attention, this allows the elected official to reach multiple constituents and get press coverage – it’s a win-win for all!

- **Stay flexible.** Your best chance of securing a meeting is to be flexible to the elected official’s needs regarding the time, date, and location of the meeting. Be aware that the elected official may ask to reschedule the meeting at the last minute or may not be able to confirm the final time until relatively close to the date of the meeting. While this makes it more difficult for you to plan, remaining flexible will increase the likelihood that the meeting takes place.

- **If at first, you don't succeed, try, try again!** While you may not get a meeting for the dates you request, making the request puts you on the elected official’s staff radar for future visits. Be sure to follow up with the staff every few weeks to check on the meeting status. If you are unable to secure a meeting with the elected official after several attempts, ask if their staff can come instead. In the event that you are unable to get a meeting at all, know that your efforts have not been in vain. Elected official offices keep track of meeting requests and it’s essential they understand what their constituents want to talk about.

- **Sell, sell, sell.** After sending in a written request, make a clear, concise case as to why the visit would be valuable to the elected official. For example, a site visit will allow them to see firsthand a program or policy being considered. If requesting a community meeting, make the case that the visit will allow the elected official to meet with multiple community leaders at the same time and to get a holistic view of the challenges the community is working to overcome.
Sample E-mail Meeting Invitation to Elected Official

Dear [Elected Official Title LAST NAME],

On behalf of students at the Swipe Out Hunger chapter of [UNIVERSITY NAME], I am writing to invite you to visit our campus and campus pantry that serves students who are fighting food insecurity and hunger.

A new report from the Hope Center shows that [X]% of college students nationwide are experiencing food insecurity. This issue impacts students here at [UNIVERSITY NAME] too. According to our own surveys, more than [X] students on campus are experiencing food insecurity.

As members of this community and campus, we are working together with school and community partners to end student hunger in our community. From our innovative [Swipe Drive program, our campus Food Pantry, Food Vouchers and Student Leadership Groups, LIST OTHER FOOD SECURITY EFFORTS], we believe that no student in [STATE] should have to experience hunger.

We also know that in order to end hunger on our campus, we will need strong leadership from elected officials who are standing with us and willing to advocate for investments in anti-hunger programs that make sure our community can thrive.

We are grateful for your existing leadership on this issue and would love to be able to speak to you more about how students on our campus are coming together to end hunger and how you can support this work.

We would be happy to meet you at your in-district office or to have you and your staff join us on campus for a tour of the [Food Pantry and to see our Swipe Drive program in action, LIST OTHER SITE VISIT OPTION]. To set this up, you can contact me at this e-mail or by phone at [XXX-XXX-XXXX].

We look forward to hearing from and meeting with you. Thank you for your time.

[NAME,
TITLE, SCHOOL]
Taking Action

Holding Advocacy Meetings
You finally got that important meeting you’ve been asking for. Whether it is a state representative, dean of student affairs, city council member, or president of the university, holding effective meetings with those in power is essential to creating pathways for change.

While these meetings can seem intimidating from the outset, there are a few guidelines that can help you build trust, establish a relationship, inform the decision maker, and convince them to join your cause. While each of these tactics might not work perfectly for every meeting you hold, keeping them in mind will help you achieve your goals and set you up for success.

1 **Schedule in Advance**
Decision makers can be busier than one would expect. To establish the best rapport with the decision maker, make sure to be flexible and schedule in advance as their schedules quickly fill up with dozens of other meetings.

For elected officials, we recommend reaching out to schedule a meeting at least three weeks in advance of when you’d like to meet (unless they suggest earlier of course). For campus administration, reach out to schedule at least two weeks in advance.

2 **Don’t Leave Behind, Send Ahead**
Make sure that the decision makers have all of the facts and information they need. Provide them with a one-pager that has 1) a summary of your issue, 2) an overview of your ask, and 3) your contact information. Many call this document a “Leave Behind” because you typically leave it with the person after the meeting. In addition to leaving a fact sheet behind, you should also send ahead. At least 24 hours before your meeting is scheduled, email your one-pager in .pdf format to the email contact that you have for the meeting. This is a great way to remind your contact about your meeting and give them an ability to read materials beforehand.
Meetings Are Relationship Builders

You wouldn’t sit down for a date and immediately know that you will spend the rest of your life with that person. Meetings with elected officials and school administrators are part of a process of building trust and relationships. Sometimes this trust takes time to build, and other times it happens pretty quickly.

This doesn't mean you can’t make a strong ask and an appeal to your side (even if you know they disagree with you from the outset), but it won’t be a successful meeting if you have an antagonistic attitude or demeaning tone. You should always go into your meetings with the intended goal of building that trust.

Follow the Three H’s (Head, Heart, Hand)

As you prepare for your meeting remember to always use the Three H’s: head, heart, hand.

Head: The head is the part of the meeting that explains your issue logically and with data. This is the left side of our brain – the part that processes issues through math and reasoning. Come equipped with firm data points (e.g. number of students on campus struggling with food insecurity, percentage of students who responded in surveys to the need of emergency aid, etc.).

Heart: The heart is the right side of the brain that processes issues through emotions and empathy. This is communicated most often through storytelling (either firsthand or third person). During your meeting, ALWAYS make sure to tell the story of a student impacted by your issue. Bring photos and videos of students (if possible) and leave them behind for the decision maker to reference.

Hand: This is the action step. The hand is how we take what we have processed from the head and the heart and improve upon it. This means having a direct and strong “ask.” An ask is very specific and helps the decision maker understand how they can jump into action (e.g. “Will you call Sodexo and set up a meeting for us to talk about adjusting our Swipe Drive program?” or “Will you co-sponsor SB 434 that will help thousands of students access SNAP?”).
Send a Thank You Note and Follow-Up
Within 24 hours after your meeting, always send a thank you email with follow-up information. This step can make a huge difference in establishing the rapport that you have with the decision maker reminds them of the “ask” you made of them. Even after your initial follow-up, make sure to stay in touch every so often. Send check-in notes, ask for progress updates (not too often...every couple of weeks at most), and keep the relationship moving.

Do Your Research
Research on the decision maker and their past action on your issue. If they are an elected official, make sure you know: 1) their past statements on your issue, 2) when they were elected (and by how much), and 3) what committees they sit on. If they are a school administrator, know if they have met with your group beforehand, if they are passionate about the issue, and what they have previously said to students and the public on your issue.

Keep the Meeting Small
While it might be tempting to bring as many voices as possible to the table, remember that each meeting is a chance to establish trust. Building strong relationships happen when both sides of the meeting have adequate time to interact and get to know each other. Try to keep the meeting to only a handful of people at most. This will allow for the decision maker to get to know you and those in the meeting on a deeper level.
Sample Email and Phone Script To Elected Officials
Communicating with your elected officials is one of the most effective advocacy tools available to you. Legislators want to hear from the people who live in their district. After all, they were elected to represent you!

A physical visit with your legislator is ideal, but if you can't visit in-person, a personal email or phone call is still one of the best ways to deliver your message. It lets your legislator know that you care enough to take the time to focus on the issue of ending hunger.

Need help finding your elected officials? Check out the easy tool at usa.gov/elected-officials.

**Emailing Elected Officials**

A personalized email, as opposed to a form e-mail can be a very influential tactic in influencing your elected official. In your email, make sure you include a personal story, the impact of a bill on students, and why you support or oppose a bill.

Your email will be read by your elected official or their staff. Elected officials usually keep track of the number of emails from their constituents and whether people favor or oppose an issue. It might seem like it’s going into thin air, but it really makes a difference!
Dear [Elected Official Title LAST NAME],

On behalf of students at the Swipe Out Hunger chapter of [UNIVERSITY NAME], I am writing to invite you to visit our campus and campus pantry that serves students on campus who are fighting food insecurity and hunger.

A new report from the Hope Center shows that [X] % of college students nationwide are experiencing food insecurity. This issue impacts students here at [UNIVERSITY NAME] too. According to our own surveys, more than [X] students on campus are experiencing food insecurity.

As a proud [SCHOOL MASCOT], I know that our community cares for each other and our students. We can do more to make sure that each student on campus and throughout our community has the resources they need to thrive.

Therefore, we launched the Swipe Out Hunger chapter in [YEAR] and why I am writing to you today to ask that you stand with our community and support [BILL NAME + PURPOSE, e.g. “S.B. 4528. the “Increase SNAP Access To Students Act”. This act will allow for students who work under 20 hours a week at work study jobs to access SNAP”].

[EXPLAIN WHY THIS BILL IS IMPORTANT, e.g. “We know that SNAP is an integral program that provides access to students and community members to the food they need. We also know that onerous work requirements leave out thousands of students from our community from accessing this important resource.”]

We have made so much progress towards ending hunger here on campus, but there is more work to do. This is why we hope you stand with your constituents and support [INSERT BILL NAME, e.g. “S.B. 4528”]. If you would like to discuss this issue further or learn more about our work on campus, we would love to host you on campus for a tour and you can reach me at [EMAIL].

Thank you for your time,

[NAME]
Calling Elected Officials

Yes, even in the time of social media and smartphones, a phone call is still one of the most effective, personal, and powerful ways to deliver your message. It lets your elected official know that you and your supporters care enough to take the time to focus on the issue of hunger. In a recent study, 86% of Congressional staff members said phone calls from constituents have a lot of influence over a legislator who is undecided on an issue.

Your calls make a difference and most elected officials say it only takes a few calls from constituents to make an impact on their decision and action. The number is even smaller when they are local or state representatives.

Just follow a few simple steps and you can even utilize our sample script below.

1. When you call your elected official’s office, the call will be answered by a staff person (sometimes in cases of local officials, it will be answered by the elected official themselves).
2. Let the staff member know that you are a constituent who cares about ending student hunger and wish to speak to the best staff person on that issue. If the staff person is not available at that time, ask if there is someone else you can speak to.
3. Once you have someone on the line, reiterate that you are a constituent and make your ask (see sample below).
4. If possible, try to personalize your ask with a story from your campus.

Sample Phone Script

Hi,

My name is [NAME] and I am a constituent and student at [UNIVERSITY NAME].

I’m calling today because over [X]% of students here in our community are experiencing hunger and food insecurity. This includes [STORY about the hunger on campus].

[DISCUSS CHALLENGE YOU WISH WAS ADDRESSED, e.g. “Continued cuts to the SNAP program with burdensome and unnecessary work time requirements and restrictions on eligibility have made it even more difficult for students at UNIVERSITY NAME to access the food they need to thrive.”]

This is why I am calling today and asking [YOU/ELECTED OFFICIAL TITLE] to support your constituents and support [BILL NAME, e.g. S.B. 4528, the Increase “SNAP Access To Students Act”].
Sample Email to Campus Administration
So you want to set up a meeting with a school administrator, but not sure where to start? Do you just email out of the blue? What do you say?

Check out an example email below from students at The University of Delaware to see how you can introduce your group and issue to school administrators and invite them to a meeting.

**Example From The University of Delaware:**

Hello [Name of Admin], hope all is well with you.

My name is [Name] and I am a [Student / Role] with [Campus Org Affiliation]. This summer, I was introduced to a phenomenal program to end food insecurity among students on college campuses. It's called Swipe Out Hunger.

A very simplified explanation of the Swipe Out Hunger program is allowing students to donate a portion of their leftover meal swipes in order to support our own fellow students who face food insecurity. I understand there is discussion to be had in order to make this a reality, and that is why I am contacting you today.

Not only would this directly impact [Name of School] students, but it is an incredible opportunity to show students that you care about their wellbeing and will join hundreds of other campuses that have already made this commitment. As of August 2020, Swipe Out Hunger has 120+ chapters at some very acclaimed universities; UCLA, USC, UPenn, U of South Carolina, Cornell and much more. I have garnered overwhelmingly positive feedback in the [Name of School] Class of [2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023] via a campus-wide survey regarding their support for the program, and it would be a pleasure to share it with you.

I understand you must have a very busy schedule with the semester beginning shortly, but if you could spare some time to meet with me to discuss further, it would be tremendously appreciated. My schedule is very flexible and I am willing to work with anything to make this possible.

Thank you so much for your time, and hope to hear from you soon. All the best, [Name]
Taking Action

Social Media Tips and Best Practices
Social media is a powerful advocacy tool. It can help raise the visibility of your issue and get in front of new audiences with greater reach. We've pulled together a few simple best practices for you to employ as you leverage social media for advocacy.

**Tone & Vibe:**
- **Channel dignity.** Whether you are speaking about or to an adversary or talking about the affected population, treat everyone with respect and dignity. This means avoiding words like "disadvantaged" “poor” “program user,” “kids” etc.
- **Focus on the solutions, not the challenges.** While you will need to explain the problem at hand, there is a way to advocate that not only uplifts the target population, but makes the problem seem solvable. It's important that your audience walks away knowing that solutions exist-- and it's your job to make them a priority.
- **Bring in student voices and stories as much as possible.** Give policymakers and other influential decision makers a sense for how hunger affects students on a personal level. Highlight student stories to help them understand how certain policies or programs affect students.
- **Have clear Calls to Action.** Social media is a great way to invoke an emotional response, but don’t stop there! Ensure that your audience is very clear about how they can join in your efforts or learn more.
- **Keep It Simple.** It's really easy to get caught up in jargon of advocacy work. Ensure that you’re translating what your advocacy efforts mean for the layman. Your job is to be “in the weeds” and garner additional support from those who care about your cause, but may not be an advocacy guru like yourself.
- **Use visuals.** Don’t be afraid to jump into Canva to create something compelling and engaging for your audience. We’re big fans of leveraging creative design to compel action, and you should be, too.
- **Tag us. If you need some amplification, make sure to tag @swipehunger!**
Outreach Tactics:

- Every platform of yours has a different audience. Your Instagram may have your peers, whereas your Facebook may be mostly family. Be strategic about what you post so that your asks are specific to each platform’s audience.
- DM some of the influential accounts of the people you want to mobilize. Ask them to share about your efforts. This can be a really simple, yet effective way to extend the reach of your posts.
- Tag relevant stakeholders, including supporters, coalition members, or other leaders that may be able to amplify your efforts. (and make sure your account is public if you want your tags to reach people who don’t follow you!).
- When appropriate, use key hashtags to contribute your advocacy to wider movement efforts.
Advocacy Petition Sample
A petition is a great entry point for students to get involved, all while showing the power of your movement. You can use Google Forms, petition sites, or just plain paper and pen.

Below is a sample petition from Spelman College to expand their Swipe Out Hunger Program. This is just one example of how you can utilize petitions to garner support and show the strength of your movement:

**Example of Petition from Spelman College**

In the tradition of our institutions, we the National Action Network Spelhouse Collegiate Chapter and the Morehouse Student Government Association are standing in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are experiencing food insecurity during their matriculation at Spelman and Morehouse College. We understand that this problem is not new and has been a prominent issue on campuses across the country. As two of the most notable Historically Black College and Universities across the nation, it is imperative that we stand as pioneers in swiping out hunger on Historically Black College and Universities. As students who hold value in the creeds of our institutions, we cannot make a choice to change the world without doing so on campus first.

We cannot live as agents of change while we idly stand by as our peers go without food. We have a solution to this momentous problem, which is Swipe Out Hunger. Swipe Out Hunger is an initiative that can be found implemented on many Aramark campuses in the country. We understand these institutions were predominantly white institutions and feel Aramark should do the same at Spelman and Morehouse.

There are approximately 4,381 Spelman and Morehouse College students, of these students 1,404 face food insecurity while on campus due to the lack of financially being able to afford a meal plan. We understand that while these students are on campus it may be the only time these students will be able to eat for the day. Students who have meal plans may waste unused swipes from their meal plans and they should be able to donate these swipes to their peers in need. These numbers do not include the students on our campus who are vegan, vegetarian, allergic to lactose, gluten or other dietary restrictions who are food insecure on campus.

We are aware that both institutions have their individual contracts with Aramark which could have a negative impact on implementing Swipe Out Hunger on campus and addressing student hunger. We are asking our institutions to revisit their contracts with the company Aramark.
Sample Hearing Testimony
Below is sample testimony given by Swipe Out Hunger to the New York State Senate. This is just one example of what testimony at a legislative hearing can look like. Always utilize the 3 H’s in your testimony: Head (Data), Heart (Story), Hand (Action).

Sample Testimony

Dear Chairwoman Stavitsky, Chairwoman Glick and members of the Joint Committee on Higher Education:

As introduced, my name is Robb Friedlander and I serve as the Advocacy and Organizing Manager at Swipe Out Hunger. Swipe Out Hunger is a national nonprofit whose mission it is to partner with colleges to end student hunger. Since 2010, our organization has served two million warm, nourishing dining hall meals to college students facing food insecurity. You can learn more on our work at SwipeHunger.org

Thank you for the opportunity to present this written testimony before you today. I have two hopes today. The first is that I’m able to elevate the issue of student hunger, that an estimated 45% of our SUNY students have reported experiencing food insecurity in the last 30 days. Secondly, we want to encourage the committees to consider Governor Cuomo’s proposal to expand SNAP access to more college students.

SUNY AND CUNY ARE ALREADY LEADING THE WAY.

Every SUNY has either a food pantry on site (70%) or one directly close to campus (30%). Tasks forces have sprung up on dozens of campuses which are introducing new programs. At the CUNYs, the Healthy CUNY initiative has hired student advocates to raise awareness, introduce new programs and galvanize more support for students’ basic needs.

Both systems have sparked central partnerships to support them in this work. We want to highlight the work of the OTDA who has been dispatching social services staff to SUNY campuses to share information about resources like SNAP to students. And of course the role Single Stop plays at numerous campuses, connecting students to public assistance.

Yet, rates of hunger persist. More action is needed, including at the state level.
WHY STUDENT HUNGER?
According to the US Government Accountability Office, 39% of undergraduates in the US, one in three college students, is food insecure. At the SUNY level, about 45% of student face food insecurity and we recently learned through a study by the Hope Center that a staggering 51% of CUNY students are food insecure. While resources like food pantries and SNAP exist, there are draconian work requirements, many students don’t know these resources are available, or stigma holds them back. Instead, they skip meals, relying on cheap and/or processed foods with low nutritional value.

A student’s ability to focus in class, stay in school, and feel part of the campus community is threatened by food insecurity.

Swipe Out Hunger is a national nonprofit partnering with universities and colleges to end student hunger. Since their start in 2010, Swipe Out Hunger has become the foremost organization responding to the issue through its innovative programming and success in policy as seen in the Hunger-Free Campus Bill movement.

The organization works with colleges and universities to provide financially and logistically efficient anti-hunger programs, including the “Swipe Drive,” allowing students to donate their extra meal plan swipes to their peers who face food insecurity on campus. Recognized for its entrepreneurial nature, Swipe Out Hunger has been named an Obama White House Champion For Change and its founder, Rachel Sumekh, has landed a spot on the Forbes’ 30 Under 30 list. From its beginnings as a grassroots movement at UCLA in 2010, Swipe Out Hunger has since served 1.8 million nourishing meals across 38 states and more than 110 campuses.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO ADDRESS STUDENT HUNGER IN NEW YORK?

Recommendation 1: Expand SNAP.

SNAP is vital to addressing hunger on college campuses. Our nation’s largest anti-hunger nonprofit Feeding America only serves one meal for every 12 meals provided by SNAP.
In Governor Cuomo's State of the State, he put out a call to expand access to SNAP for eligible community college students. An excerpt from his proposal is below:

“Expand College Student Enrollment in SNAP Benefits Governor Cuomo has acted to reduce food insecurity among college students, so they are better able to focus on their studies and attain their college degree. The Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) will establish policy to make more community college students eligible for essential SNAP benefits. Absent clarification that is lacking from the federal government, OTDA will establish state policy that community college students engaged at least half-time in career and technical education courses of study are exempt from the requirement to work 20 hours weekly to qualify for SNAP. These students will then be able to apply for and receive SNAP if they otherwise qualify based on available income and other basic eligibility rules that apply to all SNAP households.”

This policy change will increase the participation of low-income college students in SNAP, providing them with essential nutritional benefits so they are more likely to obtain their college certification or degree. This degree attainment is expected to lead to a lifetime of higher earnings and resulting well-being.

The SNAP program continues to face threats of cuts at the federal level. This proposal would not require any change at the federal level, but would simply help alleviate the burden of excessive work requirements and document gathering. We recommend this proposal be adopted by OTDA and applied to not just community college students but to students at four-year institutions as well.

**Recommendation 2: New York can consider introducing its own Hunger-Free Campus Bill.**

Originally introduced in 2017 in California, the Hunger-Free Campus legislation authored by Swipe Out Hunger, encourages campuses to adopt known best practices. These best practices include the following:

1. Establish a pantry on campus or host pop-up pantries on campus
2. Have staff or OTDA professionals on campus who can enroll students in SNAP.
1. If your campus has a meal plan, allow students to donate their excess swipes to peers.
2. Increase SNAP acceptance on campus.

Through Hunger-Free Campus, colleges and universities that meet the specified requirements are eligible to receive funding from the state to bolster their anti-hunger efforts. In 2017, California’s governor established a $7.5 million dollar fund. In the two years since, the legislation has been renewed and the funding size increased to now more than a cumulative of $20 million.

Other states are considering Hunger-Free Campus as well. New Jersey successfully introduced and passed their own Hunger-Free Campus Act alongside $1 million for campuses. State legislators in Minnesota, Maryland, and Pennsylvania are all preparing to introduce similar legislation.

Funding for basic needs on campuses has an outsized impact. Supporting students’ basic needs safeguards our country’s multi-billion dollar investment into financial aid. A student cannot thrive without access to regular healthy meals. The importance of meals goes beyond calories and plays a significant role in the student’s social, emotional, and mental health. Below are a few testimonials from students demonstrating the many ways access to meals positively impacts their experience on campus.

“I get more sleep and pay more attention in class because I’m not hungry. I can exercise in the morning because I won’t feel nauseous from skipping dinner the night prior.”

“I have become more resilient to stressful situations now that I am eating regularly.”

“This program made me feel like the college really cares about me, beyond academics.”
We appreciate the committee’s interest and investment in the success of our state’s college and university students. If there are any questions on our recommendations or if your office welcome opportunities to work alongside you to advance this cause, please contact me at robb@swipehunger.org.

Thank you for your continued commitment to our students and a higher education system that supports all students.

Robb Friedlander
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