



Early Care and Education Consortium
“THIS is High-Quality Child Care”
Legislator Visit Toolbox

Welcome Letter from ECEC

Planning Checklist

Hosting a Legislator

- ✓ Goals and Site Selection
- ✓ Training and Preparation
- ✓ Invitations and Scheduling
- ✓ Materials
- ✓ Agenda
- ✓ Promoting the Visit
- ✓ Final Preparations
- ✓ Day of the Visit
- ✓ Following Up

More Tools You Can Use

Templates, Resources and Success Stories

Materials are available for download and easy use at

http://www.ececonsortium.org/site_visit_campaign.php

Be sure to check out the success stories of child care programs around the country, and up-to-date talking points on state and federal child care policies!

Campaign Overview Presentation

Available at http://www.ececonsortium.org/site_visit_campaign.php

Self-guided Power Point Presentation lasts approx. 20 minutes,
and requires a computer with speakers

ECEC Staff

Call (202) 408-9626 or email info@ececonsortium.org for assistance or to share ideas

Welcome!

Elected officials work each day in Washington, DC and in state capitals creating policies that impact children and families. They are often asked to make decisions about an endless variety of issues, and always seem to have to balance competing priorities. Dedicated advocates and lobbyists try to convince officials to move in one direction or another. The most valuable voice a politician can hear, though, is the “voice from home” – that of a constituent, a real person who lives in their district.

As a child care provider and advocate, you know that child care is a critical part of the economic infrastructure of this country, and a critical part of the daily life of families who work. The fact remains, however, that many legislators do not know what we are talking about when we speak about child care. So we need to work even harder to make it “real” for them.

One of the best ways to help legislators understand child care in this country is to *show* them child care. This is a way to get legislators to really be engaged in their community.

These visits move beyond the fact sheets and numbers of a regular meeting, and you might be surprised to hear that votes have been changed, policies have moved because someone *showed* these decision-makers what was going on in the community. Someone *showed* them a program and asked for their support in creating policies that work. Someone *showed* them how important child care really is, and asked them to take action.

This guide is designed to help you plan and carry out a visit to your child care program by an elected official – your state Senator, Representative or Delegate, your U.S. Representative or Senator, even the Governor. Throughout the toolbox, we use “legislator” as shorthand for the elected official you choose to invite. It includes a planning checklist, tips for hosting an elected official, and sample resources.

Good luck! And thank you for all that you do for children and families.

Sincerely,

The ECEC Staff

Planning Checklist

This checklist includes the essential parts of a successful visit and the time frame for this campaign. These activities are described in detail on the following pages.

In Preparation

- Find out how to contact the state or federal elected official you want to invite
- Find out when the legislator will be in town (when the legislature is in session at the capital, they will not likely be available. Find out when session is over, or when they are taking a break to visit home.)

Two Months Before Intended Visit

Goals of Event and Site Selection

- Know the message and goal for the event
- Select the child care program to be the host

Training and Preparation

- Review this Campaign Toolbox
- Check out the quick training video available on www.ececonsortium.org
- Talk with your colleagues and other advocates (including ECEC!) about ideas and questions

Target Date

- Determine a few options that would work well for the program during the time period you've determined that the legislator will be in the area – you will need to be flexible and work with the legislator's schedule to finalize the date

Invitations

- Use the template invitation letter included with this Campaign Toolbox
- Fax or email the invitation to the office of the legislator
- Call the scheduler to follow-up on receipt of the invitation

One Month Before the Intended Visit

Materials

- Compile a few brief pieces of information about your program, if possible

Follow-up on Invitations

- Call the scheduler to follow-up on the invitation
- When the visit is confirmed, contact ECEC with the details

Agenda for the Visit

The visit will probably only last an hour.

- Create an agenda for the visit based on the particular highlights you want to share about your program
- Determine who should speak (briefly) during the visit

One Week Before the Intended Visit

Media (optional)

- Once a visit is confirmed, ask if the legislator's press staff are interested in promoting the event to local press. If they are interested, ask how you can help.
- Use the template press release in this Campaign Toolbox
- Get permission from parents to photograph children (if applicable)
- Walk through the agenda
- Prepare all presenters on the "message" of the day and practice with them

During the Visit

- Include time for interaction with staff, children and parents
- Include time to ask questions
- Ask specifically for the support of the legislator
- Take pictures!

Following Up After the Visit

- Use the template thank you letter in this Campaign Toolbox
- Send the visit evaluation worksheet to ECEC to let us know how the visit went!
- Post the pictures in your next newsletter, share them with ECEC, and send one to the legislator
- Get your success story posted on www.ececonsortium.org

Hosting a Legislator at a Child Care Program

Goal of the Event and Site Selection

ECEC is working with partner organizations to change the conversation about child care at the federal level, and there is much work to be done in the states too. We want to let all legislators know that high-quality child care and early learning programs exist throughout the country, and what they need to do to make such programs more accessible to families who need them. By bringing legislators to your programs, we can reinforce what high-quality early care and education looks like and demonstrate what is currently being done in communities all over the country.

These are more than a tour — these are an opportunity to show legislators what we do and tell them what they need to do to enact policies to support young children, parents, and existing programs.

The visit should help you to convey a positive message about child care and the needs of the community you serve. Your program offers high-quality child care and this concept must become something real for the legislator so you can explain that this is the exception, not the rule, about what is available. More can be done with their support for good policies. Giving your legislator the chance to see and interact with children, parents and teachers can be tremendously valuable.

By visiting a program, we help legislators to see that:

- High-quality early care and learning programs exist.
- The whole picture of birth-to-five is important.
- Play is learning and child care is more than babysitting.
- Child care is an important economic activity. Each program is a small business that supports lots of workers — your own staff and your parents.
- Classroom teachers and staff need and benefit from supports for training and education.

A "good site" for this project will be of particularly good quality, a program with a director who wants to be involved in this campaign (we're not trying to add stress here) and who is outgoing and enthusiastic. Where possible, we want to highlight the positive impact of child care subsidy, preK grants and partnerships, quality initiatives, and support for the early childhood workforce.

Training and Preparation

In addition to this Campaign Toolbox, we encourage you to watch the presentation (approximately 20 minutes) online at http://www.ececonsortium.org/site_visit_campaign.php. If you need assistance at any time during this planning process please call ECEC at (202) 408-9626.

Invitations and Scheduling

Don't know your legislator, or don't have their contact information? Visit the **ECEC Action Page** at http://action.ececonsortium.org/action_center and click on the link to look up your elected officials.

Find out when your legislator (either state or federal) will be in the area. Times that the legislature is in session, the legislator won't be available to leave the Capitol. Your state legislature's website should have a calendar you can access online. Or, call us and we can help you find out.

This Campaign Toolbox includes a letter of invitation you can modify and send to your legislator. If your program can be flexible with dates, work with the scheduler and the legislator to find a date and time that works for everyone. The invitation letter should be **faxed or emailed** to the office of the legislator. If inviting a Member of the U.S. Congress, **do not mail the letter**. Mail processing for Members of Congress takes a very long time. Instead, you should fax or email the letter.

Scheduling Tips:

- Remember that legislators may not be able to give more than an hour for this visit.
- Be sure to pick a day and time that the legislator will see the program in action, with children who are awake!
- Be sure your contact information is clear on the invitation letter.

The invitation will take some following up with phone calls. As you work with the scheduling staff, note that the legislator may bring or send a staff person. Legislative staff are a very important part of the operation and are good people to know! Welcome a visit from a staff person.

Materials

Provide the legislator with a few background materials that will help remind her or him of the visit. Consider also a program's brochure or positive news clips.

Agenda

Part of the visit will, of course, be a tour of the program. But this isn't just a walk-through. Think about what you can show them about the services you provide. Every day you implement the policies set by Congress and the states. You know what it takes to provide high-quality care. Show them examples of this in your classrooms, in your teachers, in your whole program.

Briefly provide program history, numbers and facts, and an overview of your community. Choose someone on the staff who can comfortably articulate these points. Parents can be great for this too. Consider asking in advance for one or two of your parents to say a few words. Work with the chosen presenters in advance and help them prepare to convey the message/focus of the event.

Arrange for someone to take pictures when the legislator comes! You may want to have a record for your newsletter, board communication, or for follow-up with the legislator's office.

Make sure the visit includes not only observation of programs or activities, but also interaction. This interaction can be the most compelling part of the visit.

Ideas:

- Use circle time as a way to involve the visiting legislator — suggest that she/he pull up a chair!
- If appropriate, involve the legislator in snack time or lunch, and to show that this is an important part of learning and development.
- Your legislator might be interested in reading a story to the children. (This is a great photo opportunity, too.)

Remember, too, that this visit is because you want their support. You have invited these people because there is something you want them to do. Make sure you tell them what that is! Suggested talking points for this are included in the Campaign Toolbox at

http://www.ececonsortium.org/site_visit_campaign.php

Promoting the Visit

Once the visit has been confirmed with the legislator, you may want to also engage the local media. Working with the media is an important way to enhance visibility and engage the public. It's a way of letting the local community know about your program, the high-quality early learning activities that go on there, and can serve as a way to inform the public about what child care is and how it helps children and families every day.

Local newspapers are eager to find out about events and activities that are occurring in the community. The fact that a legislator will be attending makes it all the more newsworthy as newspapers like to record the goings on of their elected officials, as well as what they have to say.

The first step is to find out if the press staff of the legislator might be interested in helping with this part of the effort. They will have contacts and access to the local media.

You can still do this without their assistance, if you would like. Local newspapers and television affiliates are the easiest and probably most effective outlets for getting your event covered and publicized. You can easily find out the right contact name and email address on the outlet's website. Do this research in advance so you can be ready with a press release as soon as the event is over.

A press release is what the reporters will use to cover your story. It must include all the details of the event, as well as contact information for someone who can be reached for follow-up questions. Press releases should include the basic Who, What, Where, When and Why and should attract positive attention.

You can use the sample press release in this Campaign Toolbox. Modify the press release to reflect your child care program and the highlights of the visit from the legislator. Then, fax or email the press release to the local media on the day of the visit!

You can also promote the visit using communication tools you already have. Program newsletters are a great way to highlight the visit from the legislator. Include a photograph from the event! Your website and email listservs are good for this as well.

Final Preparations

The staff of the legislator may call to confirm leading up to the date of the visit. But you should be proactive and reach out to confirm and make any scheduling adjustments that might be necessary.

The Day of the Visit

This is a fun and exciting opportunity! Greet him or her by title (“Hello, Senator” or “Welcome, Assemblywoman” will do nicely.)

Your agenda will guide you through the visit. The talking points in the Campaign Toolbox will help with the policy advocacy piece. Remember that you’ve invited the legislator here because you want them to go back to the Capitol and do something good for child care!

And, take lots of pictures!

Following Up After the Visit

You have had your legislator’s attention, and now you need to keep it. Once the event is over, follow-up is critical. This visit is a part of your relationship with the legislator who represents your community. Like any relationship, it must be nurtured.

Next steps:

- Send a thank you letter immediately after the event. A sample letter is included in the Campaign Toolbox.
- Fill out the Follow-up Form included in the Campaign Toolbox and send it to ECEC so we can help plan future activities!
- Congratulate yourself and your staff for a successful advocacy day right in your own program.