



A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN TO
GIVE KIDS the SCHOOL FOOD THEY DESERVE

A SLOW FOOD USA CAMPAIGN

TOOLKIT: The final phase of the Time for Lunch Campaign

Congress expects to pass the Child Nutrition Act by March, which means it's time to get ready for the Time for Lunch Campaign's final push. This toolkit explains how we're going to do it.

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The campaign team at the national office is at your service. We can answer questions, share resources and help you make strategic choices. Please feel free to reach out to us at any time by emailing timeforlunch@slowfoodusa.org or calling 718-260-8000.



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About the Child Nutrition Act

First, a quick reminder: the Child Nutrition Act is a federal law that Congress updates every five years. It governs the funding and nutrition standards for all school lunch programs nationwide – so every school district, every parent and every child has a stake in this campaign. The bill also presents an enormous opportunity to link schools to local farms, to rebuild school kitchens and plant school gardens, and to help 31 million children learn to make healthy food choices.

Our work has already begun to pay off. The last time Congress renewed the Child Nutrition Act, there was hardly any press about the issue. But this time around our organizing has resulted in hundreds of media hits, thousands of letters and tens of thousands of people getting involved.

Legislators have already stated support for all of our [policy goals](#) – but we haven't won yet.

Strategically, we need to focus our messaging on (1) increasing the amount schools receive per lunch and (2) securing mandatory funding for Farm-to-School programs.

→ We've been calling for Congress to increase the reimbursement rate by \$1 per lunch. That would cost roughly \$4 billion per year (but save many times that amount in health care costs). Realistically, Congress probably won't reach \$4 billion, but as citizens it's our role to state what America's children really need, not to compromise ahead of time.

President Obama's budget proposal adds \$1 billion per year to the Child Nutrition Act. Moving forward, our message to Congress will be, **“\$1 billion is an important step forward, but it's not enough to give America's kids a healthy future. Congress should add *at least* \$1 billion to child nutrition programs, and recognize that until we give schools \$1 more per lunch, we're putting America's kids at risk.”**

Raising the reimbursement rate is our first priority, but it's also important to emphasize mandatory funding for Farm-to-School programs, which equip schools to buy directly from local farms and cover the start-up costs of planting school gardens. Slow Food USA and our allies are asking for \$50 million in mandatory funding over the next 5 years.



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What you can do: Send emails to legislators

The first way your chapter can get involved is by encouraging everyone in your community to send an email to their legislators. **An email form on the [Time for Lunch web site](#) will make it easy for anyone to quickly submit an email to Congress.** Admittedly, emails are not always the most effective way to advocate – making phone-calls and sending hand-written letters both make a bigger impression. But if you can get a ton of people (100,000 or more) involved, you can surprise legislators with the sheer volume of support. So that's our goal: get tons of emails.

Your chapter can help by spreading the word to anyone and everyone: Slow Food members, friends and family, coworkers, parents, schools, mailing lists, and partner groups.

- On the next page, you'll find a sample email you can use to engage your networks and get people to write emails to Congress.
- Have a brainstorming session where you list all the groups and networks your chapter can reach. Encourage others to reach out to their own networks.
- Bring a laptop to your chapter's events, or gather email addresses and then send a follow-up email with a link to the web site.
- Tell us how it goes, and please ask for anything you need: talking points, brainstorming help, a set of eyes to look over your outreach email, etc.



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Sample email to forward to your networks

SUBJECT: Give America's kids a healthy future

Dear [Friend],

I just sent an email to Congress telling them that America's children need real food at school.

Will you join me?

<http://slowfoodusa.org/timeforlunch>

Child obesity is spiraling out of control, and our kids, our economy and our quality of life are at risk. Our best opportunity to fight back is coming up this month when Congress updates the Child Nutrition Act.

I told my legislators that schools need the resources to serve real food, cook meals from scratch and buy directly from local farms. It's time to give America's kids a healthy future.

Thanks!



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What you can do: Get local media coverage

The next way your chapter can help is to get local media coverage about school lunch. When an issue keeps popping up in the media, legislators notice – it means the average voter is paying attention. Also, any media hits that mention Slow Food are good for the organization, because they get our name out there and inspire more people to get involved in our work.

Your chapter can help by passing national news to local reporters and bloggers, by writing to your local newspapers and by organizing media events.

- As things heat up in Congress, the campaign team will send out press releases, statements and sample media pitches that you can personalize and forward to local reporters and bloggers.
- If you're interested in writing a Letter-to-the-Editor or submitting an Op-Ed to your local paper, tell the campaign team – we'll send you a template you can personalize. This is a good tactic for chapters where a single person is taking the lead on the campaign.
- A great way to get involved is to organize a media event. Here are some ideas:
 1. Invite your legislator to eat school lunch. Working together with a school, arrange the event to either highlight what's possible or show what needs fixing.
 2. Organize a meeting with your legislator (or a staff person) where a group of kids and school officials delivers a stack of letters. Plan to contact the legislator's office a few weeks in advance to talk about the idea – they may consider it a good media opportunity, and invite reporters on their own.
 3. Organize a cooking contest where contestants have only \$1 per meal to purchase ingredients. Have a few volunteers (or students from a local school) dress up like Members of Congress and serve as some of the judges. Invite the media, and make



sure the event is visually interesting enough to merit a photo.

For media events, if you contact reporters ahead of time, and if reporters think the average reader will find your story interesting, you'll probably get coverage. If you're thinking about organizing a media event, contact the campaign team: we'll help you come up ideas and plan the event, and we may be able to help you get coverage.



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What you can do: Organize a phone-calling potluck

One of the most effective ways to advocate for change is to call your legislators' offices in D.C., where staff members keep a tally of how many people call each legislator and take note of what those people are saying. Slow Food chapters are in a unique position to do this, because we have a ready-made network of supporters.

At key moments during the bill's progress through Congress, your chapter can help by getting Slow Food members in your area to call their legislators.

- The easiest way to do this is to send members an email with tips for calling Congress. The campaign team can send you an email template to use, or, if you prefer, we can email your members directly from our office.
- A far more effective way to do it is to organize a phone-calling potluck. Gather a group of members for a potluck, and, before you eat, go through and make phone calls to all the other Slow Food members in your area. On the phone, ask those members if they can call Congress, and then follow-up by email with instructions for calling. This is effective because people are more likely to do something if you ask them directly. When they're on the phone, you can also take the opportunity to invite them to an upcoming event and ask more general questions about how they'd like to get involved in your chapter.
- In either scenario, the campaign team will try to let you know as far ahead of time as possible when it's the right moment to get members to call Congress.



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Wrapping up letter writing

Our focus for the last few months has been helping kids and parents send hand-written letters to Congress. So far, Slow Food leaders across the country have helped send 2,400 letters to local Congressional offices. That's huge.

We'll continue sending in hand-written letters until the second week of February. We're setting a deadline because any letters sent after mid-February may not get to the right Congressional aides in time.

Before that deadline, we'd like to know how many letters your chapter has sent, and we invite you to share any photos and good stories you've gathered. In mid-February, the campaign team will send out a news release announcing the total number of letters mailed to Congress. We'll share it with you by email, so you can forward it to local press contacts.

Here are some resources to help you wrap up letter writing:

- [Tips for Getting Letters Written](#)
- [Handout for Parents \(PDF\)](#)
- [Sample Lesson Plan for Teachers \(PDF\)](#)



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Talking points

When you're talking about the campaign, it helps to focus on one or two key messages to get across to your audience. Here are our talking points for the campaign:

- It's time to give America's kids a healthy future.
- Child obesity is spiraling out of control, and our kids, our economy, our health care system and our quality of life are at risk.
- Our best opportunity for fighting obesity is to ensure that every child has access to fresh, wholesome food every school day.
- Right now, Congress gives schools \$2.68 per lunch, about \$1.00 of which goes towards buying ingredients. As a result, schools have to rely on the cheap processed foods that are fueling the obesity and diabetes epidemics.
- With an additional \$1.00 per lunch, schools would be able to serve real food, buy whole ingredients and cook meals from scratch.
- President Obama's budget adds \$1 billion per year to child nutrition programs. That's an important step forward, but it's not enough to give America's kids a healthy future. Not when Congress spends over \$13 billion per year subsidizing processed foods, and when obesity costs our nation \$147 billion per year. Congress should add *at least* \$1 billion to child nutrition programs, and recognize that until we give schools \$1.00 more per lunch, we're putting the health of America's children at risk.
- Congress should also pass mandatory funding for Farm-to-School programs, which link schools to local farms, create jobs in local economies and give schools the resources to update their kitchens and plant school gardens.



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Why we do advocacy

Slow Food USA is a national network of citizens who work to make good, clean and fair food available to everyone. We do it by educating consumers, supporting local farmers, strengthening communities and expanding access to good food. But some of the problems with our food system are structural problems, and those problems require policy solutions. When that's the case, Slow Food members start advocating.

School lunch is one of those cases. The National School Lunch Program feeds 31 million children, and until we fix it, our food system will never be good, clean and fair.

Advocacy does not replace any other part of our work, and it certainly doesn't mean the organization is moving away from our core values of sharing food, taking responsibility and building community. Rather, those values become our vehicle for social change as we build a grassroots movement with the power to fix the American food system.