



**STUDENT  
ADVOCACY  
TOOLKIT**

# RESEARCH CHECKLIST

While it may seem like you know everything about your school, it's worth putting the time in to do some thorough research before moving forward with advocating for change. You might be surprised what comes up!

The following is our most thorough checklist to help guide you through this research. Feel free to only research what is most relevant to you.

## RESEARCHING YOUR SCHOOL

- Links to the school's website and social media, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, and Google and Yelp review pages (as relevant)
- School's location: What major metropolitan areas, public transit centers, landmarks, or other popular attractions is it near? Is it near any landmarks, public transit centers, or other popular attractions? What is the surrounding area like?
- Motto, mission statement, and any other relevant taglines, phrases, or quotes by the institution and its leadership (pay extra attention to anything that emphasizes health, wellness, or being "eco-friendly")
- Who provides the school's food service (is it done in house or by a third party company?)
- Number of meals and/or people served
- Any health- or environment-related policies, initiatives, or partnerships, and a list of news articles, press releases, and other content covering them
- Information about any other groups or advocates already working for change
- President's or other leaders' salary
- Awards the institution has received
- Upcoming events you could attend for outreach

# RESEARCH CHECKLIST

When you're preparing to negotiate with key decision makers, it's helpful to gather as much information as you can find about the top leadership at your school so you can build a relationship and connect what they care about with your cause.

## RESEARCHING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

- Who are the school's top leaders?

Find as much info as possible about the top 1 or 2 leaders at the institution. Do they serve on the board of another company or institution? Are they involved with any nonprofits or groups in their local community? Where did they go to college? What is their degree in? Look at their LinkedIn and look for any news coverage of their work to get to know them better.

- Leadership Salary

This information isn't always available, but in many cases it can be useful — e.g., *"School's President makes \$x million a year; they could afford to put their students first"*.

- Environment and Sustainability Professionals

Look for titles like "Director of Sustainability" "Sustainability Officer or Coordinator" etc.

- Potential allies in the institution

See if there are any health- or environment-related employees at the institution, such as a professor of nutrition or environmental studies, a faculty advisor for a health-focused or environmental student interest group, campus physicians or nutritionists, sports medicine providers, and more.



# SAMPLE POLICY ASK

Given the current state of planetary health, wherein collectively, we have just a few remaining years to reverse course before we experience irreversible climate destruction, there is an urgent need for the foods served in our schools, offices, universities, and hospitals to be more climate-friendly and in line with the advice of leading climate and nutrition experts. With an increasing number of meals being served outside the home, and the many mandated food programs at universities, food service companies and their contract institutions have a responsibility to quickly address the health and environmental crisis to which too many of their foods contribute.

The volume of food served by food service companies and their institutions puts them in a prime position to have a massive, widespread positive impact on the lives of their customers and the planet more broadly. This is why we're calling on them to commit to a meaningful nutrition policy aimed at balancing their menus to be more in line with the recommendations of leading healthcare organizations, nutrition and public health experts, and environmental advocacy groups with the eventual goal of serving entirely plant-based breakfasts and lunches. Knowing that nearly 90% of Americans don't get the amount of fruits, vegetables, and whole grains recommended for optimal health, and that animal agriculture is a leading cause of global warming, there is no excuse for continuing to serve so many meat, dairy, and egg products every day.

## SAMPLE TEXT

*Our ask is that your institution issues a public statement outlining a commitment to replace at least 20% of the meat, poultry, and egg products purchased and served with health- and climate-friendly fruits, vegetables, legumes, whole grains, and other plant-proteins over the next two years. Further, they should commit to the eventual goal of serving completely plant-based breakfasts and/or lunches by 2025.*



# CONTACTING LEADERSHIP

## FIRST CONTACT

Hello (NAME),

I hope this email finds you well. My name is (NAME) and I am (DESCRIBE YOURSELF).

Given the current state of the climate crisis along with the public health epidemics of diseases like heart disease and diabetes, I have no doubt you're already aware of the growing interest in, and demand for, healthier and more planet-friendly alternatives to animal-origin foods high in cholesterol, saturated fat, and sodium. The need for improved options on menus around the country and here in (LOCATION) is of particular concern at this moment in time because of the substantial impact that food choice has on the health and wellness of our community and our planet.

I believe that, like myself, you too are committed to meeting student demand for alternatives to foods associated with climate change such as meat, dairy and eggs. Would you be willing to set up a time to meet to discuss any policies you have for reducing these ingredients in the meals you serve at (SCHOOL)?

I look forward to your response.

## SECOND CONTACT

Hello (NAME),

Following up about an email I sent last week seeking to connect about (SCHOOL)'s commitment to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions while promoting better student health. It's important we schedule a time to talk in the near future - I'm happy to accommodate your availability. If I don't hear from you by (TIME), I'll give your office a call.

# CONTACTING LEADERSHIP

## THIRD/FINAL CONTACT

Hello (NAME),

I am writing to inform you that despite repeated emails, phone calls, and attempts to schedule meetings with you, I have been unsuccessful in securing a time to talk with anyone at (SCHOOL) about your nutrition and environmental initiatives. The evidence for decreasing the amount of unhealthy foods you serve, specifically disease-linked foods like meat, poultry, and eggs, is undeniable.

Students like myself are increasingly aware of the science and nearly everyone is impacted personally by the devastation that diet-related disease, illness, and premature death cause. Unfortunately, without being able to connect with a leader on your team to discuss opportunities for making more climate-friendly and healthier foods more available, and given the urgency these issues require, I will be launching a public awareness campaign aiming to educate members of the school community about this issue.

We deserve to know the impact the food they're being served is having on their health and the planet, especially when we have no choice in the matter, and (SCHOOL) has a responsibility to our community to serve fewer foods known to contribute to climate change and cause heart disease, diabetes, high-blood pressure, and even cancer.

Until (SCHOOL) makes a public commitment to reduce the amount of unhealthy foods it serves, specifically meat, poultry, and eggs by at least 20% and replace them with healthier plant-based alternatives at breakfast and lunch, I will continue to work tirelessly to ensure this community knows the true price of meals served in your cafeterias.

I would prefer to resolve this issue privately and will cease my campaign efforts in the event that (SCHOOL) works to address the glaring issues with its meal offerings. I welcome the opportunity to speak with your team to begin moving forward. I will be in touch as our efforts continue.

# GIVING A PRESENTATION

All the researching, communicating, and preparing has finally paid off—it's time to make your case to a decision maker for why your community needs more plant-based menus.

A good presentation does three things in a clear and concise manner:

- 1** makes a compelling case for your ask
- 2** clarifies how it benefits the decision maker
- 3** addresses potential barriers

**Plan to give your presentation during your first meeting with decision makers.**

In your presentation, be sure to communicate that you are seeking to work with the institution's leadership to make these changes. The best way to move forward is as a team, so be polite and positive!

**Be prepared to answer questions** about cost savings associated with serving more plants and fewer animal products, how the change will impact public perception, how the food staff can implement the change, and how to set a timeline for implementation.

## DON'T WORRY!

The team at Balanced can help you prepare your case and walk you through everything you'll need to know to get decision makers on your side. Get in touch for 1-on-1 support at [advocate@balanced.org](mailto:advocate@balanced.org)



# HELPFUL RESOURCES

Use these resources to build your own knowledge as you make the case for replacing meat on the menu.

## FOR CLIMATE INFORMATION

*We Are the Weather: Saving the Planet Begins at Breakfast* by Jonathan Safran Foer



## HELPFUL NUTRITION WEBSITES

Nutrition Facts, [NutritionFacts.org](http://NutritionFacts.org)

Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, [PCRM.org](http://PCRM.org)

## PEER-REVIEWED STUDIES

The Journal of American Osteopathic Association, "Is Meat Killing Us?"

New England Journal of Medicine, "Association of Changes in Diet Quality with Total and Cause-Specific Mortality"

For additional peer-reviewed studies, please email [info@balanced.org](mailto:info@balanced.org)

## HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATION STATEMENTS

American Medical Association Resolution 406

American College of Cardiology Resolution, "Planting a Seed: Heart-Healthy Food Recommendations for Hospitals"

The MAYO Clinic, "Boiling Down the Dietary Guidelines"

CDC, "Making the Connection: Dietary Behaviors and Academic Grades"

Brookings, "How the Quality of School Lunch Affects Students' Academic Performance"

# DRAFTING A PETITION

The petition is the foundation of your campaign; it's how you're going to show your decision makers that your community wants and demands these changes.

A good petition does three things clearly and concisely:

1

describes  
the problem

2

provides the  
solution

3

explains why  
it's needed

## TIPS

Be **specific** and **clear** in your proposed solution and who has the power to make it happen

Make it **personal** and *briefly* explain why this issue is important to *you*

**Share** it on social media & email, with flyers, and with your school and local media

Get support from us at  
[advocate@balanced.org!](mailto:advocate@balanced.org)



# BUILDING A WEBSITE

Your campaign website is an important tool that you can share to spread the word about your solution to the issues, direct people to sign your petition, and encourage them to get more involved.

The simplest way to do this is to contact the Balanced team for help at [advocate@balanced.org](mailto:advocate@balanced.org)! We will take care of the design, hosting, and technology work for you so you can focus on advocating.

If you want to make your own website, we recommend it have the following four things:

**1** a description of the problem

**2** the solution that's needed

**3** a link to the petition

**4** ways folks can get involved

## TIPS

**Make the “ask” very clear** and towards the top of the page. For example, provide a link to your petition within the first few lines.

**When in doubt, less is more.** Be concise and simple—we’re all busy, so your site is more likely to be read if it’s short and to the point.

**Ensure the site works on both desktop and mobile.** That way, you can reach everybody who needs to see your message.



# LEVERAGING MEDIA

Having media coverage to spread the word about your campaign can provide a big boost to your advocacy efforts. Here are some tips for success:

## WHAT TO SHARE WITH MEDIA

- Introduce yourself and in 1 or 2 sentences, briefly explain your cause and your campaign (the why, what, and how)
- Share any pushback or response you've gotten from decision makers
- Include a link to your campaign website and petition
- Let them know you're eager to set up a time to connect
- The best way to bring attention to your campaign is by doing a bit of research, drafting a sincere submission email, and reaching out to reporters and news outlets directly

## NEWS SOURCES TO CONTACT

- Local newspaper (print/digital), TV news stations, and radio stations (especially NPR affiliates or other news/talk stations)
- Campus media outlets like a student newspaper, radio stations, and more
- Whenever possible, do your research to identify the right program and reach out to the producers online, through email, or via social media

## HOW TO REACH MEDIA OUTLETS

- Check their website for a submission form or a general "contact us" form
- Find reporters who have written pieces covering health, schools, or other personal interest stories and contact them directly
- Get on Twitter. Many reporters and news outlets use Twitter to stay up to date on important news, and it's a direct line to many influential reporters
- If you're struggling to get coverage from reporters, try writing an op-ed or a letter to the editor. Some reporters don't have the bandwidth to cover every campaign, but many editors are eager for quality submissions

# PRESS RELEASE

**For Immediate Release**

(DATE)

**(CITY, STATE)**—Monday, students at (INSTITUTION), launched a campaign to get healthier, more climate-friendly foods served in (INSTITUTION). The students called on (INSTITUTION) to provide more servings of fruits, vegetables, legumes, and grains, and fewer servings of the meat, dairy and egg products that have been linked to climate change. The students note that dozens of food service companies like Chartwells and other institutions around the country have already made this change, but (INSTITUTION/ INSTITUTION'S FOOD SERVICE PROVIDER) has yet to do so.

This campaign comes shortly after the EAT Foundation and the United Nations both issued statements calling for the urgent reduction of meat, dairy and egg products consumed in an effort to fight climate change. In addition to these organizations, the students point to leading environmental organizations like Greenpeace, Sierra Club, and Friends of the Earth who have also called for a reduction of animal-source foods as part of a comprehensive strategy to fight climate change. The students say (INSTITUTION)'s menus, which do not reflect these groups' dietary recommendations or the leading environmental evidence.

"When it comes down to it, the food served in our dining halls at (INSTITUTION) falls short of the dietary recommendations made by top environmental, healthcare, nutrition, and public-health organizations," [student leader] said. "In the face of our global climate crisis, balancing our menus is something that must happen before it's too late. Our ask - swapping 20% of the meat, eggs, and dairy served in favor of more plant-forward proteins and other foods —is a simple change (INSTITUTION) can make that will have a positive and meaningful impact on the future of our planet."

(STUDENT ORGANIZERS) encourage individuals who want to support this effort to get involved at their website, ([www.WEBSITE.com](http://www.WEBSITE.com)).

## **About Student[s]**

### **Contact:**

Contact information

# USING SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a quick and easy way to get the word out about your advocacy. Here are just a few ideas:

- Share graphics/videos
- Share petition & updates
- Recruit new supporters from campus groups
- Write & share blog post, op-ed, or LTE
- Comment on the institution's most recent posts and Live feeds
- Send messages to the institution's page
- Leave a 1-star review on Google or on their page
- Run ads targeting student and/or school leadership
- Host a Facebook/Instagram Live or other video filmed on campus
- Tweet at the institution
- Tweet at top leadership and board members
- Use a free platform for a Twitterstorm

**TIP** Take screenshots of any comments, ads, tweets, reviews, etc. so you can share that feedback with decision makers

Contact us for templates at  
**[advocate@balanced.org!](mailto:advocate@balanced.org)**



# UPDATING DECISION MAKERS

When sending a regular update to a decision maker, be sure to include:

- The current state of the campaign (links to website, news article, etc)
- The momentum you're building, e.g. *"In the time since we last spoke, our team has gathered an additional 200 signatures..."*
- The next phase of your campaign
- Times you're available to meet to discuss the campaign or negotiate a resolution

## EXAMPLE

Hello (NAME),

I'm writing to share with you that due to SCHOOL's continued neglect of this pressing public health and environmental issue, my team is entering a new phase of our campaign.

It has now been (TIME) since we first launched our campaign, and we are disheartened that you continue to ignore your students who care deeply about this issue. Since our launch, we have had (#) visitors to our campaign website, with (#) new signatures on our petition demanding (INSTITUTION) prioritize this issue. We have heard feedback from our supporters on social media and on our petition about how important this issue is to them, and I've attached a few samples for you to review.

In the next two weeks, we will be spreading our campaign's message on social media, in person, in the media, and engaging our growing grassroots network to help educate everyone on campus until you and your team commit to making changes.

As I've mentioned before, we would prefer to resolve this issue privately and will cease our campaign efforts in the event that (INSTITUTION) works to take meaningful action towards better public and planetary health through its meal offerings. I welcome the opportunity to speak with your team to begin moving forward. I'm available to meet (TIME).

# UPDATING SUPPORTERS

Make sure to keep your supporters updated throughout the campaign process to encourage them to get (or stay!) involved. Each update should include:

## A THANK YOU!

Say “thank you” for their support and give a summary of what has been accomplished since the campaign launch or the previous update. You could include the number of new petition signatures, new events or meetings that were organized, or other digital or grassroots campaign efforts that have been made. It is always nice to recognize any accomplishments by stand-out volunteers when appropriate.

*ex: “This month, your support has helped us make huge progress in our campaign to bring more climate friendly foods to \_\_\_!”*

## A CALL TO ACTION

- Give a preview of what's coming up for the next month and share 1-3 concrete actions your volunteers can take to continue making a difference.
- Announce any upcoming meetings, protests, or other events.
- Provide a link to the campaign petition along with buttons/links and encourage them to continue to share the petition.



# DISTRIBUTING LITERATURE

Distributing leaflets is a great way to get the word out about your campaign and to find potential supporters. Luckily, it happens to be one of the easiest ways to spread the word, too!

All you need is 15 minutes, a stack of leaflets, and a bustling public place to get started. If you've got a few minutes in between classes, you can leaflet!

It can be nerve-racking to put yourself out there, but try to push through and **remember why you're out here—you're here to save lives and save the planet!** If you need help, it never hurts to bring a friend to join you!

Here are some more tips for effective leafleting:

## PICKING A GOOD SPOT

**Find a busy, public place to get started.** As a general rule, public sidewalks with lots of foot traffic are fair game for leafleting.

**Stand in the middle of the sidewalk or foot traffic flow.** This will give you the best ability to reach the most people, and it will make you hard to ignore.

## MAXIMIZE YOUR IMPACT

**Use a quick line,** like “Save the planet” or “Better food on campus” to convince people to take the information.

**Make the leaflet hard to refuse.** Step forward, lean towards them, and extend your arm towards the recipient, placing the leaflet near their hand.

## JUST BE FRIENDLY!

**Smile and say hi!** People are far more likely to take information from somebody who is friendly than not.

**Respond with a kind “Have a nice day” if folks say no.** That way, the next people will still see you as friendly and will still be interested in taking your information.

# WRITING A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Writing a letter to the editor can help inform your community about your issue and bring public opinion around to your side.

Your letter will have the best chance of being published if it is brief, informed, and passionate but rational. The goal is to get your community on your side, not just to air any frustrations. Once you've written your letter, make sure to proofread and go back over it to see if anything can be trimmed or condensed.

## HOW TO STRUCTURE YOUR LETTER

1

### ADDRESS THE EDITOR

If possible, find the name of the editor and address them in your letter. Otherwise, a simple "To the Editor" is fine

2

### GRAB THEIR ATTENTION

Draw the reader in with a powerful opening line that gives them a preview of what they're about to read

3

### EXPLAIN THE ISSUE

Explain the issue (in this case, public health and climate change) and why it is important simply and briefly

4

### GIVE EVIDENCE

Back up your call for change with the facts. Refer to the Helpful Resources page in the toolkit and *We Are the Weather* for specifics

5

### PROVIDE THE SOLUTION

Be specific about the solution you propose and how it will benefit the school (and planet!)

6

### SIGN YOUR LETTER

Provide your full name, phone number, and email address so the news outlet can follow up



# DOOR-TO-DOOR CANVASSING

Canvassing in your campus dorms or in other areas with lots of students and faculty around is a great way to get the word out about your campaign and hopefully earn new supporters!

## WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- a prepared script to start the conversations
- answers to common questions
- campaign literature with a link to the petition
- comfortable shoes and water
- a canvassing buddy (canvassing is safest and most effective with a partner!)

## WHAT TO SAY

We recommend structuring your introduction in this order:

- 1 who you are
- 2 the purpose of your campaign
- 3 the current problem
- 4 how things *should* be
- 5 your solution
- 6 what support you need

## ENCOURAGE THEM TO TAKE ACTION!

Once you get through your opening script, just follow the natural flow of the conversation and answer any questions they have. Make sure to give your call to action (sign the petition and get involved!)

If they are willing to sign the petition, encourage them to do it either on a sign-up sheet you've brought with you, or on the phone right away - before they forget!

If they are busy, offer to come back later. If they're not interested or not home, leave a leaflet for them to read later.

**{ NEED ADVICE? Let us help! Email us at [advocate@balanced.org](mailto:advocate@balanced.org) }**

# SPEAKING AT EVENTS

Campus forums and meetings are great opportunities to make your message heard by both decision makers, faculty, and fellow students. With some practice and preparation, you can deliver powerful speeches that rally people and decision makers to your cause.

## HOW TO PLAN YOUR COMMENTS

1

### INTRODUCE YOURSELF

Introduce yourself and make a brief, one-line preview of why you're speaking. For example, you could say "I am here today to request your support on my campaign to get this school to serve more plant-forward menus for our health and for the health of our planet"

2

### EXPLAIN THE ISSUE

Briefly explain the problem, and frame the issue to show how it will benefit the school, your peers, and the planet. For example, serving fewer animal ingredients could lower healthcare costs for employees *and* reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

3

### ADDRESS CONCERNS

Plan ahead for any arguments someone might make against you. How would you respond if somebody said what you want is too expensive? Add a line into your speech about the cost-savings for the school if they make this change.

4

### ASK FOR ACTION

Clearly state what you want people to do about it. For the audience, that may be signing your petition. For the decision-makers, it's to get their support behind your cause.

## TIPS

If you are organizing a group, make sure that each person's statements provide something new to the conversation. Nobody wants to listen to the same speech again and again!

Appeals to emotion are important, but it's important to not be combative or overly emotional. Making a reasoned argument will earn you more supporters in the long run.

# ORGANIZING DEMONSTRATIONS

Organizing, or even attending, a demonstration can feel intimidating, but with these tips, you'll be a pro in no time!

## MAKE A PLAN

Take the time early on to think critically about all aspects of the event—proper planning is what ensures your event is effective!

**Set up a planning team:** We are all busy, and planning events can take time—so find volunteers who can help you with the details.

**Pick a smart location and time:** Make sure your location is very accessible and has a lot of visibility to foot and/or other traffic. Pick a time of day that will maximize traffic too, like morning rush hour or lunch breaks.

**Follow the rules:** Check your local laws and campus rules to find out what is required to hold a demonstration. In many cases, it's as simple as just making sure you're on a public sidewalk, not private property!

**Plan your message:** Take the time early on to plan the tone and message of the event, both on your signs and in conversation with passersby and media.



# ORGANIZING DEMONSTRATIONS

## REACH OUT

The next step is of course to find people to show up to the protest with you. Encourage the supporters you already have to show up and help spread the word, and continue doing outreach in your community to build awareness on the issue. You can try sending mass emails out to student lists, distributing flyers and putting up posters, building a buzz on social media, connecting with interest groups on campus, and talking to campus media.

Getting the support of local influential people can be a huge help in getting the word out about your event. They'll lend your event credibility, followers, and likely media attention.

Be sure to invite your local media to attend the event itself. That's a fast and easy way to get your message to as many people as possible!

## DOCUMENT YOUR EVENT

On the day of the event, take lots of photos and/or videos. This is crucial to maximize your impact even after the protest is over! Consider going live on social media at your event—it's a great way to get attention while your event is happening, and is a useful link to share with decision makers and media after your event is over.

Share photos and videos of your event on social media. Tag any relevant decision makers, and be sure to share the content with local media. Send photos of your event and materials in your next update to key decision makers to keep up the pressure.

## FOLLOW UP

With the increased attention you're likely to get after your event, be sure to engage with newcomers to your cause. You can add them to your email lists and find other ways for them to contribute to the campaigns to keep the momentum going!