

September 20, 2014 Policy Workshop- **How to Engage Your Elected Officials**
Food Bank for Westchester via Food Bank for New York City Guide

- ❖ **Find out who represents you.** There are many places to find this information. The best way is to visit the New York State Board of Elections website at <http://elections.ny.gov/district-map.html> . This website will provide you with the name and contact information for your federal and state representative. You can also do a simple google search including the zip of the area you are searching for. Keep in mind those local representatives catchment areas may change year to year.
- ❖ **Introduce yourself and who you represent.** Mail, call or e-mail your representatives to introduce yourself. Ask for a meeting to inform them of what your agency is doing or to introduce yourself as their new contact if they already have a relationship with your organization. Request a meeting to update them or educate them about what your organization is doing. Most offices have a staff member who works on a particular issue such as hunger, food, income security and education. Ask them what they are doing currently to support your community and what your organization can do to support their efforts.
- ❖ **Stay informed.** In this day and age keeping up with your local representatives is easy, many if not all of them have Facebook, Twitter and Instagram pages. These are easy ways to follow what's happening in the here and now. It is important to attend community events when you can, especially those involving the issues that affect your consumers and organization.
- ❖ **Keep in touch to deepen your relationship.** Follow up with your elected officials, include them on regular e-mail notices of news and events and share written materials with them about your organization missions and goals. Sharing key information about your program will connect the elected official to your organizations work. Don't forget about their staff, much of your communications will go through your elected official's staff. Befriend them early on and remember to thank them for their work and support.
- ❖ **Connect Personally.** Invite your elected official to visit your organization so that he or she can see your organizations work directly.



September 20, 2014 Policy Workshop- **Prepare for Your Visit**
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❖ **Before Your Visit**

- **Call to make an appointment** with the elected official or the staff member who works on your particular issue. You should always be prepared that you may be meeting with a staffer and not the actual representative.
- **Be prepared.** Do some research on the person with whom you are meeting, as well as the issue and/or bill. Be sure to find out how your representative feels about the issue or bill so you know if you should already be thanking them and reinforcing their support.
- **Create a one-pager** about your organization (if you do not already have one), and information that connects your organization's work to the issue that you are meeting to discuss.
- **Develop a strategy.** If you are meeting as a part of a larger group, determine roles and speaking order beforehand. It's great to bring people from the community you are representing to speak about their personal experiences. You should always prepare them beforehand with what to say and the best and most effective way to present their story.

❖ **During the Visit**

- **Keep it brief and be specific.** You or your entire group may only have a few minutes to speak with the elected official or their staff. Think of a maximum of three points that you must convey before you leave the office.
- **Create a Connection;** pull some heart strings by connecting real stories to the issue or bill you are meeting about. Include a few short stats such as 1 in five seniors in Westchester County are food insecure.
- **Never assume.** As someone who works with consumers' every day, you are the expert. Never assume the elected official or staff member knows more about the issue than you do. You may be meeting with them to help in determining their stance on an issue.

- ❖ **After your visit** share highlights of the visit with your consumer, co-workers, co-volunteers and other key community members. Keeping all interested parties informed is essential for another part of advocacy-organizing.

