



American
Heart
Association.

American Heart Association.



Voices for Healthy Kids Grassroots Toolkit

Welcome Letter

Dear Voices for Healthy Kids grassroots leaders,

Over the past few generations, this country has changed dramatically. We've engineered physical activity out of our daily lives and, to a large extent, removed it from our schools. Unhealthy foods are being sold in larger portion sizes and at lower prices, while it remains difficult for many families to buy healthy, affordable foods and beverages.

In short, we've created a culture in which the healthiest choice isn't always the easiest one, and that culture is having an impact on our kids. To reverse this, we must ensure that the places where our children live, learn and play make the healthy choice the norm and not the exception.

Our work will unite the voices of moms, dads, sisters, brothers, caregivers, grandparents and extended family in communities across America in an unparalleled grassroots effort. The changes inspired by these voices will be backed by the best science and amplified by the leadership and resources of the American Heart Association and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, as well as the expertise and skills of a vast network of our nation's leading advocacy organizations.

Grassroots advocacy efforts are designed to influence policymakers or policymaking by mobilizing the general public to support or oppose a particular position on an issue. A robust grassroots lobbying program enhances an issue's visibility and educates the public and lawmakers regarding an organization's point of view.

Successful grassroots campaigns are the result of organized programs designed and sustained over time to recruit, train, communicate with and mobilize potential advocates. This is a dynamic and engaging way to bring to life the impact of policy on real people. Grassroots advocacy efforts are the squeaky wheel that helps an organization get the support it needs to build a culture of health.

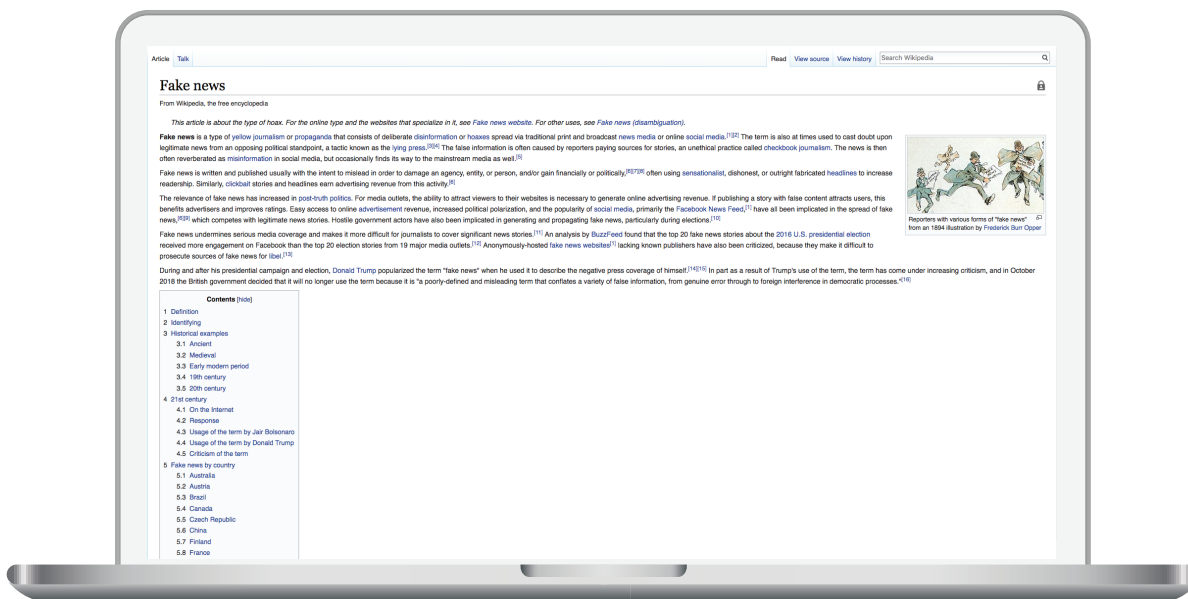
This training will give you the baseline knowledge on grassroots advocacy campaigns that will enable you to build a successful program, recruit activists and affect change to support healthy kids and other important issues.

Research

You know the case you want to make. You know the improvement you want to see in your community to make it a healthier place. But before you begin recruiting activists and mobilizing them to take a desired action or to educate the public and government officials, it's critical that you collect important information that will enable you to make the case in support of healthy kids.

There are many different data points you can gather to help make your case:

- *Public opinion survey results*
- *Nationwide, state or local-specific statistics (i.e., the number of children who use the Children's Health Insurance Program)*
- *Scientific data and research*
- *Information from other organizations that support your issue*



NOTE: It's crucial that you use information from credible sources. Don't share or base your materials on information from a Wikipedia page or "fake news" source.

NOTE: Voices for Healthy Kids provides resources and talking points your state campaign that you can share with activists as they prepare to take action on your behalf.

Where can you find credible data points?

Your number one resource for information will be the Voices for Healthy Kids (VoicesforHealthyKids.org) or American Heart Association (Heart.org) websites. On these pages, you will find fact sheets on everything from SNAP benefits to healthy food access.

Identify other organizations that advocate for the same issues and see what resources they have available. For example, Families USA and Kaiser Family Foundation have data on health equity and SNAP.

Both the federal and state governments, counties and cities, and the Kaiser Family Foundation offer research and fact sheets that are easily accessible with a simple search. These can prove to be powerful advocacy tools.



Take Action: Open your phone's web browser and search for one credible fact sheet on healthy school lunches. What did you find?

In the age of the internet, it's easy to find credible, reliable data points that you can use to advocate for your campaign. **It is critical that you only use credible sources for your advocacy campaign.**

Lobbying versus Nonlobbying

Whenever an organization undertakes a campaign aimed at policy change, it is important to understand what constitutes nonlobbying and lobbying activities and appropriately plan for tracking and budgeting for each type of activity. This section will help you understand what constitutes grassroots lobbying.

The following checklist will help you to determine whether your grassroots efforts might be considered lobbying under the IRS grant rules and therefore must be paid for with separate, lobbying-approved funding. A variety of lobbying rules apply, so make sure you consult your lawyer to share your plans and address any questions.

Grassroots Lobbying

There are four elements of “grassroots lobbying.” An activity will be grassroots lobbying under the IRS rules only if the answer to all four questions is “yes”:

- *Is your activity a communication to the public (e.g., speech, advertisement, op-ed, email)?*
- *Does it refer to legislation (or to a proposal for legislation that hasn't been introduced yet)?*
- *Does it reflect a view on that legislation?*
- *Does it include a call to action?*
 - *Asks audience to contact a legislator;*
 - *Identifies a legislator as being the audience's representative;*
 - *Provides contact information for legislator;*
 - *Provides a vehicle for contacting the legislator (e.g., form email, petition);*
 - *Identifies a legislator's position on the legislation as being undecided or opposing the communication's viewpoint; or*
 - *Identifies a legislator as sitting on the voting committee.*

If you don't answer yes to all the above questions, your activity is not grassroots lobbying.

Exception: A mass media advertisement that runs two weeks before a committee or floor vote on “highly publicized” legislation may be grassroots lobbying even without a call to action. It is presumed to be grassroots lobbying if it is:

- *A paid advertisement that appears in the mass media*
- *Within two weeks of legislation that is very prominent in the public conversation,*
- *Refers to the legislation, and*
- *Reflects the organization's view on the legislation.*

NOTE: A communication to the public regarding a ballot measure is lobbying even without an IRS call to action.

NOTE: Calling an organization's own members to ask others to engage in direct lobbying is treated as grassroots lobbying.

Think strategically: In most circumstances, if communications to the general public do not include a call to action, they do not qualify as lobbying. For example, if you talk about state funding for SNAP incentives that is pending in the legislature, without asking people to contact their legislators (or any other form of an IRS call to action), the communication will not be lobbying.

NOTE: This document does not contain legal advice. It is recommended that legal counsel be consulted before undertaking any particular activity described in this document. The Alliance for Justice/Bolder Advocacy is another valuable resource.

Grasstops/Ally Recruitment

Allies and other third parties are among the greatest untapped resources of most organizations' grassroots advocacy programs. Allies include other organizations with a similar interest in issues, residents with an interest in the cause or a stake in the outcome, coalitions with a similar point of view on the issue, or even vendors or suppliers of the organizational sponsor.

Campaign managers should look for organizations with existing networks and infrastructure in place with whom to partner, and they should engage with civic organizations, local officials and businesses to actively develop relationships.

Some examples of organizations and officials with whom you can partner include:

- *Kiwanis clubs*
- *Parent-teacher associations*
- *Local chambers of commerce*
- *Faith-based organizations*
- *State chapters of national groups*
- *Mayors*
- *Board of Supervisors members*
- *Groups that promote diversity*

Third-party outreach takes many forms, from meetings and phone calls to recruit formal commitments from other organizations to advocacy websites that are designed to recruit, educate and activate residents online to take action on an issue.

Having a strong coalition behind your message will lend credibility, open more avenues to educate decision makers and increase the likelihood that your issue campaign will be a success.

Useful Tip: Keep a master document of all your coalition partners that you can include when requesting meetings with potential coalition members, decision makers or their staff. Having a master list will enable these stakeholders to see the depth and broad reach of your coalition and will aid you in securing meetings. More often than not, the people you're seeking a meeting with will know the organizations and individuals on your coalition list, as they interact with them on different issues.



Homework: Find some organizations in your state that also operate in your issue area.

Sample Coalition Partner List:

American Heart Association.



Voices for Healthy Kids Maryland Campaign Coalition

These business, faith-based and community leaders believe Maryland benefits when policy is enacted that protects children and fosters growth for the next generation:

Hon. Tom Dunn

City of Towson
Mayor

Neil Patrick

Frederick Chamber of Commerce
President & CEO

Fran Smith

College Gardens Elementary PTA
President

Frank Smith

Ocean City Kiwanis Club
President

Hon. Burt Kent

Dorchester Board of Supervisors
Supervisor, District 2

NOTE: In addition to these community leaders, the Maryland Campaign for Voices for Healthy Kids has a network of over 3,000 volunteers who share our vision.

Recruiting and Engaging Grassroots Activists

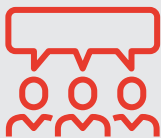
Recruitment

While grassroots coalition members help your campaign build credibility and gain access to decision makers and opinion leaders, you will not be able to achieve your mission without building a strong network of dedicated grassroots volunteers.

Grassroots volunteers will be imperative to your campaign for:

- *Knocking on doors*
- *Making telephone calls*
- *Meeting with decision makers*
- *Writing letters to the editor*
- *Attending town halls and events*
- *Increasing your outreach during mobilizations around key legislative events*
- *Conducting lobbying days*

As a campaign begins and progresses, you will find that there are key target districts that you want to recruit advocates from based on the elected officials you are trying to persuade. Be sure to focus your recruitment on these target districts so you have people to take action when the time comes.



Take Action: What are some ways you can think of right now to recruit grassroots volunteers?

The first step to building your grassroots base is recruitment. You need to go to places where you will find people who are passionate about your issues and convince them to sign up to volunteer.

Some examples would be:

- *PTA meetings*
- *Kiwanis meetings*
- *Food bank drives*
- *State/county fairs*
- *Faith-based groups*
- *Advocates from past or related campaigns*

At these events, you will want to set up a table with information about your campaign and policy agenda. By making sign-up sheets available at your table, you can capture interested activists' contact information and encourage them to participate in future grassroots activities. Voices for Healthy Kids campaigns also have access to text-to-join campaigns that allow advocates to join your campaign with a simple text message.

NOTE: Be sure to reach out to the organizers or leadership of these events to obtain permission to set up a table. Be sure to bring volunteers with you to assist in signing up grassroots activists. It is also important to welcome and engage new recruits quickly—these messages can be especially enhanced when they come from another volunteer.

Sample Sign-Up Sheet

Voices for Healthy Kids Maryland Campaign Sign-Up Sheet

First Name	Last Name	Zip Code	Phone Number	Email

Engagement

Once you have recruited your grassroots advocates, it's critical that you keep them engaged with your campaign, so they stay motivated and willing to take action for you. This requires regular communication, not simply activation emails when you need them to write elected officials.

Many organizations and campaigns put a lot of time and effort into recruiting grassroots activists but then fail to maintain communication with them. An activist is less likely to make a phone call, participate in a lobby day or write a letter to their elected official during an activation if they don't hear from you until you want something from them.

Think of the relationship with your grassroots activists as if it's with a friend. If you only called your friend when you needed help moving furniture, or needed a ride somewhere, do you think they'd be likely to remain your friend?



Take Action: What are some ways to keep activists engaged when there isn't an immediate activity to undertake?

Some methods for keeping grassroots activists engaged:

- *Weekly email updates/newsletters*
- *Social media posts and groups*
- *Recruitment drives with incentives (never financially incentivize communication with elected officials)*
- *Events with special guests*
- *Low-cost training opportunities such as webinars and conference calls*
- *Share media articles*

By keeping open lines of communication and developing relationships with your grassroots activists, you will significantly increase the likelihood that they will take action when you call upon them.

Assessing Online and Offline Assets to Determine Strategy

Before beginning a grassroots activity in support of your campaign, you must first assess your assets in order to determine which type of action would have the greatest impact.

Once you have stock of your current assets, you will be able to determine which grassroots activity you're equipped to undertake.

Examples of offline resources to consider:

- *Number of volunteers willing to knock doors*
- *Number of volunteers willing to phone bank*
- *Number of advocates in key decision maker districts*
- *Activists with compelling stories for visits with decision makers*
- *Printed collateral available*
- *Number of grassroots spokespeople available*
- *Number of advocates in key decision makers districts*

Examples of online resources to consider:

- *Number of grassroots activist email addresses you maintain*
- *Number of social media followers you can activate*
- *Grassroots activists with large email lists of their own*
- *Grassroots activists with blogs and followers*
- *Grassroots activists with large social networks*



Take Action: What assets do you currently have available, and based on those assets, what type(s) of grassroots advocacy activity do you think you're best equipped to undertake?

Engaging in Traditional Grassroots Activities

Now that you have done your research, gathered the talking points to arm your grassroots advocates, taken stock of your offline and online resources and recruited your activists, it's time to get to work.

There are many different offline grassroots activities you can undertake to further the policy goals of your campaign, but we will focus on three main areas:

- *Door knocking*
- *Phone banking*
- *Hosting events*

Door Knocking

Door knocking is a great tool to meet with voters and concerned residents face-to-face and recruit them to your cause.

As this is an activity that is best done during times when people are more likely to be home, weekends are best suited to conduct door knocking.

Once you have recruited your volunteers to knock doors, you will need to break them up into teams and assign homes to each team. It is important to send volunteers out in groups of two to three for safety concerns or in case any issues should arise.

Note: Never allow volunteers under the age of 18 to go out by themselves or to be part of a group without a responsible adult. Make sure you have parental consent ahead of time as well.

Next, you will want to put together the volunteers' walk bags. These will consist of a map of the area they are door knocking that indicates the streets/houses they're responsible for, all collateral that you want them to give to people or leave at homes when there is no answer at the door, bottles of water and a contact sheet should they run into any problems.

The last piece to the door knocking puzzle is the door script. You want to develop a set script for volunteers to use at the doors so that they can articulate your message clearly, effectively and consistently. Below is a sample script:

Sample Door Knocking Script:

Hello,

My name is XXX.

I am a volunteer with the Voices for Healthy Kids Maryland Campaign, and we're out door-knocking to raise awareness about healthy school lunches. We hope that the Maryland House of Delegates will soon look at this issue. Do you have a few minutes to talk?

We want to work to make sure we strengthen nutritional requirements in our state's schools, ensuring that every child has access to a balanced, nutritious diet.

In order for us to succeed, it's critical that residents, like yourself, reach out to educate their legislators and ask them for their support. We have some information we'd like to leave with you that has instructions on how you can be a part of this important effort, and we'd ask you to join our cause.

NOTE: It is a federal offense to leave literature in a resident's mailbox. Be sure to instruct your volunteers to always leave literature at the door.



Take Action: Write a short door-knocking script in opposition to imposing work requirements on SNAP recipients, making it harder for families with young children to provide nutritious food.

Phone Banking

Unlike door knocking, phone banking is an activity that can be tremendously successful on any day of the week. However, as we're trying to reach people when they're home, it is best to schedule your phone banks for the evening to catch people when they're home from work.

If you're holding a phone banking event as opposed to having volunteers make calls remotely, you will want to get a head count ahead of time so you can ensure you have enough phones available. If your resources are limited, you can ask volunteers to bring their personal mobile phones with them to use.

It is helpful with recruitment to provide food and beverages to your volunteers and doing so will also increase your participation.

Just like with door knocking, you will want to provide a set script for your volunteers to work from so that they can articulate your message clearly, effectively and consistently. Your script for phone calls will need more detail, however, as you are unable to leave behind information for the people with whom your volunteers interact. It is a good idea to have a webpage to drive people to who want additional information. You will also want to instruct your volunteers to leave the script as a message should the person they're calling not answer their phone.

Sample Phone Script

Hello,

My name is XXX.

I am a volunteer with the Voices for Healthy Kids Maryland Campaign. I am not selling anything or asking for donations. I'm calling to raise awareness about healthy school lunches, which we hope the Maryland House of Delegates could consider this year.

We want to strengthen nutritional requirements in our state's schools, ensuring that every child has access to a balanced, nutritious diet.

To succeed, it's critical that residents, like yourself, reach out to their legislators and educate them on this important issue. Please call Delegate XXX at his/her office and ask him/her to support healthy school lunches! His/her office number is (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Thank you very much and have a great day.

Hosting Events

Events are a great tool to bring in people and grassroots activists from the surrounding community, educate them on your campaign's issues, arm them with the tools to help your campaign achieve its policy priorities and build awareness of your organization.

There are endless types of events you can choose to host, but some examples are:

- *Community forums*
- *Social gatherings*

When choosing to host an event, there are a few key logistical items you need to consider:

Invitations

- *Send several rounds of invitations (via email, social media and traditional methods like mail or advertising).*

Agenda

- *Set an agenda to ensure that you maximize the time and can address all the main points you want to get across to attendees.*

Guest Speakers

- *Make sure you have guest speakers for each event you host. This will boost the profile of your event, increase participation and give you a third party to validate the message you are trying to deliver*

Collateral

- *Provide plenty of informational handouts to attendees so that they can be educated and advocate on behalf of your issues once they leave the event.*

Tracking Attendance

- *Collect contact information for everyone in attendance. This will enable you to target these individuals for grassroots activities in support of your campaign and will enable you to begin building the relationship with them that will benefit you in the future.*
- *Be sure to follow-up and thank attendees for their participation.*

Engaging with Elected Officials

Having a strong network of grassroots activists and grassroots allies, you are positioned to begin direct advocacy with elected officials and other decision makers.



Take Action: Look up each of your elected officials at the federal, state and local levels, as well as their scheduler and contact information.

Elected Officials

There are several venues for you to engage with and advocate positions to elected officials:

- *In-district meetings*
- *Fly-in days*
- *Lobby days or other hosted events*
- *Town halls*
 - *Live or virtual*

In-District Meeting

In-district meetings are conducted in an elected official's offices located back in the district (not in the federal or state capitols). These meetings offer a much more intimate environment where you can effectively lay out the case for your policy position and make a direct ask of the lawmaker for their support.

You should aim to bring four to five coalition partners and grassroots advocates with you to this meeting and request a one-hour time slot to allow adequate time for each participant to speak and ask questions.

When selecting your participants, look for grassroots allies who have connections with this particular lawmaker and grassroots advocates with a compelling story who reside in the lawmaker's district. The more vivid the example of real-world impact you can produce, the more effective your advocacy will be.

When requesting these meetings, you want to send the lawmaker's staff:

- *A list of the attendees you will be bringing with you*
- *The topics you want to cover*
- *Some background on your organization*

Prior to the in-district meeting, you will want to meet with your participants to go over the flow of the meeting and provide them all with a list of questions to ask and key points to cover.

Be sure to prepare leave-behind materials on the issues you discussed and send thank you note follow-ups to the lawmaker and their staff.

Fly-Ins and Drive-Ins

Fly-in meetings are conducted in an elected official's offices in either the federal, state or local capitals. On the federal side, these meetings often occur in conjunction with an annual policy conference hosted by the national organization you're affiliated with. On the state side, these meetings typically occur as part of a legislative action day.

With fly-ins, you will often be coordinating meetings with dozens of lawmakers, so be sure to schedule meetings well in advance so you have ample time to coordinate scheduling and logistics.

You should aim to bring four to five coalition partners and grassroots advocates with you to this meeting. The elected official may not be available but often their staff are willing and able to sit down with you.

Much like with in-district meetings, you should look for grassroots allies who have connections with this particular lawmaker and look for grassroots advocates who reside in the lawmaker's district and have a particularly compelling story when selecting your participants. The more vivid the example of real-world impact you can produce, the more effective your advocacy will be.

When requesting these meetings, you want to send the lawmaker's staff:

- *A list of the attendees you will be bringing with you*
- *The topics you want to cover*
- *Some background on your organization*

Prior to the fly-in meeting, you will want to meet with your participants to go over the flow of the meeting and provide them all with a list of questions to ask and key points to cover. Be sure to prepare leave-behind materials on the issues you discussed and send thank you note follow-ups to the lawmaker and his/her staff.

Town Halls

Another venue for interacting with your elected officials is attending their town hall meetings. Town halls are public gatherings where the lawmaker gives a legislative update and then opens up the discussion to the audience for questions. This is a prime venue to ask the lawmaker for their position on the issue you're advocating on and to get them on the record concerning it.

Over the past few years, especially since the 2016 election, we've seen a lot of hostile environments develop at town halls.



It is important that you and your activists comport yourselves in a respectful manner. Not only will this increase the likelihood that you will get a thoughtful, meaningful answer to your question, but it will also increase the likelihood that you will be granted future interactions to develop the relationship.

When preparing for a town hall meeting with your activists:

- *Brief your activists on the expected behavior they are to show*
- *Provide them with a set of questions to ask to ensure you are all working towards achieving a targeted set of answers*
- *Instruct them to get in the lines to ask questions*

Office Hours

State and local officials will often hold office hours at local coffee shops or libraries. Train your grassroots advocates to be on the lookout for these opportunities so you can leverage them as a tool to get your people there to advocate on behalf of your issues.

Digital Grassroots Campaigns

Every successful issue advocacy campaign must have a robust digital program to increase potential reach, build more support and amplify its message.

Increasingly, social media is becoming the most effective and least expensive method for reaching and recruiting residents of targeted areas to participate in grassroots outreach. Savvy organizations now design recruitment campaigns specifically aimed at the general public, or key segments of the public, for the express purpose of identifying grassroots supporters for their issues. These internet-savvy supporters are more likely than the public-at-large to be registered to vote and to participate in activities most desirable to grassroots initiatives, such as educating lawmakers, attending rallies, and forwarding mail.

Social Media

Social media is a “must” for any advocacy campaign. It can be used to recruit new volunteers, keep your current activists engaged and spread news and updates. Your organization may have specific rules about using social media. Be sure to connect with your communications team.

Facebook

The primary social media channel you will use for your campaign is Facebook.



Take Action: Write down how many followers your Facebook pages have. How many do you have?

The first task you will have is to grow your following to increase your outreach potential. There are several methods to do this:

Organic growth

- *By simply increasing the number of posts you produce, you will increase your outreach potential as you receive more engagements from different sources.*

Paid advertising

- *Facebook allows you to advertise your organization's page for relatively low dollar amounts. You can target your advertising by area, gender, age, interests, pages liked and a whole host of other data points - enabling you to recruit a targeted audience.*
- *NOTE: Organizations are now required to provide contact information and receive approval before they can place paid political ads.*
- *NOTE: You must allow for two to four weeks to get your content through Facebook's approval process. Each person wishing to post content must go through the verification process.*

Third-party validators

- *Most likely your grassroots allies have Facebook pages as well. By getting them to tag you in posts or to share your content, you will increase your outreach and attract new followers.*

Next, you will want to spread your message on Facebook. Facebook doesn't limit the amount of words/characters you can use in a post, but it is good practice to keep it brief to keep people's attention. Be sure to use action-oriented language and to share relevant and new information. You can also upload videos to go with your posts or share news articles. Sharing this type of content will also increase the engagements you receive on your page. You should try to post new content at least once per day on Facebook to optimize your outreach potential.

Facebook will also let you boost your posts to increase your outreach. This can be particularly useful when you need to build support or influence people to take action around key moments. There are some costs associated, but by using Facebook's targeting features, you can reach the right people with relatively low associated costs.

Facebook Live is another great tool for you to use to grow your presence and spread your message. Facebook Live enables you to broadcast an event or speak directly to your audience.

Checklist for Facebook Live:

- *Create an agenda to maximize your time and ensure you hit all of your key points.*
- *Promote your event ahead of time.*
 - *Spread the word so your targeted audience knows to tune in.*
- *Follow-up to reiterate your key points.*
 - *Follow-up your Facebook Live event with posts that reiterate the main points, amplify your message and ask people to like and share.*

Facebook serves as a great tool to engage with your Members of Congress, State Legislators and local lawmakers. Encourage your activists to consistently comment on their elected officials' Facebook page to share your targeted message; particularly around key policy issues.

You can also request a Facebook Live town hall with your elected official. This format gives them a lot of flexibility as they can participate with constituents conveniently. If the elected official agrees to host a Facebook Live town hall, be sure to:

- *Promote it on your Facebook page to increase participation*
- *Encourage your activists to participate by asking targeted questions pertaining to your issues:*
 - *Questions are typically asked by leaving a comment on the Facebook Live feed for the event.*

Instagram

Instagram is another critical tool for your campaign to utilize. Instagram is a grassroots-heavy platform that provides opportunity to recruit new activists and engage with elected officials.

Your first task is to grow your following to increase your outreach potential. There are several methods to do this:

Organic growth

- *By simply increasing the number of photos you share and by tagging relevant organizations, people or elected officials, you will increase your outreach potential.*
- *Utilize Photo Safaris*
 - *Photo Safaris are a great tool to build the case for your policy objective using images and a hashtag. Using a hashtag enables a viewer to see all the photos and supporting posts when it is searched.*
 - *An example would be to have your activists post pictures of unhealthy school lunches using the hashtag #WeNeedHealthyLunches. When a viewer searches that hashtag or key word, it will display all of the posts you all have made displaying unhealthy lunches, thereby building the case for policies requiring healthy choices.*

Paid advertising

- *Instagram enables organizations to promote their content through several methods:*
 - *Instagram Stories Ads*
 - *Utilize users' story feeds to share your content and to recruit volunteers by linking to your webpage.*
 - *Photo Ads*
 - *These ads appear in users' feeds as regular posts with some written content and a clickable link, which should take them to your webpage to capture their information.*
 - *Video Ads*
 - *These videos appear in users' feeds as regular posts with some written content and a clickable link, which should take them to your webpage to capture their information.*

Third-party validators

- *Most likely your grassroots allies have Instagram accounts as well. By getting them to tag you in posts or to share your content, you will increase your outreach and attract new followers.*

Twitter

Twitter is another important social media platform for your campaign to use. Twitter is an influencer-heavy platform that allows you to engage meaningfully with grassroots, reporters and elected officials.

Your first task is to grow your following to increase your outreach potential. There are several methods to do this:

Organic growth

- *By simply increasing the number of Tweets you produce, you will increase your outreach potential as you receive more engagements from different sources.*

Paid advertising

- *Twitter allows you to advertise your organization's page for relatively low dollar amounts. You can target your advertising by area, gender, age and a whole host of other data points - enabling you to recruit a targeted audience.*

Third-party validators

- *Most likely your grassroots allies have Twitter accounts as well. By getting them to tag you in Tweets or to share your content, you will increase your outreach and attract new followers.*

Twitter is limited to 280 characters, so you have to be much craftier when developing your message. The key to developing an effective message on Twitter is to say what you need to in as few words as possible. Adding relevant hashtags or tagging the person or group you're trying to reach are other methods to ensure your message reaches them directly.

Just like Facebook, Twitter enables you to share videos, photos and article links along with your targeted message, enabling you to share updates quickly and effectively.

Most organizations will share pictures from their events and in-district meetings with lawmakers, demonstrating the effectiveness of their advocacy.

You should try to post new content at least twice per day on Twitter to optimize your outreach potential. Be sure to utilize relevant hashtags, which enables Twitter users to see your comment by searching for trending topics or the hashtags themselves.

Twitter is another great platform through which you can engage with your elected officials. By Tweeting at a lawmaker you can amplify your message, as a larger audience will see your Tweet. This is especially helpful around key legislative events. By getting your activists to join you in Tweeting at the lawmaker either in support of, or against, your issue, you can demonstrate broad support for your side of the issue.

Note: Be sure to be respectful with your Tweets at elected officials as you will be far more likely to get a meaningful exchange.

You should also use Twitter to share your message by live Tweeting at events. Events typically will garner a large audience, so by joining the conversation and using relevant hashtags, you can significantly amplify your message and reach a larger audience.

Action Alerts

Action alerts are a great tool for mobilizing your grassroots advocates quickly to take action in support of your cause. The Voices for Healthy Kids Action Center enables your state campaign to utilize action alerts to get your advocates to take one of the following actions with their public officials:

- *Send an Email*
- *Post on Social Media*
- *Make a Patch-Through Phone Call*

Steps for launching your action alert:

Determine which grassroots advocacy action is best suited for the issue

Write the message that will be delivered by your grassroots activists to their public official

- *Some activists will make modifications to the message you prepare, but oftentimes they will just hit send. Ensure that your message is decision maker-ready before you send the alert.*

- *Ensure that individual activists send email messages only to their own lawmakers. Lawmakers have systems in place to dispose of non-constituent communication. Discourage activists from spamming the entire State House of Delegates. To deliver an official organization message to a policymaker, a variety of tools are available.*

Work with the Voices for Healthy Kids national staff to set up your action alert

- *Voices for Healthy Kids uses an online advocacy platform to enable state and local campaigns to facilitate grassroots engagement with public officials. Staff will be able to assist you with setting up your action alert.*

Share your activation

- *Once Voices for Healthy Kids publishes your action alert on its site and readies an activation on its platform, you can email your grassroots supporters with a link to the site, where they can take action, and promote the action alert on your social media channels. Encourage your supporters to like and share your social media activation posts.*
- *You will also be able to use Voices for Healthy Kid's email list.*

Optional: Send out a press release

- *Once your activation has achieved significant grassroots participation, send out a press release that shares:*
 - *The reason for your activation*
 - *The number of public officials contacted*
 - *The amount of grassroots engagements your activation garnered*

Email Communication

Your organization should conduct a robust email campaign in addition to your social media posts to keep your grassroots activists engaged. As you collect email addresses through all of your other activities, add them to your email subscriber list to grow your influence and sustain the new relationships you've developed.

At a minimum, you should use mass emails weekly to:

Send legislative updates

- *Keep your activists and coalition up-to-date with the activities related to the campaign. By keeping them updated they will be ready to take action for you when the moment arrives.*

Send coalitions news

- *Keep your coalition updated on the organization's activities. Let them know about the new *grasstops* partners you've recruited, the most recent public officials you met with, or the upcoming events. Make them feel part of the family and integral to the success of the mission.*

Share new talking points

- *As policy develops or new polls are released, it's likely that your talking points will change/adapt. Use your weekly emails to keep your coalition partners up-to-date with the newest talking points so they can be successful in their advocacy on your behalf.*

Earned Media for Grassroots Campaigns

The final component for engaging in a successful grassroots issue campaign is to earn media attention for your efforts. Learning how to use the media to boost your message will contribute to the success of your campaign.

Letter to the Editor (LTE)

Most newspapers have an LTE section, which serves as a useful tool for placing short, personalized messages from grassroots activists on key issues.

Papers provide guidance on LTE submissions via their website. Be sure to check for word count limits and other requirements. In general, LTEs should be no more than 250 words, meaning you have to be concise when making your points.

First you will want to identify one of your activists to submit an LTE in their name. Once you have one identified, it is helpful to write a draft for them, but understand that they will inevitably make tweaks to it and it is important that it be in a genuine voice.

You will also want to provide your activists with the website link or email address to the paper

where you want them to submit the LTE. Ask them to send you verification once it's submitted so you can keep track.

After the LTE has run in the paper, share it on your social media channels and with your email subscribers to help amplify your message. Also send it to decision-makers with the power to solve the policy problem.

Sample LTE (From The Shreveport Times)

To the Editor:

As a Healthy Schools Program Manager with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, I work with schools in Louisiana and serve as a certified technical assistance provider for the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement.

U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue's announcement on May 1 that the federal government will delay implementation of school nutrition standards aimed at reducing sodium and increasing whole grains does not reflect the tremendous progress and success I have seen in schools throughout Louisiana.

In 2016, Curtis Elementary School was nationally recognized by the Alliance for a Healthier Generation for meeting or exceeding the updated federal nutrition standards for school meals, which include increased fruits and vegetables, whole grain-rich items and meals lower in saturated fat.

At Curtis Elementary in Bossier Parish, their wellness council worked with the cafeteria staff to implement strategies through the Smarter Lunchrooms Movement, which is aimed to improve consumption of healthy foods and reduce food waste.

Providing students with appealing, nutritious meals takes dedication and commitment. But I've seen that when schools receive adequate support, school leaders are eager to make changes, students are enthusiastic about healthier meal and parents are overwhelmingly supportive of healthy changes.

The Alliance for a Healthier Generation has worked with more than 35,000 schools across the country to implement healthier meals that meet standards required by the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, which were derived from the best scientific evidence of children's dietary needs.

Now is not the time to reverse progress. We must instead focus on giving schools the support they need to keep kids healthy.

Erica Gilliam

Opinion Pieces (Op-Eds)

Op-eds are a great opportunity to share a longer, more in-depth message than you are afforded with an LTE. Op-eds need to come from a grassroots-level advocate, as you want someone who is a recognized leader and whose word carries some weight on the topic.

Many papers post their requirements for op-ed submissions. In general, the sweet spot for the length of an op-ed is 600-750 words, enabling you to pack in more statistics and facts about the issue. It is also helpful to include some personal narrative from the advocate whose name you're attaching to the piece (e.g., personal experiences they have had with health equity issues, childhood cancer in the family, etc.).

The first step is to recruit your grassroots ally whose name will be attached to the op-ed. Once you have identified your advocate, you will want to write the piece and personalize it with their story. Be sure to include a short, approved biography (no more than a paragraph) about the author at the end.

Once you have completed the first draft, you will send it over to them for edits. Note: You should plan for one or two rounds of revisions with your advocate to get it right, so plan accordingly and budget for ample turnaround time.

Once you have the completed product, you will reach out to the opinion editor for the paper in which you want to place the op-ed and pitch them on the idea. For your pitch, make sure to develop a good hook that will demonstrate how the contribution piece will add to the public debate and highlight the credentials of the author.

Sample Op-Ed (ran in the Hartford Courant)

Congress missed a recent deadline to reauthorize the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act, which means that the program will continue as is for now but doesn't settle arguments about school nutrition, which affects students a great deal. This law, the renewal of which Congress is still debating, focuses on improving child nutrition programs in schools, where 30 million young people just like me eat every day. Over the last several weeks, lots of adults have been arguing back and forth about whether the nutrition standards in the law should be maintained or rolled back; however, no one seems to be asking our opinion about it.

I believe that the youth perspective is valuable, simply because we are the ones eating school lunch every day. If Congress took our opinion into consideration it would have an idea of what youths would want to eat for their lunch and our representatives would understand that the standards about fruits and vegetables being eaten shouldn't have to be a standard — it should be a norm.

Additionally, food shouldn't come from big corporations that process their food. Our schools buy processed foods that students don't find appealing, which amounts to a waste of everyone's tax dollars.

Many Republicans have argued that students aren't eating healthy food, so Congress should get rid of the standards set by the Healthy Hunger Free Kids Act — standards that decrease sodium, eliminate trans-fats and increase whole grains. I want to see more vegetables cooked with spices and flavors, well done food, fresh food that hasn't been processed, a greater variety of food and food that is prepared at the school, not just heated up.

Billion-dollar food corporations provide the majority of food for schools. Their food has more sodium, fats and sugars than local, fresh and unprocessed food. This is unhealthy for students because too much sodium and sugar can aggravate diabetes and other health problems. In Hartford, where I live, everyone doesn't have access to health care, so eating foods like this is something you want to avoid. How can a student who doesn't have much food at home avoid unhealthy food if they don't have healthy options at home or in their neighborhood? School is a place where healthy food should be provided.

Too many people fail to think about situations like this. This is called a food desert. A food desert in Hartford means not having a lot of grocery stores that people can get to easily and that fresh food and fruits may not be available or affordable in that area. In Hartford County, 18.8 percent of children are food insecure. That is one in every five children under the age of 18. In Hartford public schools, 18,000 children participate in the free and reduced lunch program. I believe every one of these students has a right to a healthy, enjoyable meal.

Youths' voices need to be heard and taken into consideration in decisions that have a heavy effect on our lives. These decisions are being made by people who are not eating school lunch, so of course their perspective is going to be much different. Corporations that provide food for schools are not thinking about what's best for the students, but what is best for them.

What students need is for Congress to focus on helping with resources for farm-to-school programs that help nutrition directors in our schools get access to healthy food for our cafeterias. Additionally, Congress should maintain the strong standards in the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act. With fresh and local food, we can have meals that meet or exceed the standards and that will be appealing to me and my peers, with even bigger portion sizes. Congress should take these ideas into consideration before changing the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act.

Omyra Lockhart, 18, is a senior at A.I. Prince Technical School. She is a member of Grow Hartford, a local youth program concerned with social and food justice issues and that is affiliated with a national network of youth organizations called Youth for Healthy Schools (www.youthforhealthyschools.com).

Press Releases

Press releases are key to helping your campaign spread the word on your activities, policy positions and key statements surround legislative activities.

There are six key elements to every press release::

- *Who*
- *What*
- *Where*
- *When*
- *Why*
- *Quote from your organization's leadership*

Once you have drafted your press release and have it approved through any internal channels that are required, you should send it out to your press list.

When developing your press list, you should gather the email addresses for all reporters who cover your issue for every single paper in the state. Be sure to include all national papers that have operations in your area as well (like the Associated Press), your local news television stations and any digital outlets who have a following in your area.

After your release has gone out, it's good practice to do follow-up phone calls with key reporters who you have either developed relationships with, or who have covered this particular topic extensively. Simply call them and say that you want to follow up on a release you previously sent them and then go over the purpose of the release. Oftentimes, reporters overlook releases as they are flooded every day with information from different organizations trying to get their story out there, so a friendly follow-up call helps you stand out.

Sample Press Release (From the American Heart Association)

WASHINGTON, D.C. – December 6, 2018 – The American Heart Association issued the following statement in response to the final rule on school nutrition standards issued today by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The rule eliminates the final sodium target, decreases the amount of whole grains and allows 1 percent flavored milk in school meals:

“We hope all schools reject this regulation and continue their commitment to serve healthier foods on our kids’ plates. Many schools declared they would do just that when these changes were first announced late last year. With nearly 100 percent of the nation’s schools already complying with the school meal standards that were released in 2012, children across the country are clearly benefiting.

“USDA’s decision to weaken the standards – despite overwhelming opposition – threatens to reverse our progress toward ensuring our nation’s children receive healthy meals at school that help them attain better long-term health and academic success. If the concern truly was to provide those few schools experiencing challenges with more ‘flexibility’, the more responsible approach would have been for USDA to provide more technical assistance to these institutions so they could offer healthier food choices.

“When it comes to our children’s health, there should be no ‘flexibility.’ Failing to meet the science-based sodium standards for school meals originally adopted by USDA will put kids’ health in jeopardy.

“We strongly believe that all schools can meet the original nutrition standards. It is in the best interests of our children for schools to keep moving in that direction, despite this latest USDA rule.”

*The American Heart Association’s comment letter on USDA’s interim final rule is available [here](#).
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Media Kit for your Grasstops Advocates

Throughout the course of your campaign, there will be ample opportunities for you to secure media coverage for your grasstops advocates or for yourself as the head of your campaign. It’s good practice to have a media kit prepared to help secure interviews and to aid journalists in writing the story or conducting the interview.

A media kit is a tool that contains background on the person being interviewed and the organization, contact information for your organization and information that entices the journalist to engage with you.

Your media kit should include at a minimum:

- *Contact details*
- *Information on your organization*
- *Past press releases*
- *Data on the issue*
 - *Make it as local as possible*
- *Images of the person available for interview*

Some optional examples of materials to include:

Grassroots advocate stories

- *Providing examples of how the issue you're advocating for has affected real people often gives the reporter a hook through which to examine the story*
- *Recent news coverage on your organization*

Conclusion

Successful grassroots campaigns are the result of organized programs designed and sustained over time to recruit, train, communicate with and mobilize potential advocates. By utilizing the techniques you have learned in this training, you can create and sustain a meaningful campaign.

In the appendices of this toolkit, you will find additional resources to help you carry out your grassroots campaign. If ever you have questions or want additional resources, please visit the Voices for Kids Action Center or contact the Voices for Healthy Kids staff.