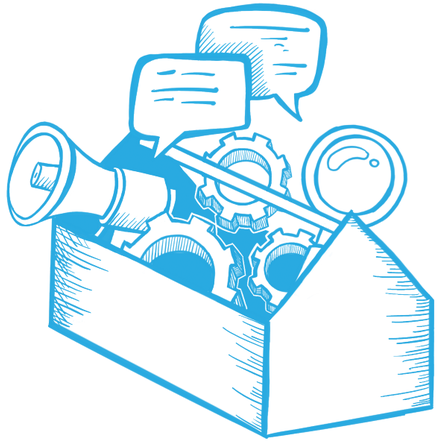
YOUR ADVOCACY GUIDE

A toolkit to create positive change for kids and families.

IAA
IOWA AFTERSCHOOL ALLIANCE

YOUR AFTERSCHOOL ADVOCACY GUIDE



THANK YOU

This advocacy guide is for anyone who believes passionately in the power of education and that afterschool supports every child to reach their full potential. Your support positively impacts the lives of kids and families across Iowa.

In order to make well-informed decisions at the local, state, and national levels, decision-makers need to know what's happening in their communities and need to know the role that afterschool can play in supporting youth and families. In the following pages you'll find tools and resources to help you make a difference.

We hope you find this guide useful in your everyday advocacy. One goal of these tools offered here is to make advocacy easy and to help you integrate advocacy activities into your daily schedule. Please know the Iowa Afterschool Alliance is always here to help. Contact us any time with questions or to update us on what you are doing.

Thank you for all you do each and every day to support Iowa's children and families.

This guide is intended to help you promote your program and the issue of afterschool and focuses on advocacy to legislators. But you can apply anything here to other audiences such as school administrators, the public, or potential funders.

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WHAT IS ADVOCACY?

Advocacy is:

- Educating and raising awareness on a specific issue
- Sharing your story and experiences
- Building relationships
- Writing letters, talking with legislators, and hosting events
- Speaking up for others
- A daily activity
- Fun!

Advocacy is not:

- Influencing specific legislation (this is called lobbying)
- Done just one time
- Only focused on legislators and other elected officials
- Difficult – anyone can do it!

Looking for more? Check out these resources:

Iowa Afterschool Alliance
www.iowaafterschoolalliance.org

Afterschool Alliance
www.afterschoolalliance.org

National Summer Learning Association
www.summerlearning.org

Alliance for Justice
www.afj.org

National Council of Nonprofits
www.councilofnonprofits.org/everyday-advocacy

Advocacy Activities Checklist

Promoting afterschool doesn't have to take a long time! Here are a few things you can do to become a champion for kids and afterschool whether you have a lot of time or just a few minutes:

Stuff That's Easy To Do

- [x] Pick up a copy of the IAA Advocacy Guide
- [ ] Call or email a decision-maker (a member of Congress, your state legislator, or school principal, for instance) and tell them to support afterschool programs (5 minutes)
- [ ] Invite decision-makers to an event you're hosting at your afterschool program (10 minutes)
- [ ] Write a thank you letter to a decision-maker (5 minutes)
  - Page 19 has more ways to keep in touch with elected officials
- [ ] Keep your program's social media updated – highlight activities, events, and success stories (10 minutes)

Stuff That Takes a Little More Time

- [ ] Write a letter to a decision-maker asking them to support afterschool programs (15-30 minutes)
  - Check out page 15 for a template
- [ ] Organize a letter writing or phone calling campaign (30-90 minutes)
  - Ask others who are involved in afterschool to join you in writing letters or making phone calls to your legislators. The more letters and phone calls a decision-maker gets on an issue, the more they pay attention!
- [ ] Attend legislative and community meetings in your area (60-90 minutes)
  - Check out page 16 for more information

Stuff That Takes More Time

- [ ] Meet with decision-makers (2 hours)
  - Set up a meeting with a decision-maker to speak with them about your program and the benefits of afterschool.
- [ ] Coordinate a site visit to your program with a legislator or other decision maker (4 hours)
  - Flip to page 20 for a step-by-step guide

CRAFTING YOUR MESSAGE

Before you begin advocating for afterschool you have to first decide what you're going to say. Because there are so many positive impacts of afterschool, it can be hard to focus on only one or two messages. But it will be important to do so!

Here's a quick way to craft your message.

brainstorm
all of the benefits of afterschool you can think of

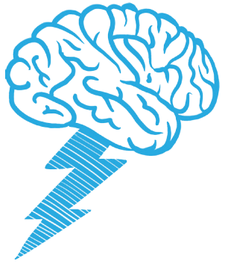
narrow
that list down to one or two key messages with the most impact

expand
your message with data and success stories from your own program

You can use this process any time you're advocating, whether you're meeting with legislators, writing a letter to the editor, or posting on social media about your program.

Step 1: Brainstorm

Begin by writing down all of the positive ways that afterschool impacts students, families, and communities. Below is a list to get you started:



Hands-on experiences

Provides a safe place after school

Positive youth and adult interaction

Supports working families

Community partnerships

Academic support

Provides meals

Complements the school day

Helps kids build skills in conflict resolution and relationship building

Leadership opportunities for students

Step 2: Narrow

Once you've finished brainstorming, it's time to narrow your message. This next section will walk you through choosing 1 or 2 of these benefits to use for your talking points. While all of the benefits you brainstormed are true and important, your message will be the most effective if you hone in on just a couple of them.

Work through the following questions:

What is your advocacy goal?

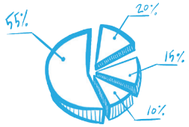
What are you trying to accomplish in your advocacy? Choose talking points that support your goal.

Who is your audience?

Who are you advocating to and what messages will they find most persuasive? Example: a legislator who is a retired police officer would be interested that afterschool provides a safe place for kids, a school administrator would be persuaded by how afterschool supports students' academic success.

What are your program's strengths?

Think about areas in which your program does really well and use one of your talking points to highlight those successes including program data showing positive outcomes, a unique community partnership, or a successful STEM project.



What does your data say?

You'll want to have data and success stories from your program to support your talking points to make them more persuasive. Think about which of the benefits you brainstormed has the most impactful data or stories to back it up.

Why do you care about afterschool?

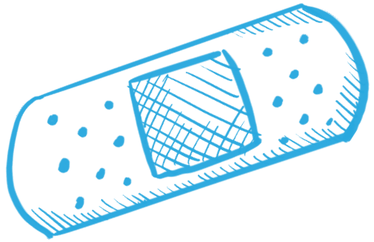
Oftentimes, an advocate's passion for their issue can be the most persuasive. Pick a talking a point that you especially care about to allow your enthusiasm for afterschool to come through.

Got your message? Great!
Write it down and flip the page →

Step 3: Expand

Message Map

Now it's time to expand your one or two talking points. Message maps are an easy way to visually lay out your messages. Challenge yourself to come up with three sub points for each. These sub points will answer the question, "How does your program address the needs of students, families, and communities?" They can be success stories and personal experiences from your program, data from either your program or the state level, or supporting statements. There are a couple of examples of message maps below to give you an idea of what yours may look like.



Afterschool programs

KEEP KIDS SAFE

Kids need a safe and supportive place to go when not in school. Youth are most likely to engage in risky behaviors or be involved in criminal activity between the hours of 3pm and 6pm.

Afterschool offers youth productive ways to engage with the community instead of getting in trouble.

In our program we have seen referrals decrease by…

Afterschool programs

HELP WORKING FAMILIES

Families often cannot afford to take time off to supervise children left alone after school. They rely on afterschool and summer programming to fill the gap.

A parent from our program says…

76% of Iowa families have both parents working outside of the home. This means a lot of families have gaps between work and school schedules and need afterschool and summer programming.

As compared to the year before, students showed an x% increase in vocabulary/fluency/grades.

Study after study shows that afterschool programs are effective in boosting achievement. Students in afterschool programs have better grades and test scores. They attend school more often, and have better behavior and work habits in class.

Afterschool programs

CULTIVATE STUDENT SUCCESS

STEM Messaging Spotlight

Over the last few years STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) has become an important topic in education and afterschool. It has become a buzzword among policy makers and many more programs are offering STEM than ever. It's an important topic to talk about. Because of the importance of STEM, we've included STEM-specific messaging points below for you to use any time you're advocating.

Overall message:

Given our complex and changing world, it is essential that the next generation of leaders are critical thinkers and problem-solvers to meet future challenges. Learning in STEM builds the knowledge and skills needed to sift through information, draw reasonable conclusions, make decisions based on evidence, and come up with creative solutions. Experts agree that building students' skills and content knowledge in STEM fields is essential to prepare our future workforce and leaders.

Afterschool programs

GROW OUR FUTURE WORKFORCE

- Afterschool STEM sparks interest, builds skills, and puts more students on the path toward majoring in STEM fields and pursuing STEM careers.
- Share a success story of a graduate of your afterschool program who is now pursuing a STEM career.
- Iowa's economy will increasingly depend on a workforce fluent in STEM.

Afterschool programs

CONNECT LEARNING TO INTERESTS

- Helps kids connect learning with the activities that most interest them.
- Hands-on activities ignite student interest in STEM and support students' excitement to learn.
- "After participating in afterschool STEM activities, our kids showed a x% increase in their interest in STEM."

Step 4: Make an Ask

The only way your advocacy will have an impact is if you ask the other person to do something that will help afterschool programs and kids. Here are four asks you can make:

1. **Embrace afterschool in educational planning and policies.**

   For instance, STEM- and education-related committees and initiatives should include representation from afterschool and other informal learning programs.

2. **Equip afterschool program leaders more effectively.**

   For example, the training and resources that are available to classroom teachers should also be accessible to afterschool program providers.

3. **Increase funding for afterschool programs in science, technology, engineering and math.**

   Building on the success of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative, it makes sense to establish competitive grants for afterschool STEM programming.

4. **Visit an afterschool program.**

Elevator Speech

Often the best way to start a conversation with a decision-maker is to give an elevator speech. This is a brief, persuasive pitch that introduces you and sparks interest in the issue you care about. Your elevator speech should be short, about 30-45 seconds long, or the time it takes to ride an elevator (hence the name).

This is only meant to be the beginning of a conversation; if the decision-maker you're talking to has more time, use the discussion guide on the next page to keep the conversation going.

Components of an elevator speech:

1. Who you are
2. Your connection to afterschool
3. Why afterschool is important
4. Make an ask – tell them what your program needs to be successful (Need ideas? See below)

Example elevator speech

Hi, my name is Jane Doe and I run an afterschool program, Program XYZ, in Little Town, Iowa. I'd like to talk to you today about the impact of summer learning on our students. During the summer months too many children fall further behind academically and this widens the achievement gap. We have a solution for that.

Program XYZ provides hands-on learning opportunities over the summer and data from our program shows that almost all of our students either maintained or improved their literacy rates over the summer. I'd love to have you come visit our program this summer to see the work we're doing.

Write your own elevator speech

SHARING YOUR STORY

Letters

Afterschool is important to you. Tell them why. Writing letters is a great way to communicate the importance of afterschool. The letters to the editor section is one of the most-read sections of any newspaper and an effective way to tell the public about the importance of afterschool. Legislators, state and federal, are always looking to hear from their constituents on issues that matter to them. Writing letters is an easy way to share your story and let them know what's going on in their district.

Social Media

Posting on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter is a great way to share the positive impacts of afterschool as well as demonstrate the need for more programs. Start by friending, liking, and following your friends and other afterschool-related organizations. Here are some suggestions for posts:

- Links to articles about afterschool
- Pictures from your program
- Positive feedback/comments you've received from parents

Media

Cultivating relationships with your local newspaper and TV and radio stations will help keep your program and afterschool in the public eye. Local media are always looking for community stories and will appreciate your input. An easy way to start doing this is to invite them to events hosted by your program.

Letter Template

Dear Editor/Legislator,

[Start with an attention grabbing first line. Why are you writing this letter? Are you responding to a previously published article, a proposed bill about afterschool, or a current event?]

[Make your argument. Explain the issue in a concise manner, pick one or two data points that are powerful and really add to your argument. Example: For X amount of dollars, our program can provide X amount of kids with high-quality STEM activities during the school year or summer.]

[Focus on your connection with the issue. What is your personal story? Why does this issue matter to you?]

[Make a call to action. Urge your elected officials to support afterschool or ask readers to reach out to their legislators.]

Sincerely,
[Your name]
[Address]

Tips For Writing Letters

- **Keep it short and to the point.** Limit letters to the editor to 150 – 300 words. A letter to your legislator can be longer.
- **Use powerful language** – make the most of your limited word count.
- **Write about your personal experiences with the issue** – your letter will be more relatable to the reader.
- **Make it timely if possible** – reference a recently published article or current event.
- **Include a call to action** – something the reader can do to make an impact.
- **Proof your letter before submitting!**
- **Include your contact information.**

MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS

How to Find Your Legislators

Find your state senator and representative here: *https://www.legis.iowa.gov/legislators/find*. You can search by city, county, or school district.

At the federal, or national, level you are represented in Congress by one representative and both of Iowa's senators. You can find your representative here: *http://www.house.gov/representatives/find/*.

Where to Go

The State Capitol

The Iowa Afterschool Alliance hosts advocacy events at the State Capitol each year during the legislative session which runs January through April or May. These events provide easy opportunities to meet with your legislators and talk with them about the importance of afterschool. Join the IAA mailing list to receive emails about upcoming events.

Legislative Town Halls

When Congress or the Iowa Legislature is not in session, members generally hold a series of meetings across the state or across their district to meet and talk to their constituents. Meeting locations and times are usually advertised in newspapers beforehand and may also be distributed via email. Once there, sign in and try to ask a question about afterschool during the townhall. If you're unable to ask a question, introduce yourself to the elected official following the event.

Site Visits

Seeing your program firsthand is the most effective tool to advocate for your program. Site visits allow the decision-maker to see the intervention – in this case, your program – in action. The decision-maker can ask children and youth their opinions on the program, and, if timed right, parents on how the program supports them. Check out page 20 for a step-by-step site visit planning guide.

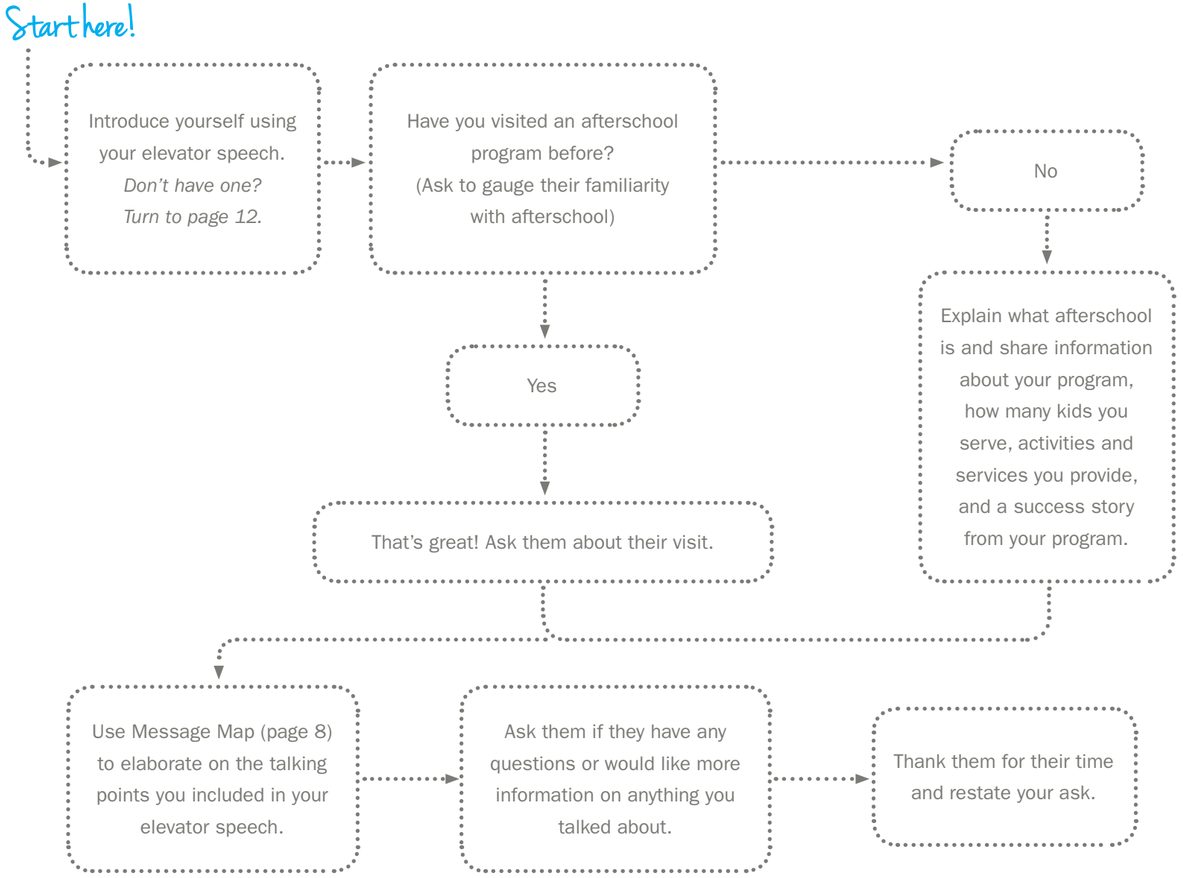
Meeting with Congressional Staff

Each federal legislator has staff in Washington D.C. and regional offices throughout Iowa with staff dedicated to meeting with and listening to constituents. Federal legislators rely on their staff for advice on policies and for constituent feedback. Set up a meeting with a legislator's staff or invite them to visit your program to begin developing these important relationships.

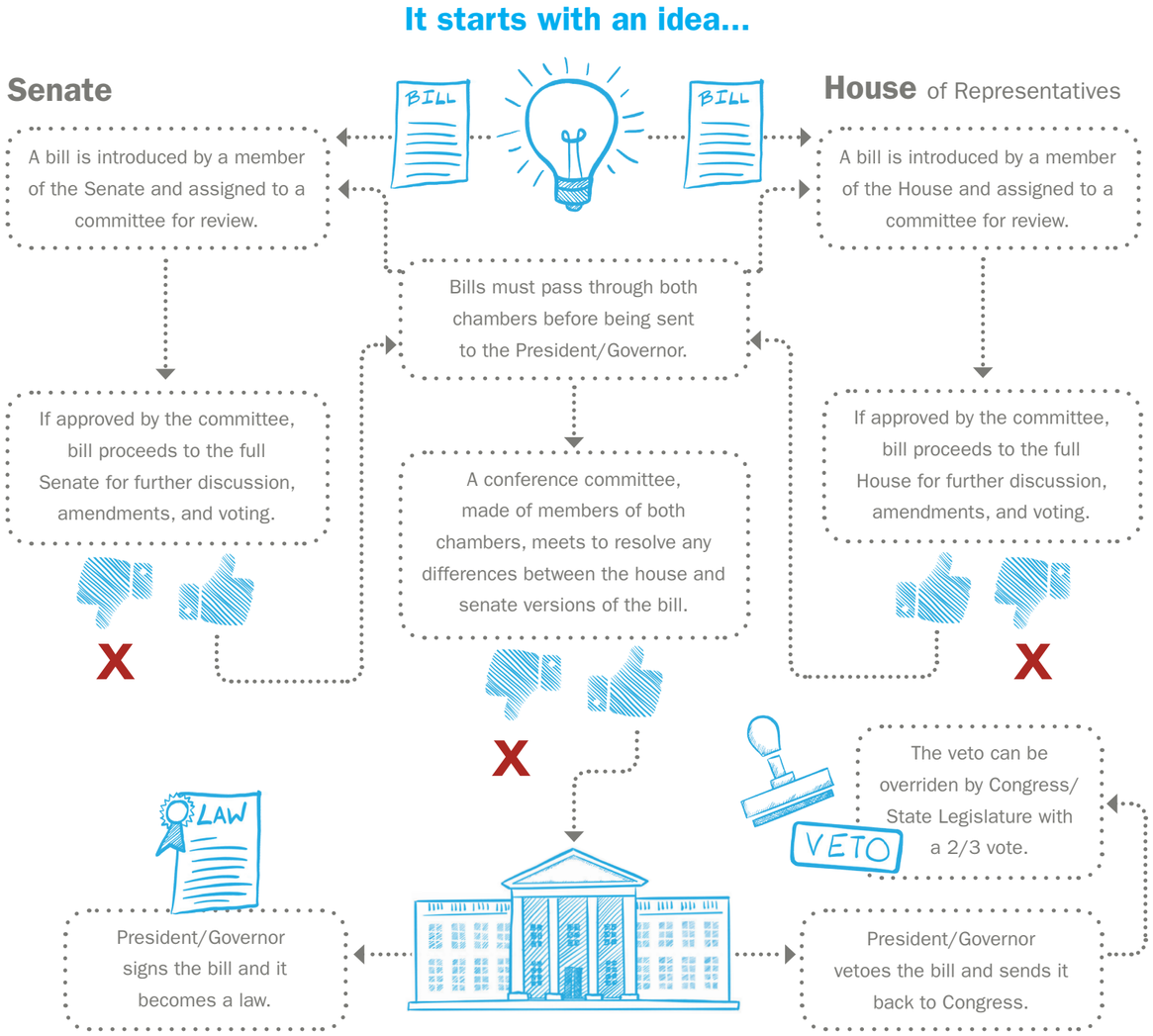
Discussion Guide

This discussion guide outlines a typical conversation you might have with an elected official about afterschool. Use this guide to practice your conversations ahead of time so you are focused and ready to deliver your message when the time comes.

Be flexible – no two conversations will be the same. For instance, your conversation with a legislator at your site visit will be different from the one you have at a legislative town hall.



The Legislative Process



KEEP IN TOUCH

The Importance of Follow Up

Advocacy is not designed to be a bunch of one-time meetings. Advocacy is most effective when you build relationships with elected officials based on your credibility, reliability, and passion for afterschool. In order to build these relationships, it is important that you keep in touch with your elected officials. So write, call, and visit often!

Here are a few ways to keep them in the loop:

- Send a follow-up note within a week thanking them for meeting with you and highlighting one or two topics that were discussed, especially if they referred you to another person or resource.
- Sign them up for your agency newsletters (ask them first).
- Invite them to local or state events.
- Get them to your program! Coordinate site visits with the legislator or their staff.
- Attend their events. Many legislators hold regular coffee chats and town halls where the public is welcome.
- Send them:
  - A thank you note
  - Copies of positive media coverage your program receives
  - Invitations to special events at your program
  - A success story of a student at your program
  - A letter offering yourself as a resource to your legislator on issues related to afterschool
  - Data from your program or school district that show the positive impacts of afterschool

Woody Allen said 95% of life is showing up – so show up and be seen!

SITE VISITS: A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

A site visit is the most effective advocacy strategy available to afterschool programs. Inviting a legislator to visit your program allows them to see what goes on in a program and hear from students, parents, and community partners about the positive impact your program has made.

1. **Select the day**
2. **Reach out to your legislator**
3. **Create a schedule**
4. **Invite families, partners, or school administrators**
5. **Reach out to media**
6. **Day of Checklist**
7. **Follow Up**

Ready to set up a site visit?

Continue to Step 1

1 Select the day

First, select a few potential days to host a site visit. If you are planning a site visit in January through April, keep in mind that state representatives and senators will be in session in Des Moines Monday through Thursday and will have limited availability. If you are asking a federal legislator to attend a site visit, pick a few dates during the next Congressional recess when they will be back in Iowa. (Visit *https://www.congress.gov/days-in-session* for the Congressional calendar)

Check out your schedule and pick a few days with activities that you would like to highlight with legislators. Select a day a few weeks out to give legislators time to schedule the visit and give you time to organize the visit.

2 Reach out to your legislator

The next step is to reach out to your legislator. If you would like to host several legislators at your program it is best to schedule a separate visit for each.

Below is an email template for reaching out to your legislator. You could reach out via a phone call or in-person first and then follow up with an email.

```
Dear [Representative/Senator] [NAME],

[Organization Name] would like to invite you to visit our program at [school or site name
if have multiple sites] and see afterschool in action.

[1-2 sentences providing a summary or background on your program and the services/
activities you offer students]

When you visit, our staff, parents, and students will be on hand to show you our program and
all that we are doing to strengthen student success and support working families.

Are you available the afternoon of [potential date(s)]? If that time does not work for you,
we would be happy to work with you to find one that does. Once we have a date and time set,
I will follow up with more details and a tentative schedule for the visit.

I look forward to hearing from you!

[Name]
[Position and Organization]
```

3 Create a schedule

Plan your visit for 60 minutes. You will want to include a tour of your program, highlight an activity, and provide opportunities for the legislator to meet with families, community partners, students, and other stakeholders. Be sure to take photos and share them after your visit!

Sample schedule:

3:30 p.m. — Legislator arrives. Introduce yourself and staff to your legislator and provide them with a brief overview of your program.

3:35 p.m. — Begin tour of your program. Use this time to introduce your talking points on the impact your program has made on students and the community, and the overall importance of afterschool.

3:45 p.m. — Visit a STEM activity or other engaging activity going on at your program. Allow the legislator to interact with students; ask youth to share their favorite part of the program or what they would do if the program did not exist.

4:00 p.m. — Meet with families in a classroom. Parents will have time to share their experience with the program and ask questions of the legislator. Allow legislator time to speak if they would like.

4:15 p.m. — Meet with school principal who can explain the positive impacts of afterschool on students' school attendance, test scores, and behavior, or any other improvements linked to your program.

4:30 p.m. — Speak with the legislator one-on-one to wrap up the visit. Thank them for visiting your program, reiterate talking points, hand them any materials you have prepared, and make an ask.

4 Invite families, partners, or school administrators

Two weeks out from the site visit reach out to families and partners of your program to invite them to meet your legislator and share their positive experiences with afterschool. Think about what messages you want to deliver to the legislator during the site visit and who the most effective messengers would be. (Ex. have school principal talk about improvements in school attendance due to your program, parents talk about providing safe place for kids and healthy snacks, etc.) Or pick one student or family to share their story of how your program has positively impacted them.

5 Reach out to media

A week before the visit, reach out to your local tv stations and newspapers. Send them a media advisory with the basic details of the visit as well as a short summary of your program. Let your legislator know that there may be media coverage during the visit so they are not surprised the day of.

6 Day of Checklist

- ☐ Provide the legislator with a brochure of your program and any other relevant materials.
- ☐ Share 1-2 brief success stories that highlight the importance of afterschool.
- ☐ Cover 1-2 talking points from the Message Map on page 8-9.
- ☐ Provide opportunities for your legislator to interact with students and ask questions.
- ☐ If available, provide opportunities for the legislator to meet with parents and community partners.
- ☐ End with an ask of your legislator! (Find some ideas on page 11)

7 Follow Up

Don't forget to follow up with your legislator after the visit. Send a thank you note within one week to your legislator and be sure to:

- ✓ thank them for their time
- ✓ reiterate the talking points you covered during the visit
- ✓ include any additional information they requested during the visit
- ✓ include photos from the visit

Follow up with any media who were at the site visit to track media coverage of the day. If there is media coverage, be sure to share it with your program's families, staff, partners, students, and the IAA.

Let the Iowa Afterschool Alliance know how the site visit went. Your feedback will help us better track statewide advocacy efforts and prioritize legislative targets. We can also help you track media coverage.

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