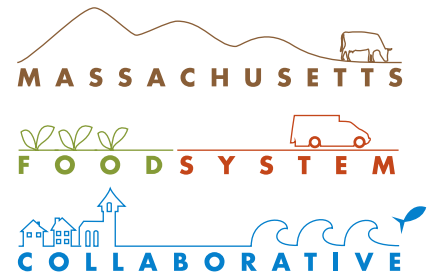


Massachusetts' Annual Operating Budget

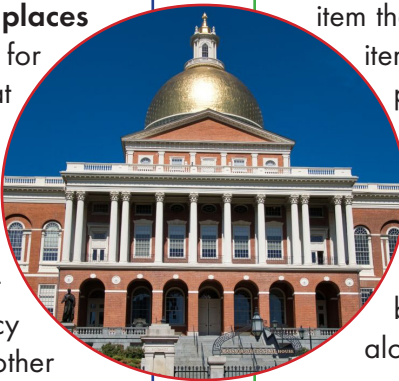
Tips for food system advocates



Each year the legislature and governor draft, debate, and pass an operating budget, allocating funds for every state program and agency for the fiscal year (July-June). More than just a list of numbers, the budget illustrates the values and priorities of the administration and the legislature, as increased funding for some items and issues demonstrates support, and a lack of funding for others may suggest insufficient attention to those issues. The budget process offers many opportunities for advocates to provide input and to learn about policy-makers' understanding of and attention to food system issues.

Quick facts about the budget

- **The budget must pass.** Unlike policy bills, which may take several years to pass, the budget must pass every year. If it failed to pass, the state would not be able to conduct its normal activities.
- **Food system issues are in many places throughout the budget.** Funding for staff and administrative services at agencies like MDAR and DTA; programs like HIP and MEFAP and healthy soils program and universal school meals; grant programs like the Food Security Infrastructure Grant program and the local food policy council grant program; and many other important programs and services are funded through the annual operating budget.
- **The budget process takes all year.** There are many opportunities for input, and legislators need to hear from advocates and constituents about the programs you want to see them support and the impacts of the budget in their community. See the timeline on the next page.



Budget terms

- **Line item.** The budget is made up of line items, each of them specifying the amount of funding to be given to a particular state agency, program, or other public body.
- **Earmark.** An amount of funding within a line item that provides a specific amount of that line item to a particular program, institution, or project. These are often local priorities, filed by legislators for projects in their district.
- **Outside section.** The budget may contain items that are not about funding, but rather are policy issues that will pass along with the overall budget.
- **Capital Budget.** Separate from the annual operating budget, each year the governor issues a capital budget, committing resources to infrastructure and other programs. Funding for this budget comes from bonds, which are authorized by bills that give the governor the authority to spend up to a certain amount on particular programs and issues.

Find more advocacy tips at <https://mafoodsystem.org/projects/legislation/>

Opportunities for input during the annual budget process.

At this stage of the process...

Fall. Departments and agencies submit their budget requests to the governor.

...advocates can:

Meet with commissioners and secretaries to discuss budget priorities, and submit letters to the Governor in support of those asks.

Early January. The Governor proposes their budget.

January-April. The House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means hold hearings and develop their budget proposals.

Write to, call, and meet with committee chairs and staff to make the case for funding priorities.

April (House) and May (Senate). Committees on Ways and Means release their budget drafts, legislators propose amendments, and the chambers pass final budget proposals.

Urge legislators to introduce amendments for budget items that were not included, solicit cosponsors for those amendments, and urge Ways and Means Committee Chairs to support those amendments.

June. Conferees from both chambers meet to reconcile the two budgets and pass a unified proposal.

Submit letters to conferees, supporting your budget priorities.

By June 30. The governor signs, vetoes, or vetoes parts of the budget, and suggests changes for the legislature to consider.

Urge the governor to support their budget priorities.

Where to find budget information

- **Past budget proposals from the governor**, and a link to the current year's proposal, are at <https://www.mass.gov/lists/budget-archives>
- **The legislature's budget process** is always available by clicking "Budget" on the top navigation bar at <https://malegislature.gov/>

Build relationships to ensure that your legislators will listen

- **Get to know your legislators.** Find out who your legislators are at <https://malegislature.gov/Search/Find-MyLegislator>. Learn about what their priorities are by reading their bios and seeing what committees they serve on and what bills they have introduced.
- **Relationships with legislators' staff are also important.** They are often more accessible as well as very knowledgeable about issues and very influential with the legislators they work for.
- **Tell a personal story** about how a program or investment affects someone's life, business, or community. This has more of an impact than repeating data or talking points others are already sharing.

This timeline reflects a broad overview. There are other interim steps and the process often is not as linear as indicated here. See the Collaborative's [Cultivating Good Food Policy: A guide to advocacy campaigns for Massachusetts food system stakeholders](#) for further advocacy tips and additional details on the legislative process.