

Time is Money: Preparing Your Message

As school nutrition professionals, you are the experts in your field and will often be called upon to advocate for your program at the local, state, and national level. You will find that the amount of time to make your case can be limited, so it is helpful to prepare a strong yet succinct message. Answering these questions can help you develop a message that is clear and compelling and provides the necessary information for your audience.

1. Who are you?

- Are you a constituent? Are the students and families you serve constituents?
- Briefly describe your work, background and relationship with SNA. This is your opportunity to establish yourself as the expert.

2. What is the issue for the meeting?

- Be prepared to describe your issue and don't be surprised if your legislator is unfamiliar with it. It can be hard to do so briefly, but using plain language and thinking in bullet points can help hone in on the heart of the issue.
- As time is limited, try to focus on only one or two pressing issues.
- If possible, bring data and examples with you. Facts and stories can help policy makers to make the case to colleagues.

3. Why is this issue important to you?

- Because you know this world better than most, you can discuss the impact – both positive and negative – any situation would have on your program.
- Be prepared to discuss the opposing view as well, as it can help shape the discussion and demonstrate your expertise.

4. Why should this issue be important to the policy maker?

- Describe how this issue will affect his/her constituents. This can range from kids going without meals to job loss/sustainment to economic development. It is easier for policy makers to support a positive change in their area such as development of a school garden, but most will work hard to mitigate negative impacts such as financial impacts that result in eliminating feeding programs.

5. What action would you like the legislator to take?

- Always have a clear call to action and always ask for a follow-up or response.
- Be specific in your request– do you want them to write a letter supporting your position? Reach out to colleagues? Hold a hearing? Visit your school?
- Sometimes the best action is to keep dialogue open. Be sure to follow up in a timely manner.

6. What can you leave behind?

- Try to leave something in writing that is factual and tells the story. What you leave behind should mention the issue and help them remember your visit.
- Examples can be a District Profile Backgrounder, photos of school meals, and/or kids' artwork.