Raise Your Voices for Women and Girls
A Guide to Advocacy
Dear Dining for Women Members:

I’m excited to share our advocacy guide *Raise Your Voices for Women and Girls*. This guide will help you advocate for U.S. policies that empower women and girls to realize their rights and improve their lives.

Through our years of grantmaking, Dining for Women (DFW) has done amazing work to support on-the-ground projects in more than 40 countries with 150+ grassroots organizations. This work has been guided by a simple truth: investing in women and girls can pull whole families, communities, and even countries out of extreme poverty.

We’ve seen that when women are educated, child mortality goes down and economic growth goes up. When women farmers have access to land, fertilizers, and new technologies, crop yields significantly increase and hunger diminishes. When women have a say in family spending, more money goes toward their children’s health and education. When women are empowered, nations become more prosperous, peaceful, and stable.

In short: when women and girls do better, we all do better.

Advocacy is an important and exciting next step for DFW, as well as a natural extension of our grantmaking. The most effective nonprofits work to address both the symptoms and the root causes of problems like poverty and injustice. By raising awareness and pushing for U.S. policy reform, we can create systemic, long-term change to improve the lives of women and girls internationally.

This guide responds to the wishes of DFW members who asked us to add advocacy to our work. Many members want to go beyond grantmaking and push for policies that align with our mission. They want to contact their elected representatives—as individuals or with their chapter members—to start conversations about how policies can better support gender equality. Many DFW members have the will to advocate, but don’t know how or where to begin.

DFW has an impressive track record of success with our collective donations. Now, we can have an even greater impact with our collective voices!

Beth Ellen Holimon
President, Dining For Women
Welcome to DFW’s Advocacy Program!

DFW is sparking a grassroots advocacy movement to support women and girls in the developing world. We’re not about highly paid lobbyists. We’re fueled by you, our fantastic members, and led by a committee of dedicated volunteers. Your tireless determination, your fierce passion, and your booming voices can make change happen.

Our power comes from the grassroots: our thousands of members working individually and with their chapters to advocate for the importance of gender equality in ending extreme poverty.

What are we advocating for?

DFW members will advocate for policies that align with our mission of empowering women and girls in the developing world and promoting gender equality. Our advocacy efforts will encompass a range of U.S. funding and legislative initiatives—from support for gender equality in the U.S. foreign aid budget, to specific policy areas such as protecting girls’ access to education, preventing violence against women, or advancing women’s role in peace and security. We also expect to support policies that make it easier for nonprofits to operate and be effective.

This movement is a big, non-partisan tent. DFW’s grantmaking brings together people from across the political spectrum, and our advocacy will do the same.

The need to advocate for ending extreme poverty and ensuring gender equality transcends political affiliations.

Carolyn’s Story

Carolyn Acio lives in a rural district of Uganda with her husband and two daughters. Just a few years ago, her family was living on less than $1.90 per day. But a program run by Village Enterprise—a DFW grantee—and funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Feed the Future program has turned Carolyn’s life around. She took part in trainings about the value of saving money and the basics of launching and managing a business, and then started a business raising and selling pigs.

Carolyn saved enough money to build her family a proper house and send her daughters to school. She and her husband now work as equal partners. Thanks to a U.S. Government-funded program, their lives have been transformed.
Raise Your Voice for Women and Girls: Get Started Now

As a grassroots movement of more than 8,000 members and growing, we can make an impact on U.S. policies. There are many ways to make your voice heard, and our volunteer advocacy leaders will guide you in how and when to act.

Here are some of the options:

- Write or call your members of Congress.
- Visit your representatives. You can have the most impact when you meet face-to-face.
- Write guest editorials or letters to the editor of your local newspaper.

To find and get in touch with your members of Congress, use this handy online tool:

www.usa.gov/elected-officials

Remember to focus on representatives from your district or state. Elected officials listen to the people who can vote them in or out of office.

We are the voice for women and girls who don’t have the power to determine their own futures.

Barb Collins
Co-Founder, Dining for Women

You Don’t Have To Go It Alone

You can advocate as an individual or with your DFW chapter. You may find that it is both fun and empowering to come together with your fellow chapter members. Or you may prefer to take action on your own. To start advocating with your DFW chapter, talk to your chapter leader about how you can work together, bring this up at your next monthly meeting, or send an email to rally your chapter members.

Whichever way you approach advocacy, you will soon realize the satisfaction of having your voice heard and the joy of making an even greater difference in women’s lives.

We’re here to help! DFW can help you reach out to your elected officials. We will periodically send out alerts about opportunities to advocate, DFW’s stances on funding or policies, and resources to make your voice heard. And if you ever need additional support, get in touch with us at info@diningforwomen.org.
A key focus of our advocacy program is the U.S. foreign aid budget. 

*Foreign aid* is often used as a broad term to describe many types of assistance the U.S. gives to other countries—from fighting terrorism and the illicit drug trade to providing disaster relief, vaccines, education, clean water, and more.

Most foreign aid is provided through the International Affairs Budget, which represents a very small percentage—about 1%—of the total U.S. budget. Only about half of the International Affairs budget is used to combat poverty and advance humanitarian efforts through foreign aid. The rest funds a mix of diplomatic activities and military assistance.

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### U.S. Foreign Aid Facts

In 2016, the U.S. provided **$33.6 billion** in official development assistance. In terms of absolute dollars, the U.S. is the largest development aid donor in the world.¹

When you consider spending as a percentage of gross national income, the U.S. is only the **22nd most generous** donor country, behind Canada, the UK, Sweden, and many others.²

U.S. foreign aid has been declining over the past decades. **We spend 50% less on foreign aid today** as a percentage of GDP than we did in the 1980s.³

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¹ Source: OECD  
² Source: OECD  
³ Source: USGLC
Putting Women at the Center of Foreign Aid

Some U.S. foreign aid is specifically allocated to advance gender equality and support women and girls. This focus has made a big impact on the health, education, safety, and economic prospects of millions of people:

4.8M lives saved by USAID maternal and child health programs since 2008

2.7M women and children impacted by work to combat hunger, funded in 2014 by U.S. Department of Agriculture

11.3M people reached by USAID efforts to fight gender-based violence in 2016

3.2M girls and women enrolled in school or informal learning programs in 2015 thanks to the Department of State and USAID

But the U.S. is lagging behind other countries in our support for women and girls. In 2015, nearly $5.2 billion—approximately 17%—of U.S. foreign aid focused on gender equality. That percentage made us 10th out of the top 10 aid donor countries.

Can the U.S. become a leader in supporting women and girls in developing countries? Can we help more women and girls get an education, access medical care, and earn income to pull their families out of poverty? **Can DFW play a role in making this happen?**

Yes, yes, and yes!

DFW, in collaboration with other nonpartisan organizations, can lead the way to making gender equality the centerpiece of U.S. foreign aid. This shift in focus will direct more resources to women and girls, and it will make our world a safer, more peaceful, inclusive, and prosperous place for everyone.

Making this change won’t be easy and it will take years of work, but other countries are already doing it. Canada and Sweden have both formally adopted feminist foreign policies that promote the rights of women and girls and put them at the core of foreign aid efforts.

Empowering women and girls and advancing gender equality are also a critical part of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an internationally agreed-upon set of goals to end poverty and advance equality. Many countries are using the SDGs to inform and inspire their aid and related policies.

DFW urges the U.S. government to become a leader in advancing gender equality and empowering women and girls in the developing world. This should be the top priority of U.S. foreign aid because it is the most effective way to end extreme poverty. **Together, we can call on our elected representatives to maintain a strong foreign aid budget—one that puts gender equality at its core.**

* Source: USAID  
* Source: USDA  
* Source: USAID  
* Source: USAID and the State Department  
* Source: OECD
You Can Have an Impact on Foreign Aid

There are many opportunities to contact your members of Congress during the budget process to tell them the priorities you care about. Here’s how the budget process is supposed to work:

1. President submits budget request to U.S. Congress
2. House and Senate Appropriations Committees hold hearings
3. Appropriations Committees prepare bills
4. President may veto and send back to Congress, or sign into law
5. President receives final budget for signature
6. House and Senate reconcile respective bills

This process often gets delayed, and Congress has sometimes passed interim measures (Continuing Resolutions or CRs) to keep the government running until a final budget agreement can be reached.

It’s most important to reach out to your members of Congress in the months between introduction of the president’s initial budget and finalization of the House and Senate bills, ideally between February and August. If your members of Congress are on either the House or Senate Appropriations Committees, connecting with them at this time is critical because they have power to determine specific spending on foreign aid programs.

The most important thing is to take the first step: commit to getting involved, look up your members of Congress, and learn about their positions on foreign aid. Start simple with your outreach, and then ramp up over time to get more bold and specific.

Key Months: Feb-Aug

For information on how you can become a DFW advocate, visit:

DININGFORWOMEN.ORG/ADVOCACY
You Can Do It! We’re Here to Help

DFW members can be an important voice in a national movement to support strong U.S. foreign aid focused on women and girls. We need you—each and every one of you—to make your voices heard. DFW has helped you more effectively use your dollars, connecting you to amazing grassroots organizations that serve women and girls. Now we can do the same with your voices.

diningforwomen.org/advocacy