



TIP SHEET & SAMPLE MATERIALS: Organizing a Site Visit for a Policy Maker

Inviting policy makers and their staff to visit your afterschool program is a powerful way to help them understand the benefits your program provides to the community. Below are suggested steps, a timeline and a sample schedule for your event, as well as a sample invitation and thank you letter. Consult the Key Dates to see when your Members of Congress will be back in your community.

Step 1: Find the home district address and phone number for your elected officials. Visit the Afterschool Alliance website, www.afterschoolalliance.org, and look for the Contact Congress box on the right side of the homepage. Enter your zip code to access contact information for your law makers. (You can also visit www.senate.gov or www.house.gov to find this information.) Most Senators and some Representatives have more than one district office. Select the office closest to you. If you do not have access to the Internet, look in the blue government pages of your local phone book.

Step 2: Identify a few dates during the next Congressional recess when you could host a visit to your program. Using the date that is most optimal for you, write an invitation letter based on the sample provided in this packet. Have the letter 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 visit to your afterschool program for the Senator or Representative. You may be connected with a legislative aide or a scheduler.

Try for the top. Ask if the law maker can visit during the next Congressional recess. Provide options for dates and times if your first choice 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 policy maker's interests (literacy, improving academic achievement in public schools, keeping communities safe by decreasing juvenile crime, helping families, etc.). Offer to re-send your "Invite Letter" and more information about the program and who will be at the visit. Encourage the policy maker to bring staff members.

Be flexible. If the law maker is not available, ask whether a senior staff person can visit instead. Even if the law maker agrees to come, keep in mind that elected officials' schedules can change with little notice. Several days before the visit, call to confirm the event and be prepared to reschedule.

Mail or fax your personalized invitation letter (sample here). Be sure to send along a program profile, brochure and 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 to be available for the visit and give them background material on the policy maker, so they will feel comfortable at the event. Share the basic schedule for the visit and clarify their roles. Make sure to invite key partners, supporters, your school's principal and even school board members. Send a media advisory to invite press and prepare a press release for the day of the event. (Go to Program Tools, Media or the *Lights On Afterschool* area of www.afterschoolalliance.org for tips and samples.)

Step 5: The visit. On the day of the visit, have someone wait outside the building to greet and direct the visitors to the right location. Be sure to have program brochures or a program profile on hand. You may want to make copies of any articles, youth essays, parent letters, awards or other documents that demonstrate community support for your program. Be sure the policy maker gets to hear from the young people at your program. Let him/her ask questions of the students or facilitate a discussion to get their perspectives on afterschool and what they gain from the program. Other ideas: ask parents

to share their perspectives; ask a principal to talk about the ways the program affects students; ask a police officer, youth counselor, pediatrician or health leader talk about the benefits to youth who attend it; invite community members to comment on how the program keeps kids out of trouble. Often elected officials are interested in documenting their visit with a photo - think through some possible photo opportunities before hand and suggest them to accompanying staff. If children will be any pictures, be sure you have signed parental release forms.

At some point during the visit, perhaps early on and then again near the end of the visit, consider identifying an “ask” that you would like to make to the Member of Congress. Examples include asking for the Member of Congress to support increased funding for the 21st CCLC during the appropriations process; or asking him or her to cosponsor legislation such as bills to support older youth programs or those in rural areas; or asking him or her to support funding for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education in afterschool programs..

Sample Schedule

- 3:00 p.m. Policy maker and staff arrive at the program and are greeted by the program director or other lead host.
- 3:05-3:15 p.m. Lead the policy maker and staff on a tour. Let them see the youth activities.
- 3:15-3:30 p.m. Afterschool snack/meal time! Let the policy maker enjoy a snack or meal and talk with the children about their favorite parts of the program. Ask the kids where they would be if they did not attend afterschool or what their friends outside the program do after school.
- 3:30-3:45 p.m. After the snack, facilitate a discussion between parents and the policy maker. Ask the parents to explain how the afterschool program helps their families.
- 3:45-4:00 p.m. Ask your invited guest (principal or superintendent, police officer, youth counselor, etc) to talk about the benefits they see the program offering youth.
- 4:00 p.m. Thank you and goodbye!

Step 6: Send a Thank You letter. See the “Sample Thank You Letter” in this packet.

Planning Timeline

Work backward from the date of the policy maker visit to make sure you are well-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 policy maker’s office to confirm visit
2 days	Invite the media (see Program Tools at www.afterschoolalliance.org for sample media advisory and other materials)

Sample Invitation Letter to Send Your Member of Congress

[Your Program Letterhead]

[Date]

The Honorable Ruth Smith
500 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Smith:

I would like to invite you and your staff to visit the **[Bright Lights Afterschool Program]** during your next district working session. Our program provides 300 middle school children with safe, educational afterschool activities during the critical hours from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., when many parents are still working and juvenile crime rates triple. Students in our program are not only safe; they are doing better in school, and show more interest in learning.

We would like to take you on a short tour of our program on **[date]** at **[time]**. If that time is not convenient, we would be happy to work with you to find a time that is. I have also invited members of the local **[Rotary Club]** and several parents to attend. They are eager to talk with you about the importance of keeping afterschool programs open and making these programs available to more children.

I hope you will join us and see our program, and our students, in action. Afterschool programs such as ours are important because they inspire students to learn, keep kids safe and help working families. The **[Bright Lights]** community relies on us.

A profile of the **[Bright Lights Afterschool Program]** is enclosed for your reference. I will contact your office within the next two weeks to follow up. I look forward to seeing you on **[date]**.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
[Phone Number]
[E-mail Address]

Sample Thank You Letter to Send to Your Member of Congress

NOTE: A copy of this letter should also be sent to the district office. It is also a good idea to thank staff members who joined the policy maker on the visit to help further your relationship with the office.

[Your Program Letterhead]

[Date]

The Honorable Ruth Smith
500 Hart Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Smith:

Thank you for taking the time to tour our **[Bright Lights Afterschool Program]** during your recent district working session. The youth, parents and program staff enjoyed meeting you tremendously, and we were delighted to have the chance to share our activities with you.

I hope your visit helped reinforce how much our community values this program. As we discussed, and as I have witnessed firsthand, afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire learning and help working families.

I look forward to meeting with you again to further discuss the ways in which we can work together to ensure that afterschool programs stay open and are available to more children in our community and our state. Thank you again for taking the time to visit!

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
[Phone Number]
[E-mail Address]