



Afterschool for All Challenge Take Action at Home Kit



TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	A Guide to Taking Action at Home
3	Take Action Calendar: 2015 Key Dates and Events
5	Sample Thank You Letter for Congressional Office from Challenge Participants
6	Sample Letter from an Afterschool Program
7	Sample Letter from a Parent
10	Hosting a Successful Congressional Visit
11	Dos and Don'ts
12	Sample Invitation to Your Member of Congress
13	Sample Thank You Letter - Site Visit
14	Take Action From Home on Social Media
16 - 28	Media Outreach Ideas and Tips

A GUIDE TO TAKING ACTION AT HOME

Now that you've completed the *Afterschool for All Challenge* in Washington, D.C., here are a few ways to step up your advocacy efforts at home. You can help us protect afterschool!

1. CONTACT YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS

Providing feedback to your Member of Congress is easy to do and is a critical part of the democratic process. This year, both the Senate and House of Representatives introduced bills to reauthorize the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*. These bills threaten to eliminate funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC), the dedicated funding stream for afterschool programs. Send an email or letter to your Members of Congress calling for their support of afterschool programs and ask them to keep funding in place. You can find a sample "thank you" letter on page 12 to send Congressional offices following your visit. These letters are a great way to remind them about what you discussed and express your appreciation for their time.

2. SET UP A SITE VISIT IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Inviting policy makers and their staff to visit your afterschool program is a powerful way to help them understand the benefits your program provides to the community. To help you get started we have provided sample invitations, planning guides and schedules to make your site visit a success.

3. LEVERAGE TRADITIONAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA

Afterschool advocates have many ways to generate news coverage about the extraordinary youth outcomes afterschool programs deliver as well as the challenges these programs face. Use our templates, talking points and key messages to spread the word about the importance of afterschool.

TAKE ACTION CALENDAR: 2015 KEY DATES AND EVENTS

February - April	<p>Key Vote - Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Reauthorization</p> <p><i>Call, write and fax your senators and representative. Organize the entire community to call and write letters to their Members of Congress asking them to support funding for 21st CCLC.</i></p>
March 6-15	<p>House Recess</p> <p><i>Invite officials to visit your program to talk to the children about their jobs and what they do to keep your community safe.</i></p>
March 30-April 10	<p>House and Senate Recess</p>
May 4-8	<p>House Recess</p>
May - September	<p>Key Vote - Congress Works on Appropriations</p> <p><i>Call, write and fax your senators and representative. Organize the entire community to call and write letters to their Members of Congress asking them to support the proposed increase in afterschool funding.</i></p>
May 25-29	<p>Memorial Day Recess</p>
June 21	<p>Summer Learning Day</p> <p><i>Invite district offices to participate in a Summer Learning Day event. Visit www.summerlearning.org for more information.</i></p>
June 29 - July 6	<p>Independence Day Recess</p> <p><i>Invite your officials to visit your program and celebrate Independence Day with your students.</i></p>
August 3 - September 7	<p>August Recess</p> <p><i>Meet with your senators and representatives in their district offices or invite them to visit your afterschool or summer program.</i></p>
September - October	<p>Key Vote - House & Senate Conference on Appropriations Bills, Send to President</p> <p><i>Call, fax and write to Congress and President Obama! Make sure they hear how important afterschool programs are to kids in your community and across the country!</i></p>
September 14-15	<p>Rosh Hashanah Recess</p>
September 21-25	<p>House Recess</p>
October 1	<p>Fiscal Year 2016 Begins</p> <p><i>Start a letter-writing campaign to the White House urging an increase in funding for afterschool programs in FY2016.</i></p>
October 12-16	<p>Columbus Day Recess</p> <p><i>Members of Congress will be home in their districts. Invite them to visit your afterschool program.</i></p>

October 22	<p>15th Annual <i>Lights On Afterschool</i> Celebration</p> <p><i>Invite all of your elected officials to local Lights On Afterschool events! Let them see how important afterschool programs are to the children and entire community that they serve.</i></p>
November 3	<p>Election Day</p> <p><i>With the exception of a few gubernatorial races, this is an off year for elections, as there are no major national races. Your community might hold elections for local government offices. Download our campaign toolkit to help you make afterschool an election issue in your community: http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/reachPolicyElectionIssues.cfm</i></p>
November 9-13	<p>House Recess</p>
November 23-27	<p>Thanksgiving Recess</p>
December 21-January 1	<p>Senate and House Recess</p>

SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER FOR CONGRESSIONAL OFFICES FROM *CHALLENGE* PARTICIPANTS

After your visit to Capitol Hill, be sure to send a note to Congressional offices thanking Members of Congress and any staff members who met with you. A letter is a good way to maintain a relationship with a policy maker's office and to remind them of your visit and what you discussed. If you encouraged the lawmaker to join the Afterschool Caucus, you can use this letter as a reminder to do so. If you met with a staff member, change the letter to say that you appreciated meeting with the policy maker's staff. Be sure to include your contact information at the end of the letter. Below is a sample letter that you can adapt to reflect your meetings.

NOTE for programs that receive federal grant money: We suggest writing the letter on your personal stationery so that you can specifically mention funding you receive from 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) or other federal funding sources, like the Child Care Development Fund (CCDF). If you use program stationery, you **should not** ask the official to increase funding for a specific government program like 21st CCLC or CCDF. But you can always ask the policy maker to support afterschool programs in general.

SAMPLE LETTER

(Fax or email your letter. Security concerns mean your letter, by mail, can take months to reach Capitol Hill.)

[Your address] [Date]

The Honorable **[Member of Congress name]**

[Capitol Hill office address]

Washington, D.C. 20510

Via fax: **[fax number]**

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me and other afterschool supporters from **[your city]** in Washington, D.C., on March 10. I enjoyed talking with you about afterschool programs and the great benefits they provide here in **[your city]** due to federal funding from the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. Afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn and help working families.

I hope you will consider joining the Afterschool Caucus as a way to support afterschool in Congress. I also hope you will build on the investments made by Congress and support 21st Century Community Learning Centers in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) reauthorization bill. Afterschool programs help working families, keep young people safe during the hours after school when juvenile crime peaks, and improve academic achievement. Without a dedicated funding stream for afterschool and summer learning, students will lose out on essential learning opportunities that help them prepare for school, college and careers. I know you agree that all children and working families deserve the support and stability that comes with participation in quality afterschool programs.

Whenever it is convenient for you, I would be delighted to give you a tour of our program and an opportunity to talk to the children and parents we serve.

Thank you again for your time and public service.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Phone number]

[Email address]

SAMPLE GENERAL LETTER FROM AN AFTERSCHOOL PROGRAM

[Your Address – VERY important]

[Date]

The Honorable **[Member of Congress name]**

[Capitol Hill office address]

Washington, D.C. 20510

Via fax: **[fax number]**

Dear **[Member of Congress name]:**

[1st paragraph states the reason for your letter and who you are]

I am writing to inform you what a tremendous difference our Learning for All Afterschool Program makes in our community. I work with this school-based program, which is funded by a federal grant, and know firsthand how it improves children's grades, keeps kids safe, benefits working families and has a positive effect on the entire community.

[2nd paragraph further explains your message and includes a personal account]

Our program helps several hundred working parents in our school district who otherwise would not have access to an afterschool program to enrich their children's lives during the hours after school. In addition, the Learning for All program provides our community's citizens with a proven history of success—a history that features improved student test scores, improved school attendance and more focused students. Successful afterschool programs like ours offer an academic environment that is critical in the 3 to 6 p.m. time period before most working parents can get home.

[3rd paragraph should summarize your message]

Our program provides a school-based environment in which extended academic learning is the norm. Students in our afterschool program achieve better grades in math, reading and other subjects; have fewer behavioral problems; and have better school attendance records. In addition, our program offers youth a safe place where they can learn during the peak hours when juveniles otherwise can be victims of crime or engage in criminal activity themselves. One of the best things about the program is the way it brings together various community members and gets them actively involved in helping kids learn and grow.

[OR, if you are 21st CLCC program]

Our 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) program provides an environment in which extended academic learning is the norm. Students in our afterschool program achieve better grades in math, reading and other subjects; have few behavioral problems; and have better school attendance records. Please act to save the 21st Century Community Learning Centers and support a dedicated funding stream that leverages the resources of for-profits, faith based organizations, community based organizations (CBOs), tribal organizations, non-profits, local government, colleges and universities in addition to school districts, to provide students the support they need to succeed in school and life.

Your support for afterschool programs is greatly appreciated.

[OR, if you are a 21st CCLC program]

Your continued support of the 21st CCLC program is appreciated.

[Always thank a public official]

Thank you for your public service.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Phone Number]

[Email Address]

[Street Address]

SAMPLE GENERAL LETTER FROM A PARENT

[Your Address – VERY important]

[Date]

The Honorable [Member of Congress name]

[Capitol Hill office address]

Washington, D.C. 20510

Via fax: [fax number]

Dear [Member of Congress name]:

[1st paragraph states the reason for your letter and who you are]

I'm writing to let you know what a positive impact the 21st Century Community Learning Center (21st CCLC) program has had in our community. My child participates in a quality afterschool program here in Anchorage funded by the 21st CCLC initiative. The program improves the quality of life for our family and many others.

[2nd paragraph gives reasons for your position and includes a personal needs account. Here are three different variations. You only need one paragraph.]

[Example 1: This example highlights how afterschool keeps kids safe]

I'm a single mom and live in an area of the city where crime is a big problem. Before my daughter Jessie's junior high school started its afterschool program, Project Promise, I constantly worried about her getting into trouble or getting hurt. On the days when I worked, Jessie would be home alone for two hours or over at friends' houses without any adults around. My biggest fear was that she would start using drugs, which I knew some of her classmates had experimented with. Since she joined Project Promise I don't have to worry about her safety because I know she's always supervised by adults. She's also become more interested in her classes and is even thinking about going to college to become a teacher. This afterschool program has been a big help for me and my daughter.

[Example 2: This example highlights how afterschool improves grades]

One of the best things about my son Alex's afterschool program is that it has helped him become a better student. Alex is a sophomore in high school and has always had trouble with math. I enrolled him in the new afterschool program, The Community Connection, because it offered tutoring in math, science and reading. Alex wasn't very excited about it at first, because he had tried a tutor before and it didn't help. But this time was different. It helped Alex to be around other kids and do a lot of group problem-solving. Now, Alex has made new friends and he's doing much better in math. I'm thankful that his school is able to offer this program to kids that need extra help with their studies.

[Example 3: This example highlights how afterschool helps working families]

Both my husband and I work. Our 6-year-old son John was diagnosed with a learning disability and although our school has provided some excellent assistance, he needs more. We used up much of our savings to get John the special counseling he needs. We were about to lose hope when Smith Public Schools and the Hope Community Foundation started the Bright Lights Afterschool program. The program offers activities during that critical time from 3 to 6 p.m. before we can get home. John's reading and comprehension skills have improved, and now my husband and I don't have to worry about supervising John after school every afternoon. This program makes a huge difference in our lives.

[3rd paragraph should summarize your message]

I can tell you from personal experience that afterschool programs help working families raise their children in a safe and nurturing environment. Without our local afterschool program, many kids like my son would lose out on a valuable opportunity to learn and develop new skills under the supervision of teachers and other qualified community members. Your continued support of the 21st CCLC program is appreciated.

Thank you for your public service.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Phone Number]

[Email Address]

[Street Address]

HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL CONGRESSIONAL VISIT

Inviting your Members of Congress to tour your 21st Century Community Learning Centers program is one of the best ways to show him or her firsthand the impact of the initiative and afterschool programming on students and their families in their district and/or state. A planned out and well-orchestrated tour will help accomplish both the goals of the Afterschool Alliance in Washington in support of the 21st CCLC initiative and your goals at home. This how-to guide will assist you in the tour and the process for getting started.

BEFORE THE VISIT

1. IDENTIFY YOUR FEDERAL LEGISLATORS

Your 21st CCLC program is represented by at least one representative and two senators. Keep in mind that if your location is situated on or near a Congressional district line, you may have students, families and employees from multiple Congressional districts. In this case, you may want to expand your reach beyond the Members of Congress who serve your district to those who also represent the interests of the students and families you serve.

2. IDENTIFY UPCOMING FEDERAL RECESS PERIODS

Members of Congress travel in and around their home districts during certain times of the year. These “recess” periods are the best time to invite your Members of Congress to visit your facility. Congress is usually in recess during most federal holidays. Longer recess periods revolve around Presidents’ Day, Easter, Memorial Day, 4th of July and the entire month of August. In election years, Congress tends to adjourn in October, leaving the rest of the fall open for visits.

3. INVITE YOUR REPRESENTATIVE FOR A VISIT

Due to the demands on Members of Congress, their schedules fill up quickly. Your invitation letter should be sent several weeks in advance of your preferred date for their visit. The letter should be personalized with specific information about your 21st CCLC program and should include a window of time during which you would like them to visit (i.e. the April recess period). The letter should be printed on letterhead and signed by the head of the program. The letter should then be emailed to the Member’s scheduler. A sample letter has been included in the appendix of this toolkit.

4. FOLLOW UP WITH THE REPRESENTATIVE’S SCHEDULER

Contact the Member’s scheduler within 24 hours of sending the invitation to make sure it was received. He or she will work with you to set a date. If the Member’s schedule is too tight this recess period, suggest another time or offer to visit the Member and/or his or her staff at the district office at their convenience. The scheduler will be able to arrange that meeting or will pass you to the district office to set up a time.

5. COORDINATE WITH THE MEMBER’S COMMUNICATIONS STAFF

It is up to the Member whether or not the press should be involved. If media coverage is agreeable with the elected official, you may want to produce media materials well in advance of the visit as it can often take days for a Member’s office to approve materials. Be sure to draft a media advisory, press release, and photo release for the review of the Member’s office.

- **Media Advisory:** A brief written notice to media about an upcoming event or announcement. The advisory will concisely list the date, time, location, purpose of the event or announcement, participants and contact information. Advisories are typically a page or less in length, and should be circulated to the press, including the photo editor of the local newspaper, within five business days of the event or announcement.
- **Press Release:** A written communication announcing news that is sent to media. Usually contains a point of contact for further media inquiries or requests, and quotes from those associated with the news. The release should be put on letterhead and be approved by the Member’s office prior to distribution. The release should be circulated to the media as soon as the visit begins.

- **Photo Release:** Similar to a press release, a picture from the event or announcement that is released to the press for publication. Should include a photo credit and brief caption that identifies people in the photo. In this case, the photo should include the Member of the Congress meeting with program leadership, employees and/or students if pre-approval has been received, and must be approved by the Member's office prior to distribution. The photo should be circulated to the media and/or sent to photo editors at target publications as soon as the visit concludes.

In addition to these media tactics, the Member's visit should be featured on your program's website along with a brief write up and photo.

6. CREATE A FACT SHEET AND RELEVANT MATERIALS

A fact sheet is a great document to share with the Member's office in advance of their visit so that they are familiar with your program, the services you provide to students and families, and who benefits. Your program fact sheet should include: current employment numbers, your footprint in the district, interesting facts about your program including the number of students you serve, and positive testimonials of parents, community leaders, etc. The fact sheet should also be given to the Member along with an issue backgrounder, found in the appendix of this toolkit, as "take away" materials from the visit.

7. CONFIRM WITH THE REPRESENTATIVE'S SCHEDULER

It is best to contact the scheduler one to two weeks in advance of the visit to confirm the meeting, and confirm who will be attending the visit with the Member - make sure you have that person's contact information. Items you should provide the Member's office for this conversation includes:

- ✓ Schedule of events for the visit (sample included in the appendix)
- ✓ List of program participants and their bios
- ✓ Map/directions/parking instructions for the Member and Congressional staff
- ✓ Program contact name and number(s) for event
- ✓ Materials about the program and an issue backgrounder
- ✓ Media confirmed to attend the tour (if available)
- ✓ Confirm whether or not the staff would like to do a walk-through 24 hours in advance of the Member's arrival and if so, present a schedule and confirm logistics for the walk-through

8. NOTIFY YOUR STAFF AND EMPLOYEES ABOUT THE VISIT

Employees, staff and families should be informed of the Congressional visit and your expectations. The more prepared everyone is, the better the visit.

9. PERFORM WALK-THROUGH WITH PROGRAM LEADERSHIP ONE DAY AHEAD OF THE VISIT

The route should be mapped out so that the event and tour run smoothly and on time. A walk-through the day prior to the event is recommended to ensure that all participants understand their roles, know the purpose of the visit, are aware of the route that will be taken in and around the building and know how much time they will be allotted for their portion of the presentation. This is also a good time to review messaging. Present leadership with a schedule and a key messages document.

10. ISSUE THE MEDIA ADVISORY AND FINALIZE OTHER PRESS MATERIALS

Within five business days of the visit, issue the media advisory to the press, including the photo editor of the local newspaper. Follow up with a phone call and a reminder e-mail the day of the event. Also work with the Member's communications team to finalize the press release.

DURING THE VISIT

1. GREET THE MEMBER AND HIS/HER STAFF (2-3 MIN.)

It is often good to have a “Welcome Representative/Senator X” banner or a sign in an area with high visibility for the Member to see as soon as he/she arrives. Program leadership should be on hand to greet the Member and his/her staff when they arrive on site. Preferably, one or two employees or representatives from your facility should also be on hand. You may want to consider including a representative from one of your community partners and/or a local business leader who is involved in the program and understands how vital your program is to the local community and state. Following brief introductions, the tour should promptly begin.

2. TOUR YOUR FACILITY (20 MIN.)

The head of the program should lead the tour. This is the best time to show your work “in action” to the Member and his/her staff. Have a camera ready to capture the best moments.

3. MEET WITH EMPLOYEES AND/OR STAFF (30 MIN.)

At the end of the tour, you should allow the Member to have open interaction with students and employees. This will allow him/her to offer remarks and answer questions.

4. CLOSING REMARKS AND THANK YOU (2-3 MIN.)

Close out the visit by thanking the Member and his/her staff for visiting the facility. If you wish to present the Member and their staff with a small (under \$50 according to ethics rules) token of your gratitude, this would be the time for that presentation. Make sure also to supply the Member and staffer with your take away materials.

5. ISSUE THE PRESS RELEASE AND/OR PHOTO RELEASE

Circulate the release(s) to the media and/or send to local press contacts.

AFTER THE VISIT

1. SEND A THANK YOU LETTER TO THE MEMBER

A thank you note should be sent shortly after the Member’s visit. To ensure delivery, it is best for this letter to be sent via email to the staffer who attended the visit with the Member.

2. MONITOR FOR MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE VISIT

If/when positive articles about the tour are published, make sure to pass them along to the Member’s communications staff.

TOUR “TO DOs AND DON’Ts

DO Plan well in advance

Elected officials have numerous constraints on their time. Your chances of successfully recruiting a representative to visit your program require that you invite him/her well in advance.

DO Be flexible with your dates and times

Recess periods are often long and some dates and times may work better than others. Accommodating the elected official can mean a lot in the long run.

DO Invite the relevant education policy staffer to accompany the member

While the elected official is the boss, his/her staff can be key advocates of your cause and are often in charge of the “day to day” dealings with the office.

DO Distribute schedules to everyone who will be involved in the tour

It is important that the tour run as smoothly as possible and that everyone involved knows his/her role. Once the schedule has been finalized, create a schedule to distribute to all participants. Send a copy to the member’s scheduler.

DO Involve your employees, staff and/or local leaders

Representatives will want to interact with staff as a way to better understand how your program is adding value to the local community. Invite local leaders who understand your footprint in the community and state and can reinforce your messages.

DO Take the member wherever they request

While you may have planned your tour, oblige the member if they request to go into “uncharted” territory. Sometimes representatives will request to walk into an office or talk to employees in passing; these are positive encounters. However, this also shows the need to make everyone aware that a member of Congress will be visiting, and they should be prepared to answer any questions.

DO Let the member dictate the timing

While it is important to spend as much time with the member during his/her visit, schedules are tight and they may need to leave early. However, if the member is engrossed and has an open schedule, let the visit run over by keeping the conversation going and the member engaged. A well-orchestrated hour tour should be the goal.

Don’t Be discouraged

Members are unable to fill all the requests that are sent to them. Try again for the next available time they will be in their district or state, or offer to visit their district office for a quick meeting with the member and /or their district staff at their convenience.

Don’t Assume the members know about the 21st CCLC initiative

Remember, some members have little working knowledge of the 21st CCLC initiative and how it has been implemented in communities – urban and rural – across the United States. Use this time to educate them about afterschool programming and the importance of the 21st CCLC initiative and the work of the Afterschool Alliance.



SAMPLE INVITATION TO YOUR MEMBER OF CONGRESS

[Your Address – VERY important]

[Date]

The Honorable [Member of Congress name]

[Capitol Hill office address]

Washington, D.C. 20510

Via fax: [fax number]

Dear [Member of Congress name]:

I would like to invite you and your staff to visit the [Bright Lights Afterschool Program] during your next district working session. Our program provides [300 middle school children] with safe, educational afterschool activities during the critical hours between 3 and 6 p.m., when many parents are still working and juvenile crime rates triple. Students in our program are not only safe, they are doing better in school and show more interest in learning.

We would like to take you on a short tour of our program on [date] at [time]. If that time is not convenient, we would be happy to work with you to find a time that is. I have also invited members of the local [Rotary Club] and several parents to attend. They are eager to talk with you about the importance of keeping afterschool programs open and making these programs available to more children.

I hope you will join us and see our program, and our students, in action. Afterschool programs such as ours are important because they inspire students to learn, keep kids safe and help working families. The [Bright Lights] community relies on us.

A profile of the [Bright Lights Afterschool Program] is enclosed for your reference. I will contact your office within the next two weeks to follow up. I look forward to seeing you on [date].

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Phone Number]

[Email Address]

SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER TO YOU MEMBER OF CONGRESS – SITE VISIT

[Your Address – VERY important]

[Date]

The Honorable **[Member of Congress name]**

[Capitol Hill office address]

Washington, D.C. 20510

Via fax: **[fax number]**

Dear **[Member of Congress name]:**

Thank you for taking the time to tour our **[Bright Lights Afterschool Program]** during your recent district working session. The youth, parents and program staff enjoyed meeting you tremendously, and we were delighted to have the chance to share our activities with you.

I hope your visit helped reinforce how much our community values this program. As we discussed, and as I have witnessed firsthand, afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire learning and help working families.

I look forward to meeting with you again to further discuss the ways in which we can work together to ensure that afterschool programs stay open and are available to more children in our community and our state. Thank you again for taking the time to visit!

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Phone Number]

[Email Address]

TAKE ACTION FROM HOME ON SOCIAL MEDIA

It's easy (and effective!) to take the *Afterschool for All Challenge* home by urging community members to advocate using social media. By tagging tweets with your representatives' handles, advocates will make sure that they or their staff see the message, continuing the call to action that you issued while in Washington, DC.

Key upcoming date to remember: On March 24, friends of afterschool will gather in Los Angeles for the National After-School Summit. Summit participants will take to social media to call on their representatives to support afterschool, and you can join them from home by using these sample messages on that day and encouraging your friends and networks to do the same.

TWITTER

As you learned at the Challenge, it's important to Members of Congress to see how the decisions they're making will affect their home states. Our [America After 3PM dashboard](#) provides a wealth of state-specific data— substitute your state's abbreviation for "XX" and the relevant numbers for "##" in the highlighted areas and in moments you'll have a compelling message that will grab your representatives' attention. Find their handles starting on page 3.

- ##% of XX kids are waiting to get into an #afterschool program. They're counting on Congress to #Invest3to6—not cut!
- ###,000+ XX kids waiting to get into an #afterschool program are counting on Congress to #Invest3to6— not make cuts! @InsertRepHandle
- Parents of ###,000+ XX kids count on #afterschool programs each day. @InsertRepHandle, #Invest3to6— don't cut afterschool funding!
- An overwhelming ##% of XX parents are satisfied w/ #afterschool programs. @InsertRepHandle, keep afterschool strong in XX! #Invest3to6

In a hurry? These national posts can be sent with just one click—but to really make an impact, tag your representatives using the list of handles starting on page 3.

- 19.4 million kids waiting to get into an #afterschool program are counting on Congress to #Invest3to6— not make cuts to #21stCCLC! [[click here to tweet this!](#)]
- An overwhelming 84% of parents nationwide support public funding for #afterschool programs! Congress needs to #Invest3to6, not cut. [[click here to tweet this!](#)]
- #Afterschool programs inspire learning & keep 10.2 million kids safe every day—they're counting on Congress to #Invest3to6. [[click here to tweet this!](#)]

FACEBOOK

Just like on Twitter, if you're tagging your representatives' Facebook pages in your posts or posting on their walls, it's critical to show them the effect afterschool programs have on their state. Dive into the [America After 3PM dashboard](#) to find data for your home state, then drop the information into the highlighted areas in these sample posts to send a message that will resonate with your representatives as well as your local friends and family.

- Just ## percent of [STATE NAME]'s children are enrolled in an afterschool program—another ## percent are waiting for a chance to enroll. Tell Congress: #Invest3to6—don't cut funding for afterschool!
<http://capwiz.com/afterschool/home/>
- More than ###,000 [STATE NAME] children are enrolled in afterschool programs, and their parents are overwhelmingly satisfied. But afterschool funding is at risk—tell Congress to #Invest3to6 to keep afterschool strong in [STATE NAME]. <http://capwiz.com/afterschool/home/>
- ##% of [STATE NAME] kids are waiting to get into an afterschool program—reduced resources for afterschool will make it even harder to meet demand. Tell Congress to #Invest3to6: Kids can't afford afterschool cuts. <http://capwiz.com/afterschool/home/>
- Afterschool programs help thousands of working families in [STATE NAME]—families can't afford cuts to afterschool funding. Take action today: Call on Congress to #Invest3to6!
<http://capwiz.com/afterschool/home/>

In a hurry? You can copy and paste these national statuses to share the impact afterschool programs are having across the country.

- 19.4 million children across the country are waiting for their chance to enroll in an afterschool program—they're counting on Congress to #Invest3to6, not make funding cuts that will make it even harder to meet demand. Take action today: Tell Congress kids can't afford afterschool cuts!
<http://capwiz.com/afterschool/home/>
- An overwhelming 89% of parents are satisfied with their child's afterschool program! But afterschool funding is at risk—tell Congress to #Invest3to6 to keep afterschool strong and invest in our future.
<http://capwiz.com/afterschool/home/>
- Afterschool programs help millions of working families across the country—families can't afford cuts to afterschool funding. Take action today: Call on Congress to #Invest3to6!
<http://capwiz.com/afterschool/home/>

INSTAGRAM

Instagram is a great place to show off your support for afterschool. We invited NAA attendees to take a photo at the conference's Selfie Station with a message explaining why they support afterschool. You can join the conversation when you get home by writing the biggest reason you support afterschool on a whiteboard or a piece of paper and posing for a photo with your message! Many Members of Congress now have a presence on Instagram, so be sure to search for your representatives before you post and tag them if they have an account.

- **Not sure what to write?** Here are some of the biggest reasons to support afterschool:
 - Afterschool programs keep kids safe
 - Afterschool programs inspire learning
 - Afterschool programs help working families
- **How to caption your photo:** I'm calling on Congress to #Invest3to6 because [insert your reason here]!

MEDIA OUTREACH IDEAS & TIPS

Afterschool advocates have many ways to generate news coverage about the challenges afterschool programs face, particularly during the current wave of budget cuts, funding shortfalls and threats to 21st Century Community Learning Centers and other funding streams. Following are ideas, along with some instructional information, for getting out your messages about afterschool. At a minimum, consider issuing a news release and/or a letter-to-the-editor to your local newspaper about your visit to Washington, D.C. You'll also find in this guide other ways to generate media coverage, as well as tips and sample materials to help you:

- **Messages that Work**
- **Write an Opinion Article (Op-Ed) for Your Local Newspaper**
- **Look for a Local Cable Television Interview Opportunity**
- **Talk with the Relevant Editorial Writer(s) of Your Local Newspaper**
- **Before, During and After Your Trip to Washington, Use Social Media to Spread the Word**
- **Send a Letter to the Editor of Your Local Newspaper(s)**
- **Send a News Release About Your Trip to Washington, D.C.**
- **Pitch Yourself to a Local Radio Talk Show**
- **Write a Blog Post About Your Trip for Your School District's or Another Blog**

MESSAGES THAT WORK

The Afterschool Alliance recommends using the following messages with the media:

- Afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn and help working families.
- Research commissioned by the Afterschool Alliance, released in 2014, finds that the number of children in the United States participating in afterschool programs are on the rise. The study found that 10.2 million children (18 percent) participate in an afterschool program – an increase from 2009 (8.4 million; 15 percent) and 2004 (6.5 million; 11 percent). Nearly 1 in 4 families (23 percent) currently has a child enrolled in an afterschool program.
- But economic difficulties have taken a toll on afterschool programs. Many are cutting back hours and some have been forced to close. That same study, released in 2014, found that unmet demand for afterschool — parents who would enroll their child in a program, if one were available — increased to 19.4 million children in 2014. Demand is especially high among low-income, African American and Hispanic families.
- Years of research have demonstrated that afterschool programs work, and support a wide range of positive outcomes for kids, families and communities.
- Afterschool programs are about the future. Science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) programs offered after school and during the summer are getting young people excited about studying these important and growing fields. The hands-on, experiential learning that is a trademark of afterschool programs lends itself naturally to the scientific method and STEM subjects. In an era of global competitiveness, afterschool STEM programs offer an exciting way to ensure we have the workforce we need tomorrow.
- Afterschool programs are an effective tool in the ongoing battle against childhood obesity. Most parents (72 percent) report that their child's afterschool program provides children with beverages, snacks and/or meals,



and 81 percent of these parents are satisfied that the food served is healthy. Four in five parents agree that afterschool programs should offer opportunities for physical activity and 80 percent of parents with a child in an afterschool program report that the program does just that.

- America needs more quality afterschool programs. We need lawmakers, businesses and foundations to come together to ensure that afterschool programs get the funding they need to serve our children and our communities.
- At the federal level, afterschool has suffered from across-the-board budget cuts, and funding remains at risk. This year, afterschool faces a new challenge: Proposals in the House and Senate that would collapse several dozen education programs into a single block grant, pitting afterschool funding against a host of other initiatives. The proposal amounts to a raid on afterschool funding, and it would result in many programs losing their grants and closing their doors.
- In addition, the president has proposed allowing 21st Century Community Learning Centers (21st CCLC) grant funds to be used for purposes beyond afterschool, including adding time to the traditional school day or year, summer school, and teacher planning and professional development. The Afterschool Alliance supports 21st CCLC funds being directed to afterschool, before-school and summer programs that focus on hands-on, engaged learning that complements and enhances, but does not replicate the traditional school day.
- The Afterschool Alliance is encouraging Congress to reject proposals to collapse 21st CCLC funding into a single block grant, and instead supports the bipartisan *Afterschool for America's Children Act*. It would reauthorize the 21st CCLC initiative and include improvements such as innovative ways to engage students in learning that's different from the regular school day, with an emphasis on hands-on, experiential learning; science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) education; social and emotional learning; and physical activity and nutrition education. The legislation encourages strong partnerships between schools and community- and faith-based organizations, through shared data and resources.

WRITE AN OPINION ARTICLE FOR YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

Opinion articles (also called “op-eds” or guest editorials) are a great way to get your message out. Start by doing some research on your local newspaper’s opinion page. Check every day for several days to see if the paper runs opinion articles from members of the community. Some newspapers only carry staff-written or syndicated columns, but most publish selected pieces from readers. If your paper accepts opinion articles, call and ask for the opinion page editor and tell them you’re interested in writing an op-ed on the funding challenges afterschool programs in the community are facing and what it means to local families. Ask if such a piece might be of interest to the newspaper. The editor likely won’t make a commitment on the phone, but might indicate a willingness to look at such a piece, and even offer suggestions on what might make it publishable. Ask what the procedure is—how long the piece can be, to whom to submit it and how, and any other guidelines the newspaper observes. Write it, submit it per the newspaper’s instructions and then call the next day to be sure it arrived.

Four tips for writing an op-ed piece:

1. Never exceed the word limit.
2. Because it’s an opinion article, write with a point of view but without being shrill.
3. Back up what you say with facts. Tell real stories.
4. Start with a lead paragraph that captures the reader’s attention and gives a sense of where you’re headed. For example: “Every weekday afternoon in Little Rock, more than 9,000 students participate in one of several 21st Century Community Learning Centers’ afterschool programs across the city. The programs keep them safe, inspire them to learn and relieve their parents of worries about whether their children are safe and supervised after the school day ends. But with funding lagging so far behind community needs, many of our children have no safe, adult-supervised place to go in the afternoons.”

If you are not successful placing your op-ed piece in your community’s major daily newspaper, consider community papers (often weeklies), or look for a website or blog (the school system, an ally, your own program) that will publish it.

TALK WITH THE EDITORIAL WRITER(S) OF YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER

There’s nothing quite like having an editorial on your side to help generate support from policy makers. Editorial writers are always looking for topics, so if you think your newspaper’s general editorial disposition might favor increased funding for afterschool, see if you can convince the editorial page editor (or editorial board) to write an editorial saying so.

First, call the newspaper, ask for the editorial page, and ask who writes editorials on local education issues. Depending on the size of the paper, it could be the editorial page editor, a columnist or even a reporter.

Ask to be connected with that person, and then request a meeting to talk about the funding challenges facing state and local afterschool programs. If they agree to meet, bring whatever fact sheets or other material you may have, as well as information on the impact of budget shortfalls. Be sure to check the Afterschool Alliance’s website at www.afterschoolalliance.org for the latest information. You may want to bring a parent, principal, or other person with a distinct and powerful point of view with you to the meeting.



Be prepared to explain in specific terms the threat to local programs, what inadequate funding would mean for children and families, and how many would likely be affected if the federal government cuts afterschool funding next year.

Remember, the writer will be thinking in terms of how he or she might write an editorial, so be sure to provide a local angle (that should be easy!) and specific facts that support your case.

SEND A LETTER-TO-THE-EDITOR TO YOUR LOCAL NEWSPAPER(S)

Look at your newspaper's letters page. Scan the page itself and the newspaper's website letters section for instructions on word counts and where to send your letter. If you can't find instructions, just count the number of words in a given day's letters. Also, see whether published letters all refer to stories or editorials the newspaper recently ran; some newspapers insist on it, some don't. Then write a letter that reflects what you've learned—length, tone, keyed to a story already published in the newspaper or not, etc.

Be sure your letter says that:

- Afterschool is the key keeping kids safe, inspiring them to learn, and helping working families.
- Afterschool programs face severe funding shortfalls that are forcing many to cut back their services to kids and families, and forcing others to close their doors altogether.
- In addition, Congress is considering legislation that would collapse the 21st CCLC initiative into a single block grant along with dozens of other programs, pitting important education initiatives against each other. The proposal would inevitably result in programs being forced to close their doors. It's important that the federal budget sustain and increase current funding for afterschool programs.

Follow the newspaper's instructions on how to submit the letter and be sure to include a phone number (not for publication) where the editor can confirm that the submission is actually from you.

You'll find a sample fill-in-the-blanks letter-to-the-editor below that's keyed to this year's *Afterschool for All Challenge*. The Afterschool Alliance urges you to modify the text so that if the newspaper asks if the letter is being submitted to other papers around the nation, you can honestly answer that yours is unique. Newspapers are increasingly sensitive to this issue.

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

[Date]

Letters to the Editor

[Name of newspaper]

[Address]

[City, State, Zip]

To the Editor:

Every afternoon in the United States, millions of children leave school with no organized activity or adult supervision awaiting them. Not surprisingly, the afternoon hours are when children are most likely to be the victims of crime and to engage in risky behaviors.

Afterschool programs provide a safe alternative. And that's one of many reasons we need quality afterschool programs—and many more than we have now. The parents of 19.4 million children not already in afterschool say they would enroll their kids *if programs were available*. Unfortunately, the economy has made it harder for afterschool programs to raise private funds, and tight local, state and federal budgets are forcing many programs to cut back their programs or close their doors.

This week I was proud to join hundreds of afterschool supporters from around the nation in meeting with, calling and emailing our Members of Congress and their aides to discuss the urgent need to fund afterschool programs, as part of the Afterschool Alliance's *Afterschool for All Challenge*. We'll all be better off if lawmakers heed that message.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Your program]

[Your phone numbers, not for publication]

SEND OUT A NEWS RELEASE ABOUT YOUR TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

Many advocates find that local newspapers, television or radio stations are interested in doing stories on their trip to Washington, D.C., to attend the *Afterschool for All Challenge*. On the trip home, fill in the blanks of the news release that follows, and then distribute it to local media as soon as you can (don't let the release grow stale in a clearance process; it won't be news if it's three days old).

When filling in the blanks of the news release, make certain that you fairly characterize what your representative, senators or their aides said in your meetings. For example, if an aide said the Member of Congress would support increasing the 21st Century Community Learning Center afterschool appropriation, but didn't say to what level, be sure not to suggest an amount.

Send the news release to:

- Assignment desks of local TV and radio stations
- Local education reporters at daily newspapers
- Assignment desks (or education reporters) of any community, ethnic or specialty newspapers
- The newsletter editors at interested organizations: the school district, PTA, Boys & Girls Club, YMCA and others
- School system and community cable stations

Don't overlook ethnic or other specialty outlets. Adjust the quote in the news release as you see fit, and be sure to mention in your quote any commitments from lawmakers or their aides—just be sure not to overstate what they told you!

If anyone in your traveling party maintains a blog or has posting privileges on one, you might consider arranging for an entry about the trip (see sample blog post in this kit).

SAMPLE NEWS RELEASE

[Program Letterhead]

News Release
[March 11, 2015]

Contact: [Name]
[Phone]

[Your State] Leaders Say Congressional Meetings Provided Valuable Chance to Discuss How Afterschool Programs Help Kids, Families

Congressional Meetings Send Clear Message: Afterschool Kids Need More Federal Support

Afterschool supporters from [state] returned home today after a [three]-day visit to Washington, D.C., where they met with Members of Congress, including [list any home-state senators or representatives you met with], to discuss the unmet need for more funding for afterschool programs. The visit was part of the annual *Afterschool for All Challenge*, sponsored by the Afterschool Alliance.

[Your name], [your title] of [your organization], declared the visit an “outstanding opportunity to inform lawmakers about the ways afterschool programs support children and families.” Joining [last name] on the trip were [name other local participants including their role and their organizational affiliation].

A highlight of the conference was a day-long visit to Capitol Hill, during which afterschool leaders from around the nation took part in more than 200 meetings with Members of Congress and their aides. Many more activists from around the country took part in a “Thunderclap” campaign, sending social media messages about protecting afterschool funding via Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr.

“Afterschool programs across the country provide a critical service to families and communities,” said Afterschool Alliance Executive Director Jodi Grant. “But they face very real challenges on Capitol Hill. Current proposals would collapse the main federal funding stream for afterschool — the 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative — into a single block grant, forcing it to compete with dozens of other programs for support. The proposal amounts to a raid on current afterschool funding. Members of Congress need to hear about the great work being done in afterschool keeping kids safe and engaged in hands-on learning activities. That’s the best way to remind them that we need to keep these programs going, and to grow the federal contribution to afterschool. We think afterschool advocates sent a clear and convincing message this week — one we think will be hard to ignore.”

The goal of the visits on Capitol Hill and in home districts was to educate lawmakers about the unmet need for afterschool programs as they set priorities for federal funding and work toward reauthorizing the *Elementary and Secondary Education Act*, formerly *No Child Left Behind*.

In [name of community], a federal 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant **supports [name of afterschool program]**, but other worthy applicants were turned down because there were not enough funds available. The Afterschool Alliance is urging Congress to support funding for afterschool programs.

“The *Afterschool for All Challenge* was a great experience,” said [name and title]. “It was encouraging to meet with so many other committed afterschool providers, and to be reminded about the reach of the afterschool movement. Every day, here and at programs across the nation, afterschool programs are helping our kids, our families and our communities by keeping kids safe, inspiring them to learn and helping working families. We took that message to our



Members of Congress, and I think we made an impression on them. **[Senator/Representative]** said **[she/he]** would **[support funding for afterschool OR consider our request, and we were very glad to hear it. We are hopeful he/she will conclude that the enormous benefits from afterschool programs are worth the modest investment.]** Without secure federal funding, afterschool programs and the children and families they serve will suffer.”

According to the Afterschool Alliance’s 2014 [America After 3 PM](#) report, a nationwide household survey on afterschool:

- 11.3 million K-12 children are unsupervised in the afternoons — 1 in 5.
- By contrast, just 10.2 million children are in afterschool programs.
- The parents of another 19.4 million children say they would enroll their children in an afterschool program if one were available.

[You can replace or supplement the data above with numbers from your state’s *America After 3 PM* news release, available on the [Afterschool Alliance website](#). Click on your state, then scroll for the relevant numbers of children who 1) are unsupervised, 2) are in programs, and 3) would be in programs if they were available.]

[Add local information about afterschool in your community—some combination of information about your program, local funding challenges, major providers, local evaluations of programs, etc.]

The Afterschool Alliance is a nonprofit public awareness and advocacy organization working to ensure that all children and youth have access to quality afterschool programs. More information is available at www.afterschoolalliance.org.

[Add a one- or two-sentence description of your program.]

#

NOTE: For more information about afterschool, including *America After 3 PM*, or other research data, visit www.afterschoolalliance.org or call Gretchen Wright at (202) 371- 1999. For more information on the trip, contact **[name and phone number]**.

PITCH A SEGMENT TO A LOCAL RADIO TALK SHOW

Want to be on local talk radio? It's easier than you might think. Here's how:

First, scout local talk shows. Most medium-size or larger markets have a talk news station, and that's probably where you'll have the best luck. Check listings for that and other stations carefully—they're often available online. Don't overlook public radio and college/university stations. See which programs are locally produced—you're not likely to be on a national program on National Public Radio or a nationally syndicated one like the Rush Limbaugh Show.

Listen to each show to get a sense of whether any of them would give you the chance to get your message out.

Put together a three-paragraph "pitch letter" like the sample that follows. It should explain briefly (in one page or less) why quality afterschool programs are important, why and how these programs are threatened, how funding shortages affect local children and their families, and why you are qualified to talk about it.

Don't forget to mention that you recently traveled to Capitol Hill to talk with Members of Congress and their aides. Address the letter to the show's producer (call the station and ask for the name). Email the letter, then call to follow up the day after it arrives. When you call, be ready to repeat a distilled version of your basic "pitch" to the producer.

SAMPLE PITCH LETTER TO RADIO TALK SHOW

[March 11, 2015]

[Name of Producer]

[Name of Show], [Radio station name]

[Address]

Dear [Mr./Ms. Producer's Last Name]:

As any working parent in [Name of community] can tell you, the hours immediately following the regular school day can be a time when parents worry about what their children are doing—whether they're safe and constructively engaged, or getting into trouble. Over the last two decades, afterschool programs have helped millions of families across the nation. But millions more are without the afterschool programs they need because of severe funding shortages, a problem made even worse by the current recession and by budget cuts.

As the [position] of the [Name of program] in [Name of community], I've seen firsthand what a difference afterschool makes in the lives of our children, our families and our communities. I've just returned from Washington, D.C., where I joined with afterschool advocates from across the country in educating our senators and representatives about the benefits offered by afterschool programs and the need for more resources to support them. I met with several elected representatives from [State] and their aides, including [any senators or representatives with whom you met], for a wonderfully successful day of education on behalf of our kids. Even more activists from around the country took part in a "Thunderclap" campaign, sending hundreds of messages about protecting afterschool funding via Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr.

I think this issue would be of interest to your listeners. According to recent research, the parents of more than 19 million children nationwide would sign their children up for afterschool programs if programs were available. Many of your listeners are probably in that group! If you're interested in doing a segment or show on the subject, I'd be happy to join you and to help identify a parent or student who has benefited from afterschool as well as a teacher or school principal who could describe the vital role afterschool programs play in reinforcing academic learning from the regular school day. I'll be in touch to follow up. Thanks very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Your title]

[Your phone number]

BLOG ABOUT YOUR TRIP TO WASHINGTON, D.C.

Many school districts around the country have blogs to help parents, faculty and other community members learn about news and events related to the district and education. If your school district has a blog, you might consider submitting a post about your trip to Washington, D.C., for the *Afterschool for All Challenge*.

Blog posts are usually short and conversational, so keep yours fairly brief. You also want to communicate the excitement and importance of the *Afterschool for All Challenge* and what it was like to meet with your Members of Congress and their aides and to participate in this national advocacy effort.

SAMPLE BLOG POST: ADVOCATING FOR AFTERSCHOOL

Afterschool programs are vital to our nation's children, families and communities. But they're facing tough funding challenges, resulting in part from the federal government's budget deficits. In the last few years, as budgets have tightened and charitable support has become harder to come by, many programs have trimmed back their offerings, reduced the number of students they can serve, or—in some cases—closed their doors for good.

This week, I joined hundreds of afterschool advocates from across the country at the annual [Afterschool for All Challenge](#), as we teamed up to send a message to Congress that we need to make afterschool a priority.

Sponsored by the [Afterschool Alliance](#), the *Afterschool for All Challenge* featured a day-long visit to Capitol Hill by hundreds of afterschool leaders from around the nation. While they met with Members of Congress and their aides, afterschool advocates in communities from Maine to California turned up the grassroots volume, by joining in a "Thunderclap" campaign, sending hundreds of messages about protecting afterschool funding via Twitter, Facebook and Tumblr.

[City or state] conference participants met with **[names of senators, followed by names of representatives,]** as well as aides to **[senators followed by representatives]**. I had the opportunity to meet with **[list any senators or representatives from your state who met with your group, or "aides to" senators or representatives]** about how important afterschool programs are to our community and all they do for children and working families. **[Add interesting information about what senators, representatives or their aides said to you, being careful not to overstate what they said.]**

At the federal level, afterschool has suffered from across-the-board cuts in recent years, and funding remains at risk. This year, afterschool faces a new challenge: Proposals in the House and Senate that would collapse several dozen education programs into a single block grant, pitting afterschool funding against a host of other initiatives. The proposal amounts to a raid on afterschool funding, and it would result in many programs losing their funding and closing their doors.

In addition, the president has proposed allowing 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant funds to be used for purposes beyond afterschool, including adding time to the traditional school day or year, summer school, and teacher planning and professional development.

The Afterschool Alliance supports the use of 21st CCLC funds for afterschool, before-school and summer programs that focus on hands-on, engaged learning that complements and enhances but does not replicate the traditional school day. That's how the program was originally envisioned, and it has been an unqualified success!



[Research](#) from the Afterschool Alliance illustrates just how far we are from making afterschool available to all who need it. Among the most telling findings of the organization's 2014 *America After 3PM* report was that the parents of 19.4 million children not already in afterschool programs say they would sign their kids up if a program were available to them locally. That's almost twice the number of who are in programs (10.2 million), which means we've got a huge unmet demand for afterschool. To put it more clearly, our problem is that we don't have enough programs to meet the need – and proposals now before Congress would make things worse.

That's why the Afterschool Alliance is urging lawmakers to co-sponsor the bipartisan *Afterschool for America's Children Act*. The bill would reauthorize the 21st CCLC initiative, and it includes a number of improvements, including innovative ways to engage students in learning that's different from the regular school day, with an emphasis on hands-on, experiential learning; science, technology, engineering and math (STEM); social and emotional learning; and physical activity and nutrition education.

We went to Washington because we believe that by educating lawmakers about how afterschool programs keep kids safe, inspire them to learn and help working families, we will have a chance to secure the funding afterschool programs need so that they may continue to provide vital services to the community—here, across the state and around the nation. That was a message our lawmakers needed to hear, and we were proud to deliver it! Let's hope they heard us!