Take Action Success Stories:
Two Site Visits & A Legislative Breakfast

Nurturing Relationships with Local Officials
Boys & Girls Clubs of East Los Angeles

What: Multiple visits to Anna Araujo's Boys & Girls Club (BGC) afterschool site by local elected officials and their staff.

Goal: To develop a climate of support among local elected officials for afterschool programs in general and the Boys & Girls Club in particular.

Results: Araujo reports that stronger relationships with elected officials are responsible for increased support and resources for her program. Her access makes it possible to make specific requests—for new equipment or discretionary funding, for example—to officials and their staff.

> It's important to be in touch with local elected officials and staff even when you're not asking them for something. If I have an event that I think will allow an official to shine, I make sure their field representative knows about it, and knows their boss is welcome to stop by and say a few words.
>
> - Anna Araujo

How it was done: Araujo has worked hard for several years to develop consistent relationships with local elected officials and their staff members. Among them is a member of the county board of supervisors with jurisdiction over her area. Araujo inherited a less than ideal relationship with the supervisor, owing to staff problems at the Boys & Girls Club that occurred before she arrived. But with consistent efforts to keep elected officials informed about Club activities, making the Club available to them for visits and photo opportunities, and providing officials with ready access to groups of children for various media-friendly events, she has turned the relationships around. Araujo has focused attention not just on the officials themselves, but on their key aides, field representatives and schedulers.

Lessons Learned:

- **Nurturing relationships with officials' key staff members pays off**. They are often the ones to decide whether and where the official will appear, and they play important roles in policy making as well. So Araujo maintains regular contact with aides, sending personal emails, newsletters, annual reports and individual thank-you gifts (art from students, for example) after visits.

- **Help elected officials' staff envision a successful visit** by their boss. When staff members visit, Araujo tries to make it easy for them to visualize a successful and media-friendly visit from the elected official. She distributes t-shirts to students, takes staff to see photogenic activities, shows them a stage area where presentations could be made, etc.

- **Extend your network of contacts**. Araujo finds that staff turnover can be high with elected officials, but that the same people turn up in new jobs with different officials—thus extending her network of contacts.

- **Invite elected officials or their staff members to sit on event-planning committees**. Araujo says that by involving officials, they become more invested in program activities—even if they don't actually participate in the planning process.

- **Let officials and their aids know that your students are available for events**. Araujo is often asked by officials for help in gathering a crowd of children for various announcements or ceremonies. She works hard to be responsive to those requests, giving her children exposure to the political process while helping nurture relationships with important officials.

- **Be straightforward in describing your program and your event**. When inviting officials to come to an event, Araujo is careful not to overstate expected turnout or otherwise "over-hype" the event. Officials and staff understandably want to know what to expect, and unpleasant surprises can sour a relationship.

Planning a Visit from a Member of Congress
Dream Team Action Clubs, St. Mary's County, Maryland Public Schools

What: A tour of an afterschool program by Rep. Steny Hoyer, House Majority Leader and senior member of the Appropriations Committee. The Representative stayed for two full hours at the Lexington Park Elementary School program in St. Mary's County, Maryland, where he toured the program, met with children and staff, made a speech, and talked with media.

Goal: To buttress Rep. Hoyer's already solid support for afterschool programs, to encourage him to take even stronger leadership in support of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, and to increase local visibility of afterschool issues. Hoyer's office had requested that the Maryland State Department of Education arrange a visit to a site in St. Mary's County, one of five counties in his district.

> We worked hard to make sure we showed off all the good things about afterschool. Because of Representative Hoyer's leadership role, we knew his visit could have national influence. And it certainly had a great effect locally, with afterschool suddenly becoming a hot topic and lots of powerful people looking at how we can find continued funding.
>
> -Mark Smith

Results: The event earned considerable local media attention, including a story in the *Washington Post*, and helped solidify the relationship between the local afterschool program and the Representative's office.

How it was done: Smith worked for several weeks to iron out every detail of the visit, including contingency plans for what to do if the Representative arrived late, if other speakers spoke too long, etc. In fact, the visit had to be delayed several weeks when a snowstorm closed school. Smith invited a number of local officials, including school board members, to join in the visit. Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant attended as well.

Lessons Learned:

- **Remember that other officials or allies who attend an event with a Member of Congress will often have an interest in talking to the Member about non-afterschool issues**. Make sure you're able to keep the visit focused on your issues.
- **Be flexible**. Smith had to reschedule the event because of a snowstorm. And despite ample planning and coordination with Rep. Hoyer's staff, he spoke earlier and stayed longer than expected. Flexibility matters.
- **Be sure to have a camera handy**, along with an experienced photographer to operate it.
- **Connect with the staff of the visitor**. Smith had many phone and email conversations with Rep. Hoyer's legislative assistant in charge of education issues to plan details of the visit. In the process, he briefed the staffer about afterschool programs, providing information on afterschool that she ended up using in news releases. Smith plans to build on the relationship with future events.
- **Bone up on your afterschool facts so that you'll be ready to answer detailed questions about the program**—how many children, how much money, etc.
- **Assign someone the task of working with journalists who attend**, getting their contact information and helping make sure they have what they need to file their stories.

Pennsylvania Area Council of Boys & Girls Clubs
Recognize "Youth of the Year" at a Legislative Breakfast

What: The Pennsylvania Area Council of Boys & Girls Clubs held an award ceremony/legislative breakfast to reward local "Youth of the Year" candidates and announce the selection of the "Pennsylvania Youth of the Year."

Goal: The event showcased the youth to legislators to demonstrate the value of Boys & Girls Club (BGCA) programming and garner state budget support for Boys & Girls Club programs.

How it was done: The Legislative Breakfast initiative has been a regular part of the state "Youth of the Year" program for the past four years with an ever-increasing number of state legislators and administrative officials participating and/or attending the event. Invitations to the breakfast are sent out two months prior to the event with follow-up phone calls. Other personal contacts are made by the local Club executive staff and/or board members to their local representatives and senators. Specific and influential legislators and administrative officials are selected to serve as hosts of the event and participate as speakers and/or presenters at the event. In the past four years the following people served in various capacities at the breakfast: Senate and House Appropriation chairs; chairs of the House and Senate Education committees; the Secretary of Education; and the Lt. Governor.

> "[Boys & Girls Clubs] have provided me with a safe place to learn and grow; ongoing relationships with caring adult professionals; life-enhancing programs; character development experiences and hope and opportunity." -**Nick Khan, 2009-10 Pennsylvania Youth of the Year**

Lessons Learned:

- **Develop and nurture relationships between local club staff, board of directors and local legislators.** This builds a strong grassroots network that can be useful in critical times as legislators are pressed to cut state budgets in order to meet budgetary requirements. Strong local support will make a difference as to whether your budgetary requests are either reduced or eliminated or are championed by your local legislators.

- **Develop a strong relationship at the state level with Administration officials and staff.** Relationships provide the opportunity to demonstrate the value of your afterschool program and possibly reduce any opposition to your efforts by state leaders.

- **Develop a strong and active role within the educational establishment of the state.** Work with other non-Administration groups to find common ground and present a unified non-competitive image to the Adminstration and the legislature.

- **Develop a strong and working relationship, at the state-level, with legislative staff.** This will increase the access to legislators for their participation in and/or attendance at the Legislative Breakfast and encourage them to champion the afterschool cause.

- **Encourage local "Youth of the Year" winners to offer their assistance to local legislators** in serving as tour guides for their constituents and as possible youth voices in any town meeting or panel discussions that the local legislator may want to sponsor.

- **Encourage local legislators to publicly recognize their local "Youth of the Year" winners through Legislative Resolutions and other awards.** This provides local legislators with "feel good" opportunities within their local districts and further encourages them to become part of the local family of supporters.