Organize a Site Visit

Inviting policymakers, businesses, higher education institutions, law enforcement, school leaders, board members, and funders to visit your afterschool program is a powerful way to help them understand the value your program brings to the community. When policymakers and community leaders have visited your site and have seen the impact you have on the youth you serve and their families first hand, they are better able to advocate for funding, resources, and other enhancements in policy that will benefit your program.

I. Suggested Steps

These steps are a guide that will help you prepare for your site visit and maximize its potential to have an impact on the community leaders you are inviting. You should structure your site visit to fit the needs of your program.

Step 1: Identify and contact your legislator and other attendees.

Step 2: Identify a few dates 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 legislator’s 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.

Email and mail 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 and community leaders attending so they will feel comfortable meeting them. Share the basic schedule for the visit and clarify their roles. Make sure to invite your local school’s principal and consider inviting school board members, municipal officials, institutes of higher education, businesses, law enforcement, and funders. 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, youth essays, parent letters, awards or other documents that demonstrate the community’s support for your program. Be sure the guests get to hear from the youth. Let the guests 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 to their child and the family as a whole; have your principal or program director talk about students’ increased school attendance and improved behavior; invite community members to comment on how the program keeps kids safe.


II. Sample Schedule

Follow this sample schedule to maximize the community leaders’ time visiting your program and remember to adjust it to fit the daily schedule of your program and to ensure leaders are able to engage in the premiere components of your program.

3:00 p.m.
Invitees arrive at the program and are greeted by the program director or other lead host.

3:05-3:15 p.m.
Lead the attendees on a tour of the facility. Let them see what activities the youth are engaged in.

3:15-3:30 p.m.
Afterschool snack time! Let the attendees enjoy a snack and talk with the children about their favorite aspects of the program. Ask the kids where they would be if they did not attend afterschool, what their friends do after school, and why they enjoy attending your afterschool program.
3:30-3:45 p.m.  
After the snack, facilitate a discussion between parents and attendees. Ask the parents to explain how the afterschool program helps their families.

3:45-4:00 p.m.  
If you are a school-based program, ask the principal or superintendent to talk about school-wide improvement attributable to the afterschool program. For example, ask the principal to show the attendees the school’s improved assessment scores and attendance record.

If you are a community-based organization, ask the program or site director to discuss the impacts of youth program attendance on their school and community life.

4:00 p.m.  
Say thank you and goodbye!

III. Suggested Timeline

Use the suggested timeline to help you plan for the days leading up to the site visit. Work backward from the date of the visit to make sure you are prepared. Allow at least one month between the invitation and the actual visit to be sure you have enough time to coordinate guests and schedules.

Below is a sample timeline to use when planning for your site visit. This timeline helps to ensure you are fully prepared for the day-of event and helps to map out when certain steps need to be taken in the planning process.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Prior to Visit</th>
<th>Task</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4-6 weeks</td>
<td>Invite policymakers and community leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 weeks</td>
<td>Invite parents, community leaders, school officials, and youth</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 weeks</td>
<td>Develop the schedule for the day; Identify roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 week</td>
<td>Finalize the program agenda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 days</td>
<td>Call the office of policymakers and community leaders to the confirm visit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 days</td>
<td>Invite the media</td>
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