

Relationship Building with Decision Makers

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Head Start leaders must do everything possible to convince elected representatives at both the state and federal level that our program is successful, productive, and works based on scientific research and family reports. While this is a constant need, we currently are facing *direct attacks on the program with proposals to kill it outright and withdraw services to the most vulnerable children and families in America.*

We must win the battle to keep Head Start alive and thriving! While we have been targeted for nationwide closure by the current administration, ultimately the decisions regarding our future will rest with Congress. The reason for this is that Head Start was created in a law generated in the House and Senate and signed by many presidents over our proud 60-year history. Our challenge now is to find 10 to 12 Republican members of the Senate and a comparable number in the House of Representatives to vote for a long-term, healthy future for this program. *We believe that this is absolutely possible if we commit to making it happen!*

We have had strong bipartisan support through much of our history. In our last official reauthorization, which was completed with the Head Start Act of 2007, 94 senators voted on our future and all 94 voted in favor of Head Start. In the House of Representatives, we ended up with 83% of all members voting for Head Start. This gives us hope for our future.

We basically looked at each member of the Senate and each member of the House of Representatives and decided to *institute an ongoing relationship-building process with each member of Congress, tailored to each individually.*

A Well-Tested Tool to Increase Your Impact!

To effectively use this tool, you'll need to organize an agency effort that supports ongoing connection with the elected representative. This might involve motivated and supported parents or it could be built around staff. Leadership of your agency needs to decide the following:

1. Decide which elected representative is the focus of each campaign. Even a small program is represented by two senators and at least one member of the House. For agencies that are spread across more geography, the number of senators will remain at two while members of the House can include more than a single elected representative. Since we are also incredibly interested in the future of Head Start at the state level, you will want to do the same study of who in your state legislature represents you, your agency, and the families you serve.

2. Since the target of this relationship-building campaign is meant to build deep and meaningful relationships, this needs to be treated as a long-term – likely permanent – set of activities. The key here is that one should not meet with an elected representative or their lead assistants for the first time only to be asking for something. It's much easier to ask for support

when the elected representative and their staff know who you are, what you do, and why you are important to their own success within their districts or their state.

We recommend that at the very least you commit to doing one action per month on an ongoing basis. We suggest that one of your first steps will be laying out a plan for the first 12 months. While a monthly connection will serve well during normal times, you may even decide to do more than one connection per month during this period when we are under so much attack!

3. Once you've determined who it is that you are going to create action teams around and how often you are going to seek to have a relationship-building contact with that office, you can get down to deciding what feels useful, appropriate, and most in alignment with your values. To enrich the possibilities, we have created this tool that *has many more options than any agency will use in a one- or two-year period.*

4. Most of these activities are built around thoughtfulness and are not expensive efforts. You **do not** want to give—or appear to be giving—any kind of gift or contribution to any elected representative or their office. With this in mind, you likely need no budget. If you actually do have something you need to buy materials for, consider purchasing with non-federal resources. Some of our suggestions can be classroom activities that involve the children. Some projects may be more complex. In Ohio, there was a high-quality quilt created by each of the Head Start programs in the state that captured all Head Start agencies across the state as an integral part of the design. It was very colorful and was so loved by the US senator who received it that he displayed it as a wall hanging in his Washington, DC office. When he moved his office within the Senate, we noted that this was the first item that was moved and rehung in the new space.

5. We would encourage you to brainstorm how to *make this project fun* as well as meaningful. One thing that is very useful is having people from your staff become friends with the local staff of the elected representative. Work very hard at building trust and avoid any sense of manipulation. You are proud of your work and you want them to be proud of the program as well! Head Start is the rare federal program that has demonstrated incredibly high levels of ROI. For many members of the House and Senate, their local Head Start program in their district or state is a source of pride. You want to nurture that positive emotion.

Here are some possible activities to encourage building these relationships.

The Congressional websites, House.gov, Senate.gov, and Congress.gov will provide extensive information for you about your member(s) of the House of Representatives and your senators. Use these websites routinely.

1. When you have a newly elected member of Congress, send them a letter of congratulations on their election and introduce yourself as the director of HIS/HER Head Start program in whatever town or county is your target area. Tell them briefly about your program.
2. Identify the Congressperson's assistant for education and become their new best friend. Invite them to visit your program any time, and maintain REGULAR contact with them on behalf of your program. Have them invite their boss to visit.

3. Send a letter of congratulations to a *re-elected* member of your state legislature or Congress and indicate that you will appreciate their continued support for HIS/HER Head Start program.
4. Learn the birthday of your elected representative and have some of the children make birthday cards you can send to their office. You could also send a birthday greeting on behalf of the entire program.
5. Get personally acquainted with your elected representative's local office chief of staff. Visit them routinely with copies of your newsletters and anything else of importance regarding your program.
6. Invite your elected representative's staff to come read to the children, attend a Policy Council meeting, speak to parents, or visit a regular monthly breakfast with parents, etc. Make them your new friends and invite them to visit frequently.
7. During a Congressional recess, invite your House member or senator to visit the center, and make it a publicity opportunity with local newspapers and TV stations. Include their family in the invitation. Elected officials want this coverage as much as you might.
8. Get photographs of your elected representative. Large, framed ones might be hung boldly in your central offices – or any building they and the public might visit. Take some photographs of children and/or a Head Start family near that large photograph so that it shows up in the photo. Send that family/child photo to the elected representative telling them that the children you serve or this family sends regards and thanks for their support. Of course, always get appropriate written permission from anyone who is in a photograph.
9. If you are planning a building project, inform your local office lead about the project and invite them to see it. Share your excitement and enthusiasm AND the reason you need new facilities or renovated facilities. If you are opening a new facility, invite the elected representative to join you in the ribbon cutting ceremony or celebration.
10. If you have a reasonably friendly elected representative, consider sharing budget dilemmas you might be having and solicit their input. Do use good judgment here when deciding who can be trusted with information. Don't feed delicate information to a staff person or an elected representative who may slip into becoming your adversary.
11. Share our “Return on Investment” thought piece. We’ll send this to you if you request it.
12. Always send your elected representative a letter of thanks when your federal grant is renewed, new funding is assigned, or state or local support is made available. Give them a short, bulleted list of your goals for the coming period.
13. At the beginning of each school year, send your elected representative a note outlining how many children you have enrolled – EHS, HS, special needs, categorically eligible, etc. Include some general parent information, like “we have 280 parents this year and 226 of those are gainfully employed.”

14. Show your elected representative or their assistant how much money your program contributes to the community, in as much as 80% to 90% of it stays in the community. Share how many people you employ and how many jobs you provide in the community. Economists calculate that for each dollar invested in a community, that dollar's impact is multiplied by a factor of 3.5 to 5.0 times. A moderate sized program might spend \$5 million in the communities they serve and as a result, there is a \$17.5 million or greater economic impact.
15. Tell your elected representatives how many parents in your program have landed a job while being a part of Head Start, have earned a GED, or learned to read, etc. Our parent achievements are noteworthy and often overlooked as we outline what we are doing for families. We have been a "multigenerational" program decades before these became popular!!
16. Make a chart of your program's structure, including your funding information. Include numbers of children enrolled in Early Head Start, preschool Head Start, special needs, special categories. Include the number of parents and caregivers and your number of staff. Share the chart with your elected representative and his/her aide.
17. Share with your elected representative's aide the curriculum you are using and how productive it is for the children's balanced development.
18. If your state has a Kindergarten readiness screening, get the results of that. If results are favorable, share with your elected representative. A key mission of Head Start is school readiness as well as life readiness.
19. Make sure when you're building relationships with your elected representative's local staff that you educate them on the extensive requirements of Head Start and how rigorous we are in meeting those requirements. If it seems as though there is an interest, share with them a copy of the performance standards that come from OHS. Few people really know and understand the rigors of the program. You need to educate your elected representative and their staff members.
20. If there is a natural event in your area like a tornado, floods, bad weather damage, pandemic, fires, or accidents, we know that Head Start program staff are ALWAYS ready to help, rescue, support, etc. Should something like that happen near you, keep careful track of what your program and staff are doing to help and send it in writing to your elected representative with a note – "just wanted you to know ..."
21. Often there are parents who need extensive help out of a bad situation, and Head Start staff is always there to help. If such support happens in your program, make sure you chronicle that information and share it. Be sure to always protect the identity and ongoing safety of those involved and share in a general and anonymous way.
22. Each year you serve children whose behavior is off the charts and who may be suffering from chaotic home lives, absent parents, abuse, etc. Have your social service staff chronicle those numbers and conditions and share information (in a generalized and anonymous way) with your elected representative's staff, citing the challenges your center staff

encounter daily. They need to understand that we don't live in an idyllic world of Dick, Jane, and their cute dog Spot.

23. At least once a month, take candid photos of activities – children getting off the bus; serving lunch and/or pouring milk; using a computer, etc., and send a quick note with the photo, telling your Congressperson “Here we are in your Head Start program, having a wonderful day. Thank you for your support.” **Make sure** everyone shown in each photo has given full written permission, especially since it's hard to know where a photo will end up once it's shared.
24. Return on investment (ROI) should be celebrated often with decision makers. Provide a brief background starting with Ronald Reagan and the finding "Spend a dollar and save \$4." Then move to more contemporary research by Dr. James Heckman, the Nobel prize-winning economist from the University of Chicago. Reflect on the influence of the economists at the University of Chicago. Share an overview of Heckman's findings with the decision maker and his or her assistant. We have included a copy with this package. You can also request both links to the Heckman Equation and a copy of a summary of Dr. Heckman's work from us.
25. Remember to share the fact that when you invest \$1 in a young child living poverty,, we save \$7 to \$13 over the life of an enrolled child. Once a year, provide an overview of what was invested in your Head Start program and what the return on that investment will be.
26. Include the return on investment totals for a year in your program. Be sure to include this in your annual report as well.
27. Make sure that each congressional office and each state office receives a copy of your annual report. Produce a document that you can be proud of. While sometimes the cost can be quite high, consider matching up with a student in a local graphics art course who might do your annual report has a project for which they get credit. Everyone wins!!
28. The younger the child, the greater the savings! EHS brings savings of \$11 to \$13. Head Start brings savings of \$9 to \$10. Dr. Heckman reports that by the time dollars are invested in middle school children, the return is approximately one dollar return for every dollar invested. It is still worth doing, of course, but the leverage has declined over time.
29. Examine the ROI tied to helping a parent move from dependency to becoming a taxpayer.
30. One classroom of 18 children could save up to \$1 million over the lives of those children.
31. There are financial savings for institutions that handle teen pregnancy, crime, incarceration, and financial dependency.
32. Reducing the need for special education results in huge savings.
33. There is also a *reduction in pain* that comes with the struggle of academic failure as well as the difficulty of being a teen parent. Share anonymous, accurate stories reinforcing how

well Head Start works. These can come from current or previously enrolled parents, staff members, community partners, or members of your policy council or board.

34. Create a community garden on your site. This will help children be aware of where food comes from and will also provide fresh healthy food to serve the children. Well, we are not suggesting you create a full farm and try to be self-sustaining, what we are encouraging is all of the learning and conversation that comes with healthy food sources. Some have even opened their garden to parents of enrolled children!!

The above ideas are only a beginning. Please feel free to add your own. *The reason we give you many more ideas than you can possibly use is to give you choice. Choose the ones you think are most to each specific individual elected representative as you learn more about them.*

Relationship-Building Campaign Design
For (decision-maker) _____ Year _____

	Action/ Description	When will we do this?	Who's the lead?	What do we want to accomplish?	How do we know it works?
January					
February					
March					
April					
May					
June					
July					
August					
September					
October					
November					
December					

Dedication...

This tool was created as a contribution to the overall effort to keep Head Start alive and thriving! It has been tested and used in multiple campaigns and settings across Head Start's history. It is being provided at no cost to the Head Start community, as a part of our effort to keep Head Start alive and well!!

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