

MEDIA OUTREACH IDEAS & TIPS

Afterschool advocates have many ways to generate news coverage about the benefits offered by afterschool programs and the urgent need to continue funding these essential programs. The following ideas, samples, and instructional information can help get out your messages about afterschool. At a minimum, consider issuing a news release and/or letter-to-the-editor to your local newspaper about your visit to Washington, D.C. **These media tools as written DO NOT constitute lobbying.** If you are allowed to lobby, you can be more direct in talking about the need to stop cuts to afterschool. See the Take Action page (www.afterschoolalliance.org/policyTakeAction.cfm) for sample language and tips.

- **Messages that Work**
- **Write an Opinion Article (Op-Ed) for a Local Newspaper**
- **Request a Supportive Editorial in a Local Newspaper**
- **Send a Letter to the Editor to a Local Newspaper**
- **Issue a News Release About Your Trip to Washington, D.C.**
- **Pitch a Segment to a Local Radio Talk Show**
- **Write a Blog Post About Your Trip for Your School District's or Another Blog**

MESSAGES THAT WORK

The Afterschool Alliance recommends using the following messages with the media:

- Afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, and help working families.
- Research commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance, released in 2014, finds 10.2 million children participate in an afterschool program.
- The study also found tremendous unmet need for afterschool programs. For every child in an afterschool program, two more are waiting to get in. Demand is especially high among low-income, African-American, Hispanic, and rural families. In total, 19.4 million children are waiting to get into an afterschool program.
- Afterschool programs provide homework help, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education, mentoring, sports and physical activities, healthy snacks and meals, robotics, computer programming, college- and job-readiness, opportunities for hands-on learning, and much more.
- Years of research demonstrate that afterschool and summer learning programs work, and support a wide range of positive outcomes for students, families, and communities. These programs also make it possible for many parents to work, as losing their afterschool programs would jeopardize their ability to hold jobs and support their families.
- Federal funds support afterschool programs for 1.6 million students in the United States. Ending federal funding for afterschool would result in fewer programs, diminished program offerings, and gutting of the partnerships between afterschool and summer learning programs and museums, businesses, colleges, and others.
- At a time when 1 in 5 children in the United States are unsupervised after the school day ends, America needs more quality afterschool programs. We need lawmakers, businesses, and foundations to come together to ensure that afterschool programs get the funding they need to serve our children and our communities. We should be investing more in afterschool and summer learning programs, not cutting the funding we have.

WRITE AN OPINION ARTICLE FOR YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

Opinion articles (also called “op-eds” or guest editorials) are a great way to get your message out. Start by doing some research on your local newspaper’s opinion page. Check for several days to see if the paper runs opinion articles from community members. Some newspapers only carry staff-written or syndicated columns, but most publish some pieces from community leaders or experts on various topics. If your paper accepts opinion articles, call and ask for the opinion page editor and tell her or him that you’re interested in writing an op-ed on the funding challenges afterschool programs in the community are facing and what that means to local families. Ask if such a piece might be of interest to the newspaper. The editor likely won’t make a commitment on the phone, but might indicate a willingness to look at your piece, and even offer suggestions on what might make it publishable. Ask what the procedure is—how long the piece can be, to whom to submit it and how, and any for other guidelines the newspaper observes. Write it, submit it per the editor’s instructions, and then call the next day to be sure it arrived.

Four tips for writing an op-ed piece:

1. Never exceed the word limit.
2. Because it’s an opinion article, write with a clear point of view but avoid being shrill.
3. Back up what you say with facts. Tell real stories.
4. Start with a lead paragraph that captures the reader’s attention and gives a sense of where you’re headed. For example: “Every weekday afternoon in Little Rock, more than 3,000 students participate in an afterschool program funded, in part, through a federal grant. The programs keep children safe, inspire them to learn, and relieve their parents of worries about whether their kids are safe and supervised after the school day ends. But funding lags far behind the need, so many of our children have no safe, adult-supervised place to go in the afternoons – and there’s cause for concern that there will be fewer, rather than more, afterschool programs in the months and years ahead.”

If you are not successful placing your op-ed piece in your market’s major daily newspaper, consider community papers (often weeklies), or look for a website or blog (the school system, an ally, your own program) that will publish it.

TALK WITH THE EDITORIAL WRITER(S) OF YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

There’s nothing quite like having an editorial on your side to help generate support from policy makers. Editorial writers are often looking for topics, so if you think your newspaper’s general editorial disposition might favor continuing or increasing federal and other funding for afterschool and summer learning programs, see if you can convince the editorial page editor (or editorial board) to write an editorial saying so.

First, call the newspaper, ask for the editorial page, and ask who writes editorials on local education issues. Depending on the size of the paper, it could be the editorial page editor, a columnist, or even a reporter.

Ask to be connected with that person and then request a meeting to talk about the funding challenges facing state and local afterschool programs. If they agree to meet, bring whatever fact sheets or other material you may have, as well as information on the impact of budget shortfalls or cuts. Be sure to check the Afterschool Alliance’s website at www.afterschoolalliance.org for the latest information. You may want to bring a parent, principal, or other person with a distinct and powerful point of view with you to the meeting.

Be prepared to explain in specific terms the threat to local programs, what inadequate funding would mean for children and families, and how many people would likely be affected if the federal government eliminates or cuts afterschool funding next year.

Remember, the writer will be thinking in terms of how he or she might write an editorial, so be sure to provide a local angle (that should be easy!) and specific facts that support your case.

SEND A LETTER-TO-THE-EDITOR TO YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER(S)

Look at your newspaper's letters page. Scan the page itself and the newspaper's online letters section for instructions on word counts and how to submit your letter. If you can't find instructions, just count the number of words in a given day's letters. Also, see whether published letters all refer to stories or editorials the newspaper recently ran; some newspapers insist on it, some don't. Then write a letter that reflects what you've learned—length, tone, keyed to a story already published in the newspaper or not, etc.

Follow the newspaper's instructions on how to submit the letter and be sure to include a phone number (not for publication) so the editor can confirm that you are actually the person who submitted the letter.

A sample fill-in-the-blanks letter-to-the-editor is below; it is keyed to your participation in this year's *Afterschool for All Challenge*. The Afterschool Alliance urges you to modify the text, so if the newspaper asks if the letter is being submitted to any other newspapers around the nation, you can honestly answer that yours is unique. Newspapers are increasingly sensitive to this issue.

If there is more than one newspaper in your media market, do not submit the same letter to more than one of them. Either choose one outlet for your letter, or submit an entirely different letter from someone else who supports your program to a second outlet.

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

[Date]

Letters to the Editor

[Name of newspaper]

[Address]

[City, State, Zip]

To the Editor:

In our community, too many children leave school each weekday afternoon with no adult supervision awaiting them. It's no coincidence that those afternoon hours are when children are most likely to be victims of crime and to engage in risky behaviors.

Afterschool programs provide a safe alternative, offering educational and enrichment opportunities during those sometimes-perilous hours. [Add a sentence or two about the offerings by afterschool programs in your community.] That is which is one of many reasons we need more of these programs.

But unfortunately, the administration has proposed ending federal support for afterschool programs. If Congress agrees

to that, afterschool programs in our community and our state would be at risk of closing. That would cause tremendous harm to students and families.

Our entire community would be better off if there was more – not less – funding for afterschool programs. That’s why, [this/last] week I joined hundreds of afterschool supporters from around the nation in meeting with our U.S. senators and representatives in Congress to urge them to fund afterschool programs, as part of the Afterschool Alliance’s *Afterschool for All Challenge*. We’ll all be better off if lawmakers heed that message.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Your program]

[Your phone numbers, not for publication]

ISSUE A NEWS RELEASE ABOUT YOUR TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

Some advocates – and especially those in small or mid-sized media markets – find that local newspapers and television and radio stations are interested in doing stories on their trip to Washington, D.C. to attend the *Afterschool for All Challenge*. On the trip home, fill in the blanks of the news release that follows, and then distribute it to local media as soon as you can (don’t let the news release grow stale; it won’t be news if it’s three days old).

When filling in the blanks of the news release, make certain that you fairly characterize what your representative, senators or their aides said in your meetings. Send the news release to:

- Assignment editors at local TV and radio stations
- Local education reporters at daily newspapers
- Managing editors or education reporters at any community, ethnic or specialty newspapers
- Newsletter editors at interested organizations: the school district, PTA, Boys & Girls Club, YMCA and others
- School system and community cable stations

Adjust your quote in the news release as you see fit, and be sure to mention in your quote any commitments from lawmakers or their aides—just be sure not to overstate what they told you!

If anyone in your traveling party maintains a blog or has posting privileges on one, you might consider arranging for an entry about the trip (see sample blog post in this kit).

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

[Program Letterhead]

News Release
[June 9, 2017]

Contact: [Name]
[Phone]

With Federal Funding for Afterschool Programs at Risk, [Your State] Leaders Say Congressional Meetings Provided Valuable Chance to Discuss How Afterschool Helps Students, Families

Advocates Sent Clear Message: Afterschool Programs Deserve More – Not Less – Federal Support

Afterschool supporters from [state] returned home today after a [two]-day visit to Washington, D.C., where they educated members of Congress, including [list any home-state senators or representatives you met with], about the urgent need to increase funding for afterschool and summer learning programs. The visit was part of the annual *Afterschool for All Challenge*, sponsored by the Afterschool Alliance.

[Your name], [your title] of [your organization], declared the visit an “outstanding opportunity to inform lawmakers about the ways afterschool programs support children and families.” Joining [last name] on the trip were [name other local participants including their role and their organizational affiliation].

A highlight of the conference was a day-long visit to Capitol Hill, during which afterschool leaders from around the nation took part in more than 200 meetings with members of Congress and their aides. Many more activists from around the country sent social media messages about the need to protect afterschool funding. The trip came at a key moment, when Congress is considering the fiscal year 2018 budget and the administration has proposed eliminating all federal support for afterschool and summer learning programs.

“Afterschool programs are critically important to students, families and communities across the country,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “But they face a very real funding challenge on Capitol Hill right now. Members of Congress need to hear about the great work being done in afterschool to keep kids safe, engaged and learning during the hours after the school day ends and before parents return home from work. That’s the best way to remind them that we need to keep these programs going – and to grow, rather than end – the federal contribution to afterschool. Afterschool advocates sent a clear and convincing message this week that will be hard for lawmakers to ignore.”

The goal of the visits on Capitol Hill was to educate lawmakers about the unmet need for afterschool programs. In [name of community], a federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant supports [name of afterschool program], but other worthy applicants were turned down because there were not enough funds available. The Afterschool Alliance is urging Congress to increase funding for afterschool programs and reject all proposals to cut or eliminate this essential funding.

“The *Afterschool for All Challenge* was a great experience,” said [your name and title]. “It was encouraging to meet with so many other committed afterschool providers. Every day, here and at programs across the nation, afterschool programs are helping families and communities by keeping kids safe, inspiring them to learn and helping working families. We took that message to our members of Congress and made an impression on them. [Senator/Representative] said [she/he] would [support funding for afterschool OR consider our request, and we were very glad to hear it. We are hopeful he/she will conclude that the enormous benefits from afterschool programs are worth the modest investment.] Without secure federal funding, afterschool programs and the children and families they serve will suffer.”

According to the Afterschool Alliance’s 2014 [America After 3 PM](#) report, a nationwide household survey on afterschool:

- 11.3 million K-12 children are unsupervised in the afternoons—1 in 5.
- By contrast, just 10.2 million children are in afterschool programs.
- The parents of another 19.4 million children say they would enroll their children in an afterschool program if one

were available.

[You can replace or supplement the data above with numbers from your state’s *America After 3 PM* news release, available on the [Afterschool Alliance website](#). Click on your state, then scroll for the relevant numbers of children who 1) are unsupervised, 2) are in programs, and 3) would be in programs if they were available.]

[Add local information about afterschool in your community—some combination of information about your program, local funding challenges, major providers, local evaluations of programs, etc.]

The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.

[Add a one- or two-sentence description of your program.]

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NOTE: For more information about afterschool, including *America After 3 PM*, or other research data, visit www.afterschoolalliance.org or [email Luci Manning](mailto:Luci.Manning@afterschoolalliance.org) or call her at (202) 371-1999. For more information on the trip, contact [name and phone number].

PITCH A SEGMENT TO A LOCAL RADIO TALK SHOW

Want to be on local talk radio? It’s easier than you might think. Here’s how:

First, scout local talk shows. Most medium-size or larger markets have a talk news station, and that’s probably where you’ll have the best luck. Check listings for that and other stations carefully—they’re often available online. Don’t overlook public radio and college/university stations. See which programs are locally produced (you’re not likely to be on a national program on National Public Radio or a nationally syndicated one like the Rush Limbaugh Show).

Listen to each show to get a sense of whether any of them would give you the chance to get your message out.

Put together a three-paragraph “pitch letter” like the sample that follows. It should explain briefly (in one page or less) why quality afterschool programs are important, why and how these programs are threatened, how funding shortages affect local children and their families, and why you are qualified to talk about it.

Don’t forget to mention that you recently traveled to Capitol Hill to talk with members of Congress and their aides. Address the letter to the show’s producer (call the station and ask for the name). Email the letter, then call to follow up the day after it arrives. When you call, be ready to repeat a distilled version of your basic “pitch” to the producer.

SAMPLE PITCH LETTER TO RADIO TALK SHOW

[June 8, 2017]

[Name of Producer]

[Name of Show], [Radio station name]

[Address]

Dear [Name]:

As any working parent in [name of community] can tell you, the hours immediately following the regular school day can be a time when parents worry about what their children are doing—whether they're safe and constructively engaged or getting into trouble. Over the last two decades, afterschool programs have helped millions of families across the nation, including many here in our community. But millions more are without the afterschool programs they need and there's a very real chance that federal support for these essential programs will soon be eliminated. That would exacerbate the shortage of afterschool programs that is already harming children and families, put enormous strain on working parents, and deny the next generation essential opportunities to learn.

As the [title] of the [name of program] here in [name of community], I've seen firsthand what a difference afterschool makes in the lives of our children, our families and our communities. I've just returned from Washington, D.C., where I joined with afterschool advocates from across the country in educating our senators and representatives about the benefits offered by afterschool programs and the need to continue and increase support for them – and to reject the Trump administration's proposal to eliminate federal support for afterschool. I met with several elected representatives from [state] and their aides, including [any senators or representatives with whom you met], for a wonderfully successful day of education on behalf of our kids.

I think this issue would be of interest to your listeners and hope you'll agree. According to recent research, the parents of more than 19 million children nationwide would sign their children up for afterschool programs if programs were available. Too often, they simply are not. Many of your listeners may be in that group!

If you're interested in doing a segment or show on the subject, I'd be happy to join you and to help identify a parent or student who has benefited from afterschool, as well as a teacher or school principal who could describe the vital role afterschool programs play in reinforcing academic learning from the regular school day. I'll be in touch to follow up. Thanks very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Your title]

[Your phone number]

BLOG ABOUT YOUR TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

Many school districts around the country have blogs to help parents, faculty and other community members learn about news and events related to the district and education. If your school district has a blog, you might consider submitting a post about your trip to Washington, D.C., for the *Afterschool for All Challenge*. If your school district does not have a blog or it is not available to you, consider approaching other supporters of your program that have blogs and might be interested in publishing your post.

Blog posts are usually short and conversational, so keep yours fairly brief. You also want to communicate the excitement and importance of the *Afterschool for All Challenge* and what it was like to meet with your members of Congress and their aides and to participate in this national advocacy effort.

SAMPLE BLOG POST: ADVOCATING FOR AFTERSCHOOL



Afterschool programs are vital to our nation's children, families, and communities. But the tough funding challenges these programs already faced were exacerbated this year when the Trump administration proposed eliminating federal support for afterschool and summer learning programs. If Congress were to go along with that proposal, students and families in our community would be adversely affected in very significant ways.

That's why I joined hundreds of afterschool advocates from across the country [this/last] week at the annual [Afterschool for All Challenge](#), as we teamed up to educate Congress about the myriad benefits afterschool programs provide. Sponsored by the [Afterschool Alliance](#), the *Afterschool for All Challenge* featured a day-long visit to Capitol Hill by hundreds of afterschool leaders from around the nation. And while we met with U.S. Senators and Representatives, afterschool advocates Maine to California turned up the grassroots volume by using social media to send hundreds of messages about the need to protect afterschool funding.

[City or state] conference participants met with [names of senators, followed by names of representatives,] as well as aides to [senators followed by representatives]. I had the opportunity to meet with [list any senators or representatives from your state who met with your group, or "aides to" senators or representatives] about how important afterschool programs are to our community and all they do for children and working families. [Add interesting information about what senators, representatives or their aides said to you, being careful not to overstate what they said.]

We told them that afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn, and help working families by providing homework help, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) education, mentoring, sports and physical activities, healthy snacks and meals, robotics, computer programming, college- and job-readiness, opportunities for hands-on learning, and more.

We noted that years of research demonstrate that afterschool and summer learning programs work, and support a wide range of positive outcomes for students, families, and communities.

We reminded lawmakers that these programs make it possible for many parents to work, as losing their afterschool programs would jeopardize their ability to hold jobs and support their families.

We said that federal funds support afterschool programs for 1.6 million students in the United States. Ending federal funding for afterschool would result in fewer programs, diminished program offerings, and gutting of the partnerships between afterschool and summer learning programs and museums, businesses, colleges, and others.

At a time when 1 in 5 children in the United States is unsupervised after the school day ends, we said we believe that America needs more quality afterschool programs – and we hoped lawmakers, businesses, and foundations will come together to invest in afterschool.

We went to Washington because we believe that by educating lawmakers about afterschool programs benefits our community. That was a message we were proud to deliver! Let's hope they heard us!