



Project Bread's Action Academy

AN EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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**PROJECT
BREAD**



**Congressional
Hunger Center**



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Introduction

THE STATE OF HUNGER IN MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts is one of the wealthiest states in the country. Despite this economic resource, one-in-eleven Massachusetts households were food insecure as of 2018 [1]. The ongoing threat of the COVID-19 pandemic has revealed the true vulnerabilities of the American food system. Food insecurity in Massachusetts has doubled from pre-pandemic numbers. As of October 2020, approximately 16% of Massachusetts households were food insecure [2]. Among the most vulnerable populations to food insecurity in the state are children and Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC). One in five children in the state are currently experiencing food insecurity, and children of color are experiencing food insecurity at twice this rate [3].

Though the numbers are daunting, we have the resources we need in the United States to end food insecurity permanently. The existence of food insecurity and poverty in our country is inexcusable and is a testament to the misguided priorities of our political leaders. We are in need of advocates at the state and national levels who are dedicated to solving these political problems. The first step in advocating for sustainable and scalable solutions to end hunger is understanding its root causes. Systemic racism and historical inequities perpetuate the cycle of poverty and food insecurity in our nation, disproportionately impacting marginalized communities. Project Bread works to break down these barriers to food access by connecting people to resources and identifying policies that will promote food security in Massachusetts. In creating the Action Academy, Project Bread empowers Massachusetts residents to understand their role as anti-hunger advocates and work to bring about systemic solutions.



Image 1.




About the Action Academy

A GUIDE TO ANTI-HUNGER ADVOCACY

Project Bread's Action Academy is an eight-part guide that details the basics of hunger, its intersections with other challenges, and best practices for advancing comprehensive solutions that will break the cycle of hunger. Each section of the Action Academy will be uploaded online to allow people across Massachusetts, and even advocates outside of the state, to learn at their own pace. The objective of the Action Academy is to provide advocates with the necessary tools they need to not only share the issues that are important to them but to then influence their elected officials to take action. When advocates come together to bring about change, they are the most influential actors in the political process. The Action Academy fosters a powerful movement to end hunger in Massachusetts and beyond by presenting data, sharing the stories of people directly impacted by food insecurity, and connecting people to build a strong coalition.



Image 2.





Anti-Hunger Advocacy

Each section of the Action Academy builds upon one another, beginning with basic information on the issues of hunger and poverty and ending with tips that will maximize the effectiveness of anti-hunger advocacy. The sections serve as a compilation of the necessary information a person will need as they create their personalized advocacy plan of action. Whether it's key terms, data and statistics, or advice from anti-hunger professionals, the Action Academy offers a detailed guide that pushes participants out of their comfort zone and into a space of bold and transformative growth. The sections of the Action Academy are as followed:

- 1: About Project Bread
- 2: Hunger 101
- 3: The Root Causes of Hunger
- 4: Who Experiences Hunger?
- 5: Anti-Hunger Programs
- 6: How a Bill Becomes a Law in MA
- 7: Telling Your Story
- 8: Where You Come In

About Project Bread

VISION: Project Bread envisions a Massachusetts where hunger is permanently solved.

MISSION: Project Bread connects people and communities in Massachusetts to reliable sources of food while advocating for policies that make food more accessible—so that no one goes hungry.

The first section of the Action Academy explores the history of Project Bread, their current operations, and the intended outcomes of their work. The objective of this section is for advocates in Massachusetts to understand Project Bread's unique approach to ending hunger and provide resources for advocates seeking information about anti-hunger in the state.

Project Bread started as a group of activists leading an anti-hunger walk in downtown Boston. An estimated 2,000 community members showed up for the 1969 Walk for Hunger [4], the nation's first-ever pledge walk. The purpose of the walk was not only to raise funds for those experiencing hunger in the area but to also stand as a community to create social change. The group of activists that started the Walk for Hunger later founded their own non-profit organization— Project Bread. Today, Project Bread works to address hunger at the local, state, and federal levels through a number of programmatic solutions.





Image 3. The First Walk for Hunger in 1969

Project Bread works to address the systemic causes of hunger to make it easier for all people to access and afford food with dignity. Therefore, Project Bread's programs are centered around improving food access, educating and increasing awareness of hunger, engaging community members and organizations, and advocating for policy solutions and systems change to end hunger. Programs including the FoodSource Hotline and Healthcare Partnerships are aimed at supporting community food solutions and increasing community access to immediate and long-term food resources. Focused on feeding children where they learn, The Child Nutrition Outreach Program and the Community Nutrition Services program work to ensure all school children have access to nutritious and appealing meals throughout the year. Lastly, Project Bread aims to inspire community action and inform policy. The annual Walk for Hunger and the Action Team create connections with community members interested in anti-hunger advocacy.



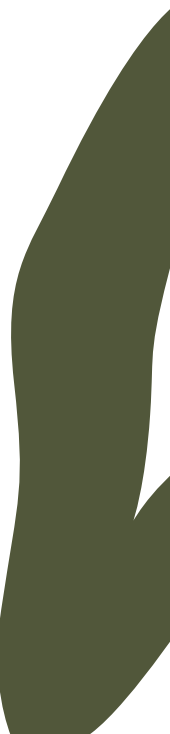
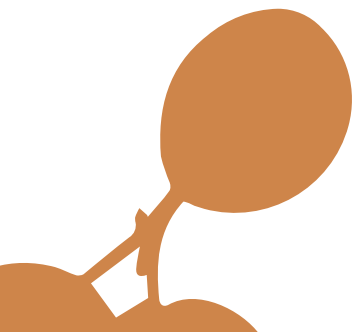
Image 4. Project Bread Staff in Washington, D.C.

Hunger 101

The second section of the Action Academy details the many meanings and experiences of "Hunger." The objective of "Hunger 101" is for advocates to learn key information on the issue of hunger and apply this knowledge at the state level.

Hunger can range from a feeling of discomfort between meals to a more serious, chronic condition where people aren't able to get food when they need it. The term "food insecurity" is used to distinguish the more chronic condition from the many other experiences of hunger [5]. Food security" is a term that the US Department of Agriculture uses to describe someone who has access to food at all times, and can support an active and healthy life [6]. The opposite, however, is "food insecurity" which is broken into two different categories: low food security and very low food security. "Low food security" is used for people who have reduced the quality, variety, or desirability of their diet, but haven't reduced the amount of food they eat. "Very low food security" is when people have been forced to change their eating patterns and possibly skip meals because they do not have enough money for food, regardless of it being healthy or unhealthy. [7]

It's important to recognize that a lack of available food is not a primary driver of food insecurity. The high cost of living and lack of adequate access to resources are larger reasons why people are unable to eat a healthy diet. This lack of resources is caused and exacerbated by systemic inequities. The challenges people in Massachusetts face in accessing nutritious food are largely influenced by the high cost of living, expensive childcare costs, and high employer-based health insurance in the state.



The Root Causes of Hunger

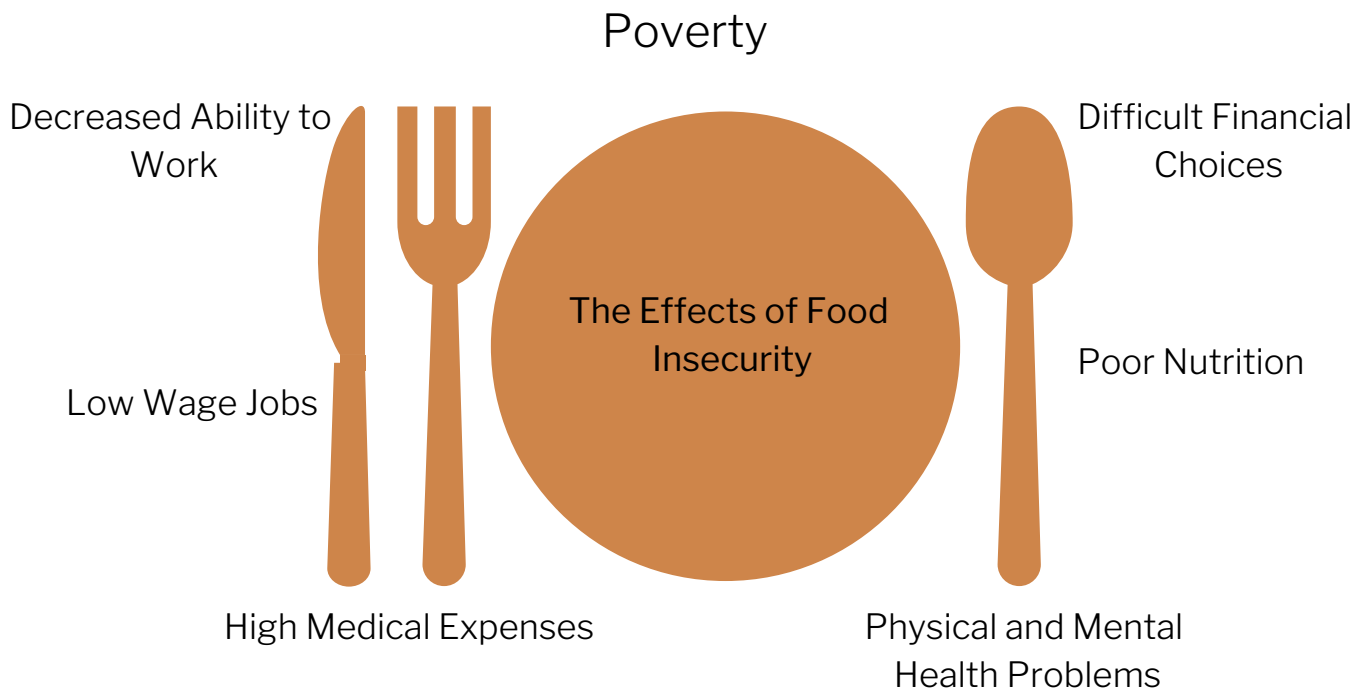
The Action Academy's third section presents the barriers that prevent people from accessing nutritious, substantial, and culturally appropriate food. The objective of this section is to outline the systemic causes of food insecurity and understand the financial limitations of a basic budget in Massachusetts.

The term “food desert” is commonly used to refer to an area that lacks sources of affordable nutritious foods, and instead may have convenience stores and fast-food restaurants that make healthy options hard to find [8]. However, these geographic limitations in food access are not coincidental. Food inaccessibility is a result of the many injustices that are present within the food system. While an area may lack access to affordable healthy food options, to refer to it as a “desert” makes it seem as if it is naturally occurring and that there is no life present and no potential for growth. On the contrary, these communities are resilient and very much alive. “Food Apartheid” is a term coined by Karen Washington, an activist, and farmer based in New York, to acknowledge these intentional inequities within the food system [9].



Image 5. Farmer and activist Karen Washington

Massachusetts is currently in the incremental process of increasing the minimum wage to \$15/hr by January 2023 [10]. Despite this increase, the minimum wage is not a living wage. The Action Academy uses data from MIT's Living Wage Calculator to estimate the typical family budget and cost of living [11]. Factoring in the cost of housing, daily transportation, healthcare, and childcare, an adult's monthly paycheck will be more than depleted after paying for their basic necessities, which don't include their many other necessary expenses. Of the expenses that people need to cover, the first item that they often compromise is food. The consequences of food insecurity, while extremely threatening, are often less immediate than the consequences associated with other basic needs. Difficult financial decisions contribute to and perpetuate the issue of hunger, causing families and individuals to make the difficult, unfair choice between food and other necessities.



Who Experiences Hunger?

In the fourth section of the Action Academy, advocates will learn the ways identity and hunger are connected. The objective of this section is to further explore the root causes of hunger that disproportionately affect marginalized populations.

This section includes data on the intersection between food insecurity and identity among communities of color, Indigenous populations, undocumented individuals, women, queer and trans people, those living with disabilities, and older Americans. Following the acknowledgment of the structures that contribute to these inequities, advocates will learn ways to create a more just food system. It is essential to consider identity as an anti-hunger advocate and to understand how identity-based injustices create societal barriers to opportunity and access, including a barrier to food. Critical race theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw coined the term “intersectionality” as a way to describe the connection between the multiple identities each person holds [12]. This section describes the ways white supremacy operates on the interpersonal, institutional, and systemic levels to create exclusionary and discriminatory policies and practices that make it more difficult for people of color to access the same benefits and resources as white individuals. It also asserts the importance of prioritizing equity over equality in advocating for sustainable policies to end food insecurity. Equity acknowledges the disparities created by white supremacy and other systems of oppression and works to foster a more racially, socially, and economically just society.

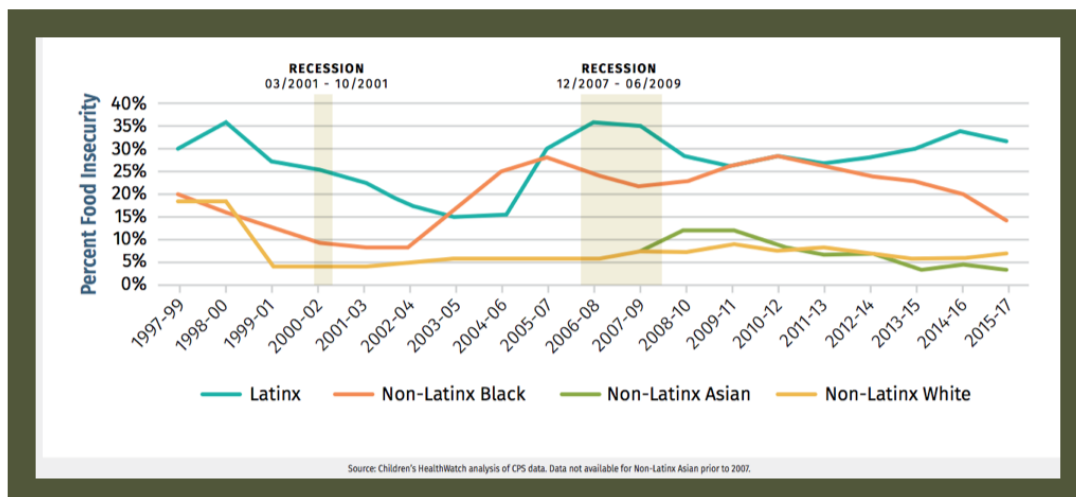


Figure 1. The trend of Food Insecurity by Race/Ethnicity in Massachusetts

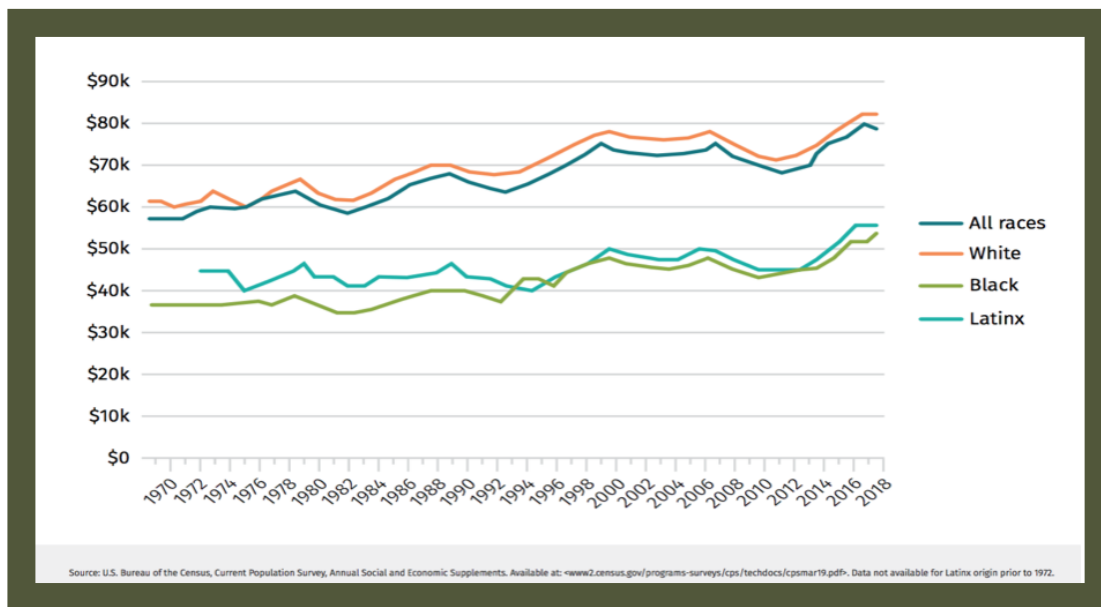
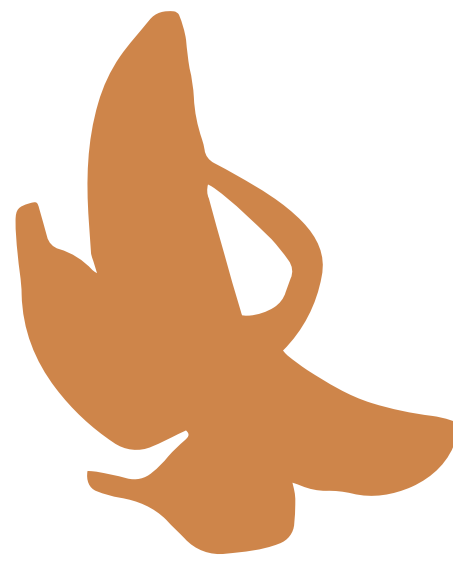


Figure 2. Median Family Income by Racial and Ethnic Group

Food and identity are intimately tied, and hunger cannot be addressed in the United States without addressing the structures in place that have created and continue to perpetuate social, political, and economic inequities based on identity. In order to move towards an equitable food system, advocates must acknowledge the United State's history of oppression and how it continues to operate today. This includes not only challenging the structures in place but also challenging personal biases that may intentionally or unintentionally contribute to identity-based inequities. Importantly, anti-hunger advocates must center those most disproportionately impacted by hunger and poverty in America, so they have the resources they need to make their own choices in their best interest. Advocating for policies that are rooted in trust will give people the autonomy to make their own decisions and promote food sovereignty, people's right to define their own food system. This is a step towards creating a more equitable food system that supports people of all identities.



Anti-Hunger Programs

Section five of the Action Academy provides an overview of the most widely used anti-hunger programs offered both at the federal and state level. The objective is to help advocates understand the programs that are critical to food aid and their impact.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) has helped over 38 million low-income Americans, including over 760,000 in Massachusetts, afford an adequate diet as of 2019 [13]. SNAP, formerly known as “food stamps,” provides income-eligible families with monthly benefits, based on their household size and income. Although the importance of SNAP is clear, there are still people in Massachusetts who are eligible but not enrolled to receive benefits. The application process can be difficult to complete, and the benefits often times do not fully meet the needs of participants. Additionally, the program excludes certain populations from participating, including many immigrants and people just above the income threshold. Implementing a common application and expanding benefits would maximize SNAP’s impact and reach more food insecure people in Massachusetts.

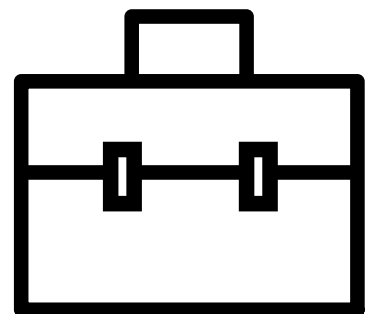
1 in 9 Massachusetts residents participates in the SNAP program [13].



Over 53%
of SNAP participants in
MA are in
families with children.



Nearly 51%
of MA SNAP participants
are in families with
members who are elderly or
have disabilities.



Over 32%
of SNAP participants
are in working families.

The other large anti-hunger initiatives at the federal level are the Child Nutrition Programs, authorized by the Child Nutrition Reauthorization intended to improve and strengthen the child nutrition and school meal programs [14]. The School Breakfast Program and the National School Lunch Program provide nutritious meals for students during each school day. In order to further the nutritional education children receive at school, the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program is a federally assisted initiative to familiarize students with fresh produce and increase their overall awareness and consumption. The Summer Food Service Program, known in Massachusetts as "Summer Eats" [15], provides reimbursements for institutions that provide free meals for children in low-income areas during the summer months. The Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) reimburses child care centers, adult care centers, or after-school programs that provide eligible children and adults with nutritious meals. Lastly, the Special Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for Women, Infants, and Children, most commonly referred to as WIC, is a federal grant program providing assistance to low-income women and their children up to the age of 5.



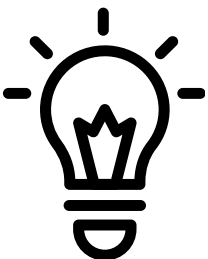
Image 6.

How a Bill Becomes a Law in MA

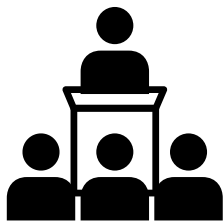
The sixth section of the Action Academy details the basic information advocates need to know regarding how the government works, with specific attention to the Massachusetts legislature. The objective of this section is to understand how a bill becomes a law and how the different levels of government have a significant impact on anti-hunger legislation.

The section begins with an overview of the three co-equal branches of government at the state level in Massachusetts: the judicial, executive, and legislative branches. It then details a simple overview of the Massachusetts legislative process [16]. Every bill starts as an idea and anyone in Massachusetts can file a bill. Bills are typically filed with a petition listing the legislators who sponsor the bill. After it is filed and receives support from legislators in the form of co-sponsorship, it will head to committee consideration by the joint committees. “Joint” committees are those that specialize in certain subject areas, such as education, housing, or transportation. The joint committees must hold a hearing and issue a report on each bill before voting. If the committee vote is favorable, the bill moves on through the legislative process, which can include consideration in additional committees, debate by the full House and Senate, and ultimately a vote. Once passed by both chambers, the bill is sent to the governor to be signed into law.

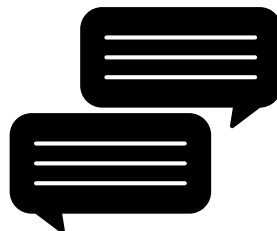
Advocates have a powerful impact on the legislative process, especially when advocacy efforts are timely. Reaching out to legislators and telling them why a particular bill is important will have a direct impact on the legislation that gets passed. Moreover, this section serves to remind advocates that all forms of advocacy are important, and they have the power to promote comprehensive anti-hunger legislation in Massachusetts.



Idea & Petition



Committee



Debate



Enactment

Telling Your Story

The seventh section of the Action Academy provides advocates with storytelling tactics that can be used to craft their advocacy. The objective is to establish an understanding of storytelling through an equity lens.

Lecturer Marshall Ganz's "Story of Self, Us, and Now" can be used to frame a person's advocacy "ask" [17]. The goal of these stories is to build a relationship with a legislator through meaningful story sharing that showcases shared values and the urgency of the specific policy. The "Story of Self" shares why the advocate has been called to serve, revealing personal beliefs or values. The "Story of Us" communicates why the advocate's community is called to act and their plan of action to invite others to join their cause. Lastly, the "Story of Now" communicates the urgent challenge that calls people to act on the political issue. The story includes a unique strategy or set of ideas that will help the advocate achieve the goals of their policy "ask."

Stories have power and are one of the most effective tools in creating change, thus it is important to understand the implications of the stories we tell. While often unintentional, the way stories are told sometimes creates or furthers a narrative that is harmful to a particular individual or community. Anti-hunger advocates may want to share a story of a time they witnessed the injustices of hunger and poverty. In practicing ethical storytelling, there are a few important things to consider to reduce harm and maximize impact:



All stories should be framed through a personal lens to ensure they don't assume someone else's circumstance.



Stories have the power to change the narrative around hunger and poverty to showcase them as systemic problems rather than the common narrative of personal failures. Thus, it is important to let those most closely impacted speak for themselves and ensure that the story does not perpetuate harmful stigmas or stereotypes.



To include a portion of someone else's story in a personal story, it is imperative that the advocate receives consent beforehand and that all information is accurate. This is the most effective way to communicate without exploitation.



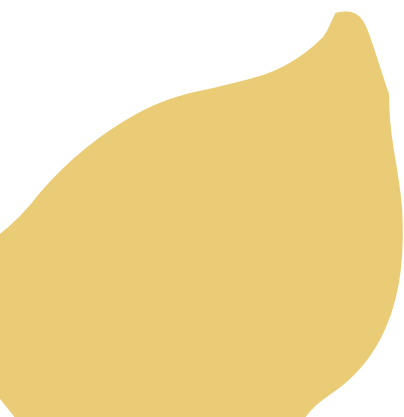
Although it takes practice and courage for an advocate to share their story, this section serves to encourage them to learn and grow to ensure their message is both meaningful and ethical.

Where You Come In

The final section of the Action Academy showcases the ways advocates can build upon their stories from the previous section and take action. It provides links to resources and some sample conversations that will prepare advocates to communicate with their legislators. The objective of this section is to help advocates form a plan of action to create political change and feel confident moving forward with their advocacy journey.

The first step in taking action to create change as an advocate is formulating a message. There are many different methods of advocacy, however, some may be more effective than others depending on the intended message. This section details each method and ranks them based on their level of effort and impact. Posting on social media is an effective way to share brief messages with legislators and interact with them on a more casual level. Writing elected officials via email or a handwritten letter are both effective advocacy strategies that are simple and convenient, and can be personalized to show the legislator support and urge them to act on a specific issue. Calling a legislator is one of the many ways an advocate can create change and start to acquire the attention of the legislator and lead them to become advocates on the issue themselves. Lastly, and arguably the most effective form of advocacy, is in-person meetings with legislators. Though more effort than the other forms of advocacy, face-to-face meetings have the power to amplify advocacy messages considerably.

Regardless of the method used, advocates should always identify themselves as a constituent, keep their message simple and brief, and include a specific ask of their legislator. Then, clearly share what they believe the legislator should do. Any advocacy is better than no advocacy at all, and while the delivery of the information is important, it is the content that makes all the difference.






Recommendations

Project Bread's Action Academy is a uniquely comprehensive tool that will effectively advance anti-hunger advocacy in Massachusetts. There is a wealth of information regarding anti-hunger advocacy and learning it takes time and practice. However, the creation of the Action Academy is a testament to the widespread dedication to finding a permanent solution to end hunger. Though the final version is not yet live, the Action Academy in its entirety will provide valuable information about food insecurity as a political issue and motivate Massachusetts residents to put the academy's lessons into action. Based on the contents of the Action Academy outlined in this report, the following recommendations have been made to strengthen the overall effectiveness of the tool and maximize the outcome among its participants.

1. Include external resources throughout the Action Academy:

Given the scope of information covered in the Action Academy, there is much that could not be included for the sake of keeping the guide feasible for participants to complete. Thus, it is important to provide participants with resources to further their understanding of anti-hunger advocacy and the issues that are tied to food insecurity in the United States. Linking to additional articles, videos, podcasts, and other information sources will allow participants to be in control of their advocacy experience. There will be specific sections of the Action Academy that interest or resonate more with the participant than others, or there may be sections that the participant knows little of and would like to learn more about. Including these resources will encourage participants to go beyond the Action Academy, as the tool is a great first step in becoming a strong anti-hunger advocate, but there is always more to learn.



2. Ensure the language is accessible:

A primary challenge in creating the Action Academy was acknowledging the different stages of anti-hunger advocacy participants may be in. A participant may begin the Action Academy having an interest in solving food insecurity and poverty, but have little knowledge about the issues themselves. On the contrary, a participant may be well versed in the information covered in the Action Academy and may have even participated in anti-hunger advocacy prior to viewing the various sections. As a result, the information discussed in each section assumes little past knowledge of the participants in order to ensure that nobody is left behind. This also reinforces the idea that everyone has the ability to learn and relearn, finding new ideas and concepts even from information someone already knew. Although the Action Academy prioritizes the shared learning of all participants, the topics may easily default to non-accessible language that includes jargon without explanation. In order to ensure that everyone benefits from the information in the Action Academy, the language used throughout the videos must be intentional and explicit about their meaning and impact.

3. Create a platform for feedback and discussion:



The Action Academy is not perfect, nor was it meant to be. The purpose of this advocacy tool is to introduce people to the issue of food insecurity, which can be complex and intersects with many other issues in the United States. There is undoubtedly room for improvement and the most productive changes will be led by those who participated in the Action Academy. Holding a space for virtual feedback, whether after each section or following the guide in its entirety, will lead to a stronger and more effective tool altogether. If the Action Academy were to be updated every few years, ensuring the data throughout is accurate, participant feedback could also be incorporated. Additionally, participants may want to discuss their thought on a particular section or ask questions to other participants or Project Bread staff. Including room for dialogue along with the slides of each section will foster a more interactive learning experience. It will also build relationships among people with a shared interest in ending hunger in Massachusetts and nationally.



Conclusion

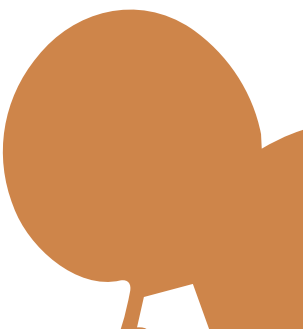
Hunger and poverty will not be solved tomorrow, but when people work together and combine their unique talents and skills, we are collectively moving in the right direction. Those who complete the Action Academy have taken a big step towards ending hunger in Massachusetts. Their commitment to educating themselves and growing in their advocacy highlights the reality that there is a solution to food insecurity. There is no lack of resources or interest in finding this solution, but a lack of political investment that goes beyond emergency response and moves toward prevention. Anti-hunger advocates must hold their legislators at all levels of government accountable to solving the hunger and poverty crises in the United States. The Action Academy provides advocates with resources to advance this legislative accountability and the data to uphold and strengthen their arguments. The systemically focused and equity-based approach of the Action Academy guides advocates to the root causes of hunger and poverty, pushing many people out of their comfort zones into addressing the role institutional oppression has on our food system. Importantly, the Action Academy teaches people to share their own stories and frame their experiences to create comprehensive policy change. The lessons within the Action Academy not only promote systemic changes in addressing hunger but also guides people in understanding their own power within this process.

The Action Academy is a continual project that will become an essential tool for anti-hunger advocates in Massachusetts. Whether to provide healthier and more accessible meals to kids in schools, to ensure SNAP reaches more families, or any other sustainable solution to hunger, advocates will gain the tools they need to be successful in creating any changes they wish to see. Incorporating the recommendations detailed in this report and continuing to focus on systemic solutions, the Action Academy will better serve Massachusetts residents and make meaningful strides towards ending hunger permanently.





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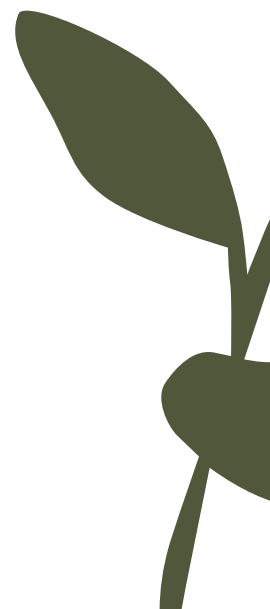


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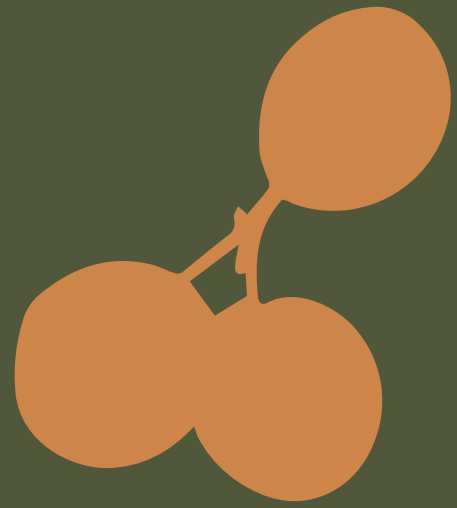


IMAGE 1. <https://www.canva.com/>

IMAGE 2. [Project Bread's Action Academy](#)

IMAGE 3. <https://www.projectbread.org/policy>

IMAGE 4. <https://www.projectbread.org/policy>

IMAGE 5. <https://www.riseandrootfarm.com/karen-washington>

IMAGE 6. <https://www.canva.com/>

FIGURE 1. <https://www.projectbread.org/uploads/attachments/ckewxxld702k61c4lnirukepx-the-state-of-hunger-in.pdf>

FIGURE 2. <https://www.projectbread.org/uploads/attachments/ckewxxld702k61c4lnirukepx-the-state-of-hunger-in.pdf>

**ICONS, FONTS,
& TEMPLATE.** <https://www.canva.com/>
