



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 most programs are experiencing. Following are ideas, along with some how-to 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. But you'll also find in this packet other ways to generate media coverage. Contained here are 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; and**
- » **Write a Blog Post on 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 from the Afterschool Alliance, sponsored by jcpenney and released in 2009, found that 15.1 million K-12 children are unsupervised in the afternoons. 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.
- The recession has taken a harsh toll on afterschool programs, with many programs cutting back hours and some forced to close altogether.
- The President's budget proposal for FY2012 would increase funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative (21st CCLC) by \$100 million, which would help provide afterschool for another 100,000 children across the nation. He has also requested an additional \$1.3 billion for the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF), about a third of which would be used to provide services for school-age children. His proposals for 21st CCLC and CCDF deserve support.
- In addition to the budget, Congress is expected to take up reauthorization of the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (formerly the *No Child Left Behind Act*). When it does, it should make sure that 21st 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 21st CCLC do not reduce the number of children or communities served, and that the bill maintains the current formula for grants to states that then distribute funds to local communities.

- 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 lawmakers, businesses and foundations to come together to ensure that afterschool programs get the funding they need to serve our children and our communities.

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 say 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 most publishable. Then ask what the procedure is - how long the piece can be, who to submit it to and how, and any other guidelines the paper observes. Write it, submit it per the newspaper’s instructions and then call the next day to be sure it arrived.

Here are four tips for writing an op-ed piece:

- First, never exceed the word limit.
- Second, because it’s an opinion article, write with a point of view but without being shrill.
- Third, back up what you say with real facts. Tell real stories.
- Fourth, 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 21st 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 afternoon.”

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 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 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.