

FRAC 101: Site Visits to Child Nutrition Programs

As the nation continues to grapple with the deepest recession in decades, millions of low-income children are turning to the child nutrition programs to access meals in and out of school. That is why it is critically important that Members of Congress and state and local elected officials visit Child Nutrition Program sites. Seeing children engaged in activities and eating nutritious meals when school is out 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, school, 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, avoid sites that have a lot of vending machines or ads for junk food. You can enhance the site 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 your 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 (community newspapers, local television network affiliates, and radio stations) 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 media advisory and 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. Make sure to capture plenty of shots with your elected official and other guests.
- ✓ 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.

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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 decreasing juvenile crime, stress how the children are safe and secure in a supervised environment while their parents are at work. If the office is interested in curbing childhood obesity, focus on the nutrition quality of the meals and the opportunities the site provides for physical activity.
- ✓ 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 (use national or state data) participate due to a variety of barriers. Please work with us to protect and strengthen all of the federal child nutrition programs.

Working with the Media

To maximize the impact of the site 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.
- ✓ In advance, identify a few parents that are comfortable with speaking to reporters about the positive impact the school, summer food, afterschool, or child care food programs has had on their families. This will ensure that reporters respect the privacy of the children and families at the site.

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 Summer Food

After your elected official has had a chance to see the site in action – and if they have time in their schedule – create an opportunity for him or her to meet with key stakeholders privately to discuss how to protect and strengthen the Child Nutrition Programs. Stakeholders could include anti-hunger advocates, food bank staff, summer food sponsors, community leaders, educators, and anyone else invested in improving and expanding summer nutrition programs. (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



Congressman Pallone from New Jersey speaks with children at the Red Bank Summer Camp, where he announced passage of Simplified Summer Food legislation.

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) or Etienne Melcher (emelcher@frac.org) if you would like assistance in planning a site visit.