
Legislative Site Visits – Tips and Tricks

Our elected officials may spend a lot of their time working at the Capitol in Lincoln, but one thing is true: it's the issues happening in their home districts that matter most to them. Giving senators and their staff a firsthand look at your facilities will enhance their understanding of your work and its importance in securing funding for providers. Given the importance of advocacy at both the federal and state levels, inviting your federal representative or senator to participate in these visits is also a good idea.

Sample In-District Meeting Request:

Dear Senator _____.

On behalf of [YOUR ORGANIZATION], I would like to invite [ELECTED OFFICIAL TITLE AND NAME] to visit our program when (s)he is back in the district during the next recess. [IF THEY HAVE DONE ANYTHING TO HELP YOUR COMMUNITY OR I/DD PROVIDERS, PLEASE THANK THE ELECTED OFFICIAL HERE.]

We are very proud of the vital services we offer to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in [AREA YOU ARE BASED IN] and would love to share them with the [ELECTED OFFICIAL]. We participate in the Home and Community Based Settings (HCBS) Medicaid program, which allows people with disabilities to live full lives in the community. Currently, we serve [NUMBER OF INDIVIDUALS] by [DESCRIBE YOUR SERVICES.] We also employ [X name of people in your state, e.g. "Ohioans"]. [IF YOU HAVE MULTIPLE SERVICES, BRIEFLY DISCUSS THEM HERE.]

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) rely on Medicaid community-based services to live independent lives in the community across their lifespans. Due to the nature of Medicaid as our primary payor and reimbursement rates at the state level that have not kept up with inflation, we experience high turnover and vacancy rates among the direct support professionals (DSPs) who provide these critical supports. The workforce crisis in our industry has accelerated to the point of forcing providers like us to close programs and services, threatening access to HCBS [OR DESCRIBE OTHER CHALLENGES]. We would love an opportunity to further exhibit our services to [ELECTED OFFICIAL.]

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request. We hope to see the [ELECTED OFFICIAL] and your colleagues this summer and look forward to hearing of any opportunities that might arise in their schedule.

Sincerely, [Your Signature]

Planning a Successful Site Visit:

Plan Ahead

- Visits typically last 30-60 minutes. Consider how to utilize this time to showcase your services. Determine what you're most proud of and where you have the most challenges that you can highlight within the hour.
- Ensure any handouts are ready in advance. Including some of your agency "swag" is also a nice touch; pens, mugs, etc. – but don't give them too much to carry around during the tour itself. These should be offered at the conclusion of the visit.
- Ensure that staff and participants whose voices you wish to amplify are available.
 - Communicate objectives clearly: share the visit's goal, messaging, and itinerary with your team to ensure everyone is aligned and stays on message.

Document the Visit

- Designate someone to take notes during the meeting for follow-up purposes.
- Pay attention to the accompanying staff of the elected officials, as they are likely to specialize in specific issues and will be particularly interested in learning about your organization.
- Remember to capture photos to share on social media with NASP and the visiting offices.

Follow-up

- Extend gratitude along with any materials promised during the tour.
 - Send a follow-up email thanking them for their time and include this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&si=6hrMh8yND_srJTpW&v=edjfi9QPu10&feature=youtu.be, and/or
 - Send a handwritten thank you card signed by your team and participants
- Keep the relationship active by inviting their office to upcoming community events in the following weeks and months.

Outline of Tour:

- Meet them outside when they arrive (weather permitting) or at the door
 - Be ready and waiting for them; don't make them wait for you
- Begin tour; introduce them to the participants & staff you encounter
 - Reminder: prep participants and staff ahead of time so they know who is coming and why the visit is important
- Tour the facilities while providing examples of the specific services your agency provides.
 - How many people you support
 - The number of staff/contractors you employ
 - How your services benefit the local community
- Allow space for Q&A throughout the tour
- When the tour wraps, escort the legislator/staffer back out of the facility.
- Thank them for coming and being willing to learn more about services for folks with I/DD!

Talking Points:

- Provide the basics of Medicaid Home and Community Based Services:
 - [Medicaid Community Providers](#) (you can print this as a handout)

HCBS providers help people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) live full and independent lives in their communities. These person-centered supports may assist with activities of daily living, meal preparation, medication management and employment support, among many other crucial and life-saving services.

These services are almost exclusively funded through Medicaid. Medicaid operates as a partnership between states and the federal government to fund certain health care services. States determine the scope and payment for these services and the federal government provides matching funds at a predetermined rate. This combined funding is then used to reimburse community providers for the services they deliver.

- It may be necessary or helpful to offer background information on IDD:
 - “IDDs are differences present before age 21 and that uniquely affect the trajectory of the individual’s physical, intellectual, and/or emotional development. Many of these conditions affect multiple body parts or systems.”
 - Examples include, but are not limited to, autism, down syndrome, and cerebral palsy...
- Explain the challenges you are facing as a Nebraska business owner/service provider:
 - Workforce shortages
 - [Workforce Crisis One-Pager](#) (you can print this as a handout)
 - High overtime
 - High turnover
 - Budget deficits

Key Messaging:

- IDD services are required by law and HCBS providers partner with the state to provide these services at a fraction of the cost of the state-run institution, Beatrice State Development Center.
 - BSDC averages approximately \$385,000 per year to support an individual; HCBS averages about \$90,000 per year to support an individual. Supporting providers to do our work well helps the state bottom line.
 - HCBS have a strong ROI – **for every \$1.00 invested in HCBS, the state sees \$1.40 return:**
neserviceproviders.org/vimages/shared/vnews/stories/65aa9bc779e90/Final_HCBS_EconStudy.pdf (you can share this study with them in a follow-up email)
- Ensure they understand that the Legislature sets Medicaid provider rates; your state senator and their colleagues are who ultimately determine access to and quality of services available in the communities they represent.
- Service providers such as yourself are utterly dependent upon state leadership in what you can pay your staff and invest in capital (buildings, vehicles, etc.).

- The reimbursement providers get from the state is the sole revenue source for many providers for services for individuals with IDD. This means costs must be absorbed by the provider when the reimbursement does not cover the cost of care.
- Additional funding is desperately needed to maintain Direct Support Professionals' wages above Nebraska's rising minimum wage.
 - Data on the care crisis: [Workforce Survey Report 2024 V4](#)
- Have them contact NASP if they need more information: alana@neserviceproviders.org

Dos and Don'ts of a Tour:

- DO thank them for taking the time to come to see your services; this is a big deal, and a lot of policymakers don't make the effort to do so.
- DO emphasize that issues are nonpartisan and the need to fund our staff is nonpartisan.
 - Do NOT get into partisan politics.
- DO Keep it simple. Medicaid is complicated and the mechanics of our services can be complicated. Don't overwhelm them with too much info - the basics will stick!
- DO Leave space for interaction with the staff and those we serve.
- DO have available and offer drinks or snacks.