



School Nutrition Association Advocacy Toolkit

Leveraging Your Voice to Strengthen School Nutrition Programs

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TO OUR ADVOCATES	4
The Power of Grassroots (You!)	4
What They're Saying	4
Looking Ahead	4
HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW	5
Legislation is Introduced	5
Committee Action	5
Floor Action	6
Conference Committee	7
The President	8
The Bill Becomes a Law	8
LEGISLATION VS. REGULATION	9
The Rulemaking Process	9
Regulatory Advocacy	10
Does it make a difference?	10
SNA ACTION NETWORK: JOIN THE MOVEMENT	11
Online	11
In Person	12
SNA's Legislative Action Conference	12
The District Office	12
Cafeteria Site Visits	12
Town Halls	12
Planning an Effective Meeting	13
USING YOUR VOICE	17

Developing an Impactful Message	17
PR: Tools to Develop Your Message with the Public	18
Stop That Bill! When Problematic Legislation Arises	19
STATE ADVOCACY	20
Your State Legislative Position Paper	20
Hiring a Lobbyist for Your State Association	21
Additional Resources for State Advocacy Efforts	22
State Advocacy in Action	22

TO OUR ADVOCATES

The Power of Grassroots (You!)

The United States legislative and regulatory process is designed to be “of the people, by the people, for the people.” Contrary to what some may believe, you don’t need any special connections, credentials, or titles to share your voice as a citizen and constituent. When we use consistent and strategic communication, we can move mountains!

What They’re Saying

Each year SNA advocates send hundreds of thousands of messages to Congress and hold hundreds of meetings on Capitol Hill and in district offices. In our meetings, calls, and conferences we’ve heard the same thing over and over again. Legislators, congressional staffers, and USDA leadership have all pointed to the remarkable power of school nutrition advocates when we take action together as one voice.

We are so grateful to have impassioned citizens like you doing what it takes - both in the cafeteria *and* the halls of our government!

Looking Ahead

SNA’s goal is to continue our strong working relationships with lawmakers and the USDA while providing a clear and well-understood advocacy message at the state and local levels. Keeping our students nourished and prepared for success begins from the ground up - with the laws and policies that shape school nutrition programs.

“We do not have government by the majority. We have government by the majority who participate.”

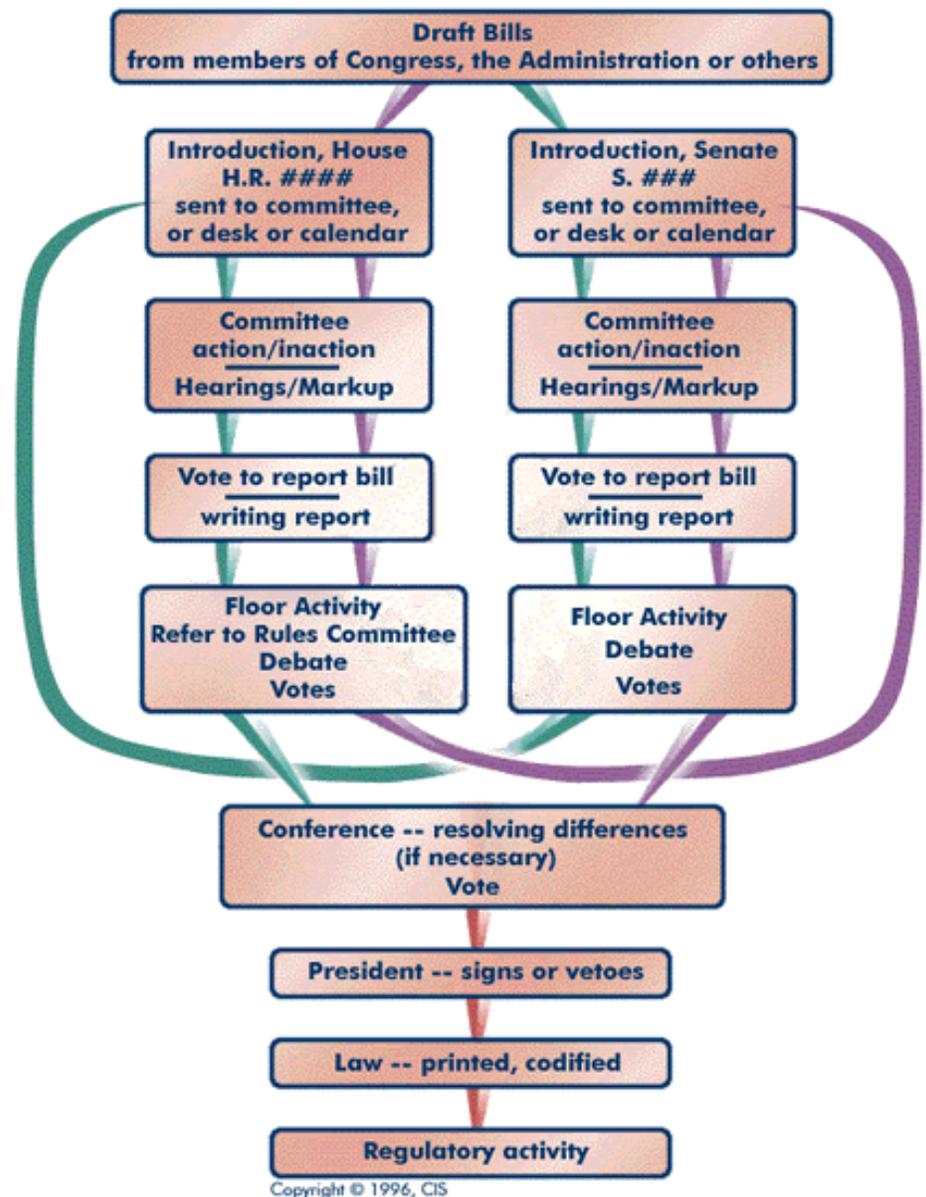
Thomas Jefferson

HOW A BILL BECOMES A LAW

How does a bill originate, and what happens to it as it moves through Congress? Below is a description of how a bill becomes a law. The process can happen in parallel tracks in both Chambers or begin in one and finish in the other.

Legislation is Introduced

- Any Member of Congress can introduce a piece of legislation. In the House, legislation is handed to the Clerk of the House. In the Senate, Members must gain recognition of the [presiding officer](#) to announce the introduction of a bill.
- The bill is assigned a number (i.e., HR.1 or S.1) and labeled with the sponsor(s)'s name(s). It is important to have a bill co-sponsored by multiple, bi-partisan members.



Committee Action

- The bill is then referred to the appropriate Committee or Committees by the Speaker of the House or the presiding officer in the Senate. A bill can also be split into parts and sent to multiple Committees.

- The Chairman often assigns the bill to Subcommittee, where the first hearings take place.
- The Full Committee will hold a "mark-up" session during which it will make revisions and additions to the subcommittee version. The Chamber must approve, change or reject all committee amendments before conducting a final passage vote.
- The Committee staff prepares a [written report](#) explaining why they favor the bill and why they wish to see their amendments, if any, adopted.
- Once a bill passes the Committee vote, the legislation is placed on the respective [Chamber's Calendar](#).

Most bills, about 90%, never make it out of Committee. Only about 2-6% of all bills pass both Chambers and become law.

Statistics and Historical Comparison,
[GovTrack.us](https://govtrack.us)

Floor Action

Scheduling

- House: Bills are placed on one of four House Calendars. The Speaker of the House and the Majority Leader decide what will reach the floor and when. Some bills never reach the floor for consideration.
- Senate: Legislation is placed on the Legislative Calendar. There is also an Executive Calendar to deal with treaties and nominations. Scheduling of legislation is the job of the Majority Leader. Bills can be brought to the floor whenever a majority of the Senate chooses.

Debate

- House: Debate is limited by the rules negotiated by the House Rules Committee. Debate is guided by the Sponsoring Committee, and time is divided equally

between proponents and opponents. Once a [quorum](#) of members is established, the bill will be voted on.

- Senate: Debate time can vary, and amendments need not be [germane](#) - [riders](#) are often offered. Entire bills can therefore be offered as amendments to other bills. Unless [cloture](#) is invoked, Senators can use a [filibuster](#) to defeat a measure by "talking it to death."

Vote

- Members of the Chambers vote. If the legislation is passed, it is sent to the other Chamber unless that Chamber already has a similar measure under consideration.
- If either Chamber does not pass its version, then the bill dies. If the House and Senate pass the same bill, it is sent to the President. If the House and Senate pass similar bills, the two versions are sent to Conference Committee.

Conference Committee

- Members from each Chamber form a Conference Committee and meet to work out the differences. If the Conference Committee reaches a compromise, it prepares a written Conference Report, which is submitted to each Chamber.



Did You Know?

The National School Lunch Program (NSLP) was established by the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act, while other federal child nutrition programs, including the School Breakfast Program (SBP), were created by the Child Nutrition Act of 1966.

Every five years, Congress attempts to review and amend these programs through Child Nutrition Reauthorization.

The most recent reauthorization law, [The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, P.L. 111-296](#), was signed into law on December 13, 2010.

- The Conference Bill and Report must be approved by both the House and the Senate.

The President

- The bill is sent to the President for review. A bill becomes law if signed by the President or if not signed within 10 days and Congress is in session. If Congress adjourns before the 10 days and the President has not signed the bill, then it does not become law ("Pocket Veto").
- If the President vetoes the bill, it is sent back to Congress with a note listing his reasons. The Chamber that originated the legislation can attempt to override the veto by a vote of two-thirds of those present. If the veto of the bill is overridden in both Chambers, then it becomes law.

The Bill Becomes a Law

- Once a bill is signed by the President or his veto is overridden by both Chambers, it becomes a law and is assigned an official number.
- After a bill becomes law, it moves to the appropriate agency for the beginning of the regulation process.



Now that you know the ideal process, watch this [entertaining six-minute video](#) describing the true journey of legislation from introduction to the President's desk.

LEGISLATION VS. REGULATION

Federal agencies respond to directives contained within legislation by drafting regulations, also known as “rules” which are published to the [Federal Register](#). For example, the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act (HHFKA) required the USDA to update regulations detailing federal [nutrition standards](#) for school meals.

Agencies may also embark on the rulemaking process in response to major data or technology changes, concerns from the public, Presidential directives, or new studies and recommendations of agency staff. Agencies cannot take any regulatory action that goes beyond the authority provided by the law and must follow an open public process.



School nutrition programs are one of the most highly regulated public programs. Since implementation of HHFKA, thousands of pages of new rules, notices, and guidance documents have been published.

The Rulemaking Process

The rules process can take months or years depending on the complexity and urgency of implementation. In general, Agencies will provide a comment period for proposed rules ranging from 30 to 60 days. For complex rulemakings, agencies may provide 180 days or more, may reopen comment periods, and even reissue several proposed rules.



Regulatory Advocacy

Daily, SNA tracks regulatory updates and keeps membership informed of notices, proposed and final rules, new guidance, and opportunities to share feedback. Providing both Association-wide *and* individual personalized comments is a key part of SNA's advocacy strategy.

Agencies must review and consider comments as part of their final rulemaking along with scientific data and expert opinions (including yours!). If the record contains persuasive policy arguments, or poses difficult questions or criticisms, rulemaking may be terminated. To move forward with a final rule, the agency must conclude that it will help accomplish the goals identified. It must also consider whether alternate solutions would be more effective or cost less.

Does it make a difference?

Yes! Sharing your feedback through channels such as SNA meetings, and directly through the federal rulemaking comment system, helps to shape the final regulations that impact our programs. The chart below shows how there is opportunity to make change almost every step of the way - from new legislation to final regulation.

	<u>Introduced by:</u>	<u>Altered by:</u>	<u>Stopped by:</u>	<u>Final when:</u>
<u>Legislation</u>	Lawmakers Any legislator can introduce legislation 	Committees through the amendment process 	Stalled/Failed in Committee , not considered by the other chamber, etc. 	Signed by President or Congress Overrides President Veto
<u>Regulation</u>	Federal Agencies draft regulations based on laws	The Public may submit comments 	Congress/The Public by strong comments or a resolution of disapproval by Congress 	Published regulations (Final Rules) in the Federal Register are final

SNA ACTION NETWORK: JOIN THE MOVEMENT

Join thousands of school nutrition advocates who have influenced policy and made a real difference. A few minutes, days, or months - whatever time and resources you have available, there are many effective ways to make your voice heard.

Online

Visit SchoolNutrition.org/Takeaction to sign up for SNA's action alert system and get the latest on key policy and legislative initiatives. SNA will reach out during critical moments to request that you contact your legislators through email, phone, and social media. Participate from wherever you are, on whatever device you're on when you get the alert!

Social Media

Contacting your legislators through their social media has become one of the most effective ways to gain traction on your cause. Here are some tips to keep in mind:

80% of Congressional offices agree that it takes 30 or less similar social media comments to catch their attention.

Congressional Management Foundation,
[#SocialCongress 2015](#)

- Follow your local, and federal legislators' public accounts. Track what they're working on to get an idea of how to best communicate your cause. Interact!
- The public nature of this communication means etiquette is essential. Keep your messages polite, concise, and informative.
- Use hashtags relevant to school nutrition. For example: [#schoollunch](#) [#childnutrition](#) [#schoolnutrition](#) [#childhunger](#)



Watch these quick tutorial videos to learn how to personalize your advocacy [emails](#) and [social media posts](#) for maximum impact.

In Person

Combining in person and online advocacy is the surest way to see movement on your cause. There are several opportunities for a face-to-face with your legislators.

SNA's Legislative Action Conference

Hundreds of school nutrition professionals from across the country participate in SNA's annual Legislative Action Conference. In addition to networking, education sessions, and spectacular general session speakers, participants meet with their Congressional representatives to discuss SNA's [Position Paper](#).

The District Office

U.S. Senators and Representatives maintain offices in their home states and districts that allow constituents to meet with them or their staff more easily.

Cafeteria Site Visits

Meeting with your legislators at your school meal site is one of the most effective methods for conveying a message about a legislative or policy matter. A site visit will give your legislator a first-hand look into how school nutrition programs operate. [Learn more](#).

Town Halls

Legislators often schedule town halls in their neighborhoods to keep in touch with their constituents. Prepare a question in advance! This is a great opportunity to tell your story and gain some visibility for your cause.



Elevator Pitch

You never know when you might run into a legislator, policymaker, or allied advocate. Take some time now to think of a quick thirty second summary for how you might explain what you're advocating for. Here's an example:

"SNA works to ensure strong federal nutrition standards are met, while also addressing the challenges that underfunded school meal programs across the country face. We want to bolster school nutrition programs and increase student access to school meals for their behavioral and academic success."

Planning an Effective Meeting

Scheduling

While Congress is in session, your senator or representative will be in Washington, D.C. While Congress is in recess, they will likely be back in their district offices. Most of your legislators' websites include a "Request for Meeting" form that you can fill out online *or* offer an email address for the person in charge of scheduling appointments.

Your meeting request should be sent at least four weeks in advance and should include your name, the issues you wish to discuss, the office you wish to visit and the dates you can meet.

Template Email to Schedule a Meeting

Dear [Senator or Representative] [Last Name],

As a School Nutrition Association advocate, I am writing to request a meeting with you and your staff to discuss legislation that impacts schools, school nutrition programs and the families and students that rely on them.

I will be available to meet with you at your [location] office on [wide range of dates you are available] and would welcome the opportunity to speak with you about these issues. I can be reached at the phone numbers listed below. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

[Your Name]

[Your Address]

M: [Your Mobile Phone]

O: [Your Office Phone]

H: [Your Home Phone]

Research

Well in advance of your meeting, research your legislators' work on the issues you will discuss. They may have introduced or cosponsored related bills. If so, you want to be sure your request for support reflects the work they've already done! Here's what you should know before your meeting:

- Which district or state does the legislator represent?
- What is their legislative record?
- On which committee or committees do they serve?
- To which party does the legislator belong?

You may be scheduled to meet with a Congressional staffer instead of the member. Understand this is a great opportunity to speak directly with the person that is likely to be responsible for researching the issue and drafting the actual bill. Members of Congress rely heavily on their staff to assist them with issue management, support of legislation and final votes.



[Congress 101](#) provides an excellent overview of how legislators and their staff spend their time, and an organizational chart and description of offices and staff positions.

Introduction

If several people will join you in the visit, plan ahead to decide who will introduce the group and which person will discuss each topic. During the meeting, introduce your group to one of the staff people sitting in the reception area of the office. Let him or her know you have an appointment and give the name of the staffer. If you do not have an

A normal day for legislators can be quite hectic with fluid schedules. Don't be discouraged if you end up with a meeting in the hallway. If you're prepared, you can make an impact with just five minutes.

appointment, tell them you would like to meet with the staff person who handles child nutrition issues. If the person is unavailable, ask if you can leave behind information and your business card.

Time

Find out how much time the person you are meeting with can spend with you. Adjust your presentation accordingly but be flexible as meetings can be cut short if Members are voting.

Answers

Prepare with references for the information you will share. If you don't have the additional information they are looking for, do not hesitate to say, "I don't know, but I can get that information for you." It's better to follow up after the meeting rather than being inaccurate.

Relationship

Keep in mind your goal going into the meeting is to establish a long-term relationship with the staff person handling child nutrition.

Studies have shown that people need to see a message at least seven times before it sinks in. This is called the Marketing Rule of 7 and it's been around since the 1930's because it works!

- Send a follow up email after your meeting with any additional requested information or just a thank you for their time. Copy the SNA Government Affairs and Media Relations team on the email (advocacy@schoolnutrition.org.) We will be more than happy to help with follow-up efforts!
- Develop a "resource relationship." You want to position yourself as the authority on the local impact of legislation. Send the staffer new resources, studies, or news articles as you come across them. [Sign up](#) for SNA's weekly policy

newsletter, *Tuesday Morning*, to help you stay up to date on the latest news and resources.

- Sign up for any legislative mailing lists. When your legislator hosts town halls or other local events, show up and speak up. You can use some of the same messaging and resources you previously created. Communicating your message takes repetition and consistency.
- If you use these tips, you may find that legislators and their staff begin coming to you for information, help, or your point of view on new bills.



For more insight on planning an effective meeting and establishing a relationship, take a few minutes to watch [What to Expect in Meetings](#) . [How to Hug a Porcupine](#), and [Why Follow Up Matters](#).

USING YOUR VOICE

Developing an Impactful Message

You have two very valuable and unique traits that make you the best person to speak up for school nutrition programs. You have lived expertise to share, and you are a constituent. With a little planning, you have the potential to make a big difference for the schools and families in your community. Use the questions below as your guide while you develop your advocacy messaging.

1. Who are you?

- Are you a constituent?
- Describe your work, background, and responsibilities. This is an opportunity to establish yourself as an expert.



Download and complete SNA's [District Profile](#) sheet to share a snapshot of your program with legislators.

2. What is the topic for the meeting?

- It can be hard to summarize a problem briefly but being concise and using plain language can effectively drive the point home.
- Don't act surprised if your legislator is unfamiliar with these issues.
- Time is limited; try to focus on one or two pressing issues.
- Provide local facts, data, and examples; this can help a policymaker make the case to colleagues.

3. Why is this issue important?

- Discuss the local impacts that a specific scenario could have on your programs.
- Describe how this issue directly affects his/her constituents. For example, a child going without a meal, impact on a school's academic success, or the possibility of substantial job loss.

- It is easier for policymakers to support a positive change like the development of a school garden program. However, most legislators will work hard to mitigate any negative impacts.
- Be prepared to discuss opposing viewpoints. This strategy can help shape the discussion and demonstrate your expertise.

4. What actions would you like the legislator to take?

- Always have a clear call to action. Be specific in your requests - do you want them to write a letter supporting a position? Reach out to a colleague? Hold a hearing? Visit your school?

5. What should a legislator take away from this meeting?

- Leave something behind in writing that is factual, descriptive, and memorialized the visit. Examples include a District Profile Sheet, infographics, relevant news articles, letters from kids, and related resources.

94% of House Chiefs of Staff felt a "1-2-page issue summary" left behind after a meeting is somewhat or very helpful, while only 18% said the same of a "5 page or greater length" document.

Congressional Management Foundation,
[Face-to-Face with Congress](#)

Public Relations: Tools to Develop Your Message with the Public

SNA's [PR Kit](#) provides members with a multitude of tools to help spread the message that school meals are healthy, delicious, and a great value. The kit includes:

- Media and outreach guides
- Talking points
- Customizable brochures, flier and letters
- SNA-produced video clips to promote school meals
- An overview of school nutrition programs, including key statistics and details on nutrition standards

Stop That Bill! When Problematic Legislation Arises

You are already implementing new federal policies, juggling local issues, and struggling with your budget. Now what? Changing legislation as it moves through the process cannot always be done, but there are steps you can take to encourage legislators to alter language or table a bill for another year.

- **Identify the author of the legislation** as well as the Chairs of the associated committees. Also discover if there is a companion bill.
- **Draft a letter** that includes the salient points: who you are and what you represent, specifics of how the legislation will negatively impact your program, and if possible, options for amending the legislation.
- **Offer to provide testimony** or a written statement during a committee hearing.
- **Praise the goal** of the legislation. We all want to feed hungry children, but some ways of getting there are not feasible.
- **Explain the negative impact on your budget.** Lack of funds is the number one reason why programs struggle with certain legislative and regulatory policies. Be specific and “show your work” using charts and graphs.
- **Provide contact information** in case there are questions and ask to be kept up to date on the bill’s movements.
- **Enlist partner organizations** and other groups to also reach out on the issue. There is safety in numbers!
- **Invite the representatives for a cafeteria visit** or to participate in another nutrition program. This is often one of the best ways to illustrate the benefits of the program - your best spokesperson is a child’s smile!

STATE ADVOCACY

Your State Legislative Position Paper

Each year, the School Nutrition Association (SNA) publishes a [Position Paper](#). SNA Affiliates may choose to produce similar papers for their State Legislature. The following steps will help your state when drafting a Position Paper.

1. Create an introduction and a background statement which explains the mission and overall goals of the Paper.

2. Identify and prioritize problems. Try to keep them to between three and six.

3. Clearly state why it is a problem, the local impact, and propose a solution. Be as concise and accurate as possible. Focus on how the proposed changes will ensure a better environment for students.

4. Keep topics focused on issues that can be addressed at the state vs. federal level.

5. Determine where and how the position paper will be distributed. Consider sending it to every Member of the legislative body, as well as the Governor, Lt. Governor, and State Agency heads. Include contact information.

6. Consider local media and social media promotion. Be prepared to answer questions concerning the topics including from those who may not support your positions.

7. Offer to meet with interested parties to answer questions or clarify statements.

8. Be prepared for next steps. Will your Association advocate for specific legislation?

9. Follow up! You can use a position paper as an entry into developing relationships with key policy makers in your state.

Hiring a Lobbyist for Your State Association

Your association may feel that hiring a lobbyist to represent your needs in your State is an appropriate path. Determining if it is worthwhile to hire a state lobbyist, selecting the right person and establishing goals and objectives are critical to having a successful, positive experience.

So first, here are a few questions to consider when deciding if hiring a state lobbyist is a good use of association resources.

Why does our state need a lobbyist? What are our legislative goals?

How much are we willing to spend? What have other states spent?

Do we want our own representation? Do we want to collaborate with another group?

Will we need more than legislative advocacy (regulatory, legal representation, outreach)?

What policy expertise do they have? What is their track record?

Does our lobbyist represent other clients? Is there a conflict?

All states define who is a lobbyist and what lobbying is, and they each have slightly different registration and reporting requirements. Visit the [National Conference of State Legislatures](#) to find the requirements in your state.

Additional Resources for State Advocacy Efforts

You may find these state-focused links and resources helpful as you design your local advocacy efforts.

- [SNA State Advocacy Tools](#): SNA's latest tools and tips for local advocacy.
- [State Legislature Websites](#): Find links to your state legislature website.
- [Library of Congress Guide to Law Online](#): Free online legal resources for your state.
- [Promoting Your Program PowerPoint](#): Use this PowerPoint to learn how to locally promote your child nutrition program, and some of the PR tools SNA has available to members.
- [State Legislation and Policy Reports](#): Find regularly updated reports on key state legislation, mandates, and state funding.
- [State Lobbyist Activity Reporting Requirements](#): Nearly all states require lobbyists, and those who hire lobbyists, to submit periodic disclosure reports.
- [How States Define Lobbying and Lobbyist](#): If an individual qualifies as a "lobbyist" or an activity counts as "lobbying" based on the definitions of these terms, a whole host of laws may come into effect.

State Advocacy in Action

[Massachusetts State House Luncheon: Bring Lunch to Your Local Policy Makers!](#)

This toolkit provides a step-by-step guide to planning your own successful Legislator Luncheon, like SNA of Massachusetts did! From forming a panel of speakers to executing the presentation, this guide offers great insight into the best way to bring your message to your local policymakers.

[Good Policy: A Case Study on Vermont](#)

This report is a case study of when Vermont passed legislation to cover the cost of reduced price lunches. It highlights the importance of coalition building, creating relationships and how good policy can be a marathon, not a sprint!