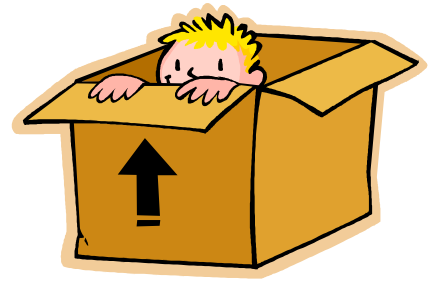


Event-in-a-Box

Hosting a Legislative Visit



Steps to planning a visit from your legislator

Inviting your local legislators to visit your program is a strategic way to inform policymakers about how their investments in high-quality early childhood education benefits children and families in their communities. This "Event-in-a-Box" is designed to help support you in organizing a visit to your program.

Introduction

- Typically, members of the Pennsylvania General Assembly work three days in Harrisburg per week (M-W) and are back in their home district on Thursday and Friday. To see when the House and Senate are scheduled to be in session check the General Assembly's web site at <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/index.cfm>.

- What makes a good site for a visit?

Keystone STARS, Pre-K Counts, or Head Start program: Select a site that is participating in one or more of the program's listed above.

Articulate, enthusiastic, personable directors or hosts. Make sure that the director and/or host can describe and answer questions about your program, including how public support (Keystone STARS, Pre-K Counts, child care subsidies, Head Start) has enhanced services for children and their families from the community.

Opportunities to interact with the children: Seeing children's faces is an opportunity to connect theory to reality – policy to people and programs. People who are not used to regularly interacting with young children can be helped to feel more comfortable if you have a very specific thing for them to do. You might invite them to join you for breakfast or lunch, to read a book to the children (perhaps their favorite book at this age), or to participate in a show and tell.

First Steps

- Identify possible dates and times for the site visit. Do you have a special event planned in which the legislator could take part? Are there days a visit would prove challenging – certification visit, ERS visit, field trip, etc.?
- Call your legislator's office in advance and ask to set up a time for the site visit. When you call identify yourself as a constituent, and be specific about dates and times you would like to schedule the visit. **Be flexible**. Work with your legislator's staff to determine what days and times would be best. Legislators often have very full schedules. If possible, have multiple dates to suggest. Contact information for your legislator is available on the General Assembly's web site at <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/index.cfm>.
- Follow up the invitation with a phone call or a confirmation letter once you receive confirmation from your legislator. You might even want to include a letter signed by the children indicating that they look forward to the visit. A legislator's schedule can change at a moment's notice. It is a good idea to call the day before the visit as well.

One – Two Weeks before the Visit

- Prepare your staff and families. It is important to ensure that your staff and parents are comfortable with a legislator visiting and observing your program. Give advance notice to

anyone who will be involved in the site visit, so that they can plan accordingly. This will also allow time for them to ask you any questions about the visit. Let them know that the purpose of legislator's visit is to learn more about your work, not to judge or watch and that it could result in increased support for your program.

- Prepare a brief introduction or welcome for your legislator. It does not need to be a big presentation. This is a great time to let your legislator know what issues are important for young children and their families in your community. Include details about how many young children you serve, the impact your program has on the community, and the challenges you face.
- Give the legislator something to take home. Your legislator will learn a lot about your work on the day of the site visit, and they should have materials to reinforce your message when they leave, but do not load them down with a lot of paper. Keep materials brief (Like a brochure about your program and a one-page fact sheet that highlights the message you want the legislator to understand).
- Consider inviting your supporters, such as parents, your Board of Directors, or local funders. Having them present will send an effective message to legislators that your work impacts upon, and is supported, by the larger community.
- Have nametags available for guests and staff.

The Day of the Visit

- Make sure that you are at the door to welcome your guests.
- Let visitors know you can answer any questions they have. Note that they are likely to ask questions when they arrive and when they leave. If you are unsure of an answer, don't be afraid to tell them so. Offer to find out the information and indicate that you will follow-up with them shortly.
- Allow time for questions or an informal "meet & greet" when people can introduce themselves to the legislator and talk about the impact of your program for them personally.
- Take photos. Photos of the visit will be a great complement to a press release or an addition to your program's newsletter. Check your organization's policy about photographing children and ensure any releases that need to be signed are taken care of prior to the visit.

Immediately After the Event

- Send a thank you letter to your legislator and reiterate your key messages. Include thank you letters created by the children. Send copies of photos. Your legislator may use them in his/her district newsletter.
- If you were unable to answer a question during the visit, make sure you follow-up.
- If your organization has a newsletter, write an article about the event and include the photos. Send a copy of the newsletter to the legislator. Add him/her to your regular mailing list.
- Don't forget to stay in contact with your legislator. You have established a great foundation with the site visit, and now you can build on this relationship throughout the year.

Adapted from:

Children's Defense Fund. *Planning a Visit to Child Care Center for Legislators*. Retrieved 3/20/08 from http://www.childrensdefense.org/site/PageServer?pagename=research_action_guides_leg_site_visit.

Pre-K Today. *Event-in-a-Box: Legislative Event Toolkit*. (2007). Retrieved 3/24/08 from http://www.prektoday.org/tools_event.shtml.

Zero to Three. *How to Plan a Site Visit: Inviting Policymakers to See Your Work with Infants, Toddlers & Their Families*. Retrieved 3/20/08 from <http://www.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/SiteVisitFinal.pdf?docID=3521>.