

This is an updated version of the toolkit put together by the former Director of Advocacy and Agency Relations, Mary Sullivan, in 2013. On pages 12-16 of the toolkit, there are three appendices with communications templates for use by Food Bank of Alaska and Alaska Food Coalition partners.

What is policy?

A course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a government, party, business, or individual.

Public policy is the means by which government officials address the needs of its citizens by deciding to act, or not act in order to resolve a problem through amending, creating, or defending laws and regulations.

Who are Policy Makers?

- Legislators (state and federal)
- State administrators
- Municipal or borough leaders and staff
- Internal agency/organization leadership, such as an Executive Director or Board of Directors
- Anyone who influences a decision that impacts policy and/or your practice environment or issue topic

Why host a visit?

One of the most important reasons to host a legislative site visit is that the influential person may not understand that hunger is a problem in your community. Or, if they do know it is a problem, they may have misconceptions about *why* it is a problem. For example, they may think that all hungry people are homeless and jobless. They may be surprised to find out that a growing percentage (currently about half, but still growing) of the people our network serve have jobs and have children or seniors (or both!) in the home. They may be surprised to find out that veterans are a growing demographic visiting your pantry. New insights into hunger as a problem may influence the influencer. You may be able to be the difference in how that legislator, governor, administrator, policy maker prioritizes funding, interprets regulation (more strictly or less strictly), etc. Your “boots on the ground” experience is VITALLY IMPORTANT. Telling your story and your clients’ stories make a profound difference!

If the policy maker doesn't understand the magnitude of the problem, then they can't use their influence to do anything about it. We want people of influence to care about hunger in their community so that they can

- Allocate funds toward emergency hunger relief
- Alleviate barriers in policy that make food distribution more difficult (food safety, transportation, tax codes around donated food, etc. etc. etc.)
- Remove barriers to our clients getting the timely help they need from government programs, and also to remove those policy barriers that may keep people in poverty. Our goal is to empower individuals to get the help they need, and then become productive, empowered members of society contributing to the public good
- Bring awareness in the community to other influential people, such as donors

But another reason to host a site visit, which is often overlooked, is that policy makers *want* the chance to get a photo opportunity with you; they want to be seen giving back to their community; they want to be in touch with the issues impacting their district. They *want* the chance to come visit you.



Senator Lisa Murkowski helping with a box build at Food Bank of Alaska

When to host a visit

Anytime is a good time to invite a legislator or other policy maker out to visit. You could simply provide a tour of your facilities. Policy makers might be particularly interested in:

- Your food distribution at your food pantry
- Hunger Action Month in September
- A Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) site
- A fundraiser event communicating your mission and services
- Holiday meal distributions



Lt. Governor Byron Mallott at Food Bank of Alaska

Before the Visit

- **Do your research on your policy maker's district, background, issues they care about, their family or extracurricular activities**, general policy positions, affiliations, time in office and other facts. The more you know about a legislator or policy maker, the more you will get out of the interaction!
- **Invite your legislator/policy maker and work with them or their staff to select a date that works with their schedule.** Check out the attached for sample phone scripts and letters.
- **Establish your talking points.** Your talking points should not only speak to the need surrounding hunger in your community, but should also include what's being done to solve the problem and highlight why your organization is vital. You should also think of 1-2 client stories. Perhaps

you even know a client who would be willing to be there on the tour/meeting with you. **Having the policy maker interact with those impacted by hunger is important and extremely impactful.** These talking points should go on a legislative leave behind (a one-two page flier or document that you will send with the policy maker when they leave).

- **Establish your “ask.”** Even if your ask is simply just for the policy maker to reach out to you when issues related to hunger, poverty, minimum wage, food stamps, (FILL IN THE BLANK) comes up, you should have an ask – some call to action – for the policy maker. Is there a regulation you would like him/her to look into? Is there a funding request your organization has? Is there an issue that requires new legislation?
- **Create an agenda,** and meet with anyone else from your organization who will be involved with the meeting in advance to go over talking points and agenda.
- If this is a community event or fundraiser, **let the policy maker know whether he/she will be addressing an audience** and how long they should speak (they may need some talking points if they are expected to provide a speech). Also, let them know whether any media will be invited.
- If asking the policy maker to address an audience, be sure to work with his/her staff to create a bio/introduction for them. Then select the right person to introduce the policy maker (a board member, a valuable volunteer, your executive director, etc.).
- **Send a reminder the day before the meeting.**
- Find someone to take pictures of the meeting. Check the cameras in advance and make sure they are functioning properly and have been charged.
- **Review your talking points before the policy maker arrives.** Check with the Alaska Food Coalition and/or Food Bank of Alaska to see what current and important policy and/or funding items you can add to your general talking points list. Think about real-life situations in your pantry/organization that can be used as lead-ins to your talking points, or as follow up to issues raised by the policy maker.

- **Let your board know that the policy maker is coming**, and invite your board president or other board members. Speak with key staff or volunteers. Speak to major donors or other community leaders who are involved with your organization - “grass tops” allies - who might be good to have at your visit.
- It is important for you to know and understand both sides to any issue you choose to discuss with them, at least as much as is possible. **FBA and AFC are here to help as a resource to assist you in understanding current food policy or funding issues.** Don’t hesitate to reach out to us if we can help!
- **Remember, they are just human beings**, with feelings, the capacity to think, and the desire to achieve positive outcomes for their communities. Legislators may have one opinion one day, but change their minds on another day based on new information. You may be able to provide that information.

On the Day of the Visit

- **Breathe deep, be organized, and expect a positive, productive visit!** You are prepared. It is going to go well! You are the expert on hunger in your community.
- Your job is to **connect with the policy maker and his/her staff.** You want to connect in a valuable, meaningful and efficient way – and not waste his/her or your time.
- When they arrive, give them a warm welcome. A friendly and sincere smile and solid hand shake will go far!



Senator Dan Sullivan visiting with partners and FBA employees

- Introduce yourself, and any other key staff or board members present. Don't assume that the policy maker remembers you from any previous encounters. **It's always good to provide a good introduction, every time.** Consider name tags for you and your staff or board members present for the visit.
- Ask if he or she would prefer to tour the facility first or sit down for a relaxed, informative conversation first. **Keep an eye on the time and be sure to fit in everything on your agenda!**
- If hosting an event, be sure to provide a public introduction.
- Start the conversation, whether while on the tour or sitting to converse, on common ground! **Start with something light, a comfortable and familiar topic to the legislator.** This might be about a hobby (fishing, boating, etc.), about family or about a common memory etc. Think small talk.
- If the policy maker seems genuinely interested in facts and figures (their eyes aren't glazing over), providing statistics and key talking points during the tour is a good way to work in your policy issues and information about the work you do. Remember though that **some policy makers don't respond as well to facts and figures, but prefer the human interest story** or real life examples and anecdotal information, so be sure to have both ready.
- If your event involves a food distribution, consider offering the legislator the opportunity to hand out meals with your staff. **Note: if you're planning to do this, this should be arranged BEFORE the event.**
- **Present your concerns one at a time**, and then be willing to listen (really listen) to the policy maker's response. Their response will tell you a lot about the framework of the policy maker's perspective or worldview, and you can use these observations to amend your messaging in the future or "on the fly" during your visit. Use their responses as a springboard to introduce your ideas and issues
- **Ask the policy maker what you can do** at your pantry/organization to accomplish some of his or her legislative or other goals (but don't promise anything).

- Ask how your pantry/organization supporters should best approach him or her on legislative matters. Does he or she prefer phone calls? Faxes? Emails? Visits? **It is helpful to know which of their staff work on the food policy or health related issues that connect with your policy issues.** Make note of this and use this staff as a resource in the future for pantry requests or efforts.



Mayor Ethan Berkowitz with FBA staff during Hunger Action Month

- **Compliment or thank the policy maker on a vote, legislation, or other work they have done.** Serving in public office and living every day under the watchful eye of the public and the media. Both require sacrifices and long hours. Politicians like to know that their efforts are appreciated.
- If appropriate, **consider lobbing a “softball” question** on one of the official’s or candidate’s favorite subjects, to help put the policy maker at ease and in good standing with those present. But don’t let the policy maker/official steal the show and get sidetracked on that issue, and not yours.
- If the legislator has questions you cannot answer, **be sure to offer to find the answers.** Make note of the question, and then add it to your list for follow up after the visit. Be sure to follow through in a timely manner. This will go a long way toward establishing your credibility, and also provides a good excuse for connecting with the policy maker again.

- **No voice is more important to a legislator or candidate or policy maker than someone from his or her district**, because that voice is a vote. However, you should not express specific voting support or lack of voting support for a candidate during the election season while representing your organization, or discuss withdrawing or providing general support based on the legislator's action during a non-election season visit. You don't want to be perceived in the wrong light.
- **Make sure photos are taken of the candidate or legislator or policy maker throughout the visit.** Consider posting these on your agency's Facebook page or publishing them in your newsletter.
- **Make your ask toward the end of the meeting** after you've had the chance to cover your talking points. You can also fit it in earlier in the visit if it naturally comes up, but reiterate it again at the end of the visit.
- **Provide contact information** to the legislator/candidate/policy maker (put on your legislative leave behind materials), and let them know you plan to follow up with them.
- **Offer to be a resource** to the policy maker on food policy and hunger issues (or poverty issues etc.) in your community. If you want your elected officials to make wise decisions, they need wise people around them. Be one of those wise advisors.

The “Please Don't Ever Do's”

- **Never** be argumentative. Remember, arguing will not help if the two of you are on different sides of an issue. Try asking, “What would help you rethink your position?”
- **Never** be critical of personalities: make your points about issues.
- **Never** lose your cool: stay calm.
- **Never** tell half-truths: don't distort or conceal important facts.
- **Never** waste a VIP's time: be brief and to the point.
- **Never** make public assumptions about another person's motives.

The “Please Do’s”

- **Do** have others present with you who are knowledgeable on the issues you plan to discuss.
- **Do** have others present with you who are influential and might grab the ear/attention of the policy maker
- **Do** deal with only one (or at most two) issue(s) at a time.
- **Do** know relevant legislation and opposing views on your issue.
- **Do** find common ground and be willing to consider a compromise.
- **Do** express appreciation for the VIP’s work, support, time, etc.

After the Visit



- With **timely, appropriate, and relevant follow up**, your credibility as a resource to the legislator will skyrocket. Your ability to be heard at a future date on a different issue will increase exponentially. Never neglect the follow-up!
- **Conduct any research or gather any information requested.** Don’t forget the AFC or FBA as a resource to help you with this. Provide the requested information/answers to the policy maker with the relevant items listed below.
- **Send your contact information to the legislator or key staff**, even if you already provided it during the visit.

- **Send a copy of your talking points and fact sheets** (even if you already provided it during the visit).
- **Send a handwritten note** thanking him/her for the visit, restate your concerns/ask, and provide copies of any photos. Consider having your ED or Board President sign the photo with a thank you to the legislator. *(NOTE: You may use the legislator's photo in a non-endorsement news piece, unrelated to any upcoming elections. You should only use the candidate's photo in a newsletter if you are including photos of all the candidates running for that particular seat, or if you can use the photo in a news piece that does not mention his or her candidacy or the election, and that does not show any hint of endorsement for that candidate or party.)*
- **Send copies to the legislator/policy maker of any future newsletters, publications, or media articles** highlighting the work of your pantry/organization.
- **Keep in touch with your legislator/policy maker all year.** Send notes of appreciation. Send cards on holidays. Send short emails about policy and funding issues relevant to food policy or hunger in his/her district.
- **Pick up the phone** to call from time to time to restate your position before important hearings or votes on legislation or budget.
- **Visit your legislator's home office during the interim/recess**, and if at all possible, visit their office in the Capital during session. In all of your contacts, offer to be a resource on food policy/hunger issues and express appreciation for the legislator's work.

Resources

- Contact us for more information or for help setting up your visits, establishing talking points, choosing a policy issue to focus on, or for any other tips for your advocacy efforts:
 - ◆ Cara Durr, Director of Public Engagement, cdurr@foodbankofalaska.org, 907-222-3113
 - ◆ Sarra Khlifi, Alaska Food Coalition Program Manager, afc@foodbankofalaska.org, 907-222-3103

- This handy “how to” from the Western Region Organization of Resource Councils is a useful tool for hosting visits with legislators:
<http://worc.org/userfiles/Influence-Public-Officials.pdf> . Check out their other “how to’s” here: <http://worc.org/HowToGuides/>.

- The Food Research Action Center (FRAC) also has a number of tools for legislative site visits. They have tool kits on doing site visits, including visits focused on child nutrition sites:
 - ◆ [Congress Site Visit Opportunities](#)
 - ◆ [SNAP Site Visit Guide](#)
 - ◆ [Child Nutrition Site Visit Guide](#)

- [Resources on how to find which legislator represents you and your organization](#)

- [Find Your Legislator](#)

Appendix A: Sample Letter-Style Invitations to Legislator

[Your Name]
[Site Name]
[Street Address]
[City, ST ZIP Code]

Month Day, Year

[Honorable Title First Name Last Name]
[Alaska State or US Senate/ Alaska State or US House of Representatives]
[Street Address]
[City, ST ZIP Code]

RE: Invitation in your Home District to [Your Organization Name]
Dear [Senator or Representative] [Last Name]

On behalf of [Your Organization Name], our Board Members, our staff, and the hungry families in our community, I would like to extend this invitation to visit our [Pantry/Feeding Site] in your home district during this interim period.

I know your schedule is busy, and I would be delighted to work with you to find a suitable day and time. A date this summer or early fall would be ideal. We will be celebrating Hunger Action Month in September, and we have several opportunities this summer to tour our food distribution and meet the wonderful constituents, including children and seniors, in your district that our pantry serves, so this is a particularly excellent time for a visit, if it suits your schedule.

We would be thrilled to give you a tour of our facility and happy to answer your questions about hunger and food policy issues in our community. We'd welcome you too, to use this visit as an opportunity to mingle with your constituents—and we will happily supply you with photographs of your interactions for your use in a newsletter or other communication.

[This paragraph is optional!] As it would be a particular honor to host you at our facility, we would like to coordinate an event at the [Pantry/Feeding Site] to involve the community in conjunction with your visit. It's important for this

reason that we hear back from you as soon as possible regarding your choice of date(s).

Before closing, I would be remiss without expressing our appreciation for your hard work this past legislative session and for your dedicated service on our behalf. Thank you in advance for consideration of this invitation. We look forward to hearing back from you and to a visit with you soon.

Respectfully,

[Your Name]

[Your Organization Name]

[Your Contact Information]

Appendix B: Sample Phone Script Inviting Legislator to Visit Your Site

Hi! This is [Name] from [community]. I'm calling on behalf of [Name of Pantry, Organization or Feeding Site] to invite [Senator/Representative or Policy Maker's Name] and/or any staff from your office to visit our [Pantry/Site] in your home district. [Insert name of Pantry/ Site] provides essential services to our community.

Option 1: We would be thrilled to give you a tour of our facility and happy to answer your questions about hunger and food policy issues in our community. Please contact us at [insert phone number]. Again, our number is [repeat phone number]. If you have any questions, please let us know. Thank you. Good bye.

Option 2: We would be thrilled to give have the [Senator/Representative] and/or staff out to volunteer at our next food distribution and get the chance to meet and interact with constituents who utilize our services. We would also love to provide a tour of our facility and happy to answer your questions about hunger and food policy issues in our community. Please contact us at [insert phone number]. Again, our number is [repeat phone number]. If you have any questions, please let us know. Thank you. Good bye.

Option 3: We would be thrilled to give have the [Senator/Representative] and/or staff out for an event we are hosting for the community on [Date] from [start and end time] at [insert location]. The event is called [insert event title] and the media have been invited as have [insert who has been invited, I.E., schools, community in general, business community etc.]. The purpose of this event is to raise awareness about hunger in our community as well as what is being done to solve the problem of hunger in our community. There will also be a fundraiser for the [Name of pantry]. We would be honored if you could attend and say a few words about what your office is doing for our community on this and other important safety net services issues. We know and appreciate how hard the [Senator/Representative] works on behalf of our district. We also would be happy to provide your office the chance to meet and interact with constituents who utilize our services. We would also love to provide a tour of our facility and happy to answer your questions about hunger and food policy issues in our community. Please contact us at [insert phone number]. Again, our

number is [repeat phone number]. If you have any questions, please let us know. Thank you. Good bye.

Phone Tips (Borrowed from Section Four of APCA's Advocacy Handbook):

- Before you place the call, take a moment to gather your thoughts. Write a mini-outline of what you plan to say.
- Identify yourself by stating your name and address. If you are the legislator's constituent, state that you are.
- Briefly educate the legislator about your pantry/feeding site. Your main emphasis should be that your site is meeting a clear need in the community, in a quality manner, and in a cost-effective way through the delivery of hunger related services to those who need it most.
- Tell the legislator or staff person your specific issue and your request for action in less than four minutes. Keep your message simple and specific.
- Ask for a commitment to your issue and inquire what the legislator plans to do.
- Be concise. A short phone call can accomplish much.
- If a staff person is taking your call, politely ask how your message will be conveyed to the legislator. Review concise talking points if necessary. For current, relevant talking points you can always feel free to contact the FBA and AFC Advocacy Team (cdurr@foodbankofalaska.org or afc@foodbankofalaska.org).
- Ask the legislator or staff person to provide his or her response to you in writing; provide your email and/or mailing address.
- Always be friendly and polite. Don't engage in discussions off topic or in controversial issues, especially if you have never met the staff person or legislator before.

Appendix C: Sample Letter-Style Thank You Note to Legislators

[Your Name]
[Site Name]
[Street Address]
[City, ST ZIP Code]

Month Day, Year

[Honorable Title First Name Last Name]
[Alaska State or US Senate/ Alaska State or US House of Representatives]
[Street Address]
[City, ST ZIP Code]

RE: Invitation in your Home District to [Your Organization Name]

Dear [Senator or Representative] [Last Name]

On behalf of [Pantry/Feeding Site], our Board Members, our staff, and the hungry families in our community, I would like to thank you for taking the time to visit our clinic this summer.

We know your schedule is busy and your time is valuable. Therefore, we would like to express our sincere appreciation for the attention and concern you demonstrated by visiting our [Pantry/Feeding Site]. We hope that your visit provided insight into the crucial role our [Pantry/Feeding Site] plays in providing our community with essential food and hunger services. We look forward to your continued support throughout the legislative session. [Optional: Enclosed are follow-up materials in response to your questions during your visit.]

Once again thank you for your time and support.

Respectfully,

[leave room for signature of first names]

[Your Name and Title]
[Your Organization Name]
[Your Contact Information]