

balanced



COOKING UP CHANGE

YOUR STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE TO BRINGING HEALTHIER MENUS
TO INSTITUTIONS THAT SERVE YOUR LOVED ONES



WELCOME

Thank you for your interest in advocating for healthier foods in your community. We are thrilled you're here! Before we dive into the campaign materials, I'd love to share a little bit about Balanced with you.

I believe the future health of our children will determine the future health of our country, and of our planet. Which is why, when I saw food companies putting their profits before our health, manufacturing and serving known disease-causing foods, and ignoring the fact they're contributing to a public health crisis, I felt compelled to take action—so I founded Balanced in 2017.

The overconsumption of unhealthy foods like processed, disease-causing meat and egg products and under-consumption of fruits, vegetables, plant-proteins, and whole grains is not - as the food industry would like for us to believe - a personal failure of choice. It is, quite frankly, the result of companies and institutions creating food environments that benefit their bottom line, no matter the cost to our health.

In order to combat diet-related diseases, disabilities, and premature death, we need healthier food environments in all the places we live, work, play, and heal.

Our families deserve food environments that make healthy eating the default – not something reserved for those with time, access, and money.

As an organization, we have worked to hold major food service companies accountable for balancing their menus and the meals they serve in schools, hospitals, universities, and offices—and now, we want to help others have the same impact in their communities.

What started as my personal mission has become an exciting movement, and I'm so glad you're getting involved! Now is the time for change, and together, we can create a food system that puts our families first.

AUDREY SANCHEZ

FOUNDER AND EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

OUR SUPPORT



You're ready to take your advocacy to the next level and campaign for healthier foods in your community. But, you might be asking yourself how exactly you're going to make it happen. *Don't worry!* We're here to help - now, and every step of the way. Here's just some of the ways we can help:

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

In this toolkit you'll find all the guidance you may need as your campaign progresses. From initial research to grassroots organizing, these toolkits include examples, how-to guides, and templates.

1-ON-1 AND GROUP TRAINING

Our team is here to answer your questions *and* help you become a stronger advocate all around. Although not a requirement, we offer advocacy coaching from our team, or you can join one of our month-long courses with changemakers like yourself!

CAMPAIGN ASSETS AND MATERIALS

We've found the most effective advocates have a few supplies ready: a website, a petition, a press release, and compelling handouts. Balanced will assist in the creation of these assets and tailor them to meet your campaign's needs.

GETTING STARTED

The importance of thorough preparation for good advocacy cannot be overstated.

In this section, we'll show you how to lay a solid foundation for your advocacy that will set you up for success.



WHAT YOU WILL NEED

1 SCORE YOUR MENU

The first step in your advocacy is to get a sense of the current state of affairs. Analyze your institution's menu and find out its grade at [balanced.org/score](https://www.balanced.org/score).

2 SET A GOOD GOAL

The goals you set for change at your institution are a crucial part of your advocacy; they determine what you'll ask for and how you'll need to proceed.

3 DO YOUR RESEARCH

The backbone of every advocacy campaign is solid preparation. Don't skip this step or you may find yourself in over your head!

4 FIND YOUR SUPPORTERS

In order to make a strong case to decision makers, you'll want to have a lot of supporters on your side ready to advocate with you for the change your community needs.



5 PREPARE YOUR CASE

Once the time comes, you'll need to be ready to make the case to decision makers that the change you're requesting is necessary and doable.

6 GET SUPPORT

Leading the way for change can be a long and difficult process, but you don't have to do it alone. Our team is here to support you by answering your questions, providing personalized guidance, and more. We also offer training groups so you can learn from changemakers like you. Learn how to get support by emailing advocate@balanced.org

ASSESSING MENUS

Before you get started advocating for healthier meals, it's a good idea to figure out where the food served by your institution currently stands.

Our organization has created an easy way to assess the healthfulness of institutional menus called the Balanced Scorecard, graded from excellent A to failing F.

To learn more and evaluate your menu, go to [balanced.org/score](https://www.balanced.org/score).



SETTING A GOAL

Once you have an idea of your starting point for the institution's menu, you'll want to establish a realistic but ambitious goal. This is an absolutely critical part of the advocacy process because it determines what outcomes you want to achieve for your community.

Your ask could be reduction of unhealthy products like meat and eggs, or increase of healthier ones like fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and legumes - or a combination. **We recommend a combination as a way to maximize the benefits of the change on health.**

Different settings may require different campaign asks, so be sure to be thoughtful and strategic when establishing your goal.

Check out the "**Sample Policy Ask**" document in the toolkit for an example you can use.

IDENTIFYING THE DECISION MAKERS

Before you start advocating for change, you will need to figure out who has the power to make the change your community needs.

While this step may seem pretty obvious, it's important to take the time to consider all the key stakeholders you have to influence. Reach out to as many decision makers as you can and set up a time to meet.

EXAMPLES INCLUDE:

- A school cafeteria food service director
- CEO of a company
- HR Director
- Food service director on a college campus

DIGGING A LITTLE DEEPER

Before diving into contacting decision makers, it's a good idea to get to know a little more about them and the institution you are seeking to change.

Here are some key things to know before you proceed to the next step:

- Is their food service run by a third party provider or are menu items prepared in house?
- How many people are served by this institution every day?
- Are there any policies or initiatives they have that focus on health or nutrition? These show they care!
- Who are the top leadership at this institution?
- Are there any potential allies who work there? They could include a school nurse or PTA group, hospital dietitians, or HR directors at a workplace.
- Are the people served by this institution generally happy with the food they are provided? You can try checking Google or Yelp reviews for testimonials.



NEED HELP?

Spreadsheet templates for you to use when compiling your research are available in the toolkit!



stay positive

Even in the most supportive environments, change can be tricky. Getting the outcomes you want may require accepting baby steps along the way.

The best and most productive way to approach advocating for change is to partner with the decision makers

and work together as a team. So **be patient and stay positive** — together, you'll achieve far more than you would alone.

Keep working on your powers of persuasion, stay positive, and never lose sight of the end-goal. **We know you'll win in the end!**

MAKING YOUR CASE

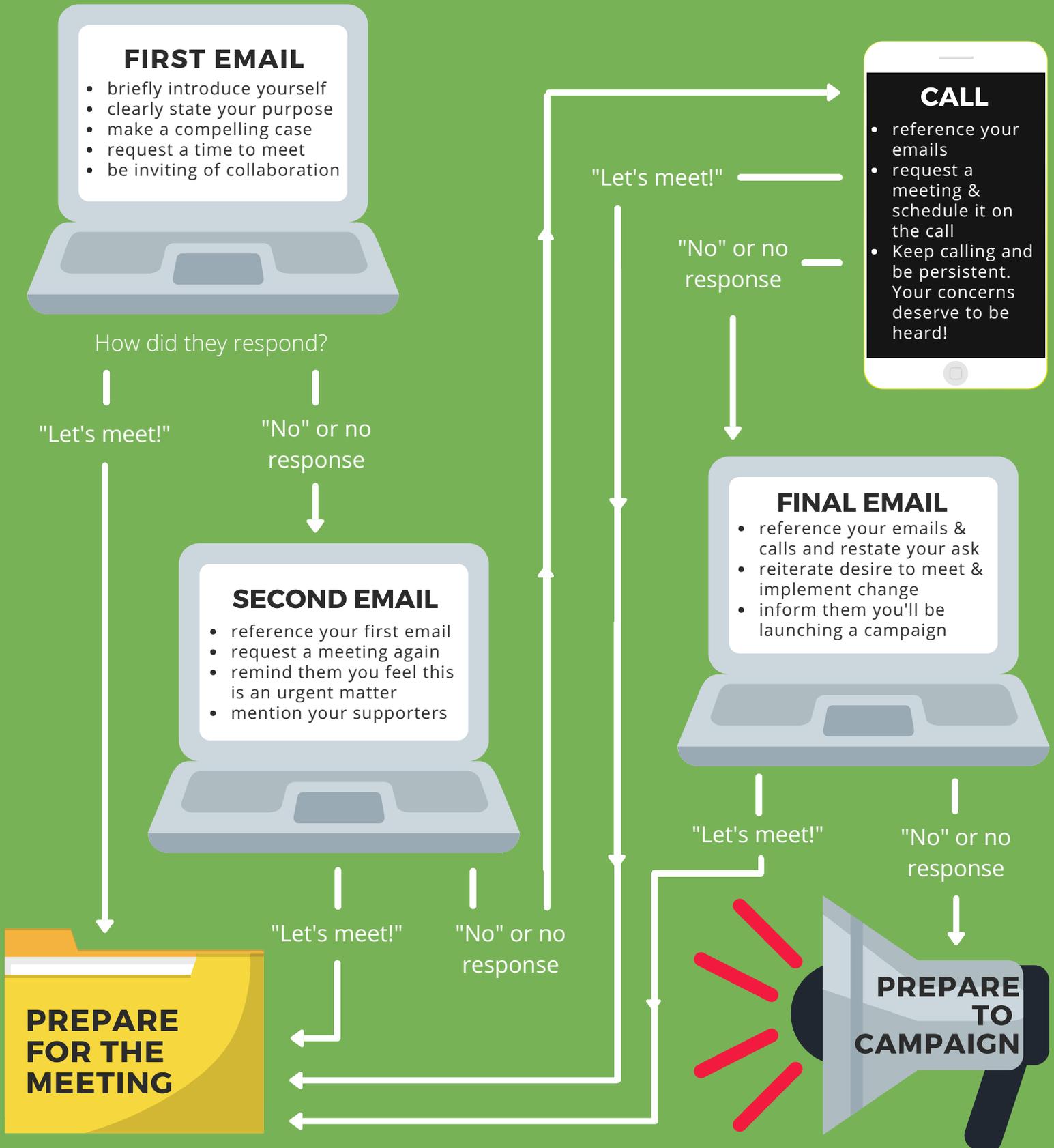
When you're ready to start advocating for change, you'll need to be prepared to show why you're asking for change and what exactly you want.

In this section, we'll show you how to make a convincing case for change with key decision makers.



CONTACTING LEADERSHIP

You've prepared all your research, and now it's time to start reaching out to the key decision-makers at your institution. Use this flowchart to help navigate how to proceed from each communication.



NEED HELP? Email templates are available in the toolkit!



MEETING WITH DECISION MAKERS

Prior to meeting with any key decision maker, it's important you do your research. Knowing why your proposed changes will benefit your community members will set you up for success. Knowing how your company will make the change is less important initially - and it's something

you and your food service director can figure out together!

There are many reasons to balance the menus wherever food is served in your community, whether it is food cost savings, improved classroom or work performance, or cheaper

health insurance premiums. But we've found the most compelling and effective argument for doing so is community health.

Check out the full toolkit for resources to help you make the most of your meeting!



be persistent

If you find the decision makers are hesitant to make changes, **don't give up. You deserve to be heard!**

Change takes time and a shift this major may require you asking multiple times, in different ways, with different people.

The good news is you've got the facts on your side there's huge momentum toward plant-forward menus in institutions across the country.

Your community is depending on your leadership so stay in the fight and don't get discouraged!



PROMOTING YOUR CAUSE

If the decision makers didn't immediately agree to your request in your meeting, it's time to start convincing your community to join your cause.

In this section, we'll show you how to ramp up pressure for change and win big for community health.





ENCOURAGING OTHERS

If other members of your community are already on board with your proposed changes, encourage them to speak up! Organize a team meeting with the food service director or other decision maker, have them drop a note to institution leadership, or highlight specific examples of support when you're talking to key decision makers. The more voices in support of the change, the more likely it is to happen.

For the community members who don't yet know the impact the institution's menus are having on their health, take the opportunity to share what you've learned. You could host an educational meeting, host an informational table at a local event, or post to social media to educate your community. We've found that most people want to eat better, but feel limited by what is available. Help your neighbors make the connection between healthier menus and healthier choices!

USING TECHNOLOGY



The fastest way to spread the word about your campaign to improve the meals at your institution is by getting online.

There are a myriad of ways to advocate for change, but we have found the best advocates take advantage of online tools like petitions, hosting a campaign website, and utilizing social media to recruit new supporters, communicate with followers, and pressure decision makers to negotiate a change.

Using technology effectively is key to achieving a timely victory!

1

PETITION

Hosting your own advocacy website makes it easy to spread the word about your solution to the issues, direct people to sign your petition, and encourage them to get more involved.

2

WEBSITE

Petitions are a great way to show decision makers that you have a broad base of support for your cause. Platforms like Care2 and Change.org are user-friendly tools for starting your petition.

3

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media helps you recruit new supporters and spread the word about your cause. It's also an easy and effective way to show decision makers how much this issue matters to your supporters.

Check out the toolkit for digital campaigning how-to guides!

GOING GRASSROOTS

Grassroots campaigning refers to the idea that organizing change happens from the bottom up. In this case, it means organizing members of your community to take action and create institutional change.

Typically, grassroots campaigning happens in person and is a tool for educating people unfamiliar with your cause and encouraging them to join your efforts and take action.

The best time to start using grassroots campaigning tactics is typically after the campaign has launched online - after you've had a few days to share the word digitally, you've organized all relevant groups online, and communicated with key decision makers about the campaign. The media is more likely to cover a grassroots demonstration than online organizing, and it increases the pressure on decision makers to negotiate a resolution.



EFFECTIVE ACTIONS TO TRY

There are lots of ways to get your community involved in your advocacy work. Here are just some ideas:

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

ORGANIZING A PROTEST

DOOR-TO-DOOR CANVASSING

REACHING OUT TO LOCAL MEDIA

DISTRIBUTING LITERATURE

SPEAKING AT PUBLIC MEETINGS

NEED HELP?

Check out our how-to guides for step-by-step instructions for organizing grassroots activities.



keep in touch

Communication is an essential component of good advocacy. Throughout the process of your campaign for healthier menus, you'll need to be in touch with several groups of people, including your supporters, the institution's decision makers, and even members of the media.

It's best practice to update your supporters regularly so they know what is going on and what they can be doing to help.

The same goes for decision makers. Keep them updated on all the work you are doing to build support for your cause in your community.



WHEN YOU WIN!

You persuaded the key decision makers at your institution to commit to balance their menus—congratulations!

Give yourself a pat on the back—all your hard work advocating for change has finally paid off, and your community will now reap the benefits of more health-promoting menus!

SAY THANKS

It's important to thank the decision makers for

agreeing to your campaign requests. A nice way to do that is to send handwritten thank you letters to each of them, along with a small, meaningful gift as a token of your appreciation. In general, the more personal you can be, the more meaningful the thanks. Showing your appreciation makes it easier to stay in touch and ensure the changes get implemented in the future.

For instance, if you've been campaigning for healthier meals in schools, consider having a student write a thank you as well saying how much they appreciate the opportunity to have healthier meals.

Be sure to thank your volunteers, petition signers, local media outlets, and any other supporters you earned during the campaign as well.



GET SUPPORT

Our organization exists to support healthy food champions *like you!*

At any point in the process, you're welcome to contact our team for support.

We're available to help troubleshoot problems, share extra resources, and provide customized guidance.

We also offer group trainings that can connect you with other changemakers across the country!



Our Community Advocacy team is ready to help you with whatever questions you have. Reach out today!

CONNECT WITH US
advocate@balanced.org



Thank you!

On behalf of our team at Balanced, and public-health advocates everywhere, thank you for taking on the critical work of improving your company's menu. We know how difficult the work can be, but we're continually inspired by people like you.

Your advocacy will save lives!



Changing Menus, Saving Lives

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