

TAKE ACTION: ORGANIZE A SUMMER MEALS COMMUNITY ROUNDTABLE

Community roundtable discussions are effective and valuable tools to connect local advocates and stakeholders with their Members of Congress during congressional recesses and whenever Members are home. Combining a community roundtable with a site visit offers a unique way for Members to see firsthand the importance of programs, like summer meals, followed by a roundtable discussion that provides a diverse group of advocates and stakeholders a forum to engage.

How do I Organize a Summer Meals Community Roundtable?

Find an Ideal Site

- Select a site that could host a site visit followed by a community roundtable. It is important to select a site in a location that is easily accessible for your Member.
- Visit the site ahead of time to make sure it promotes your programmatic priorities. You can enhance the site with banners, posters, or children's artwork.
- For detailed tips on how to select the site and plan the site visit, check out FRAC's [Child Nutrition Site Visit Guide](#).

Select Participants

- Organize a small, but diverse, group of summer meals community leaders to

participate in the roundtable, such as the following:

- anti-hunger advocates;
- summer and afterschool providers (e.g., libraries, Boys & Girls Clubs, YMCAs, and parks and recreation centers);
- food banks and other emergency food providers;
- pediatricians and public health officials;
- education organizations and school officials;
- local elected officials;
- religious leaders;
- parents and grandparents;
- business leaders;
- local celebrities.

Schedule the Event with Your Member

- Contact the congressional aide who handles food and nutrition issues for your Member, and request a date and time for the event. Explain the concept of the event and what issues the group would like to discuss.

- Pick a time and day for the visit when you know site participation will be high, and be sure that your Member will be present during the meal service.
- E-mail a formal invitation to the congressional aide and the Member's scheduler, including the list of participants (with the name, organization, title, town, and contact information for each participant), and background information on the issues you would like to discuss.

Organize a Planning Call

- Organize a planning call with participants in advance to review the event format and each participant's role.
- Determine whether or not you would like media at the roundtable. We encourage media to accompany the Member at the site visit portion of the event to increase awareness of summer meals. Be

sure to check in with the congressional aide ahead of time about media plans for the event—they may put you in touch with the Member’s communications director to coordinate efforts. For more tips on media at site visits, check out FRAC’s [Child Nutrition Site Visit Guide](#).

- Come to an agreement on the topics that will be discussed or avoided, a common message, and an “ask” of your Member.
- Develop a set of talking points and mention any statistical data that you plan to share during the roundtable.
- Assign talking points to each advocate so that everyone has an opportunity to participate. If any of your stakeholders cannot participate in the actual roundtable, ask them to follow up with the Member afterwards.
- **Tip:** Remember to let the congressional aide know in advance what topics you would like to discuss by sending an agenda and background materials, and include a list of who will be attending.

During Your Roundtable

Introduce Every Participant

- Try to avoid extremely large groups. To maintain the uniqueness and benefit of a roundtable, keep participation to 8–15 people.
- Each participant should give a one-minute introduction with information on their organization, its role in the

community, and the children they serve.

- Be sure that every person has something unique to add to the discussion.

Stay on Topic

- Keep the presentation simple and straightforward. Present your issues briefly and persuasively.

Emphasize the District/State

- Start from a position of strength. Before launching into needed program improvements, discuss the program’s strengths and impact in the community.
- Talk about a local example of how summer meals have impacted your community.
- Relate a specific incident or story that describes how strengthening summer meals will help low-income children in your community.

Make the “Ask”

- After you discuss the issues with your Member, make sure that someone is tasked to request the Member to do something specific. Examples include
 - sponsor or cosponsor a bill;
 - sign a “Dear Colleague” letter that may be circulating at the time of the roundtable;
 - write a letter of support or opposition to the committee chair or the ranking member;
 - deliver a “one minute” on the floor of the House or Senate in support of, or in opposition to, a program or proposal;

- initiate any other action that would establish your Member as a champion for federal programs.

After Your Roundtable

Follow up

- It is crucial to follow up with your Member and their staff after the roundtable.
- Send a thank-you note for the meeting.
- Send any relevant information requested during the meeting.
- Add your Member to your mailing lists (newsletters, press releases, invitations to local events).
- Keep in touch regularly with your Member and their aides to send studies, reports, and new items relevant to the roundtable discussion.

Additional Resources

- [Child Nutrition Site Visit Guide](#)
- [Site Visit Opportunities for Anti-Hunger Organizations](#)
- [Child Nutrition Reauthorization \(CNR\) Legislative Action Center](#)
- [Interactive Mapping Tools](#)

How can we Help?

For help planning and organizing your roundtable, contact Lauren Badger, Government Relations Associate, lbadger@frac.org, 202-986-2200 ext.3023.