The Power of Advocacy

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Session Agenda

1. Hunger in Ohio
2. Ohio Anti-Hunger Advocacy Priorities
3. What is Advocacy and Why Engage in it
4. Key Steps to Being Successful
5. Tools Available
Hunger in Ohio

**Current Situation**

- More than a third of the people in our state are living in households with incomes that make them eligible for help from a foodbank.
- 1 in 6 of our neighbors and 1 in 4 of our children struggle to access enough food for an active and healthy lifestyle.

**How come?**

- Many factors contribute to food insecurity and the increasing demand for emergency food, including:
  - home utilities
  - health care
  - higher education
  - housing and transportation
  - rising food costs
  - wage stagnation
Food insecurity and hunger are major public health crises and directly contribute to the rapidly rising cost of health care.

The connection between hunger and negative healthcare outcomes drives up costs for the state and for all Ohioans. Hunger costs Ohio more than $6.97 billion in direct costs related to health care, lost educational attainment and diminished productivity.
MOF Federal Policy Priorities

- Ensure the Federal Budget Protects a Strong Safety Net
- Ensure the Next Farm Bill Reduces Hunger in America
- Reduce Hunger Through Federal Spending Legislation
State Budget Request:
Mid-Ohio Foodbank is asking the Ohio General Assembly in the upcoming 2018-2019 budget to invest approximately $25 million per fiscal year in a comprehensive approach to hunger relief. The people we serve would be the direct beneficiaries of more fresh produce, protein items, and wholesome, nutritious food that we all need to thrive.
MOF State Policy Priorities

State Budget Request:
• The Annual $25 Million Request Will Fund Proven Initiatives, the Ohio Food Program and the Ohio Agricultural Clearance Program
What is Advocacy?

**Advocacy** (n.) *The American Heritage Dictionary*: 1. The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, an idea, or policy

**Advocate** (n.) *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*: 1. One who argues or pleads for a cause or proposal

Advocacy encompasses the actions we take to effect change, usually aimed toward influencing policy, practice or attitudes.

Advocacy can take many forms but will always involve action:
- Educating
- Participating
- Contacting
- Encouraging
Are you an Advocate?

• By a show of hands, who has advocated on behalf of our hungry neighbors?
Mid-Ohio Foodbank Advocacy

• Target elected officials through grassroot and grasstop campaigns

• Maintain communications with elected officials surrounding hunger and policy issues
Mid-Ohio Foodbank Advocacy

• Mid-Ohio Foodbank works with our elected officials to create programs that help do the following:
  • Increase opportunity among the people we serve
  • Maintain longstanding bipartisan commitments to protect anti-hunger programs from budget cuts and harmful policy changes
Federal Government
Why Engage Your Legislator?

• Legislative action can be most effective
• Sometimes it’s the only effective action
• Helps you to define your issue
• Creates positive publicity
• Gains you powerful allies
You’re The Expert!

- Most legislators are generalists
- You work directly with constituents and know the impacts of policy on constituents
- You see changes and trends in communities first

Know Your Legislator!

- Find out history, areas of interest, past involvement
- Tell legislators what you’re doing for their community
- Know the issues and share your knowledge
- Ask for what you want
- It’s all about the personal touch
- Call and find out who your primary contact for your issue will be. Staff are very important.
- You don’t have to do it by yourself
Tools for Success

- Constituent call
- Site visit
- District office visit
- DC visit
- Call-in days
- Petitions
- Letters of support
- Resolutions, proclamations
- Traditional and social media
- Client Stories
Model Invitation Letter

Please reference your packet for a sample letter
Social Media

Facebook:

- It’s National Nutrition Month in March! At our foodbank, we see a direct connection between hunger and negative healthcare outcomes and it is costly to our state. In fact, hunger currently costs Ohio nearly $7 billion in direct costs related to healthcare, lost educational attainment, and diminished productivity. #EndHungerOhio

Twitter:

- Have you signed our petition yet to ensure farmers can keep providing extra food to the hungry? Sign on today! http://bit.ly/2qk52s #EndHungerOhio

- Hunger is completely preventable. Join us to ensure that OH families know where their next meal will come from: http://bit.ly/2qk52s
Ideas for Successful Site Visits

- Basic tour
- Community Meeting
- Activity Based
- Client and Program Interaction
How to Get Their Attention?

- Persuasive data
- Impactful stories
- Clear information – your ask!
- Outcomes and other data demonstrating past successes
- Secondary positive/negative outcomes of the issue/need
Data is always more compelling when paired with stories to put a “face” to the bigger picture and personalize the issue.
Success Stories

If possible, it’s great to get success stories or testimonies of gratitude in front of legislators to provide examples (beyond the data) of the justification for your “ask.”
Your “Ask”

Never assume that any legislator or legislative aide is familiar with all of the details of your program or “ask”— not even your champions.
Basic Messages for Lawmakers

• Access to food can stabilize struggling families, make Ohioans healthier, support Ohio workers and stimulate Ohio’s economy.

• Hungry children can’t learn, hungry adults can’t compete for jobs and hungry seniors are less independent.
Things to Remember When Contacting Your Legislator

- It matters how we contact legislators
- Be specific in your ask
- Be personal
- Remember human nature
- Don’t underestimate your influence
Advocacy Roadblocks

What is currently preventing you from engaging in advocacy?

• Lack of comfort with advocacy process
• Lack of knowledge with the issue(s)
• Lack of time/staff
• It doesn’t make a difference, so why bother?
Do Constituents Really Matter?

- Public Opinion: 16%
- Member of Congress Opinion: 95%

"My rep. cares about what I think."
"Staying in touch with constituents."
Do Constituents Really Matter?

Members’ Responses to Aspects of Job They Consider Most Important

- Staying in touch with constituents: Very Important 95%
- Feeling that you are performing an important public service: Very Important 84%
- Feeling invested in the work you are doing: Very Important 84%
- Understanding how your job contributes to society as a whole: Very Important 75%
“If your elected official has not already arrived at a firm decision on an issue, how much influence might the following advocacy strategies directed to their office have on his/her decision.”

-Congressional Management Foundation
Thank You!

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