



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

YOUR IMPACT, OUR STORY

ENGAGING PUBLIC OFFICIALS 2024 • YMCA OF THE USA



2023 PHOTO CONTEST WINNER: State Sen. Nick Miller (D-PA) visits the Greater Valley YMCA.

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98%

of congressional staff surveyed indicated that attending district or state events was either somewhat important or very important to helping Members of Congress better understand constituent views and opinions.

(Source: Congressional Management Foundation 2020 survey of congressional staff, including senior managers and communications staffers.)

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

“Great things are done by a series of small things brought together.”

—Vincent Van Gogh

Building and maintaining relationships with public officials should be something you do YEAR-ROUND to tell your Y story, show your impact and help advance policies that strengthen communities.

Why do we need to do this? Public officials make decisions that influence things that happen inside our Ys and things that affect the individuals and families we serve. It's great for them to hear from lobbyists who sit in an office in DC, but really, you know best what your Y and your community needs.

Public officials WANT and NEED to hear from their constituents. If they don't hear from you, they won't have all the information they need to make the best decisions. Reaching out to elected leaders and their staff regularly ensures that you are in control of your own story, rather than letting other people tell it for you.

Interaction with federal lawmakers at home is a key strategy for building relationships. In fact, a Congressional Management Foundation survey asked congressional staff the best way for members of Congress to gain an understanding of constituent views—“attending events in the district/state” was the top answer, with 98% of congressional staff noting its importance. These events paint a picture for the public official—bringing home for them the very real way in which Ys impact the community day in and day out.

There are several opportunities throughout the year to engage public officials at the local, state and federal levels either at your Y, in your community or in their offices. This toolkit focuses primarily on showcasing the Y's impact through visits to your Y.

View the calendar for the
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

View the calendar for the
U.S. SENATE

CONGRESSIONAL RECESS

Congressional recess is when Members of Congress head home to spend time with constituents in their district or state. It is a great opportunity for you to meet with your representative and senators or their staff. Take advantage of these district work periods to invite your Members of Congress to visit your Y and experience firsthand the impact you have on the lives of people in your community. View the calendars for the U.S. House and Senate to learn when your Members of Congress might be home. The summer recess in August and the fall recess in October are great times to invite your Members, but there are also work periods throughout the year.

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

The purpose of this toolkit is to help YMCAs engage public officials at the federal, state, and local level. While talking points and suggestions are written with a federal audience in mind, these strategies can (and should!) also be used with state and local officials. YMCAs can also invite state and local officials to any activities/events you hold with your federal lawmakers!

SHARE YOUR SUCCESS

Don't forget to share photos and stories from your visits with the rest of the Y Movement! Participate in the **Summer Recess Photo Contest**. Submit photos of your members of Congress or other public officials engaging in programs at your Y.

A winner will be selected and receive free registration and hotel for National Advocacy Days in Washington, DC in March 2025. Email your photos to y-usagovernment.relations@ymca.net, or post them with the hashtag #YAdvocate. Be sure to use Y-USA's [photo/video release](#). Photos for the contest will be accepted through October 31.

ELECTION YEAR CONSIDERATIONS

In an election year many public officials who are running for office will be looking for opportunities to campaign. It is important that you do not let an official's visit to your Y become a political event. Please be conscious of the following campaign and election dos and don'ts to ensure that your Y remains nonpartisan and effectively navigates campaign season as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION DOS AND DON'T'S

The federal government sets clear and generous rules to allow not-for-profits to engage in advocacy and lobbying. IRS Code does, however, strictly prohibit "participating or intervening in any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office." YMCAs should also avoid the perception of partisan political activity. Here are a few dos and don'ts regarding political involvement for 501(c)(3) organizations:

DO:

- Remember that you're a private citizen! YMCA staff and volunteers can participate in elections (donate money, volunteer, etc.), provided anything they say or do is as a private citizen and not as a YMCA representative (or taking place at YMCA property).
- Conduct nonpartisan candidate forums to educate voters on candidates and promote civic engagement.
- Extend invitations to all candidates to tour your YMCA and learn more about your mission, community impact and program and services.
- Inform candidates and voters of your YMCA's positions on issues related to your mission.
- Register voters and encourage voting (impartially).
- Offer your facility as a polling location on election day.
- Advocate for legislation, policies or regulations that further your mission, during election time and any other time.

DON'T:

- Participate, endorse, work for or intervene in any campaign (federal, state or local) for or against any political candidate.
- Oppose any candidates or political campaigns.
- Sponsor a political action committee (PAC).
- Give money, in-kind or any other contributions to candidates, parties or political action committees.
- Use federal funds for any political or lobbying purposes.
- Mobilize supporters to elect or defeat candidates.
- Collect and/or distribute candidates' statements, questionnaires, voting records, or sell membership lists to candidates (while legal within specific parameters, it is recommended YMCAs avoid this).



U.S. Representative Erin Houchin (R-IN) at the Southeastern Indiana YMCA.

Hosting Candidates

While it sounds straightforward to avoid endorsing or opposing a candidate for elected office, questions do arise when it comes to hosting candidates. As community leaders and conveners, YMCAs often have candidates (local, state and federal) for public office in our buildings. Sometimes it's the Y issuing the invitation for a public forum and sometimes it's a candidate asking to come to the Y. Whether a person is campaigning for the school board, the state house, or even the presidency, it's just as important to meet the letter of the law as it is to meet the spirit and avoid the perception of partisanship.

THE IRS REQUIRES THAT YOU DON'T:

- Play favorites – if you invite one candidate, invite everyone running for that office (they don't all have to attend). If you rent space to one candidate, allow others.
- Allow use of office services that could be construed as an in-kind contribution.
- Imply endorsement through introductions, t-shirts, buttons, signage, web sites, etc.
- Waive any "customary and usual" room rental rates.

Y-USA ALSO RECOMMENDS THAT YOU CONSIDER:

- Any programs or services that may be displaced.
- If you're renting a space with significant Y signage (like a gym) the Y logo may appear in photos or media reports. Also, the Y will be listed as the location in communications.
- If political fundraising will take place. It's allowed with rental space, but not when the organization invites the candidate for voter education.

The IRS has published a **Frequently Asked Questions about the Ban on Political Campaign Intervention by 501(c)(3) organizations**: https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/501c3_polcampfaqs.pdf

Specific Issues/Ballot Initiatives/Referendums

Legally, public charities can take a stand on local ballot initiatives. Examples may include supporting a smoking ban or a bond for the public schools. A few questions to consider:

- Does this advance the mission of the Y? Often, the Y's endorsement carries great weight in a community. It's okay to remain neutral.
- Is there a perception that this is partisan? If the issue is divisive in the community, take great caution before aligning the Y with one side over another.
- What do your CVO and board think?
- Y-USA has resources available to assist with these strategic conversations:
 - » [Engaging in Community Dialogue](#)
 - » [Strategic Issue Assessment: Ten questions to ask before taking a public position on an issue](#)

Always consult your board to discuss options and prepare to defend your position in the media and with members. Please contact Y-USA's Government Relations and Public Policy Office to discuss any specific circumstances.

Voter Registration and Civic Engagement

The Y has a long, proud history of promoting civic engagement. It is an essential part of our cause to strengthen communities.

- Nonprofits like the Y reach people who are typically underrepresented in the political process—young people, lower-income individuals, and ethnic and racial minorities—and historically participate at lower rates.
- Voting is associated with a host of positive benefits for both community members and nonprofit organizations like the Y. According to The Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement, voters are more likely to volunteer, contact their elected officials, and stay informed about local affairs. Voting also helps strengthen social ties and improves health.
- Y-USA wants to make it easy for your Y to participate in voter engagement activities! Find [civic engagement resources on Link](#), including the Y's Voter Registration Toolkit, graphics, sample social media posts and more. Find online voter registration tools at ymca.org/vote.

ENGAGING PUBLIC OFFICIALS AT YOUR Y

YOU'RE INVITED

There is no better way to show the Y's impact in your community than by inviting a public official into your Y. Here are some ideas for themes and key messages that will resonate with your elected officials and tie back to legislative priorities that will advance the Y's cause of strengthening communities:

Invite a public official to serve breakfast, lunch or a snack at your **SUMMER OR AFTERSCHOOL FOOD PROGRAM(S)** or to participate in an enrichment activity alongside a meal.

Key messages

- The Y works to address child hunger by providing healthy meals and snacks to hundreds of thousands of youth nationwide through the USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) for afterschool meals and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSFP) for summer meals. Be sure to mention how your Y:
 - » Serves as a **USDA food sponsor (or site) responsible for food distribution and administration.**
 - » **Partners with other local organizations to do this work (food banks, schools, faith-based organizations, farms, etc.).**
 - » **Expanded and adjusted to creatively meet community need during the COVID-19 pandemic and in its aftermath.**
 - » **Participates in USDA's new, rural "meals to go" program – or why you have been unable to do so.**
- Alongside these meals, the Y offers enrichment programming to complement and support youth development and to increase nutritional quality and physical activity among youth during the out-of-school time.
- The Y's efforts to feed children help to ensure their healthy development, including academic and social-emotional growth, so that children are better able to learn when they are in school and are less at risk for summer learning loss and adverse health outcomes.
- **In 2023, Ys provided about 35 million USDA meals and snacks to nearly 1.5 million youth at 6,000 sites.**
- Continuing these important federal investments will ensure that the children you just met—and millions more—will continue to have access to healthy meals and snacks when school is out.

Ask your Member of Congress to help increase access to summer and afterschool snack and meal programs by supporting the Summer Meals Act, which would streamline childhood nutrition programs and increase access to meals and programs for kids in need.

Invite a public official to visit your **EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTER** and engage children in an enrichment activity. Consider having your young readers read to the public official, or ask your official to participate in an art or fitness activity.

Key messages

- Community-based organizations have great expertise in early childhood education. Ys have in-depth knowledge of early childhood development as well as the capacity and infrastructure to deliver high quality programs and take them to scale.
- The Y is proud to help provide young children in our community with a strong foundation to ensure they're ready for kindergarten.
- We believe the Y has a role in helping to prepare children for academic and lifelong success and supporting working families by delivering quality early learning programs.
- Our Y programs provide parents the comfort of knowing their children are in safe, healthy environments that support their growth and development while they work or pursue training opportunities.
- Our Y plays a critical role in this community by:
 - » **Serving infants, toddlers, and/or preschoolers.**
 - » **Offering full workday and/or part-day programs for families year-round.**
 - » **Providing Head Start and/or Early Head Start, state-funded preschool, or participating in the state's child care subsidy program.**
 - » **Supporting children as they transition from our early childhood programs to elementary school.**
 - » **Linking our early childhood education programs to local economic development or military readiness initiatives.**
- We also help make quality care affordable to families by participating in the state's child care subsidy program, which helps to ensure equitable access to early learning programs for families in our state.
- Early childhood education is a resource for the whole family; young children and their families need to learn and grow together, and participation in YMCA programs achieves just this.

Ask your public officials to support investments in early childhood education, especially the Child Care and Development Block Grant (which funds your state's child care subsidy program) and Head Start.

YOU'RE INVITED

Invite a public official to visit your **AFTERSCHOOL AND SUMMER DAY OR RESIDENT CAMP PROGRAMS** and participate in enrichment activities.

Key messages

- The Y plays a critical role in providing the enrichment and academic support youth need to cultivate the values, skills and relationships that lead to positive behaviors, better health and educational achievement.
- Afterschool and summer day and resident camp programs strengthen achievement, belonging and relationships—the core drivers facilitating the healthy development of youth.
- Afterschool and summer programs are key strategies in boosting in-school success, building and nurturing 21st century skills, developing character, building peer relationships, preparing kids for college and career, supporting physical wellness and mental health, and helping to meet the needs of the whole child. They also help kids build resilience and can help mitigate the effects of trauma.
- Our Y is working to expand opportunities and improve the engagement, educational readiness and wellness of youth in our community by:
 - » Providing enriching experiences that help youth explore their interests, discover their passions, test new skills, and build character.
 - » Partnering with area schools to deliver locally-designed afterschool and summer programs using 21st Century Community Learning Center funds.
 - » Accelerating learning to prepare students for success in school and beyond.
 - » Strengthening adult practices, because it's the adults who create the positive youth development environments and experiences that nurture young people.
 - » Investing in OST programs that have positive, lasting effects on academic success and physical & emotional well-being by implementing evidence-based and evidence-informed programs and practices.
 - » Serving as a career launching pad for youth by providing workforce training and employment opportunities for young people to serve as summer camp counselors, lifeguards, or in other staff roles.
- We help make quality OST programs affordable by participating in the state's child care subsidy program, which helps to ensure equitable access to afterschool and summer day camp programs.

Ask your public official to support out-of-school time programs. Specifically, ask your Member of Congress to support the highest level of funding possible for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program and the Child Care and Development Block Grant.

Invite public officials to observe **SAFETY AROUND WATER** programs at day or resident camps.

Key messages

- The Y has been committed to water safety throughout its history.
 - » The world's first indoor swimming pool was opened at the Brooklyn, NY, Central YMCA in September 1885.
 - » In 1906, George Carson, a Detroit YMCA staffer, invented the first group swimming lesson and went on to teach over 800 boys how to swim in just four weeks in Newark, NJ.
 - » During WWI, the Y taught soldiers how to swim.
 - » Today the Y continues to be the nation's swim instructor and delivers critical programming to prevent drownings among children and youth.
- Drowning is a silent crisis in communities across the country. Every year, approximately 4,000 people in the U.S. die from drownings—including an estimated 730 children. Thousands more are hospitalized as a result of near-drownings or nonfatal drowning incidents.
- Drowning disproportionately impacts children of color: 64% of Black children and 45% of Hispanic children cannot swim, compared to 40% of white children.
- Drowning is the leading cause of death for 0–4 year olds and the second leading cause of death for children ages 5–14.
- The Y is committed to reducing water-related injuries, particularly in communities where children are most at risk.
- The Safety Around Water program is a standardized program to reach children, ages 4 to 14, at risk of drowning and teach them basic water safety skills.
- Each year, hundreds of thousands of children learn to swim through a YMCA program. National organizations like the Y can further scale safe swimming programs that help all children at risk of drowning.

Ask your Member of Congress to support a bipartisan request to increase funding to \$5 million for drowning prevention at CDC's National Center on Injury Prevention and Control so more kids can learn water safety skills.

Invite a public official to meet with participants from a **CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION OR MANAGEMENT PROGRAM**. Ask participants to share what class is like and how it has impacted their health.

Key messages

- Chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, chronic lung diseases, stroke, Alzheimer's disease, and type 2 diabetes, account for the most deaths in the United States and globally. Chronic diseases are responsible for 7 in 10 deaths among Americans each year and the vast majority of costs to the health care system.
- Six in 10 adults in the U.S. have at least one chronic condition, and four in 10 have two or more. Key risk factors for chronic disease include poor nutrition, lack of physical activity and tobacco use.
- The Y works closely with CDC's Chronic Center and foundations to lead and coordinate efforts that improve quality of life, increase life expectancy and reduce health care costs for Americans across the lifespan by testing, implementing and scaling evidence-based and evidence-informed health programs, including the National Diabetes Prevention Program, LIVESTRONG® at the YMCA, Enhance®Fitness, YMCA Blood Pressure Self-Monitoring, and Healthy Weight and Your Child.
- Health and well-being programs are part of the Y's DNA. Be sure to share any innovative healthy living programs your Y is delivering in the community, whether it's an evidence-based program or a newer evidence-informed program making a difference in the lives of community members.
- **Visit Link** to find a fact sheet on your state's chronic disease burden to help you make the case for prevention and public health funding.
- Each one of the following programs has been shown to improve the health of participants. These programs can help restore health to millions of Americans and help the nation save billions of dollars in health costs. And many of these programs have received support from the CDC.
 - » **Ys are the largest in-person provider of the National Diabetes Prevention Program, which has been shown to prevent the incidence of type 2 diabetes by 58% for some of the 96 million Americans living with prediabetes.**
 - » **Ys deliver the Blood Pressure Self-Monitoring Program, which helps some of the 110 million Americans living with hypertension prevent heart disease and strokes.**
 - » **Ys advance Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity Initiatives to promote walking, biking and rolling in communities and strategies to increase access to healthy affordable foods to prevent and control obesity.**
 - » **Ys offer Healthy Weight and Your Child—a family-based lifestyle health program for children living with obesity. More than 20% of U.S. children live with obesity.**
 - » **Ys support some of the 54 million Americans living with arthritis through the Enhance®Fitness Program, which reduces arthritis pain, increases flexibility and improves quality of life.**
 - » **Ys support some of the 18 million Americans living with, through and beyond cancer with LIVESTRONG® at the YMCA—an evidence-based physical activity program for cancer survivors.**
- If you don't have one of these programs at your Y, be sure to make the case that additional funding for the Chronic Center at CDC could help make that happen and could support other innovative programs Ys are delivering!
- Find additional information about these programs [on Link here.](#)

Ask your Member of Congress to support the highest level of funding possible for CDC's National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion to address the nation's leading causes of death and disability and to reverse the deep health disparities in chronic disease unmasked by the COVID-19 pandemic.

YOU'RE INVITED

Here are some additional ideas for building relationships with your Members of Congress and other public officials during Summer Recess:

- **Host a forum on an issue important to your community.** The Y is both a convener and leader around issues related to our areas of impact. Hold an event (virtual or in person) where other community leaders join you to discuss the issue and invite the member of Congress as a special guest. These types of events can be open to the public or by invitation only.
- **Arrange a meeting with youth** participating in Achievers, Leaders Club, Youth and Government, etc. Empower the youth participants to steer the conversation!
- **Schedule a meeting with your member of Congress virtually or in their district office.** Building and enhancing relationships with your members of Congress does not have to take a lot of time. A short office visit or virtual meeting is a great opportunity to connect one-on-one or in a small group. Consider inviting a board member or a program participant with a compelling story to tell, or even a local partner/collaborator that can speak to your community impact. Don't be disappointed if you end up meeting with staff. Remember, their role is to be a liaison with the community, and they will brief the Member and help coordinate meetings for the Member in the future—next time it could be at the Y!
- **Attend town hall meetings or other public events that the Member is hosting.** If you are unable to schedule a meeting or host your own event/tour, consider going to an event that the Member is hosting, or one at which they are scheduled to appear. Take whatever opportunity might present itself to make a short introduction so they know the Y is present.
- **Help public officials connect constituents to services.** Public officials are looking for resources they can share with their constituents about support services and volunteer opportunities. Share information about what is available at your Y so they can help amplify the message.
- **Illustrate the Y's community benefit.** Illustrating the Y's community benefit as a nonprofit is always important. Be prepared to educate public officials about what the Y is doing to support the community, especially in response to a crisis.

THE POWER OF PARTNERS

Consider how you can incorporate your Y's partners into an elected official visit! So many Y programs are made possible because Ys work with nonprofit, government, and private sector partners in our communities. Here are some ideas of how to bring partners into the conversation:

- » **Invite the partners that made a featured program possible** when an elected official is coming to visit.
- » **If an elected official is coming to discuss a specific topic area, invite partners who are also doing work in that space.** For example, invite local health department partners to join a conversation about diabetes prevention.
- » **If your Y is in the process of requesting an earmark, invite your project partners and/or any partners who wrote a letter of support.** You could also invite any partners who are providing matching funds!
- » **Consider hosting a roundtable with other community nonprofits** to discuss issues like the charitable deduction or topics that are top of mind for the community.



U.S. Representative Sara Jacobs (D-CA) at the San Diego YMCA.

HOSTING A PUBLIC OFFICIAL AT YOUR Y

Public officials want to hear from the Y. Inviting them to visit your Y is an effective opportunity to educate them on how the Y impacts and strengthens communities every day. Ys are encouraged to meet with and host Members of Congress, as well as state and local policymakers, to deepen relationships, advocate in support of legislation, showcase model programs and to share the Y story to illustrate our impact.

THE INVITATION

STEP 1.

First, make your request by email to the scheduler. Be sure to send along a program brochure or some background materials about your Y. Immediately follow up the initial request with a phone call to the Member's local district/state office and Washington, D.C., office. If the scheduler is unavailable, leave a message and follow up with another phone call. ([Sample invitation letter](#))

- Tell the scheduler you have emailed an invitation for the Member to visit your Y and learn more about a specific program that impacts the community, or a variety of programs, during the next congressional recess.
- Suggest specific times and dates during the congressional recess. It is ideal to schedule the visit when your programs are in full swing, but be flexible.
- It is helpful to have a copy of the invitation letter when you call the Member's office.
- Be clear in your request. Include logistics (time, place, location) and a designated point of contact. Also share any relevant safety protocols.
- Paint a picture of what the event will look like.
- Be sure to mention your impact in the district and why the meeting is important.
- Point out how your Y's program(s) relate to the Member's interests (improving academic achievement, making communities healthier, etc.).
- Get to know the person on the phone—they are a key relationship. They may end up preparing the Member for the meeting and can help set the tone for the visit.
- Be sure to mention that Y staff and members will be on hand for the visit and offer to invite media as well.
- Ask if the policymaker might have time for media availability before or after the visit (if appropriate).

STEP 2.

One week before the visit, call to confirm the date and time with the scheduler and ask for the name and contact number of the staff who will be accompanying the Member. Be sure to find out how much time you will have with the elected official.

PREPARE FOR THE VISIT

STEP 3.

Identify board members, youth, volunteers, program participants or staff who can tell the Y story effectively.

You should aim to have a small group of about 4–6 people for the meeting portion of the visit for the most effective outcome.

Be prepared. One of the most important pre-meeting activities is planning out how the visit will proceed. Meet with YMCA participants to make sure everyone is clear about the goals and purpose before the visit.

- **Research:** Review the senator or representative's website to learn more about their background interests—you may have a common personal connection! For federal officials, reach out to Y-USA's Government Relations and Policy Office to learn more about the Member and where the Member stands on our federal legislative priorities. [Learn more about Y-USA's 2024 Advocacy Agenda.](#)
- **Delegate:** Assign roles to each member of the group. One person should be the lead facilitator/greeter, while others should tell a compelling story, share specific data or examples and ask for support, if appropriate. Designate a member of the group to take notes during the visit for future reference.

STEP 4.

Create informational packets. The packets should include your community benefit fact sheet (your state community benefit fact sheet as well), annual report, press release, program/schedule of visit and brochure about programs and initiatives. You may also want to include copies of any articles, youth essays, parent letters, awards or other documents that highlight your Y's programs or community impact.

Be flexible. Keep in mind that the legislator's schedule can change without notice. If he or she is no longer available, request that a member of their staff visit your Y instead or reschedule for another time.

HOSTING A PUBLIC OFFICIAL AT YOUR Y

STEP 5.

Create a proposed schedule. Tailor the visit based on the length of time allotted. The congressional office will appreciate this in advance of the visit and will likely request it.

Sample

Proposed Schedule for One-Hour Visit: Lunch with Summer Food Program Participants

Noon

Representative or Senator arrives at the Y and is greeted by the CEO, Board Chair or State Alliance Chair.

12:05–12:45 p.m.

Lunch with children/families. Representative or Senator talks with youth, parents, staff, etc. Plan for key photo opportunities, especially with the Y logo displayed.

For example, ask parents to share their perspectives on the program’s value, have a local principal talk about students’ increased attendance and improved behavior as a result of their participation in your programs.

12:45–1:00p.m.

Facilitate a discussion about the Summer Food Program, including key messages that tie back to the legislative priorities/key messages highlighted above. Showcase aspects of your community benefit data, such as financial assistance, as you tour programs supported by such initiatives, like early childhood or afterschool programs.

Educate the representative or senator about things they may not know about the Y. Of key importance is the fact that the Y is a charity, that it is inclusive, and that no one is turned away for an inability to pay.

1:00 p.m.

Thank the Representative or Senator and their staff for visiting your Y. Let them know if you have plans to attend future National Advocacy Days, and that you will make a future appointment with their office.

STEP 6.

Engage media. Ask the congressional office if it is okay to invite media. Work with the Member’s press staff to send a media alert to invite press and to prepare a press release for the day of the event. **(Sample media alert and press release)**

INVITING A MEMBER OF CONGRESS TO VISIT YOUR YMCA:

Helpful Hints

On average, a U.S. Representative will receive approximately 20 requests per week to attend events or meetings in their district—many will be turned down. In 2014 the Congressional Management Foundation surveyed key congressional staff to identify best practices for in-district events. Here are some tips based on that survey to increase the chance that your Member will visit your Y or attend your event:

- Be flexible with timing. Timing of your event and whether it conflicts with other events on the calendar is the top logistical factor that influences scheduling decisions. Work with the public official’s staff to identify a day and time that works best. Provide them with some options to ensure they are visiting at a time when they will be able to see your programs in action.
- When you call to schedule the visit, mention that there will be constituents present. This is one of the top strategic factors that matter to a policy-maker when making scheduling decisions (the number of VIPs attending was the least important).
- Avoid last minute requests. According to the staff surveyed by CMF, the ideal time to make a request is:

More than 6 weeks	Town hall-style meeting
5–6 weeks	Formal speech or community event (parade/festival/rally)
3–4 weeks	Site visit, district meeting, meeting outside the district office, informal talk, issue forum/conference/roundtable
1–2 weeks	News conference

- Check with the elected official’s office before inviting media.
- Be understanding. If for some reason a visit is not possible during your preferred timeframe, indicate your understanding, and mention that you’d like to keep in touch and schedule a visit at a future time.

HOSTING A PUBLIC OFFICIAL AT YOUR Y

STEP 7.

Get a camera. Share the photos with your local newspaper, feature them in your Y or State Alliance newsletter, and post them on Facebook and X with the hashtag #YAdvocate or in a spotlight on your website. Participate in Y-USA's Summer Recess Photo Contest to win free registration and hotel stay for 2025 National Advocacy Days.

Please use Y-USA's photo/video release. It must be signed by all participants of the event. If children are involved, parents must sign in advance. The Y-USA photo release must be signed in advance in order for Y-USA to be able to share your photo with others. **Your YMCA release is not sufficient for this purpose.**

STEP 8.

Notify the Government Relations and Policy Office.

Send an email to y-usagovernment.relations@ymca.net to let our office know about the upcoming congressional visit. Be sure to inform the Government Relations Office of any necessary staff follow-up they should conduct.

DURING THE VISIT

On the day of the visit, wait outside the Y to greet and direct the representative or senator, media and visitors to the right location. Be sure to distribute the informational packets to all attendees.

TIPS

- Welcome and introduce the representative or senator to the group. Explain who is present, including title/position. If the person is a volunteer, be sure to highlight the vital role that volunteers play at the Y.
- Respect the legislator's schedule—start on time and stay on schedule. Be prepared to end the tour early, if necessary.
- Stay positive when conversations turn contentious. Phrases such as, "I certainly see how the issue might be viewed that way; however, if I may add..." may create an opportunity to continue the dialogue.
- Ask what the Y can do to help advance or be a resource to a cause supported by the Member of Congress or other elected official.
- Remember the purpose of this visit goes beyond discussing the issues; it is also to establish a lasting relationship with the Member and their staff.
- Encourage the Member to participate in an activity.

AFTER THE VISIT

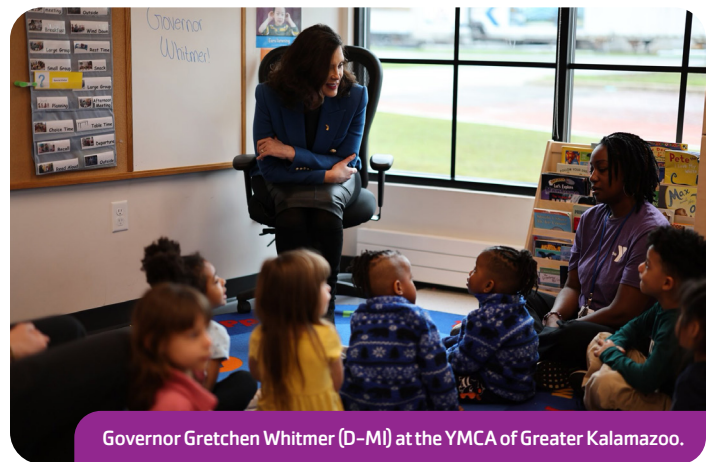
STEP 9.

Send a personalized thank you letter with a picture from the visit to the Member. ([Sample thank you letter](#))

TIPS

- If you volunteered to send follow-up information or if new information emerges, send it with the thank you letter. It never hurts to include any media coverage mentioning the Member's visit to your Y. It will serve as a helpful reminder of the pleasant visit and reinforces the relationship.
- Add the Member and staff to your email and snail mail distribution list—newsletter, press release and relevant events. Even if the Member is unable to attend, it is a great way to share the important work your Y is doing and to keep the Y on their radar screen.
- Check the Member's social media after the event to see if they post about their visit to the Y. If they do, reshare their post and thank them!

Please also log your facility visit and topline notes for Y-USA's records using this form.



SCHEDULE AN OFFICE OR VIRTUAL VISIT WITH A PUBLIC OFFICIAL

Members of Congress want to be responsive to their constituents and their needs. Developing personal, ongoing relationships with your elected officials is the most effective way to secure their support on the critical community issues in the Y's areas of impact. You can build these relationships through in-person or virtual meetings with Members of Congress or their staff.

SCHEDULE YOUR CONGRESSIONAL MEETING

Senators and representatives are eager to get to know their constituents, especially organizations with the deep community reach of the Y. They may not have the time to visit your Y, but that should not stop you from connecting with them. A meeting in a state/district office or a virtual visit is a key time to update the Member on current needs of the community and what the Y is doing to address those needs. The Y can play a vital role in educating legislators about a variety of issues, including our expertise in the areas of youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Therefore, you are a valuable resource to the senator or representative and their staff. Follow these steps to schedule a meeting with your elected official:

STEP 1.

Locate your representative or senators [HERE](#): Please try to meet with all three of your Members of Congress at some point during the year, especially during congressional recess.

STEP 2.

Submit a meeting request in writing by email.

([Sample meeting request letter](#)) In the letter, include what you would like to discuss and the names and titles of those planning to meet with the representative or senator.

STEP 3.

Call their district office and ask to speak to the scheduler to arrange a meeting. Prior to calling, determine the dates and times that will work for the meeting attendees. While on the phone, get to know the staff—they are a key relationship!

STEP 4.

Choose the meeting participants carefully for maximum impact. Remember, too large of a group can be counterproductive. Include:

- Volunteers—they are at the heart of the Y Movement and are our best advocates;
- Staff who are involved in the issue or program and who will stay involved;
- Consider a Youth and Government, Y Achievers or Leaders Club youth participant.

PREPARE FOR THE MEETING

STEP 5.

Meet with YMCA participants to make sure everyone is clear about the goals and purpose before the meeting. Consider the following:

- If a group, clarify who will take the lead or who will stress particular points.
 - » Who will open the meeting?
 - » Who will share specific data, research or other information? Remember to keep it brief.
 - » Who will share a compelling personal story?
 - » Who will ask for the Member's support (in voting for a bill, talking with colleagues, sponsoring legislation, etc.) if appropriate?
 - » Who will ask about next steps: day-to-day point of contact? Timing of when you should hear from his/her office?
 - » Who will take notes during the meeting?
 - » Who will be responsible for follow-up on information requests?
- Review the senator or representative's website to learn more about the Member and their interests—you may have a common personal connection! It is also valuable to know where the Member stands on legislative issues. [Learn more about Y-USA's 2024 Advocacy Agenda.](#)

REPORT YOUR EVENTS AND MEETINGS

Please help us keep track of meetings and events with public officials. Use our quick "[Log an Interaction](#)" form to tell us about the visit. Or, send us an email at y-usagovernment.relations@ymca.net.

SCHEDULE AN OFFICE VISIT WITH A PUBLIC OFFICIAL

STEP 6.

Bring or prepare informational materials to leave with the legislator and staff. A one-pager that outlines your Y's programs and accomplishments is best.

TIPS

- Be sure your contact information is easy to find.
- For a virtual visit, save your one-pager in PDF format.
- Include general information, such as a flyer or brochure showing the impact of the YMCA in your state or community. This material should highlight the YMCA's charitable status and community benefit.

STEP 7.

Take a camera. Share the photos with local media, insert them in the Y newsletter, feature them in the state alliance newsletter and post them to your social media (make sure to use [#YAdvocate](#)), or on your website. Participate in Y-USA's Summer Recess Photo Contest to win free registration and hotel stay for the 2025 National Advocacy Days.

STEP 8.

Log your meeting. Please help us keep track of meetings and events with public officials. Use our quick ["Log an Interaction"](#) form to tell us about the visit.

Y-USA Government Relations and Policy staff are here to help. If an issue comes up during the meeting that you are unaware of, let the legislator know you will follow up with them on our position within a few days. Immediately contact the Government Relations and Policy Office to seek input or guidance on the issue. Email y-usagovernment.relations@ymca.net.

DAY OF THE MEETING

TIPS

- Be well-prepared, friendly and positive in your message, even if your legislator does not share your perspective. It is important that they understand the basis for your position.
- Remember, you have knowledge and expertise to share, as well as front-line news from the community.
- Do not forget a call to action and bring in a one-page fact sheet on the issue(s). How might the Member support Y-USA's legislative priorities in areas of mutual concern?
- Offer to provide relevant follow-up contact or materials after the meeting.
- Thank your legislator and his or her staff for their time and any commitments they made during the meeting.

AFTER THE MEETING

STEP 9.

Send a personalized thank you letter with a picture from the meeting (if one was taken) to the Member. ([Sample thank you letter](#))

TIPS

- If new information emerges, send it with the thank you letter. It will serve as a helpful reminder of the pleasant visit and reinforces the relationship.
- Add the Member and staff to your email and snail mail distribution list—newsletter, press release and relevant events. Even if the Member is unable to attend, it is a great way to share the important work your Y is doing and to keep the Y on their radar.
- Check the Member's social media after the event to see if they post about their meeting with the Y. If they do, reshare their post and thank them!

TIPS FOR VIRTUAL MEETINGS

Virtual meetings are an effective way to share your Y's story! Scheduling and preparing for virtual meetings is very similar to the process for face-to-face meetings. Here are additional tips for a virtual environment:

- When speaking with the scheduler, ask if their congressional office has a preferred virtual platform (Zoom, Teams, etc.) and if the office would prefer to host the meeting or to receive an invite from the Y.
- Many people can attend a virtual meeting, but limit the speaking roles to four people or fewer. If you are planning to have more than four people join the call, check in with the congressional office to see if they are okay with a larger call (clarify that only four people will have speaking roles).
- The senator or representative may be able to join only a portion of your meeting, depending on his or her schedule. It is normal for a Member of Congress to leave a meeting early or join partway through. Be flexible and mindful of time!
- Prepare PDF versions of your leave-behind materials and email them to the staff on the call. Do not rely on the chat feature of the platform to share these resources.
- Be mindful that staff often keep their video turned off.

CUSTOMIZABLE MATERIALS

In this section you will find customizable materials to communicate with your Member of Congress or elected official. **Please note that these materials are drafted for in-person events and may need to be customized for a virtual interaction.**

Sample Invitation Letter



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

[Date]

The Honorable [First Name & Last Name]

U.S. House of Representatives OR U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515 (for U.S. House) 20510 (for U.S. Senate)

Dear Senator or Representative [Last Name]:

On behalf of [Name of YMCA], I would like to invite you and your staff to visit [our Y OR program OR attend an event (name event, for example, Summer Food Program, Early Childhood Program OR the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program)]. We'd be honored if you would participate in the program by (example of activity such as having lunch with Food Program participants). Members of our staff and volunteers from our community will be there to discuss all that the Y is doing to strengthen community through nurturing the potential of youth, promoting healthy living and fostering a sense of social responsibility in [city or community]. Your visit will include (be specific about activities). If your schedule permits, may we suggest that you visit on [DATE]. [If other elected officials will be present or have been invited, be sure to provide that information. For example: We have also invited Mayor Jones and the members of the City Commission. If the visit is intended to take place during a specific event at the Y—such as Healthy Kids Day—be sure to spell that out with details of the event, such as notable attendees and the number of people expected to attend].

[Provide more information about the program or topic that will be highlighted during the visit. You can also use this space to talk about concerns in the community and what the Y is doing to respond to community needs.]

We appreciate your leadership in helping youth and families in our community learn, grow and thrive, and we know you will find support for your efforts at the Y. Let me thank you in advance for considering my request. I look forward to seeing you in [INSERT MONTH OF VISIT].

Sincerely,

[Name]
[Position]
[YMCA]

YMCA NAME
123 Anystreet, Anytown US 99999
P 888 888 8888 F 222 222 2222 ymcaofanytown.net

Request A Meeting At Your Elected Official's Office



**FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

[Date]

The Honorable **[First Name & Last Name]**

U.S. House of Representatives OR U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515 (for U.S. House) 20510 (for U.S. Senate)

Dear Senator or Representative **[Last Name]**:

As the **[your title]** of the **[name of your local YMCA]**, I would like to request a meeting with you on **[DATE OF THE MEETING]** between **[INSERT TIME RANGE, I.E, BETWEEN 10AM-5PM]** in your **[State/District Office]**. Joining me will be **[name and title of any volunteers/youth leaders that will be coming with you]**, who serves on the YMCA's board of directors **[or some other capacity]**.

During our meeting, I would like to discuss the YMCA's legislative goals: 1) controlling chronic disease and health care spending by preventing obesity, diabetes and heart disease, 2) investing in the nation's youth by supporting early learning, afterschool and summer learning, and 3) preserving the charitable contribution tax deduction. As one of the leading charitable organizations in the country, the YMCA is also committed to advancing legislative reforms that will help ensure the entire nonprofit sector is held to the highest standards of governance, accountability and transparency. I look forward to sharing some of our local success stories with you and learning about how I can be a resource to you and your staff on issues affecting our community.

Please contact me at **[include phone number or email address]** and let me know what time is convenient for you to meet on **[DATE OF THE MEETING]**. I look forward to hearing from you soon and seeing you in **[STATE LOCATION OF MEETING]**.

Sincerely,

**[Name]
[Position]
[YMCA]**

YMCA NAME
123 Anystreet, Anytown US 99999
P 888 888 8888 **F** 222 222 2222 ymcaofanytown.net

Thank You Letter



**FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY**

[Date]

The Honorable **[First Name & Last Name]**

U.S. House of Representative OR U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515 (for U.S. House) 20510 (for U.S. Senate)

Dear Senator or Representative **[Last Name]**:

Thank you for taking time to visit the **[INSERT FACTS ABOUT THE PROGRAM OR HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE VISIT]** at the **[NAME OF Y]** **[INSERT MEETING HIGHLIGHTS]** on **[DATE OF VISIT/MEETING]**. It was good to hear your ideas regarding **[INSERT ISSUE]** and to share with you how the YMCA strengthens our community.

Again, thank you for visiting our Y [OR meeting with us to hear about our Y], and we hope you enjoyed your time with [our Y children, hearing from Y staff or YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program participants]. I look forward to working closely with you to help nurture the potential of kids, promote healthy living and foster a sense of social responsibility within our community.

Sincerely,

**[Name]
[Position]
[YMCA]**

Enclosure: Picture from **[your visit to the Y OR Congressional meeting]**

YMCA NAME
123 Anystreet, Anytown US 99999
P 888 888 8888 F 222 222 2222 ymcaofanytown.net

MEDIA RESOURCES

In this section you will find customizable media resources to alert the press about your visit from the Member of Congress. You will also find the Y-USA photo release form. Whether or not you invite the press, a press release is a great way to say thank you and reinforce promises made during the visit. Be sure to include some pictures with your release. You can also adapt this release into an article for your newsletter. If your Member of Congress is running for re-election, be careful to thank them for specific legislative actions rather than providing an endorsement. **Please note that these materials are drafted for in-person events and may need to be customized.**

Customizable Media Alert



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

[Name]
[Name of YMCA]
[Phone]
[E-mail]

****MEDIA ALERT/PHOTO OPPORTUNITY****

[Rep. /Sen. Name] to Tour [Name of YMCA] on [Day of Tour]

WHAT: [INSERT SEN. /REP. NAME] will visit the [NAME OF YMCA] to [INSERT ACTIVITY THAT MEMBER WILL PARTICIPATE IN AT YOUR YMCA].

WHO: [List attendees: SENATOR, REPRESENTATIVE, YMCA CEO, BOARD MEMBERS, COMMUNITY LEADERS, etc.]

WHEN: [INSERT TIME]

WHERE: [INSERT LOCATION. Be sure to include the zip code as many media use online map services to get directions to your location.]

CONTACT: [INCLUDE NAME, PHONE NUMBER, E-MAIL].

###

Customizable News Release



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:
[Name]
[Name of YMCA]
[Phone]
[E-mail]

[Senator/Representative Name] Visits [Name of YMCA] to [Name Program/Activity]

[CITY/COMMUNITY, DATE]—Today, [Senator/Representative NAME] visited the [NAME OF YMCA] to get a firsthand look at the [INSERT PROGRAM OR ACTIVITY] that demonstrates the Y's work to nurture the potential of youth, improve our communities' health and give back to our neighbors in [NAME OF CITY]. [Provide more information about the activity, program or topic discussed during the visit.]

"One of the best ways to tackle [closing the achievement gap, obesity, etc.] is when we work side-by-side with our neighbors, community partners and elected officials," says [CEO], [TITLE], [NAME OF YMCA]. [INSERT SPECIFIC BACKGROUND INFORMATION {For example, Senator Boxer has been a long-standing leader and ally for after school programs and supports the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Programs, greatly benefitting Ys.}]

[QUOTE FROM THE SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE]

[SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE NAME] was greeted by [NAME OF EACH PERSON AND TITLE].

As an advocate of the Y, [SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE NAME] plans to:

[List the priorities/issues he/she agreed to champion. If available, include facts or data to support.]

- Support funding to nurture youth by [supporting robust federal investments in the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC)].
- Improve the nation's health and well-being by [supporting the National Diabetes Prevention Program at CDC, supporting funding that seeks to strengthen communities with opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity].
- Oppose any caps or limits to the charitable tax deduction, because Ys are committed to providing support to our neighbors and opportunities for kids, adults and families to learn, grow and thrive.

For more information about the [NAME OF YMCA], visit [website] or contact [name of staff person] at [telephone number and/or e-mail].

###

End with your YMCA's boilerplate (e.g.: About the [name of YMCA]), or use the following.

About the Y

The Y is one of the nation's leading nonprofits strengthening communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Across the U.S., 2,687 Ys engage 21 million men, women and children – regardless of age, income or background – to nurture the potential of children and teens, improve the nation's health and well-being, and provide opportunities to give back and support neighbors. Anchored in more than 10,000 communities, the Y has the long-standing relationships and physical presence not just to promise, but to deliver, lasting personal and social change. ymca.net

Y-USA Photo Release



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

YMCA PHOTO/AUDIO VISUAL/NARRATIVE RELEASE

I am 18 years of age or older and, if not, my parent or legal guardian has also provided their consent by signing below.

Consent & License. For my participation in activities to be conducted by the National Council of Young Men's Christian Associations of the United States of America ("YMCA of the USA") or any of its chartered member associations in the United States (collectively "the Y"), and collaborating third parties, I consent, now and for all time, to the making, reproduction, editing, broadcasting or rebroadcasting of:

- video film or footage of me,
- sound track recordings of me
- photo reproductions of me
- any narrative account of my experience

My consent includes a perpetual license to the Y and collaborating third-parties for the use of the above materials for publication, display, sale or exhibition in promotions, advertising, education and commercial uses. Use includes reproductions in any form and media currently existing or later conceived, adaptations and/or revisions, throughout the world in perpetuity.

I understand and agree there may be no additional compensation for this license, and I will not make any claim for payment of any kind from the Y or collaborating third-parties. I may, or may not be, identified in such licensed uses; however, my name will not be used to endorse any particular products or services.

Ownership, Confidentiality, and Shared Use. With respect to any of the above uses, I further agree:

- All works shall belong to YMCA of the USA;
- The Y has no duty of confidentiality regarding any licensed uses;
- YMCA of the USA shall exclusively own all known or later existing rights to the uses throughout the world;
- The Y and collaborating third-parties may use any video film, footage, sound track recordings and photo reproductions of me and/or my narrative account for any purpose without additional compensation to me.

Release from Liability. I agree that my consent is irrevocable. I hereby release and discharge The Y and collaborating third-parties, from any and all claims, actions, lawsuits or demands of any kind arising out of my consent, license grants, uses, or the shared uses of any works or materials referenced herein.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Printed Name: _____ Age: _____

Address: _____

I am the parent or legal guardian of (child's name). I hereby consent and grant the licenses detailed in the foregoing on behalf of my minor child.

Signature of parent or legal guardian: _____

Printed name: _____

YMCA OF THE USA
101 N Wacker Drive, Chicago IL 60606
P 800 872 9622 F 312 977 9063 ymca.net

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MEDIA RESOURCES

SHARE THE VISIT!

After a visit, highlight the interactions with your public official(s) to further strengthen your relationship. Include photos and articles in your member newsletters, on your website and in your annual report. Don't forget to share photos with your social media followers, and check to see if the elected official(s) post about the visit from their accounts as well. If so, share their posts with a thank you!

Samples

- Thank you @[official's handle] for visiting @[Y handle] today! Looking forward to working with you to strengthen our community by [TOPIC, ex: improving access to afterschool programs]. #YAdvocate
- Can't wait to meet with @[official's handle] this week and share @[YMCA handle]'s accomplishments in providing meals for kids and families! We served over [number] meals [in 2021] and are looking forward to doing more this year. #YAdvocate #TheYFeedsKids
- Our day campers were excited to welcome @[official's handle] to the [Y branch name] today! Thanks for your support of the Y and our programs to engage kids and encourage their healthy development. #YAdvocate
- Big THANK YOU to @[official's handle] for coming out to @[YMCA handle] today! We hope you found the visit as productive and enjoyable as we did! #YAdvocate
- Y programs like [program name] are evidence-based and help community members prevent and control chronic disease. Thank you @[official's handle] for joining today's class and speaking with participants! #YAdvocate

Click on the photos throughout this toolkit for more examples of how Ys and officials have shared their visits! Don't forget to use #YAdvocate and/or tag @YMCAadvocacy in your posts!



State Sen. Steve McClure (R-IL) at the Downtown Springfield YMCA.

PHOTO CONTEST

Participate in the **Summer Recess Photo Contest** by submitting photos of your members of Congress or other public officials engaging in programs at your Y.

A winner will be selected and receive free registration and hotel for National Advocacy Days in Washington, DC in March 2025. Email your photos to y-usagovernment.relations@ymca.net, or tweet them with the hashtag #YAdvocate. Be sure to use Y-USA's [photo/video release](#). Photos for the contest will be accepted through October 31.

YMCA OF THE USA
101 N Wacker Drive
Chicago IL 60606
P 800 872 9622