

How to conduct a site visit with policymakers

Step 1: Identify and contact your legislator (See: *How to Contact Your State Legislators* document). You can find your Congressional Legislators' information by visiting www.house.gov/writerep or www.senate.gov.

Step 2: Identify a few dates during the next legislative recess when you could host a tour of your program. Using the date that is most optimal for you, write an invitation letter. This will be helpful to have on hand when you call the district office.

Step 3: Call the district office. Tell the person who answers that you would like to schedule a tour of your program for the policymaker. You may be connected with a legislative aide or a scheduler.

Try for the top. Ask if the policymaker could attend a tour during the next legislative recess. Provide options for dates and times if your first selection does not work. Be sure to mention that staff and parents will be on hand for the visit and offer to invite media as well. Point out how your program relates to the policymaker's interests (literacy, improving academic achievement in public schools, keeping communities safe by decreasing juvenile crime, helping working families, etc.). Offer to send your "Invite Letter" and more information about the program and who will be at the visit. Encourage the policymaker to bring staff members. Establishing a relationship with staff is equally important, especially when you need a quick quote or response.

Be flexible. If a policymaker is not available, see if a staff person can make the visit instead. If you are successful with the policymaker, keep in mind that elected officials' schedules can change without notice. Several days before the visit, call to confirm the event and be prepared to reschedule.

Mail or fax your personalized invitation letter. Be sure to send along a program profile, brochure or some background materials about your program.

Step 4: Before the visit. Identify youth, parents, program staff, school officials and community partners who would be convincing spokespeople for your program. Ask them if they could be available for the visit and give them any background material you have on the policymaker so they will feel comfortable meeting them. Share the basic schedule for the visit and clarify their roles. Make sure to invite your school's principal and consider inviting school board members. Send a media advisory to invite press and prepare a news release for the day of the event.

Step 5: The visit. On the day of the visit, be sure that someone waits outside the building to greet and direct the visitors to the right location. Be sure to have program brochures or copies of a program profile on hand. You may want to make copies of any articles, youths' essays, parent letters, awards or other documents that demonstrate the community's support for your program. Be sure the policymaker gets to hear from the youth. Let the policymaker ask the youth questions or facilitate a discussion about what youth gain from the program. Ask parents to share their perspectives on the program's value; have your principal talk about students' increased attendance and improved behavior; invite community members to comment on how the program keeps kids out of trouble.

Sample Schedule

3:00 p.m.

Policymaker arrives at the program and is greeted by the program director or other lead host.

3:05-3:15 p.m.

Lead the policymaker on a tour of the facilities. Let them see what activities the youth are engaged in.

3:15-3:30 p.m.

After-school snack time! Let the policymaker enjoy a snack and talk with the children about their favorite parts of the program. Ask the kids where they would be if they did not attend after-school or what their friends do after school.

3:30-3:45 p.m.

After the snack, facilitate a discussion between parents and policymakers. Ask the parents to explain how the after-school program helps their families.

3:45-4:00 p.m.

Ask the principal or superintendent to talk about school-wide improvement attributable to the after-school program. For example, ask the principal to show the policymaker the school's improved assessment scores.

4:00 p.m. Thank you and goodbye!

Step 6: Send a Thank You letter.

Suggested Timeline

Work backward from the date of the policymaker visit to make sure you are prepared. Use the suggested timeline below as a tool to help you plan. Allow at least one month between the invitation and the actual visit to be sure you have enough time to coordinate guests and schedules.

Time Prior to Visit	Task
1 month	Invite policy maker
3 weeks	Invite parents, community members, school officials, youth
2 weeks	Develop schedule for the day; identify roles
1 week	Finalize program agenda
3 days	Call policymaker's office to confirm visit
2 days	Invite the media

Visit <http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/reachPolicySiteVisit.cfm> for more tools.