

Advocating for After School in California



Advocacy Toolkit



Advocating for After School in California Advocacy Toolkit

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Advocacy Toolkit Overview

Elected officials represent the voice of the community especially when they make after school policy decisions. Likewise, after school programs provide valuable resources to parents, youth, schools and the communities they serve. Despite the many benefits of afterschool, these programs face budget cuts at the local, state and federal levels. For this reason, afterschool providers can become strong advocates for expanding and sustaining the many services their programs provide children, their families and the community. There are several ways to advocate for afterschool: phone calls, letters, e-mail, news media and site visits. This toolkit will provide the user with a step-by-step process for connecting with your elected officials and organizing a site visit.

The California Afterschool Network

The Mission of the California Afterschool Network is to influence policy and coordinate local and statewide efforts that support out of school time opportunities for children and youth. The Network's Policy Committee is committed to focusing on the experience of the field to promote responsive policy development.

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Create a Program Profile

A program profile is a concise, descriptive one-page handout used to convey important information about your program. This profile can be used with your elected officials, policy makers, potential funders, supporters, parents interested in enrolling their child in your after school program or in preparation for a site visit. Above all, the profile should be short, succinct and readable. When possible, bullet points should be used instead of paragraphs. The following outline will help guide the development of your program profile:

Section A: Contact Information

- Organization/Program Name
- Address, City, State, Zip
- Telephone/E-mail
- Contact Person and Title

Section B: Program Information

- Area or community served (Describe the needs of your community: attendance/behavior issues, gang activity, test statistics, PI status if applicable)
- Number of children served (Include number of participants; ethnic/gender breakdown of youth; percentage of free or reduced participants; percentage of participants receiving financial assistance if applicable.)
- Number of staff
- How long program has been serving youth
- Activities offered
- Hours/Days of operation
- Funding sources

Section C: Program Accomplishments

- Parent/Teacher/Student/Supporter satisfaction (Can include brief quotes or a very, very short story)
- Increased school attendance, improved emotional/social/academic behavior of participants, increased standardized test scores
- Community events held, collaboration with community partners or awards/acknowledgements received
- Photos-if space is available

If program accomplishments are unavailable, use organizational or statewide data.

Identify Your State Legislator

The Network wants to encourage programs to advocate for after school by organizing site visits with their state legislator and telling their story. As a result, the Network has provided resources to help you locate and connect with your state legislator. To learn more about the elected officials in your area, see the attached links below:

To search for your state representatives as well as statewide office holders by last name or zip code, click here

<http://www.votesmart.org/index.htm>

Since most Representatives have more than one district office, you should select the office closest to you. Furthermore, the blue government pages of your local phone book can be used if you do not have access to the Internet.

Identify Legislative Recesses and Fridays

Once you have located your state legislator, check the Legislative schedule to determine when the elected officials are in recess. Members are typically back in their district on Fridays during session, major holidays and summer recess.

Contact Your State Legislator

Once you have identified a few dates during the Legislative recess, it is time to invite your state legislator for a site visit to your after school program. A sample invitation letter has been provided for your reference.

[Sample Invitation Letter to State Legislator]

[Your Program Letterhead]

[Date]

Name of Elected Official
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Elected Official _____:

I would like to invite you and your staff to visit the **[Insert the Name of your Afterschool Program]**. Thanks to state funding through the **(Insert grant/funding source)** program, our program provides **[Insert Number of Children Served and Age Level-Example, 300 elementary students]** with safe, educational activities between the critical hours of three o'clock and six o'clock. The program offers **[Insert specific focus of program-Example, Literacy, Math, Science, Counseling, Credit Recovery, Test Preparation activities, etc.]** to help students do better in school and develop an interest in learning.

I would like to make arrangements for an after school program tour. I will contact your office within the next couple weeks to follow up on this invitation and your availability. I am more than happy to work with your schedule. I am also planning to invite members of the local **[Rotary Club or any other community organization]** and the families of the students we serve. I know they will be excited to discuss with you the importance of keeping after school programs open and the many benefits afforded youth with these services.

A profile of our **[Insert the Name of your Afterschool Program]** has been enclosed for your review. I hope you will visit our program and our students. I look forward to speaking with you.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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

Phone Contact and Etiquette

A phone call is the most effective way to connect with your state legislator and adds a personal touch to your site visit request. Before you send your invitation letter, call the Capitol office and/or the district office to schedule a tour of your after school program. You may be connected with a legislative aide or a scheduler who will help you with the process. Likewise, you should have your invitation letter available when you call the district office to schedule the visit.

- I. **Ask To Speak to the Appropriate Staff Person.** Ask to speak with the staff person who handles scheduling for your state legislator. If it is a specific issue, you should ask for the staff person who handles education. You will be most likely connected with a legislative aide or a scheduler who will help you with the process. This person serves as your representative's expert in the area. Likewise, they are more likely to respond to your message.
- II. **Introduce Yourself.** State your name and the after school program name. The aide may request your mailing address or zip code to verify you are a constituent. Provide the aide with information about your after school program and a reliable phone number/email address in the event the policy maker or staff member needs to contact you.
- III. **State Your Request.** Ask if the State Legislator is available to attend a site visit during the next Legislative recess. This is where your invitation letter will come in handy.
 - a. Provide several dates and times if the policy maker is not available.
 - b. Notify the caller that staff and parents will be present at the site visit.
 - c. Offer to invite the media to the event.
 - d. Identify how your after school program aligns with the policy makers interests (you will need to do research to provide accurate information)
 - e. Offer to send your Invitation Letter and Program Profile (make sure the invitation letter has the correct date and time)
 - f. Offer to send directions or any special instructions prior to the visit.
 - g. Encourage the policy maker to have their staff members accompany them on the site visit.
- IV. **Thank the District Office.** Thank the representative, legislative aid or staff member for their time and consideration.
- V. **Be Flexible.** Policy makers have demanding schedules. Call to confirm the site visits several days in advance. Be prepared to reschedule or inquire if a staff member can attend instead of the policy maker.

After you call the district office, don't forget to send the invitation letter with the correct date and time.

Preparing for the Site Visit

Use the suggested timeline below to help you plan for the site visit. Allow at least one month between the invitation and the policy maker's visit. This will ensure that you will have enough time to plan the event, coordinate the guests and finalize the schedule.

I. Before the Site Visit

- a. Identify youth, parents, program staff and community partners who you would like to be present at the site visit. These individuals should be convincing spokespeople for your after school program.
- b. Invite your school principal, district superintendent, other key district personnel and county superintendent. You may also consider inviting school board members.
- c. Provide participants with background material on the policy maker.
- d. Create and share the site visit schedule with participants.
- e. Clarify the participants' role for the site visit.

II. Timeline Prior to Visit

Task

1 month

Invite policy maker to a site visit.

3 weeks

Invite parents, community members school officials and youth.

2 weeks

Develop a site visit schedule.
Assign/Clarify roles.
Contact the Network and/or Policy Committee to identify if there are pressing policy issues that might be topical to raise or that the program should be ready to address if asked.

1 week

Finalize program agenda.

3 days

Confirm site visit with policy maker's office.

2 days

Invite the media.

III. On the Day of the Visit

- a. Arrange for someone to wait outside, greet the visitors and direct them to the right location.
- b. Have your program profile or program brochures available to your guest.
- c. Provide copies of articles, youth essays, parent letters, awards or documents that show the community's support for your after school program if available.
- d. Allow time for youth to speak to the policy maker. This could include a question and answer session or discussion where the policy maker hears the benefits of the program from the youth. Be sure to identify what state money specifically supports your program, i.e. this grant supports this lunch program, or this bond money supports our facility etc,
- e. Provide time for parents to share their perspective; the principal to discuss improvements in attendance and behavior; and, community members to provide input on how the program keeps kids safe and out of trouble.
- f. Have fun!

IV. Sample Schedule

3:00 p.m.

Policy maker arrives and is greeted by program director or host.

3:05 – 3:15 p.m.

Policy maker tours program and observes youth engaged in after school activities.

3:15 – 3:30 p.m.

Snack Time! Allow the policy maker to interact with youth over a healthy snack. Students can discuss their favorite parts of the program or what they would do if they were not enrolled in the after school program. Students can also discuss what their friends do after school. Take photos of the legislator with students. You may want to include those photos in the "thank you" letter.

3:30 – 3:45 p.m.

Policy maker talks to parents. Parents should explain how the after school program has helped/is helping their families.

3:45 – 4:00 p.m.

Policy maker talks to the principal and/or community members. Participants should explain any improvements to attendance, behavior, test scores or any school-wide improvement linked to the afterschool program.

4:00 p.m.

Site Visit ends. Thank policy maker for their time and support of your after school program.

Media Advisories

Media advisories are one-page announcements designed for print, television and radio journalists. The purpose of media advisories is to inform reporters of upcoming events and entice them to cover the story. Below are some useful tips for writing and using media advisories. A sample media advisory has been included for your reference.

Media Advisory Tips:

- Media Advisories can be used as an excellent tool for attracting the media to your after school events. The media is more likely to attend if the event is considered “newsworthy” – determined by factors such as:
 - Timeliness – Something new, exciting, or linked to a current event
 - Proximity – Local media will be more apt to cover a local story. Likewise, don’t forget about small weekly papers that are very focused on what’s happening in their communities
 - Prominence – Noteworthy people tend to get media coverage so be sure to emphasize if you plan to have an elected official (like the mayor) or celebrity attend your event.
 - Significance – the number of people affected by an issue can increase a story’s significance; For example, 400,000 kids would be impacted by budget cuts to after school programs
 - Human Interest –Something that appeals to emotion, success stories are nice to highlight, but be careful when highlighting children. Make sure you have their parents’ permission to use their name and likeness.
- Advisories can be written in narrative form or bullet form. They can also answer the questions Who, What, When, Where and Why. Whatever format you choose, make sure the advisory announces an upcoming event or press availability.
- An Advisory should offer the media a compelling reason for attending the event by stating the date of the event, the beginning and ending time, the location, the people who will be available to speak to the media and, **most importantly, the visuals!** Describe in detail what will be photo-worthy - for example: “30 5th-graders will be planting flowers in the school’s garden.”
- Don’t forget to include the name and phone number of a contact person that the media can reach to follow up. A cell phone number is best so they can be reached on the day of the event. Lastly, don’t forget to date the advisory.
- Send the advisory out 3-7 days before your event. Call each recipient the day before your event to make sure it is listed on his or her “date book.” They probably won’t tell you whether they plan to cover the event, but it’s wise to make sure they have all the details on their schedule.

- The Internet is the best place to research contact information for your local newspapers as well as TV and radio stations. Do a Google search for their websites and then for a link to “Contact us” (usually at the very bottom of the page)– many will have their assignment desk FAX number or e-mail listed. They will also have a tool for you to submit the advisory online. For newspapers, you should look for an e-mail address for the Metro or City Editors or the education reporter. Do NOT send items to the paper’s Publisher.
- For added political visibility, you should also send your advisory to the Capitol Morning Report, a daily list of Capitol-related events that legislative staff and other insiders often review each day. To be listed both as a previewed event the day before and as a featured event on the event day, simply e-mail it two days before your event to: morningreport@capitolmr.com.

Capitol Morning Report

Instructions for submitting a listing to Capitol Morning Report

Two days before your event, e-mail your listing to:

morningreport@capitolmr.com

This way, they can list your item the day prior to your event under their “Preview” section, as well as on the day of the event.

Here is a basic template that we use for listings. The Morning Report will probably edit it for space and clarity. Also, you can suggest what section you’d like it to be placed under, but they will ultimately decide. Ours usually go under “Misc.”

CITY--(Legislator/s) do ABC at (site) because XYZ. One more sentence of detail here, try to include the name of your organization. Time, location, address. Contact: Name, cell phone number (where they can reach you on day of event)

Listed participants: Title, Name, Organization

For Example:

MODESTO--Asm. Tom Berryhill and staff from Sen. Jeff Denham’s office visit an Education and Child Development Academy to see how career-focused education is keeping at-risk youth in school and on track for graduation.

Law enforcement members of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids discuss how reducing dropout rates can cut crime. 9:45 a.m., Peter Johansen High School, 641 Norseman Dr. Contact: Jennifer Ortega 916 837 3904.

Listed participants: District Attorney Birgit Fladager, Stanislaus County; Chief Roy Wasden, Modesto Police Department.

[Sample Media Advisory]

MEDIA ALERT
September 27, 2008

Contact: Jill Smith
513-555-1234 cell
email: jsmith@prfirm.com

ADVISORY

**AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM IMPROVES ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT &
MEETS THE NEEDS OF WORKING FAMILIES.**

State and local officials visit program

Unity for Kids will be featuring its [Insert program name] program, which offers [Insert specific focus of program-Example, Literacy, Math, Science, Counseling, Credit Recovery, Test Preparation activities, etc.] This program has supported a transformation for students in academic achievement, test scores, attendance etc.,

Unity for Kids will be joined by state and local officials to witness the positive impact the [Insert program name] program has had on students and working families. [Insert State Legislator's Name] will join the principal and faculty members of Rosa Parks Middle School, AmeriCorps volunteers, students' families and local media to visit the program. The site visit will take place at:

**3- 4 p.m., Thursday, October 2, 2008
Rosa Parks Middle School
108 Fifth Street in Sacramento**

WITH

**Assembly Member/Senator Stephanie Millstone (D-Sacramento)
Michael Black, Principal of Rosa Parks Middle School**

VISUALS: Ten 7th-graders will perform a chemistry experiment; Five 8th-graders will perform a presentation on "how a bill becomes a law" for Assembly Member Millstone.

Unity For Kids afterschool program offers **[Insert specific focus of program-Example, Literacy, Math, Science, Counseling, Credit Recovery, Test Preparation activities, etc.]** to help students do better in school and develop an interest in learning. Unity For Kids will be staffed by Rosa Parks Middle School faculty as well as five members of AmeriCorps.

Sample Site Visit Thank You Letter

Sending a thank you letter to your elected official is just as important as sending an invitation. Thank you letters add the finishing touch to any event and let others know you appreciate their time and support. You may want to include photos of the legislator with the program coordinators and the students. A sample thank you letter has been provided for your reference.

[Sample Site Visit Thank You Letter]

[Your Program Letterhead]

[Date]

Name of Elected Official
Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear Elected Official _____:

Thank you for taking the time to visit the **[Insert the Name of your After School Program]** on **[Insert Site Visit Date]**. The youth, parents and staff enjoyed meeting you and highlighting the many benefits of our after school program. I hope our tour allowed you to witness firsthand that after school programs keep kids safe, increase academic achievement and help working families.

I look forward to meeting you again to discuss the ways in which we can work together to secure funding for after school programs and provide resources to more children throughout our state.

Thank you for your time and support.

Sincerely,

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

Keep in Contact!

Contact the Network and share your site visit experience using the Network's Site Visit Summary Form. The form is available on the Network website at <http://www.afterschoolnetwork.org/node/7213>. If you have questions or need additional information, please contact Michele Hamilton at mvhamilton@ucdavis.edu.

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