Afterschool Alliance
AFTERSCHOOL FOR ALL

HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL CONGRESSIONAL VISIT

Inviting your representatives in Congress to tour your 21st Century Community Learning Centers program is one of the best ways to show him or her firsthand the impact of the initiative and afterschool programming on students and their families in their district and/or state. A planned out and well-orchestrated tour will help accomplish both the goals of the Afterschool Alliance in Washington, D.C. in support of the 21st CCLC initiative and your goals at home. This how-to guide will assist you in the tour and the process for getting started.

BEFORE THE VISIT

1. IDENTIFY YOUR FEDERAL LEGISLATORS
Your 21st CCLC program is represented by at least one representative and two senators. Keep in mind that if your location is situated on or near a Congressional district line, you may have students, families and employees from multiple Congressional districts. In this case, you may want to expand your reach beyond the Members of Congress who serve your district to those who also represent the interests of the students and families you serve.

2. IDENTIFY UPCOMING FEDERAL RECESS PERIODS
Members of Congress travel in and around their home districts during certain times of the year. These “recess” periods are the best time to invite your Members of Congress to visit your facility. Congress is usually in recess during most federal holidays. Longer recess periods revolve around Presidents’ Day, Easter, Memorial Day, 4th of July and the entire month of August. In election years, Congress tends to adjourn in October, leaving the rest of the fall open for visits.

3. INVITE YOUR REPRESENTATIVE FOR A VISIT
Due to the demands on Members of Congress, their schedules fill up quickly. Your invitation letter should be sent several weeks in advance of your preferred date for their visit. The letter should be personalized with specific information about your 21st CCLC program and should include a window of time during which you would like them to visit (i.e. the April recess period). The letter should be printed on letterhead and signed by the head of the program. The letter should then be emailed to the Member’s scheduler. A sample letter has been included in the appendix of this toolkit.

4. FOLLOW UP WITH THE REPRESENTATIVE’S SCHEDULER
Contact the Member’s scheduler within 24 hours of sending the invitation to make sure it was received. He or she will work with you to set a date. If the Member’s schedule is too tight this recess period, suggest another time or offer to visit the Member and/or his or her staff at the district office at their convenience. The scheduler will be able to arrange that meeting or will pass you to the district office to set up a time.

5. COORDINATE WITH THE MEMBER’S COMMUNICATIONS STAFF
It is up to the Member whether or not the press should be involved. If media coverage is agreeable with the elected official, you may want to produce media materials well in advance of the visit as it can often take days for a Member’s office to approve materials. Be sure to draft a media advisory, press release, and photo release for review by the Member’s office.

   - Media Advisory: A brief written notice to media about an upcoming event or announcement. The advisory will concisely list the date, time, location, purpose of the event or announcement, participants and contact information. Advisories are typically a page or less in length, and should be circulated to the press, including the photo editor of the local newspaper, within five business days of the event or announcement.

   - Press Release: A written communication announcing news that is sent to media. Usually contains a point of contact for further media inquiries or requests, and quotes from those associated with the news. The release should be put on letterhead and be approved by the Member’s office prior to distribution. The release should be circulated to the media as soon as the visit begins.

- Photo Release: Similar to a press release, a picture from the event or announcement that is released to the press for publication. Should include a photo credit and brief caption that identifies people in the photo. In this case, the photo should include the Member of the Congress meeting with program leadership, employees and/or students if pre-approval has been received, and must be approved by the Member's office prior to distribution. The photo should be circulated to the media and/or sent to photo editors at target publications as soon as the visit concludes.

In addition to these media tactics, the Member's visit should be featured in social media and on your program's website along with a brief write up and photo.

6. CREATE A FACT SHEET AND RELEVANT MATERIALS

A fact sheet is a great document to share with the Member's office in advance of their visit so that they are familiar with your program, the services you provide to students and families, and who benefits. Your program fact sheet should include: current employment numbers, your footprint in the district, interesting facts about your program including the number of students your serve, and positive testimonials of parents, community leaders, etc. The fact sheet should also be given to the Member along with an issue backgrounder, found in the appendix of this toolkit, as "take away" materials from the visit.

7. CONFIRM WITH THE REPRESENTATIVE'S SCHEDULER

It is best to contact the scheduler one to two weeks in advance of the visit to confirm the meeting, and confirm who will be attending the visit with the Member - make sure you have that person's contact information. Items you should provide the Member's office for this conversation include:

- ✓ Schedule of events for the visit (sample included in the appendix)
- ✓ List of program participants and their bios
- ✓ Map/directions/parking instructions for the Member and Congressional staff
- ✓ Program contact name and number(s) for event
- ✓ Materials about the program and an issue backgrounder
- ✓ Media confirmed to attend the tour (if available)
- ✓ Confirm whether or not the staff would like to do a walk-through 24 hours in advance of the Member's arrival and if so, present a schedule and confirm logistics for the walk-through

8. NOTIFY YOUR STAFF AND EMPLOYEES ABOUT THE VISIT

Employees, staff and families should be informed of the Congressional visit and your expectations. The more prepared everyone is, the better the visit.

9. PERFORM WALK-THROUGH WITH PROGRAM LEADERSHIP ONE DAY AHEAD OF THE VISIT

The route should be mapped out so that the event and tour run smoothly and on time. A walk- through the day prior to the event is recommended to ensure that all participants understand their roles, know the purpose of the visit, are aware of the route that will be taken in and around the building and know how much time they will be allotted for their portion of the presentation. This is also a good time to review messaging. Present leadership with a schedule and a key messages document.

10. ISSUE THE MEDIA ADVISORY AND FINALIZE OTHER PRESS MATERIALS

Within five business days in advance of the visit, issue the media advisory to the press, including the photo editor of the local newspaper. Follow up with a phone call and a reminder e-mail the day of the event. Also work with the Member's communications team to finalize the press release.

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DURING THE VISIT

1. GREET THE MEMBER AND HIS/HER STAFF (2-3 MIN.)
   It is often good to have a "Welcome Representative/Senator X" banner or a sign in an area with high visibility for the Member to see as soon as he/she arrives. Program leadership should be on hand to greet the Member and his/her staff when they arrive on site. Preferably, one or two employees or representatives from your facility should also be on hand. You may want to consider including a representative from one of your community partners and/or a local business leader who is involved in the program and understands how vital your program is to the local community and state. Following brief introductions, the tour should promptly begin.

2. TOUR YOUR FACILITY (20 MIN.)
   The head of the program should lead the tour. This is the best time to show your work "in action" to the Member and his/her staff. Have a camera ready to capture the best moments.

3. MEET WITH EMPLOYEES AND/OR STAFF (30 MIN.)
   At the end of the tour, you should allow the Member to have open interaction with students and employees. This will allow him/her to offer remarks and answer questions.

4. CLOSING REMARKS AND THANK YOU (2-3 MIN.)
   Close out the visit by thanking the Member and his/her staff for visiting the facility. If you wish to present the Member and their staff with a small (under $50 according to ethics rules) token of your gratitude, this would be the time for that presentation. Make sure also to supply the Member and staffer with your take away materials.

5. ISSUE THE PRESS RELEASE AND/OR PHOTO RELEASE
   Circulate the release(s) to the media and/or send to local press contacts.

AFTER THE VISIT

1. SEND A THANK YOU LETTER TO THE MEMBER
   A thank you note should be sent shortly after the Member's visit. To ensure delivery, it is best for this letter to be sent via email to the staffer who attended the visit with the Member.

2. MONITOR FOR MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE VISIT
   If/when positive articles about the tour are published, make sure to pass them along to the Member's communications staff.