



Tips for Hosting a Successful Visit with an Elected Official

Program site visits with elected officials, especially those with members of Congress, are essential to building support for national service. Site visits can help to foster relationships that will benefit your program and the national service movement for years to come. Here are some tips that can help to make your upcoming visit a great success.

1. **Send a formal invitation letter.** Even if you speak in person with a member of Congress, congressional staffer, or other elected official about visiting your program, make sure to follow-up with a formal invitation letter. Such an invitation letter should be submitted to the elected official's scheduler in the form preferred by the office. Most congressional offices will have a separate scheduling e-mail address to which invitation letters can be sent, but don't hesitate to call an office and ask how they prefer to receive invitations. If a board member or other community partner who knows your program well has a relationship with the elected official, ask that partner to co-sign the invitation letter or follow-up on the invitation on your behalf.
2. **Be flexible with respect to date and time of the visit.** Don't be afraid to offer several days or a span of time during which your program would be able to welcome the elected official to visit. Elected officials, particularly members of Congress, often have busy schedules into which they try to squeeze many visits, events, and engagements. Reasonable flexibility with respect to scheduling will increase the likelihood of securing an elected official visit.
3. **Don't be afraid to follow-up on a pending invitation.** Members of Congress and other elected officials receive far more requests of their time than they can reasonably fulfill, and sometimes invitations get lost in the shuffle. If you haven't received a response to a pending invitation, feel free to call the elected official's scheduler to confirm they received the invitation.
4. **Choose the right service location.** Members of Congress and local elected officials who represent a specific geographic area will be most interested and willing to visit a service location in their congressional district or geographic jurisdiction. If you have multiple service locations, do your best to offer an elected official the opportunity to visit a service location within the region they represent, but make sure the location that is chosen is also a strong example of your program's service model.
5. **Once a visit is scheduled, let us know!** To maximize the success of your visit, we need to pool resources, experience, and expertise. Voices for National Service has tools that can enhance a visit with an elected official, and we can help answer your questions to make sure the visit is a success.
6. **Invite external validators to participate in the site visit.** Elected officials will want to know how the investment in national service impacts the local community. It always helps to have external validators—such as private sector funders, community partners, or school district representatives—to join the visit, even if just for a few minutes, to speak in support of your work.
7. **Confirm whether the visit will be open or closed to press.** This will affect your preparation for the visit. If the elected official wishes to have the event open to press, a media advisory will have to be issued, in coordination with the elected official's office, in advance of the visit.

8. **Be careful not to engage in political campaign activity.** As nonpartisan organizations that receive federal funds, national service programs must only use visits with elected officials as opportunities to educate leaders about local programming. Visits may not occur in connection with any political campaign activities, and photos or video of site visits may not be used in campaign materials. If you have questions, please consult us or review this memo from the Corporation for National and Community Service.
9. **Highlight the connection between federal funding and the impact your program has in the local community.** During the site visit, remember to explain that your program receives federal funding from the Corporation for National and Community Service, which is then matched by private and local support. It never hurts to offer some “National Service 101,” even to those who may be expected to understand how the program works. Furthermore, be sure to show clear co-branding with AmeriCorps or Senior Corps. For example, make sure your “AmeriCorps serves here” sign is prominently displayed during any site visit.
10. **Provide briefing material in advance of the visit.** Elected officials will almost always receive a briefing memo from their staff in advance of any event or appearance. Providing a briefing memo to the elected official’s staff several days in advance of the scheduled visit will both save them time, which they will appreciate, and ensure the right message is presented to the elected official. We can assist in providing relevant policy updates to include in a briefing memo, so don’t hesitate to contact us about this information.
11. **Make an “ask.”** At some point during the program visit, someone (typically a board member, executive director, or state commissioner) should ask the member of Congress or their staff to take action in support of national service. If you are hosting a member of Congress who is not a member of the National Service Congressional Caucus, invite the member of Congress to join. If the elected official is impressed by your program and impact, ask if they would consider writing an op-ed in support of national service in a local newspaper. These opportunities will not only enhance awareness about national service, but will provide valuable opportunities to engage and stay in contact with the elected official’s staff.
12. **Share about the visit on social media.** Make sure to take a picture of the elected official visiting your program, and tweet the picture at the elected official. This provides an opportunity to thank publicly the elected official, and if the elected official retweets the picture from his or her account, that’s great publicity for your program and national service.
13. **Thank the elected official for visiting.** A simple thank you note can go a long way. At a minimum, follow-up with the elected official’s staff, thank them for taking the time to visit, and provide any materials that were discussed or requested during the visit.
14. **Let us know how it went!** A successful visit can often lead to future engagement with the elected official. We encourage you to debrief with us after the visit to organize a follow-up plan and to ensure future engagement of the elected official that will build upon your great work.

Contact Voices for National Service:

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Address: 1875 Connecticut Ave., NW
Suite 400

Washington, D.C. 20009

Phone: (202) 742-7374

Website: www.voicesforservice.org

Site Visit Invitation Template

<< Your Organization Letterhead Here >>

<< Insert Date >>

The Honorable (<< First >> and << Last >>)
U.S. (<< Senate >> or << House of Representatives >>)
Washington, DC (<< Senate 20510 >> or << House 20515 >>)

ATTN: SCHEDULER

Dear (<< Senator >> or << Representative >> and << Last >>):

<< Name of organization >>, a non-profit community service organization operating in << name of city, state >>, invites you to visit our program during the next congressional recess, << dates of recess >>, to witness firsthand how national service is uniting Americans from all backgrounds and improving our local communities.

<< Insert program description here >>. Our organization began serving the << name of city >> community in << year >> and has expanded to serve over << number children/youth/families/individuals >> annually. << Insert other notable service impact data, such as number of service hours performed and types of service activities >>.

The << AmeriCorps members/volunteers/national service members >> who participate in << name of organization >> share your commitment to the people of << name of city >>. I strongly encourage you to take the time to visit our extraordinary program and allow this inspiring group of << corps members/volunteers >> to share their stories of hard work and commitment. I will be contacting your office in the next few weeks to schedule a visit. If your staff has any questions, they may contact me directly at << phone number >> or << email address >>. I hope you can join us for a visit in << month of recess >>.

Sincerely,

<< Name >>

<< Title >>

<< Name of organization >>