

FRAC 101: How to Organize a Community Conference Call

A **Community Conference Call** is an effective (and efficient) way for advocates that have limited travel budgets to connect with their Members of Congress throughout the year. Members of Congress appreciate the opportunity to meet in the comfort of their Capitol Hill office with constituents, and advocates get the opportunity to bring together a diverse group of stakeholders who represent the concerns of low-income individuals living in the District.

Advocates invite their Member of Congress to join them on a conference call with community leaders. An agenda for the call is usually shared with the Member and his or her staff in advance of the call. FRAC can contribute to the meeting by arranging to have our D.C.-based staff in the room during the conference call. Advocates usually arrange for a pre-meeting call to establish the various roles for each participant, in addition to agreeing on an agenda and goals for the call. A de-briefing call usually occurs after the community call to agree on follow up items.

- **Build A Big Tent: Organize a Diverse Group of Community Leaders.**
Pull together a small, but diverse, group of representatives from your community. An ideal group of participants would be leaders from different sectors (anti-hunger advocates, afterschool providers, food banks, school officials and organizations, local elected officials, doctors, child care providers, religious leaders, law enforcement, etc.).
- **Schedule a Meeting with Your Member of Congress.**
Call your Member of Congress' office and work with the staff member covering food and nutrition issues to assist you in arranging a date and time for the community call. Explain the concept of the community call and the agenda for the call. The staff will request a list of those who will be participating on the call (participant name, organization, town, and contact info) and some background information on the specific issue being discussed in advance of the call. It is best to have an advocate in the room with the Member during the call. If a constituent group is unable to have a representative in the room, FRAC can arrange to have one of its staff present for the call.
- **Organize a Planning Call with All Participants.**
During this planning call, it is critical to agree on a common message and 'ask' for your Member. You should also develop a set of talking points and share any statistical data that you want to share during the call (to avoid repetition or challenging data). Assign talking points to each advocate so everyone has an opportunity to participate. If any of your partners cannot participate in the actual call, ask them to send a letter of support. Make sure all information to be discussed on the call is sent to the Member/staff in advance of the call.
- **The "Ask" – Ask for a Specific Action or Commitment during the Call.**
In the course of the call, the group should have a concrete 'ask' for the Member. Examples include: asking him or her to sponsor or co-sponsor a bill; sign a "Dear Colleague" letter that may be circulating at the time of the call; write a letter of support to Committee Chair or Ranking Member; deliver a "one minute" on the floor of the House in support for a program or proposal; or some other action that would establish him or her as a champion for child nutrition programs.
- **Follow-up!**
It is crucial to follow-up with your Member and his or her staff after the call. Thank the Member and staff for participating in the call, provide any information promised during the course of the call, send any additional information that may have been discussed during the post-call debriefing, and offer to arrange a site visit for the Member when he or she is back in the district or state. Continue to communicate with the Member's staff to ensure that commitments made during the call actually happen.