

Invite Your Members of Congress to Your Head Start Program

Hosting members of Congress at your program is one of the most powerful ways to illustrate the value of Head Start and provide lawmakers with memorable experiences that can shape their decision making.

These visits allow you to educate your members about Head Start's comprehensive, community-based model and wraparound services. A personal visit also provides an opportunity for photos and positive media coverage as well as social media—for both your center and your legislator.

Quick-Access Resource Bank

- [Invitation Template](#)
- [Sample Visit Plan](#)
- [Press Advisory Template](#)
- [Letter to the Editor Template](#)
- [Thank You Letter Template](#)

Quick & Easy Steps to Get Started

Step 1:

Find out who your members of Congress are here: nhsa.org/take-action

Step 2:

Find the contact information of your members' schedulers by calling your members' offices. Simply ask: "Can you please provide me with the name and email address of your scheduler?" *You will need to do this three times for your two senators and one representative.*

Step 3:

Download and personalize this [Invitation Template](#) with your program's specific details.

Step 4:

Send your invitation to all three schedulers (one by one!) via email.

Step 5:

Plan the visit and activities that will leave a lasting, positive impression. Use our [Sample Visit Plan](#) to get started. For talking points and additional resources email advocacy@nhsa.org before your visit.

What if they RSVP no?

If your member of Congress is unable to visit during the month asked, don't lose hope! We recommend you:

- A. Extend the invite to one of their senior staff, or
- B. Invite them to visit during a different month.

Step 6:

Use this [Press Advisory Template](#) to invite your local newspaper and media to cover this special occasion. Be sure to personalize the advisory.

Step 7:

Express your appreciation:

1. **Post** pictures from the visit on social media and [tag your members of Congress](#) to thank them.
2. **Personally** thank them by using this [Thank You Letter Template](#).
3. **Press** is always appreciated. Use this [Letter to the Editor toolkit](#) to share your thanks in the media

Step 8:

Tell us about your visit! Share pictures and key takeaways to advocacy@nhsa.org so we can highlight your visit as well!

Program Visit Timeline

Three to Four Weeks Prior to Preferred Visit Date:

- Contact** your member of Congress' office to schedule a visit.

When Your Visit is Scheduled:

- Alert** NHSA of the planned visit using advocacy@nhsa.org. NHSA will provide you with talking points for your visit.
- Invite** parents and community partners who will contribute to a successful visit.

One Week Before Visit:

- Make** your plan using the [Site Visit Plan](#) and share it with everyone you invited.
- Prepare** summary documents with information about your program/community for your member of Congress.
- Write** down and **rehearse** what points you would like to make. Refer to the [Talking Points](#) that NHSA will send to you.
- Invite** your local newspaper and media using the [Press Advisory Template](#).

Day of Visit:

- Photograph** your member of Congress at your Head Start center!
- Share photos** on social media and highlight the visit! Remember to thank your member of Congress for meeting with you by tagging them on Twitter.

After Visit:

- Thank** your member of Congress for coming to your Head Start center. Send them a thank you letter using NHSA's [Thank You Letter Template](#).
- Write** a [Letter to the Editor](#) and submit it to your local newspaper.
- Share** your visit with NHSA by emailing pictures and key takeaways from your meeting to advocacy@nhsa.org.

Early Head Start Talking Points

For Directors and Staff

Here are a few ways you can highlight the impact and need for more funding for Early Head Start. For additional messages, facts, and figures on Early Head Start, please see NHSA's [Early Head Start Advocacy Toolkit](#).

- My name is **[your name]** and I am an Early Head Start **[director/teacher/staff member]** in **[your town]**.
- Early Head Start is the extension of Head Start's child and family services and supports to pregnant women, infants, and toddlers. The Early Head Start program has been around nationally for over 25 years and has strong bipartisan support.
- In **[your town]** we serve **[number]** children and their families every year in our Early Head Start program through home visits, center-based programs, and pregnancy services.
- We have found that Early Head Start is critical because it reaches children when their brains are most rapidly developing, in infancy, and before age three.
- Our Early Head Start services are critical to get our youngest children the health services, like dental care and immunizations, child development, and early detection of disabilities they need to thrive.
- Early Head Start also provides support to parents when they are most stressed emotionally and financially. Early Head Start not only provides parenting support, it offers free diapers, formula, and access to job training and employment services.
- Nationally, only 11% of income-eligible children are able to access Early Head Start services and in **[your town]** we have a long waiting list for these services.
- I hope you will work with your Congressional colleagues to support additional funding for Early Head Start access and to support the well-trained, but undercompensated, workforce in our programs.
- I also hope you will come visit our program and see the impact for yourself!



For Parents and Caregivers

- My name is **[your name]** and I live in **[your town]**.
- I am a proud Early Head Start parent of an infant/toddler. My child(ren) receives child development services, health services, and other care at Early Head Start.
- I came to speak to you today because I want you and Congress to know that Early Head Start makes a big impact in the lives of families with young children here in **[your town]**.
- My child, **[name]**, who is now **[age]** years old, started when he/she/they were [age] months/years old.
- Early Head Start helped us by providing a safe place for my child to learn and access health care and healthy food. *[Share a story of how your child specifically was supported and how they grew or thrived thanks to involvement with Early Head Start.]*
- Raising an infant/toddler is expensive and I was grateful the program provided free diapers and came free of cost. I could not afford a private child care program, so Early Head Start gave us support we desperately needed.
- I also appreciated all the parenting classes and connections to community support that we needed. Infants and toddlers don't come with a playbook, so it was so valuable to be connected with experts and other parents who could support me as a parent.
- Early Head Start has become like a family to me!
- I am really grateful that Early Head Start exists and hope we can count on your support to expand access to more children, since access is so limited due to a lack of federal funds.
- Please come visit our little Early Head Start program and see how children's lives are being changed for the better!





Our mission is to coalesce, inspire and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

Sample Congressional Invitation

Send this template via email to scheduler/scheduling email address

Body Email:

Dear **[Scheduler Name]**,

Please see the attached request from **[Your Name]** inviting **[Member of Congress]** on **[Proposed Month/Week]** to visit the **[Your Center]** Head Start Center.

As you may know, [Head Start is the only coordinated preschool system in the country that serves three- and four-year-old children](#). In our community, **[Your Center]** is designed to meet the needs of our children and families, and families share in the decision making and governance to ensure its success. We are eager to share more with **[Member of Congress]** on **[Proposed Month/Week]** if they are available.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Center]

[Phone Number]

 [Attached document \(sample on the next page\)](#)



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[Date]

The Honorable **[NAME]**
United States **[Senate/House of Representatives]**
[Office Address]

ATTN: Scheduler

Dear Senator/Congressman/Congresswoman **[Last Name]**:

On behalf of all of us at the **[Your Center]** Head Start Center, I am writing to invite you to visit our Head Start program in **[City/Town]** this **[Month/Week]**. During your visit to our center, you will have the chance to read to children in the classroom, talk with staff, and learn more about how Head Start in **[City/Town]** serves our community's most vulnerable children and families.

As you may know, Head Start is the only coordinated preschool system in the country that serves three- and four-year-old children. In our community, **[Your Center]** is modeled to best meet the needs of our children and families, and families share in the decision making and governance to ensure its success. At **[Your Center]**, we have the privilege of serving **[Number]** children and their families. We have been working for over **[Number]** years to provide quality early learning experiences for children and families, so they may flourish and become thriving members of our community.

Recognizing that parents are their child's first and most influential teachers, we work with families to remove barriers and deepen their abilities to support their children in school and life. Research has shown that because of the services and resources we provide, parents of Head Start students are more likely to read with their children, increase their own education, and offer more stimulating home environments than non-Head Start parents. Children who participate in Head Start are less likely to need special education classes or repeat grades when they are older; they are more likely to graduate high school, attend college, and help their families escape the cycle of poverty.

We hope you can join us for a visit soon and look forward to hearing from you about next steps. Thank you in advance for considering our invitation and for all that you do on behalf of children and families in **[City/Town]**.

Sincerely,
[Name]
[Center]
[Phone Number]



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Sample Plan for a Head Start Site Visit

1. **Welcome** by the Director and/or Board Chair outside of the facility or inside the entrance.
2. **Orientation:** Director describes what the visit will entail and leads visitor/s inside.
 - a. Director gives a short overview of the program to include the number of centers, staff, children, history, partners, funding sources, etc.
 - b. Introduce the staff, parents, and community partners that are present. *It is always ideal to invite a parent or two and those you partner with, such as pediatricians, dentists, or local fire chiefs, as they are great advocates. Along with the children, they are your stars!*
3. **Tour** of the facility and program. Bring along your “all-stars” to help answer questions and drive conversation. Some ideas for discussion:
 - a. **Staff** — Explain how the Head Start enrollment process works—your partners, your process for finding families and prioritizing, and how your waiting list works.
 - b. **Family Engagement Coordinator** — Explain how Head Start is so much more than child care or pre-k because of its comprehensive, two-generational model that can focus on children’s health and wellness needs.
 - c. **Director** — Explain how you are different from other early childhood education programs, because you can adapt the federal standards to local needs.
 - d. **Partners** — Explain how state or local funding is important to your program to be able to provide comprehensive services and quality early education to all those who qualify.
 - e. **Parents** — Explain how Head Start has impacted your family and the ways you have grown since your initial participation with the Head Start program.
 - f. **Others** — Anyone who can talk about their unique role in Head Start as a community supporter, volunteer, service delivery partner, school district employee, etc.
4. Have the lawmaker participate in a **group activity** with the children.
 - a. We suggest having them read a book. It is a great image to promote after the visit.
 - b. Take photos with the lawmaker and the children (with proper releases) as well as group photos and action photos. These are perfect for social media!
5. Retire to the conference room (or private meeting room) for an **in-depth discussion** with the adults—volunteers, parents, staff, community business leaders, school officials, etc. Allow the lawmaker or staff to ask questions and for the people around the table to share their stories.
6. **Send a press release** to the media and post messages and photos to Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and/or any other social media account. Tag the lawmaker and share the photos with them.
7. Walk the lawmaker to the exit and **extend a big thank you**. Don’t forget to take pictures to share with NHSA and your community!



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Sample Media Advisory

[Your Logo]

Media Advisory

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Date]

CONTACT: [Program Contact]

[Program Contact Email]

[Your Program Name] Hosts [Member of Congress]

[CITY, STATE] – On [Date], [Program Name] will be hosting [Member of Congress] for a visit at [Site Name]. We are excited to have [Member of Congress] read to the children and gain a first-hand look at Head Start’s unique and innovative approach to high-quality early learning. [Member of Congress] will have the opportunity to speak with parents, teachers, and staff about Head Start’s locally-designed, two-generation approach to early childhood education and development, which is key to the program’s success and impact.

“We are honored to host [Member of Congress] at [Your Program Name], so [s/he] can witness firsthand the impact we make on the lives of so many vulnerable kids and their families,” said [HS Program Director]. “We send our greatest thanks to [Member of Congress] for taking the time out of their busy schedule to talk about Head Start and the critical role our program plays in the community.”

*****Open Press Event*****

WHAT: [Member of Congress] to Visit [Program Name] Head Start and Read to Children, Meet with Parents

WHEN: Date / Time

WHERE: Address

WHO: Member of Congress, any other significant partners or officials

RSVP: Contact [Program Contact] at [Program Email] if you are interested in covering this event.

###

[Your Program’s Mission Statement]



Our mission is to coalesce, inspire and support the Head Start field as a leader in early childhood development and education.

Sample Head Start Letter-to-the-Editor

Approx. 330 words

Dear Editor,

[Your Program Name] Head Start recently hosted **[your state]** Representative/Senator **[Representative's/Senator's name]** for a visit to our center in **[city name]** to read to the children and gain a first-hand look at Head Start's unique and innovative approach to high-quality early learning. **[Representative/Senator]** also had the opportunity to speak with parents, teachers, and staff about Head Start's local, two-generation approach to early childhood education and development, which is key to our program's success and impact.

[Your Program Name] reaches **[number]** children and their families every year with educational, health, nutrition, and other wraparound services to support their growth and development. These services are designed with feedback and input from parents, teachers, and the overall community to make sure they are tailored to best meet local needs.

Head Start recognizes that parents are their child's first and most influential teachers. That's why we work with families to remove barriers and to strengthen their ability to teach their children outside the classroom. Research has shown that because of the resources and training provided by Head Start, parents of Head Start students are more likely to read with their children, increase their own education, and offer more stimulating home environments than non-Head Start parents. What's more, children who participate in Head Start are less likely to need special education classes or repeat grades when they are older, and are more likely to graduate high school, attend college, and help their families escape the cycle of poverty.

With the support of influential lawmakers like **[Representative/Senator]**, we can continue our work to provide high-quality, impactful early learning experiences for children and families so they can grow into thriving members of our community.

Sincerely,
[Your name]
[Your title]
[Your center]



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Sample Thank You Letter to Member of Congress

*Format this letter on your program's letterhead. Then scan and email the pdf to the scheduler and/or staff.
*You may also want to include a thank you from kids with their handprints or a creative piece of artwork**

Body Email:

Dear [**Scheduler Name**],

Please see the attached thank you letter from [**Your Center**] thanking [**Member of Congress**] for their visit on [**Date**]. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
[**Your Name**]

 [Attached Letter \(Sample Below\)](#)



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[Date]

The Honorable [First and Last Name]
[United States House of Representatives or United States Senate]
[Office Address]

Dear [Senator/Representative Last Name]:

Thank you for taking the time to visit with the parents and staff from the [name of your Head Start program] during your visit last week. We hope that your time with us helped illuminate how Head Start provides high quality early learning experiences for vulnerable children and families in our community.

[More details on the visit, or more details that you promised to provide them]

We are thankful for your support of our Head Start program and are excited to work with you to help ensure we continue serving all the children who need the Head Start advantage. In the future, we sincerely hope that we can serve as a resource for you.

Please let us know if you have any questions and thank you again for visiting our program.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
[Name of Your Program]
[City, State]