



## After the *Afterschool for All Challenge*: Media Outreach Ideas and Tips

Afterschool advocates have many ways to generate news coverage about the challenges afterschool programs face, particularly during the current wave of budget cuts and funding shortfalls many programs are experiencing. Following are ideas, along with some instructional information, for getting out your messages about afterschool. At a minimum, consider sending out a news release and/or a letter to the editor about your visit to Washington, D.C. You'll also find in this packet other ways to generate media coverage, as well as tips and sample materials to help you:

- » Send a Letter to the Editor of Your Local Newspaper(s) (a template is included on the flash drive)
- » Send a News Release about Your Trip to Washington, D.C. (a template is included on the flash drive)
- » Pitch Yourself to a Local Radio Talk Show (a template is included on the flash drive)
- » *Write an Opinion Article (Op-Ed) for Your Local Newspaper*
- » *Look for a Local Cable Television Interview Opportunity*
- » *Talk with the Relevant Editorial Writer(s) of Your Local Newspaper*
- » Write a Blog Post on Your Trip for Your School District's or Another Blog (a template is included on the flash drive)
- » Before, during and after your trip to Washington, use social media to spread the word

### 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 from the Afterschool Alliance, sponsored by jcpenny and released in 2009, found that 15.1 million K-12 children are unsupervised in the afternoon. That includes 3.7 million middle school students and 1.1 million elementary school children. By contrast, just 8.4 million children are in afterschool programs, while the parents of another 18.5 million children say their children would participate if an afterschool program were available.
- Years of research have demonstrated that afterschool programs work, supporting a wide range of positive outcomes for kids, families and communities.
- The nation's economic difficulties have taken a harsh toll on afterschool programs, with many programs cutting back hours and some forced to close altogether.
- Afterschool programs are about the future. Science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs offered after school and during the summer are getting young people excited about studying these important fields. The hands-on, experiential learning that is a trademark of afterschool programs lends itself naturally to the scientific method and STEM subjects. In an era of global competitiveness, STEM afterschool offers an exciting way to ensure we have the workforce we need tomorrow.
- America needs more quality afterschool programs. We need law makers, businesses and foundations to come together to ensure that afterschool programs get the funding they need to serve our children and our communities.
- The president's budget proposal for FY2013 would fund the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers initiative (21<sup>st</sup> CCLC) at \$1.153 billion, the same level appropriated for the current fiscal year. But the budget would also allow 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC grants for additional purposes beyond afterschool, including adding time to the traditional school day or year, summer school, and teacher planning and professional development. The Afterschool Alliance supports 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funds being directed



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to afterschool, before school and summer programs that focus on hands-on, engaged learning that complements and enhances but does not replicate the traditional school day.

- In addition to the budget, Congress is also working on reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (formerly the *No Child Left Behind Act*). The Afterschool Alliance is urging Members to make sure that 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC funds are used to support quality afterschool, before-school and summer learning programs that enhance and complement the school day through engaging, hands-on, experiential learning activities. The bill should also build on strong partnerships between schools and community-based organizations, and it should ensure that any changes to 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC do not reduce the number of children or communities served. In addition, the bill should maintain the current formula for grants to states that then distribute funds to local communities. Members are being encouraged to co-sponsor the bipartisan *Afterschool for America's Children Act* (S. 1370; H.R. 3821) to incorporate improvements to the 21<sup>st</sup> CCLC initiative as part of the ESEA reauthorization process.

**Send a Letter to the Editor to Your Local Newspaper(s)** (See specific file included)

**Send a News Release about Your Trip to Washington, D.C.** (See specific file included)

**Pitch Yourself to a Local Radio Talk Show** (See specific file included)

### **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 newspaper’s opinion page. Check every day for several days to see if the paper runs opinion articles from members of the community. Some newspapers only carry staff-written or syndicated columnists, but most publish some pieces from readers. If your paper accepts opinion articles, call and ask for the opinion page editor and tell them you’re interested in writing an op-ed on the funding challenges afterschool programs in the community are facing and what it means to local families. Ask if such a piece might be of interest to the newspaper. The editor won’t likely make a commitment on the phone, but might indicate a willingness to look at such a 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 other guidelines the newspaper observes. Write it, submit it per the newspaper’s instructions and then call the next day to be sure it arrived.

Four tips for writing an op-ed piece:

- Never exceed the word limit.
- Because it’s an opinion article, write with a point of view but without being shrill.
- Back up what you say with real facts. Tell real stories.
- 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 9,000 students stay after the final bell—not as punishment, but as part of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Community Learning Centers’ afterschool program. The program keeps them safe, inspires them to learn and relieves their parents of child care worries. But with funding lagging so far behind community needs, many of our children have no safe, adult-supervised place to go in the afternoons.”

If you are not successful placing your op-ed piece in your community’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.

### **Look for a Local Broadcast or Cable Television Interview Opportunity**

Broadcast and cable television programming varies from market to market, so there are no firm rules about what kinds of local interview opportunities may be available to you. But, at a minimum, many broadcast stations run public affairs programs, and most cable systems have a channel devoted to local



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government or a local school system. Look through the listings of your local cable system to see what's possible in your community and then send a pitch letter (like the radio letter provided on this flash drive). Particularly for TV, offer to bring several children from your program.

### **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 always looking for topics, so if you think your newspaper's general editorial disposition might favor full or increased funding for afterschool, see if you can convince the editorial page editor 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 s/he agrees to meet, bring whatever fact sheets or other material you may have, as well as information on the impact of budget shortfalls. Be sure to check the Afterschool Alliance's website at [www.afterschoolalliance.org](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org) for the latest information.

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

### **Write a Blog Post on Your Trip for Your School District's or Another Blog (See specific file included)**

#### **Before, during and after your trip to Washington, use social media to spread the word.**

If you have a Facebook page, be sure to use it to let your friends know you'll be in Washington, D.C, and update frequently while you're at the *Challenge*. Also, if you have a Twitter account, don't pass up the opportunity to tweet about the *Challenge*. You might want to share your thoughts about events at the conference, as well as highlights from meetings with your Members of Congress and their staff. Be sure to use the hashtags #a4aChallenge and/or #afterschoolworks