



# CONGRESSIONAL VISIT TOOLKIT

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USDA SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM AND  
CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAMS



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# OVERVIEW

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Inviting members of Congress to visit a child nutrition program in their state or district is a powerful way to engage elected officials and demonstrate the impact and value of parks and recreation. By witnessing the programs firsthand, members of Congress can see the vital importance of these investments in their communities.

The resources in this toolkit can help you prepare for the visit, craft a message and follow up with your members of Congress after the visit.

If you have any questions about the resources here or need more information, contact Sage Learn, NRPA's government affairs manager at [slearn@nrpa.org](mailto:slearn@nrpa.org).

# STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

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## STEP ONE – INVITING A MEMBER OF CONGRESS TO VISIT YOUR FEEDING PROGRAM

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- Call your member's congressional office in Washington, D.C., and ask for the Scheduler and Legislative Assistant for Agriculture's name and email. The Legislative Assistant is the staff person that works on child nutrition issues and may help prioritize the visit for the congressional member. If you don't know your Representative's or Senator's D.C. phone number, call the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121, and ask to be connected.
- Once you have obtained the email addresses for the appropriate contact people, prepare your email invitation to them.
- Be sure to identify a specific date or a range of dates and times when the meal service will be provided and a member of Congress can visit. Include information about your agency and your feeding programs and why it is important to visit. (See sample invitation).
- Email the invitation to the congressional office staff (scheduler and legislative assistant for agriculture issues). Email is always the best means of corresponding with your members of Congress and their staff.

## STEP TWO – FOLLOW UP

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- Follow up with an email and/or phone call to confirm the elected official or a staff member is able to attend.
- Confirm the date, time and location.
- Make sure you know how much time you have with the Senator/Representative so you can plan and make the most of their visit.

## STEP THREE – PREPARATION FOR THE VISIT

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- Identify participants and speakers: staff, volunteers, youth, parents and any other community members.
- Identify any activities that you may want to have happen while the member of Congress is there for a visit. For example, engage the Senator/Representative to help with the meals, have the children of the program put on a demonstration of the educational or enrichment activities, have the Senator/Representative participate in an enrichment activity.
- Visit the site ahead of time – think about what the visitors will see and make any arrangements needed for the visit. Identify any photo opportunity locations. Arrange for a photographer and/or videographer to capture the event.
- Develop the agenda and confirm and brief speakers. Prepare any talking points.
- Create informational packets about your agency and feeding programs; as possible, include impact stories and data related to your program and how it is making a measurable difference in the community.
- Arrange for any special requests that the Senator/Representative may need such as parking, security, etc.

## STEP FOUR – PREPARE FOR AND ENGAGE MEDIA

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- Ask Congressional Office if it is ok to engage local media regarding the member visit.
- Coordinate with the Senator/Representative's press staff on any media materials and outreach to media.
- Develop media materials for use with local outlets.
- If your agency or community has a local access television station, consider arranging for them to be onsite during the visit to capture and package TV footage which can be used for the community channels and/or as b-roll to your local news stations.
- Send out media alert and news release with approval from all parties.

### SUGGESTED MEDIA MATERIALS:

- Media advisory
- Program agenda with times
- Press release
- Agency/feeding program overview

## STEP FIVE – THE VISIT

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- Make sure you pay close attention to time and stay on schedule.
- Welcome and introduce the Senator/Representative.
- Share why the food programs are so important to your community.
- Encourage the Senator/Representative and their staff to interact with the youth or participate in activities.
- Create good photo opportunities and take pictures, videos and capture any quotes or comments from the Senator/Representative during the visit. Make sure you have obtained photo/video release permission from the participating children.
- Use social media to distribute visit updates in real-time to your community.

## STEP SIX – POST VISIT

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- Send out a press release recapping the visit and include any photos and quotes you are approved to release.
- Place photos and articles about the visit on your webpage and in your newsletter and/or email blasts.
- Use social media to publicize the event: Facebook/Twitter/Instagram.
- Follow up with NRPA public policy staff; we will help share the story of the visit.
- Send a thank you note to the Senator/Representative and staff via email.

# CONGRESSIONAL OUTREACH CHECKLIST

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- Invite sent to Congressional Members staff**  
*One month before you want the visit to take place*
  
- Follow up phone call to ensure the invite was received and reviewed by the scheduler**  
*Within one week of sending invite*
  
- Follow up to confirm the elected official or a staff member is able to attend**  
*Two weeks before visit*
  
- Follow up with your contact or the staff attending the event to ensure they are still attending**  
*One day before visit*
  
- Send a thank you note to staff**  
*Within one week of event*

## REMINDER:

The best way to correspond with your Senators/Representatives and their staff is via email.

# SAMPLE CONGRESSIONAL INVITATIONS

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## SAMPLE INVITATION FOR THE USDA SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM

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**To:** [Your Senator or Representative]

**ATTN:** [In-District Scheduler]

**CC:** [Agriculture LA]

**FROM:** [Your Name and City, State]

**RE:** [Park and Recreation Agency] Summer Feeding Program Visit

**DATE:** [Current Date]

Dear Senator/Congressman/Congresswoman [Name],

The USDA Summer Food Service Program is making a big difference for [state's] children, and we would like to invite [member of Congress] to visit our program site to see it in action. Based on [member of Congress]'s travel schedule, we can work with your office to determine a date and time for the visit.

Across the nation, and in [state], millions of children benefit from the healthy food they receive from the Summer Food Service Program. Local park and recreation agencies use this program to provide healthy meals and snacks to children who might otherwise go hungry in the summer months. When children are served healthy meals, park and recreation agencies are not only helping to address the immediate need of hunger, but are also engaging these children in other educational and enrichment activities.

[Add one paragraph that provides background information on your organization or program-related facts/stats.]

The Summer Food Service Program is improving the lives of low-income children, and we hope we will have the opportunity to show this to you firsthand. Thank you for your service to our community and for your consideration of this invitation. If you have any questions you can contact me at: [Add your contact information]

Sincerely,

[Name of agency Director or appropriate contact]

[Title]

[Email and phone number where they may reach you during the day]

## SAMPLE INVITATION FOR THE USDA CHILD AND ADULT CARE FOOD PROGRAM FOR AFTERSCHOOL MEALS

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**To:** [Your Senator or Representative]

**ATTN:** [In-District Scheduler]

**CC:** [Agriculture LA]

**FROM:** [Your Name and City, State]

**RE:** [Park and Recreation Agency] Child and Adult Care Food Program for Afterschool Meals

**DATE:** [Current Date]

Dear Senator/Congressman/Congresswoman [Name],

Afterschool meals through the USDA Child and Adult Care Food Program are making a big difference for [state's] children, and we would like to invite [member of Congress] to visit our program site to see it in action. Based on [member of Congress]'s travel schedule, we can work with your office to determine a date and time for the visit.

Across the nation, and in [state], millions of children benefit from the healthy food they receive from the Child and Adult Care Food Program. Local park and recreation agencies use this program to provide healthy meals and snacks to children who might otherwise go hungry after school. When children are served healthy meals, park and recreation agencies are not only helping to address the immediate need of hunger, but are also engaging these children in other educational and enrichment activities.

[Add one paragraph that provides background information on your organization or program-related facts/stats.]

Afterschool meals through the Child and Adult Care Food Program are improving the lives of low-income children and we hope we will have the opportunity to show this to you firsthand. Thank you for your service to our community and for your consideration of this invitation. If you have any questions you can contact me at: [Add your contact information]

Sincerely,

[Name of agency Director or appropriate contact]

[Title]

[Email and phone number where they may reach you during the day.]

# SUGGESTED TALKING POINTS

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## **SUMMER FOOD SERVICE PROGRAM**

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- These programs provide free meals and snacks to low-income children while school is out of session.
- Park and recreation agencies are the largest public provider of healthy meals and snacks to children outside of schools.
- Park and recreation agencies use this program to provide healthy meals to children who might otherwise go hungry in the summer months.
- Through this program we are not only helping to address the immediate need of hunger, but also engaging these children in other educational and enrichment activities.
- This is why your support of reauthorizing the Child Nutrition Act to continue funding the Summer Food Service Program is so important.
- [Add stories specific to your community.]

## **CHILD AND ADULT CARE FEEDING PROGRAM**

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- These programs provide free meals and snacks to low-income children after school.
- Park and recreation agencies are the largest public provider of healthy meals and snacks to children outside of schools.
- Park and recreation agencies use this program to provide healthy meals to children who might otherwise go hungry after school.
- Through this program we are not only helping to address the immediate need of hunger, but also engaging these children in other educational and enrichment activities.
- This is why your support of reauthorizing the Child Nutrition Act to continue funding the Child and Adult Care Feeding Program is so important.
- [Add stories specific to your community.]

# SAMPLE MEDIA ALERT

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**Media Contact:**

[Contact Name]  
[Agency Name]  
[Phone]  
[Email]

[Agency Name] to Host [Senator/Representative Member Name] at [Park/Facility Name]

[Add a second-line description about why visiting/feeding program information.]

**WHO/WHAT:**

[Name of major public officials who are participating, as well as the number of people who will be in attendance.]

[List and briefly describe any programs or activities that will take place. Concentrate specifically on the highlights.]

**WHEN:**

[Date/Time]  
[Be sure to mention individual start times for notable speakers/happenings.]

**WHERE:**

[Location/Address]  
[Provide parking information, if relevant.]

**WHY:**

[Provide an overview about the feeding program and impact through parks and recreation]

For more information, go to [website].

**EDITOR'S NOTE:**

[Mention any opportunities for interesting visuals and tours. Provide onsite contact information.]

# SAMPLE SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

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## SAMPLE POSTS FOR TWITTER

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- We're here with @CongressmanJohnDoe in [CITY] to talk about #SummerMeals! @NRPA\_News [INCLUDE PHOTO]
- Thank you @CongressmanJohnDoe for addressing the importance of #SummerMeals [INCLUDE LINK TO OP-ED/NEWS RELEASE/STATEMENT FROM CONGRESSMAN] @NRPA\_News
- Excited to have @CongressmanJohnDoe join us at our #SummerMeals site at [TAG PARK AND REC DEPT HANDLE]! @NRPA\_News [INCLUDE PHOTO]

## IMMEDIATELY AFTER EVENT

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- A big thank you to @CongressmanJohnDoe for joining us to talk about the importance of #SummerMeals! @NRPA\_News [INCLUDE PHOTO]
- Thank you @CongressmanJohnDoe for supporting #SummerMeals and healthy meals for [STATE]ians! @NRPA\_News

If you are using these sample Twitter posts for your Child and Adult Care Feeding Program, be sure to replace the #SummerMeals hashtag

**TIP:**  
If you include @NRPA\_News we will help spread your story