



Take Action Success Stories: Two Site Visits & Taking Over A Town Hall Meeting

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 staff and officials.

How it was done: Araujo has worked hard for several years to develop consistent relationships with local elected officials and their staff members. Among these 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, make the Club available to them for visits and photo opportunities, and provide 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.

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

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 she 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 the 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.



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- **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 U.S. Representative Steny Hoyer, House Democratic Whip 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 Representative 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.

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 Representative's 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.

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

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.** So 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 Representative Hoyer's staff, the Representative 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 Representative 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.



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Local Afterschool Funding Initiative Baltimore Safe and Sound Campaign

What: Safe and Sound organized 130 providers and community members to attend the Baltimore City Council's annual "Taxpayers' Night" to ask for funding for afterschool.

Goal: In 2005, Baltimore announced a \$35.7 million budget surplus. Safe and Sound organized with providers on a message that the city should make a priority of investing in kids, prompting officials to allocate \$10 million to afterschool programs. In 2006, the budget surplus was \$60.6 million, and Safe and Sound again organized to ask for a funding increase for afterschool programs.

The Results: Officials agreed to review their budgets for possible funds, and to attend a future meeting with other officials and business, philanthropy, educators and criminal justice leaders to talk about funding afterschool. Even though many other groups attended Taxpayers' Night, the afterschool issue was the only one that received press coverage from that evening. In addition, the news conference to release the poll earned an article and photo in the Baltimore Sun. The mayor committed \$5 million, and the Safe and Sound Campaign plans to continue pressing for more – as much as double that sum.

Providers who spoke asked for money to go to the initiative, instead of their individual programs.

They said that there is a system in place. It works. Invest in it

-Erin Coleman

How it was done: The City Council holds a "Taxpayers' Night" each year to solicit comments from the public to the proposed "Ordinance of Estimates" budget bill. In 2006, 45 speakers requested that the budget surplus be devoted to funding afterschool programs. Talking points were made available, but most in attendance simply spoke from the heart, making the messages all the more powerful. After the Council meeting, the group coordinated individual follow-up meetings with all 15 council members with constituents from their district, urging support for allocating the surplus toward afterschool programs. In addition, on the eve of the budget bill's introduction, the group held a press conference with community leaders to release a voter poll showing strong voter support for investing in children, with afterschool as a top priority.

Lessons Learned:

- **Have a plan and stick with it.** Safe and Sound's "Collective Fund Group," a smaller group of committed providers, helped to define the goals and shared in the planning.
- **Research is vital.** The group made sure it had the facts to back up its ideas.
- **Match strengths to tasks.** Safe and Sound worked to match participants with roles they would enjoy.
- **Build on previous victories to keep momentum.** Safe and Sound's victory in 2005 helped pave the way for 2006.
- **Plan ahead and inform often.** By beginning its planning early and keeping the field regularly updated on plans, Safe and Sound was able to seize the day.