

## Stay in Touch!

Here are some ideas that agencies can implement to keep their Congressional delegation and State legislators informed. These are educational activities—not lobbying.

The term Congressman used here is gender neutral and is used referring to Congress men and women – Representatives and Senators--and state legislators as well.)

- **ALWAYS** send your Congressman and Senators a note of thanks **WHENEVER** there is an increase in Head Start budgets. Let them know that their ongoing support is vital and deeply appreciated. **IF** your Congressman and/or Senators **DO NOT** support an increase in Head Start spending, send them a note saying that the increase was important and that you regret they didn't support it and how can you help them better understand the need for continuing revenue increases for Head Start!
- Send your Congressman a copy of the routine reports you send to the Regional Office, with a brief cover letter telling them that you're just letting them know how you're doing.
- As soon as you complete any grant – renewal, COLA, etc., send your Congressmen a letter thanking them for their continued support and tell them how you're doing. Include some pictures.
- Get to know the names of your Congressman's aides, particularly those who have to do with education/social services issues. Become their new best friend. Send these people regular updates of program activities.
- Send your Congressmen copies of your newsletters and other materials (Annual Reports, etc.)
- Request a current, autographed photograph of your Congressman/Senators and hang them prominently in your administrative offices.
- Take a photograph of some children and parents standing by the Congressman's photo. Send him a copy with a brief note.
- Take a photograph of the children getting on or off the bus (with your agency's name prominently displayed on the side) and send it to your Congressmen, with a note telling them that this is what we're doing every day in Virginia, or here is how we start our day in Virginia.

You can also do this with photos of the children eating meals (pouring milk and passing bowls are great shots). Send them with a note saying that "we were thinking about you during lunch this week!"

- Get to know the local office aides for your member of Congress and invite them over frequently. This is a great way to get closer to your Congressman.
  
- Invite your Congressman to your center during one of their “district work periods” (call their office for a calendar). Include his spouse in the invitation, and do the following:
  - Have them eat lunch with the kids.
  - Take a photograph of them with the kids, frame a copy and send it to them for their office.
  - Have them eat lunch with the parents and have a brief “thank you” meeting with parents and a few, brief parent testimonials (this is a really great way to get to the politicians, because these parents are registered voters).
  - Show them classroom accomplishments, including literacy awareness and outcomes efforts, explain the assessment process to them and show them good results.
  - Show off your nicest center, and give them some demographics of the numbers of children and families you’ve served there.
  
- Have the children paint/draw a “portrait” of your Congressman/Senator. Choose a good one, have it mounted and framed and send it to the Congressman with a note of how the portrait was “commissioned”.
  
- Select some good children’s artwork and have it professionally framed. Send it to your Congressman with a brief story about the painting/artwork, and the signature artist.
  
- Have the children “write a book” or “tell a story about the wonderful state of Virginia”, or their experiences at Head Start. Put the book together and send it to the Congressman.
  
- Have the children talk about our country and what they think about how things happen – on the news – in offices, etc. Have the teachers write it down – verbatim – and send the report to the Congressman’s office. Put the report in a folder with some children’s art on the cover. It will make great reading in the Congressman’s office
  
- Create a once per month success story from a parent, written in his/her own hand, relating the good experiences in Head Start and how that parent/family has been positively impacted by the program. Send the story to your Congressman.
  
- Have the Disabilities Specialist do a brief letter on “I just wanted you to know, Congressman... “ about a special needs child and what is happening for that child. Include photos and success measures.
  
- Hold an open house during one of the legislative recesses (the schedule you got from the Congressman’s office will detail recesses) and invite the Congressman. Name the day the “Congressman Smith” day at the Head Start Center. Get the press out and create a big photo op for the Congressman. Invite the Congressman’s spouse and any children to join him/her.

- If you are opening a new center, a newly renovated center, invite the Congressman to be the keynote speaker; if he can't come send him lots of photos and news releases.
- If you have agency tee shirts, sweat shirts, etc., send one to your Congressman with a note about how well you are doing, and thank him for his support in the process.
- If you have a great peer review, send the Congressman a copy of your letter, with a note letting him know that you take seriously the importance of operating a high quality center, and you are spending tax payer money wisely.
- Send your Congressman some reports about your teachers who are in college – hopefully good grades, etc. State the numbers in training and collective GPA's. Tell them the average age of your teachers in college (bound to be in the 50's), and that they all have families to care for, full time jobs and college work to do – and are doing it for Head Start.
- **LEARN YOUR CONGRESSMAN'S BIRTHDAY.** Have the children send him hand made birthday cards – and **YOU** send him/her a note on a greeting card with your program's logo.
- Try to engage your Congressman or his aides, in a discussion about program funding. . Discuss the impact of budget cuts and how they will affect your program. Discuss how the rising costs of everyday items affect program operations. Tell him/her you need their best thinking on the “best way to proceed, with rising costs and shrinking dollars”, and that “since his district will be affected by whatever you do, you want to proceed in the best possible way; you don't want to deny children and families he services they need, but shrinking dollars will impair quality, and quality is essential to deliver the services of the program”. *This little exchange is designed to arouse his awareness of the bind your program is in with no new money. Give him some ammunition to fight the budget process back at the office!*
- Invite your Congressman's aide to a Policy Council meeting, so they can learn more about internal controls and how governance is a shared partnership between parents and community partners.
- Thank your congressmen for their help in the ARRA funds – COLA, one-time, etc., AND if you got expansion be detailed about how that expansion is helping in your community and the families you are now serving. Tell them what you have done with the expansion money.

**The more your representatives know about Head Start in general and your program specifically, the better advocate you will have in Congress. The more contact they have with you before a crisis, the better chance you have of getting their attention.**