

Site Visits

Site visits are a great way to inform legislators about the work of your organization. They are an important part of advocacy because they give your legislators a first-hand view of how the government is supporting kids through the school meal programs. Site visits put faces to issues and budget requests. For example, taking a legislator to a place where summer meals are distributed can help the legislator see how government investment and community participation work to improve the lives of children. When the legislator votes in the next session on funding for a program such as summer feeding, he/she will recall his/her site visit and hopefully cast a supporting vote.

How to Set Up a Site Visit

Call your legislator and arrange an appointment for a site visit. Let the legislator know that you would like him/her to tour your facility. Such a tour should be appealing to the legislator because they will not have to be prepared and it is a somewhat informal meeting.

Since legislators' schedules are often very tight, you want to be flexible in scheduling a site visit. It is usually best to try to schedule a visit during a District Work Period. However, if possible, try to pick a day when the legislator will have the greatest contact with kids or parents. Always pick a day where there will be some activity for the legislator to view.

Arrange for a team of folks (3-4) to do the tour of your facility, choose a board member or someone with whom legislator may have a good relationship. Create a team that could answer a range of questions about your schools and your school district.

Make the legislator feel comfortable asking questions. Do not expect the legislator to know much about your program. Give basic information on your work and encourage questions, even tough ones.

When giving the tour spend the time describing your work not "lobbying". Explain what you do rather than what you want the legislator to do (make time for this later in the visit). You want the legislator to understand what you do and why it is important.

After the tour, create a time for discussion. Find a place where you can sit down with the legislator and get their reactions to what they saw. Be sure to answer all of their questions. If you don't know the answer to their question, let the legislator know that you will get back to them with the answer and ask for the name and information of the staffer to best send the information.

During the discussion, make sure the legislator knows how decisions made at the state and federal level affect your work. Feel free to discuss with the legislator changes to regulations and budget issues. Try to get some kind of commitment from your legislator before he/she leaves: a commitment to support funding, a commitment to read more information on an issue, a commitment to meet with you again, etc.

Be sure to thank the legislator for their time both at the end of your site visit and by mail after the visit. You want to maintain communication with the legislator and ensure that the legislator recognizes you as a resource for them.