



## Rachel Cahill Consulting, LLC

FNS-Advocates Meetings - Best Practices for Lead Organizers

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### FNS-Advocates SNAP Access Meetings - Best Practices for Lead Organizers

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**Goal:** In order to maximize the opportunity for state-level SNAP advocates to lead federal administrative advocacy, 3-4 experienced state-level SNAP advocates are coordinating and leading national workgroup meetings on timely SNAP access issues approximately every 6 weeks between FNS National Office and a strategic group of 8-12 state advocates.

1. **Schedule SNAP Workgroup Meeting (6 Weeks Before Next Workgroup Meeting)**
  - a. During each SNAP Workgroup Meeting, the next SNAP Workgroup Meeting is scheduled.
    - i. Once the date is selected, send a calendar invite to attendees.
  - b. If for some reason the meeting does not get set during this meeting, the meeting can be set later via email.
2. **Schedule Planning Call with Core Organizers (As soon as Workgroup Meeting date is confirmed)**
  - a. Create a meeting poll (e.g., through Calendly or Doodle) for a 45-minute planning call with the core organizers.
  - b. Send an email to the core organizers with a link to the Calendly poll and a deadline for responses.
    - i. See email [template](#).
  - c. Determine the best time for all organizers based on the poll responses.
  - d. Schedule the meeting (e.g., through Calendly) and send calendar invitations for the planning call.
  - e. Send email to confirm the planning meeting date and that calendar invites were received.
3. **Host Planning Call with Core Organizers (ETA 3-4 Weeks Before Workgroup Meeting)**

- a. Create a proposed agenda with 2–3 SNAP access issues that the organizers identify as important to raise with FNS at the Workgroup Meeting.
  - i. There is no need to be locked-in to these ideas, as other advocates may bring other issues to the table that take precedence.
  - ii. Include items that need followup from the last meeting.
  - iii. Consider including a few anchor topics that are frequently revisited with FNS, like application timeliness or language access.
- b. Identify state advocates from each [FNS Region](#) who are best positioned to attend and/or speak at each meeting, ensuring diverse perspectives are heard.
- c. In some instances, it might be helpful to give state and/or regional offices a heads-up on issues being elevated to the national office.

#### **4. Outreach to Potential Advocates for Workgroup (ETA 2-3 Weeks Before Workgroup Meeting)**

- a. By this point, a meeting should already be scheduled with FNS.
- b. Send emails to potential advocates.
  - i. Give background on meetings with FNS.
    - 1. Include notes for the last few meetings, so they can get a feel for the meetings.
- c. Ask if the advocate is able to speak to one of the proposed topics, or if they have another topic they would like to raise, and if they are available on the scheduled meeting date.
- d. Give a deadline for a response so that if they are unable to join, there will be time to invite another advocate from the same region.
- e. Personalize the message in some way:
  - i. Since [state] has not been a part of these meetings before...
  - ii. Since I know you have call center access barriers in your state...
  - iii. Since I know you have not been to these meetings before...
- f. Add confirmed participants to the appropriate region listed on the shared agenda.
- g. If it is getting close to one week before the meeting and there are not enough confirmed participants, reach out to a couple advocates per region.
  - i. Explain that, although it is short notice and they might not be available, it would be great if they can join for the meeting and to please respond about availability ASAP.
- h. See email [template](#).

#### **5. Send Prep Email to Advocates (~1 Week Before Workgroup Meeting)**

- a. Include a final agenda with participants listed.
- b. See email [template](#).

#### **6. Send Meeting Reminder (ETA 1 Day Before/Day of Workgroup Meeting)**

- a. Send a reminder to everyone, including FNS, the day before or the day of the meeting with the final agenda.
- b. See email [template](#).

#### **7. Facilitate Work Group Meeting**

- a. See [Moderator Best Practices](#) section below to set the tone for these meetings.
- b. Ensure someone is assigned to take detailed notes with clearly marked action items.
  - i. Save notes in a shared folder that is accessible (like Google Drive)

#### **8. Work Group Follow-up (ETA 2-3 Days After Workgroup Meeting)**

- a. After the meeting, share a draft of the notes internally with the advocates only.
  - i. Ask for feedback.
  - ii. Make sure the action items for FNS are really clear.
- b. Email FNS with email follow up and action items, including confirming the next meeting date.
  - i. See email [template](#).
  - ii. Do not CC everyone on the followup email to FNS — only include the core organizers.
    1. *The logic here is that FNS staff tend to respond more freely when there are fewer people cc'd on a follow up email. Future meeting organizers may want to take a different approach!*
  - iii. Do not share notes with FNS; only share the action items.
    1. *The logic here is the notes can be more thorough if advocates are not worried about what FNS thinks about how we write the notes. Future meeting organizers may want to take a different approach!*
- c. Debrief FNS meeting outcomes with other state advocates and agree on next steps.

## 9. Email Templates

### a. Planning Call Scheduling Email to Core Organizers

|                |                                                                                            |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>To</b>      |                                                                                            |
| <b>Cc</b>      |  Person   |
| <b>Bcc</b>     |  Person |
| <b>Subject</b> |                                                                                            |

Hello fellow advocates,

I hope you all are having a great week. I created a meeting poll with options in **[month]** to hopefully find a date that works for all for a planning meeting ahead of the **[date of meeting]** FNS-Advocates SNAP Access Meeting. Please fill out this poll by **[response deadline date]** so that we can pick a date before calendars fill up. Once we have settled on a date, I will follow up with calendar invitations.

Thanks, and please reach out with any questions!

### b. Outreach for Potential Advocates

|           |                                                                                            |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>To</b> |                                                                                            |
| <b>Cc</b> |  Person |

|                |                                                                                          |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Bcc</b>     |  Person |
| <b>Subject</b> | Invitation to join [date] call with FNS re: SNAP access issues                           |

Hi [Advocate Name],

I am reaching out to see if you would be interested in representing [name of State] advocates on a call [date/time of scheduled meeting] with FNS to talk about SNAP access barriers. **This meeting will focus on [list issues on agenda].** See proposed agenda. [link agenda]

Some background on this meeting --

- This will be the [6th, 7th, 8th...so on] in a new series of calls with FNS' SNAP Administrator, [name] and their Chief of Staff, [name]
- Meetings last for 1 hour via Zoom and are scheduled every 6 weeks or so.
- We invite 8-12 advocates to each meeting, including at least one from each of the [7 FNS regions](#), so we have broad representation.
- In each meeting we cover 2-3 agenda items related to SNAP access barriers that we see on the ground. Whenever possible, we try to invite advocates with experience/concerns about the specific issues on the agenda. For example, if we want to talk about long call center wait times, we try to invite advocates from states with poorly performing call centers.
- Past meeting notes for review: [note links here]
- I help coordinate these meetings representing Ohio, alongside [state advocate names + states here], with technical assistance from Ed at CBPP.

Since [State] advocates haven't been part of these meetings to date, I wanted to extend an invitation. That said, if the topics on this agenda aren't issues in your state and/or you are not available at this meeting time — no worries! We will certainly keep you in mind for future calls.

**Please let me know by [date]** if you would like to join the meeting, so I can send you the calendar invitation and finalize the agenda.

Thanks for considering!

### c. Prep Email to Advocates

|           |                                                                                            |
|-----------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>To</b> |                                                                                            |
| <b>Cc</b> |  Person |

|                |                                                                                          |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Bcc</b>     |  Person |
| <b>Subject</b> | Agenda for [date] call with FNS re: SNAP access issues                                   |

Hello fellow advocates,

Thank you all for agreeing to represent your state's advocates at the upcoming SNAP Access Meeting with FNS on [date/time]. Here is a link [insert hyperlink] to the final agenda. Please be prepared to speak to your issue, as we will only have an hour with FNS. If we are running low on time, please put your comments or questions in the chat, to be sure we can follow up with FNS about any topics that we do not have time to address in the meeting.

Thanks again, and we look forward to this collaboration!

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#### d. Meeting Reminder

|                |                                                                                            |
|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>To</b>      |                                                                                            |
| <b>Cc</b>      |  Person  |
| <b>Bcc</b>     |  Person |
| <b>Subject</b> | Reminder: Call with FNS re: SNAP access barriers tomorrow ([date]) at [time] EST           |

Hello fellow advocates,

Thanks so much for agreeing to join the meeting tomorrow ([date]) at [time] EST with FNS-HQ to discuss SNAP access barriers we are seeing on the ground in our states. Here is the agenda [insert hyperlink] for tomorrow's meeting, in case you have not yet had a chance to review. You can also find notes from the last meeting here [insert hyperlink].

If any of these topics are major issues in your state, please come prepared to briefly share what's going on, either verbally or in the chat. (And if there are other burning issues happening in your state, shoot me an email and I'll let you know if we can work it in!)

Thank you again for your collaboration!

### e. FNS Follow-up Email

|                |                                                                                          |
|----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>To</b>      |                                                                                          |
| <b>Cc</b>      |  Person |
| <b>Bcc</b>     |  Person |
| <b>Subject</b> | Follow up from [date] FNS-Advocates SNAP Access Meeting                                  |

Hi [name(s)]

Thank you so much for meeting with SNAP advocates [day meeting took place] to discuss SNAP access issues. It was a great call and we appreciate all that FNS is doing across the country.

Below are several follow up items from my notes. Please let me know if there's anything I've missed that you need from us!

#### [List Action Items]

Lastly, we confirmed that our next meeting is scheduled for [date/time] EST. You should have received a calendar invitation from me [day invite was sent] to hold this time on your calendar. Please let me know if you did not receive it.

Thanks again!

## 10. Moderator Best Practices

- a. Coordinate with FNS' point-of-contact to ensure meeting invitations, agendas, reminder emails, etc. are circulated to the right people at the right time.
- b. Include time estimates on the agenda and try to stick to them.
  - i. If we have gone over time on the first agenda item, let people know we are going to do one more comment on this topic and then we are going to move on so that we have time for everybody.
- c. Pay attention to who has gotten the chance to speak.
  - i. Make sure that everyone gets to speak their issue live; if someone who already spoke wants to say something else, ask them to keep it short.
  - ii. You can also say that [state] dropped something in that chat, read it to FNS to ensure they see it, and then move on without asking the advocate to elaborate.
- d. Take responsibility for follow up questions if FNS did not really answer a question.
  - i. Repeat the question: "I think what [state] was asking was actually [issue]. Can you speak to that now, or should we include that in our follow up email?"
    1. Ideally the moderator takes responsibility to make sure the loop is closed for the advocate who asked that question.

- e. Direct advocates to use the chat for other thoughts on agenda items if the meeting moves on from that item.
  - i. Make sure to check the chat when possible and make sure the chat gets saved for future reference.
- f. In an email prior to the meeting:
  - i. Explain the norms for this meeting that advocates might not know coming in. For example:
    - 1. We do not bring up pending or forthcoming litigation, since FNS is unlikely to be able to speak to the issue without their lawyers, and it could shut down other productive conversations
    - 2. It is best to raise issues that have already been elevated locally (e.g. to your County and/or State SNAP administrators), so they are not caught off guard if FNS-HQ follows up with them directly.