

## Site Visits to Child Nutrition Programs

With Child Nutrition Reauthorization in 2009 fast approaching, it is critically important that Members of Congress and state and local elected officials visit Child Nutrition Program sites during late 2008 and early 2009. Seeing, first-hand, children eating nutritious meals in schools, summer and afterschool programs and child care can move an elected official to become a champion for expanding and strengthening the programs.

### Finding the Perfect Site

It is important to select a site in a location that has easy access for reporters and your elected official. Ideally, the child care, afterschool and summer sites should provide high quality care and educational and enrichment services as well as healthy meals and snacks. As you plan your event, please consider the following:

- Visit the site ahead of time – think about the picture your visitors will see. Make sure the site promotes your programmatic priorities. For example, if you are promoting healthy eating, avoid sites that have a lot of vending machines or ads for junk food. You can enhance the summer sites with banners, posters, or children's artwork.
- Check the menu ahead of time to ensure that the program will be serving healthy, child-friendly food that will be consumed enthusiastically during the visit.
- Pick a time and day for the visit when you know participation will be high. If Mondays typically have low participation, schedule the visit for later in the week.
- Schedule the visit so that your elected official and the media are present during the meal service. (Tip: In your press release, list the times the children will be eating.) Encourage your guest to don an apron and participate in the meal service!



Rep. Jim McGovern from Massachusetts enjoys lunch with children during a Summer Food site visit in Massachusetts organized by Project Bread and the Worcester County Food Bank.

## Preparing for the Visit

The key to a successful site visit is to plan ahead so the event is well-organized and runs smoothly.

- A few weeks before the event, develop (or update) your media contact list. Include local media (print, radio and TV) that are likely to attend, state-wide media that may report on the event even without attending, and reporters from your state's major papers who are based in Washington, DC.
- Create a press release for the event. FRAC can provide technical assistance or a template for you to use.
- Create a list of assignments so that everyone knows their responsibilities the day of the event.
- Work closely with congressional press staff to coordinate your media kits, press releases, materials, and quotes. Also, determine how much time the Member will have at the site and provide a timeline for the event so that staff will know what to expect.
- Create a packet of background materials for your elected official. The packet should contain your press release, relevant fact sheets, brochures and outreach materials and any other helpful information.
- Identify a staff member in your organization to take pictures at the event and discuss ahead of time the images you are hoping to capture.
- Prepare the children in advance. Tell them about the visit and what they should expect that day. If possible, include them in the preparations and allow them to be involved in planning the event.
- Distribute parental photo release forms before the visit. The forms should state that parents give permission for reporters to take photographs or video of their children during the visit. FRAC can provide a sample form. Those children without parental release forms should be out of camera range during the visit.

## Crafting your Message

Your elected official may not have a lot of time to spend at the site so you want to have a succinct message to convey during the visit.

- Research what issues are priorities for your elected official. For example, if he or she is particularly interested in curbing childhood obesity, focus on the nutrition quality of the meals or if he or she is interested in improving early care and education, focus on the value of the child care food program standards and oversight in supporting quality care.
- Regardless of the specific approach you take, your main messages should be:

Child nutrition programs provide critical nutritional support to low-income children. Unfortunately, only \_\_\_ in \_\_\_ eligible children nationwide (or add your state participation numbers if appropriate) participate in the \_\_\_\_\_ program due to a variety of program barriers. Please work with us to strengthen and expand all of the Federal child nutrition programs during Child Nutrition Reauthorization in 2009.

## Working with the Media

To maximize the impact of the visit, you want to get as much media attention as possible.

- If possible, schedule the visit earlier in the day. Television and newspaper reporters often have early afternoon deadlines for the evening news and thus prefer mornings.

- Alert the media as early as possible, preferably at least three days in advance of the visit. If your city is served by a news wire service, make sure that your event is listed in the daybook. Contact community newspapers, local television network affiliates, cable access channels and radio stations – they are likely to cover the visit.
- Assemble media kits for reporters. The kit should include your press release, fact sheets, and brochures. List the names of staff contacts and other organizations involved in the event, along with telephone and email information.
- Reporters should respect the privacy of the children and families at the site. If possible, identify a few parents willing to talk to reporters about the positive impact the summer food, afterschool or child care food programs has had on their families.

### **Creating the Perfect Photo Op**

- Ask your elected official if he or she would like to help serve meals to the children.
- Make a special chef hat or apron for your guest to wear.
- Encourage your guest to sit and talk with the children while they eat.
- Have the children present their guest with something they made such as a banner or a collection of their artwork.
- Take a picture of your guest with the children (that have consent forms).

### **Discussing Opportunities to Strengthen and Improve the Program**

After your elected official has had a chance to see the site in action, create an opportunity for him or her to meet with key stakeholders privately to discuss program improvements in the upcoming Child Nutrition Reauthorization legislation. Stakeholders could include anti-hunger advocates, food bank staff, Child and Adult Care Food Program and/or Summer Food sponsors, community leaders, educators, and anyone else invested in improving and expanding child nutrition programs. This is an opportunity to discuss specific changes to the program that would make it easier to operate and increase participation. (Note: The media normally should not be present for this part of the event.)

After the event is over, remember to follow up with your elected official.

- Contact legislative staff to answer any questions and offer opportunities for follow-up activities, such as writing an article for a newsletter to constituents.
- Share any press coverage you receive with your elected official and publicize the event to your network.
- Place photos and articles about the visit on your webpage and in your newsletter.

### **Utilizing FRAC as a Resource**

FRAC can be a resource for you as you plan your site visit. FRAC staff can provide advice and planning assistance and may be able to attend the event. FRAC also can help you follow up with your Members of Congress once they return to Washington, D.C.

Contact Ellen Teller ([eteller@frac.org](mailto:eteller@frac.org)) or Etienne Melcher ([emelcher@frac.org](mailto:emelcher@frac.org)) if you would like assistance in planning a visit to a child nutrition program.