

# Activity: Meet with your member of Congress

(1-2 hours)

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FACE THE FAST

## Objectives

Through this activity participants will:

- meet with their elected officials; and
- advocate on international issues important to them.

## Materials Needed

- information on current hunger and poverty issues is available at [actioncenter.crs.org](http://actioncenter.crs.org).

## Activity Summary

Setting up personal meetings with your elected officials or their staff is a great way to advocate in support of policies that can improve the lives of our brothers and sisters around the world. Personal interaction with government officials allows for debate on international issues and provides youth with an opportunity to share their concerns and opinions as well as ask for specific commitments. These meetings also provide a way for youth to exercise their civic right and responsibility to participate in our democratic society.

## Procedure

### Part I – Prepare for your meeting (1 hour)

Call the district office of your members of Congress and schedule a visit. You can invite your member of Congress or his/her staff to your Food Fast, or you can arrange to visit their office. Let the staff know that your group is fasting for 24 hours as an act of solidarity with the poor and hungry in our world and that your group would like to meet with their member of Congress or his/her staff to discuss their commitment to assisting the poor around the world.

Prepare in advance for the meeting. Know the issue you will be bringing to their attention, have a set of convincing arguments in support of your position ready, and have specific objectives for your meeting. CRS is happy to support you in your preparation and can give you the most up-to-date information about legislation, provide you with talking points and make sure you have the best arguments.

Assign roles. Make sure members of your group know what each of you will be talking about so that the message stays clear and concise. Contact CRS at [foofast@crs.org](mailto:foofast@crs.org).

### Part II – Meet with your member of Congress (1 hour)

Tips for how to communicate with your elected officials or their staff in person include:

- **Know what you want and expect.** Setting expectations for a meeting can lay the framework for evaluating the meeting afterwards.
- **Be on time, courteous and positive.** Remember that most people will not be won over by overly aggressive language or a negative attitude.
- **Make sure it is clear whom you and your team are representing.** It is important for your elected official and/or his/her staff to know what interest you are representing and what kind of “power” is behind the message.
- **Take notes.** This is particularly important for follow-up with the office, especially if they have questions about your issue that cannot be answered during the meeting.

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- **Ask for a commitment** even if the commitment is to “continue the discussion”. Don’t expect to have a positive outcome right away. After your meeting, make sure to:
  - Debrief with your team and identify next steps.
  - Share information with your partners and fellow advocates.
  - Call or e-mail CRS ([foodfast@crs.org](mailto:foodfast@crs.org)) to let us know the outcome of your meeting and if there is anything we can do to support your follow up.
  - Send a thank you note to the people you met and provide them with any information they may have asked for during your meeting. Take this opportunity to reiterate your message.
  - Remind the staff about your meeting every time you call or write a letter to the office to refresh their memories about your efforts and to build a lasting relationship with them.

CRS is here to help you to conduct advocacy meetings with your members of Congress and other elected officials. Please contact us for more information and assistance at [foodfast@crs.org](mailto:foodfast@crs.org).

Excerpted from Catholic Relief Services' *Global Solidarity in Action: A Guide for International Issue Advocacy in the United States*.