

Planning a Site Visit

Site visits with legislators can raise awareness, debunk myths, show strong community support, and help make children's issues a priority in the state capitol. Many elected officials have misconceptions about the need for health, education, financial, and protective services in their community and about the individuals served by community programs. Site visits can bring out personal stories that are often lost in policy debate and give lawmakers a better understanding of how public investments benefit children and families.

Potential legislative visit sites include early childhood programs, community health clinics, a residential treatment center, the home of a foster parent, or an afterschool program.

The following are some tips to help you plan an effective community site visit.

Scheduling:

- Plan the visit to maximize decision-maker attendance and attract media attention.
- Decision-makers are more likely to attend if you:
 1. Expect media attention
 2. Will have large voter (parent) turnout
 3. Have a relationship with them or can get someone with a relationship with them to ask them to come.

Visit Planning:

It is critical to plan a visit that *reinforces* the core message you want to relay. What makes a good visit?

- The site is a high quality program, but has clear struggles with regard to resources, compensation, affordability, etc.
- There is an opportunity to interact with parents and children, which will give a greater sense of urgency than just talking with administrators.
- Center administrators are well prepared.
- The program serves a mix of children and families. Visit programs that serve a diverse group of children. This will avoid generalizations about services only being needed by a specific group of people.
- A brief, well-planned presentation with ample opportunities for dialogue.

Sources:

- National Association for the Education of Young Children. "NAEYC Affiliate Public Policy Tool Kit, 2004."
<http://www.naeyc.org/policy/toolbox/pdf/toolkit.pdf>

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Activity:

Attendees can be brought closer to the issue through interactive experiences with children during the site visit. Include the legislators in a usual activity that goes on at the site or allow time for legislators to speak personally with families that are served.

Message:

It is critical to convey a message that transcends the specific site, so that the elected officials walk away with a greater understanding about the needs of children and families, not just a specific opinion about the site they visited. All written materials and staff must be “on message” in order to make sure the focus stays on the challenges relating to the children’s issue explored during the site visit and the benefits of increased state investments for all programs that provide this service.

- Give legislators written materials. Keep materials brief—i.e., a one-page fact sheet that highlights the message you want the legislator to take away.
- Thank participants for taking the time to visit.
- Ask the legislators to support increased investments in children.

Sources:

- National Association for the Education of Young Children. “NAEYC Affiliate Public Policy Tool Kit, 2004.” <http://www.naeyc.org/policy/toolbox/pdf/toolkit.pdf>