



Tips for Hosting a Successful Site Visit with Elected Officials

Why engage with elected officials?

WIC is an example of public policy at its best and site visits demonstrate the real impact of their decisions. By witnessing the programs firsthand, elected officials can see the importance of these investments in their communities.

- Funding for your WIC program is dependent on federal support voted on by Members of Congress (the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate). The more your Members understand the value of your services, the more supportive they will be.
- In NYS, additional funds are provided by our state legislators for special programs that are not federally funded.

When to invite elected officials?

The best time to invite them is when they are back home in their districts.¹

- Be sure to invite your local elected officials if you are celebrating a special event at your local agency.
- Pick a day of the week and time of day when participation will be high.
- Be mindful that many media deadlines are early afternoon, so morning visits are ideal.

How do you start the process?

- Get permission from your local agency to host an event with an elected official present.
- Contact your official's district office. All information can be found on their website.²
- Find out who is in charge of the official's schedule. Extend an invitation to the local official to visit your local agency. If the dates you proposed are not available, stay in touch with the staff person regarding scheduling a visit for when it is convenient for the official.

How do you prepare for the visit?

The Facts:

- Prepare all details pertaining to your WIC program: Caseload, number of sites, participation rates, number of vendors in your area, etc.
- Prepare a map indicating the locations of the WIC sites within the congressional district. It is good for them to know where and how many WIC agencies are located in their district.
- The National WIC Association (NWA) has statistics for each state and talking points to help you prepare for the visit. Be sure to review them and include them in your package.³
- Include research articles regarding impact of WIC on economics (\$2.48 savings for every dollar spent on WIC,⁴ benefits of revised food packages, benefits of Breastfeeding/Peer counselor program, etc. Do not include any other material that is not pertinent to your WIC program.
- Include the actual dollar amounts earned by local businesses in your area if you can get this information (such as farmers markets, etc.). At the least, emphasize that money spent on WIC participants is going back to support the local economy.
- Prepare copies of materials for other staff accompanying your official. Be prepared to email all materials following the visit.

¹ <https://www.congress.gov/resources/display/content/Calendars+and+Schedules;>
[https://www.nysenate.gov/sites/default/files/pdfs/2020_nys_legislative_session_calendar.pdf;](https://www.nysenate.gov/sites/default/files/pdfs/2020_nys_legislative_session_calendar.pdf)
https://nyassembly.gov/leg/docs/sessioncalendar_2020.pdf

² [https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/NY;](https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/NY) [https://openstates.org/find_your_legislator/;](https://openstates.org/find_your_legislator/)
<https://www.nysac.org/files/2019%20NYS%20County%20Executive's%20Association%20Directory.pdf>

³ <https://s3.amazonaws.com/aws.upl/nwica.org/2019-ny-wic-fact-sheet.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0091743519301355?via%3Dihub>

Who should be there?

- Involve your staff and breastfeeding peer counselors and have them present during the site visit. Your staff members are involved with constituents and have unique experiences to share.
- Identify a few WIC participants ahead of time who are comfortable sharing their personal stories and speaking with an elected official or reporters about the impact WIC has made on them.
- Create list of assignments so everyone knows their role - including a staff member who will take photos (plan types of photos wanted and ideal photo op ahead of time).
- Dress for the occasion. You and your staff may be on TV, your pictures may be included in local newspapers or other sources. At a minimum, photos you take should be published in your agency newsletter and on social media channels.
- Distribute a photo release ahead of time to any WIC participant and staff present - make sure only those with signed releases are within camera range.
- Never underestimate a Member's staff. Identify WIC staff who will speak with their staff on key talking points while the Member is speaking one-on-one with others. They will debrief this conversation with the Member.

How do you maximize the impact of the visit?

Provide background and what is unique to your program:

- Ask what the official knows about WIC. If there is limited knowledge, provide the basics. Include samples of WIC food packages, explain that they are prescriptive, and tailored to meet set nutrition standards.
- Think about what is unique to your program or agency and make sure you highlight your uniqueness.
 - Discuss your current caseload, and include factors that are affecting it.
- Talk about your initiatives that have positive results, outreach efforts, collaborations with other agencies, etc.
- Do your homework - elected officials have their own interests. If you can, find out what their interests are, and tailor your conversations to match them (e.g. military, agriculture, etc.).

Involve Key People:

- Invite community leaders and partners to attend, those who can demonstrate the broader community support and speak to the critical value and impact WIC provides to the community.
- Get the media involved; even a short 10-second blurb on TV is good exposure for a local WIC agency and for the elected official:
 - Create media advisory and alert them at least 3 days in advance
 - Assemble media kits (press release, fact sheets, brochure, contacts of staff involved)
- If your organization allows, organize a stakeholder meeting for immediately after the site visit (to talk privately with the official about the importance of protecting and strengthening WIC – media would not be present during this time).

What to do after the planned visit or event?

Follow-up:

- Place the best photos on your social media channels, website, and next newsletter. Tag the elected official in social media.
- Send a "Thank you" email (now the preferred method of correspondence) immediately following the visit, including answers to any questions from the meeting, and ask if they need any additional information about your WIC program. If you were unable to get the answer for any question, let them know that you are still trying to get the information.
- Offer to draft an article for their constituent newsletter.
- Share any published articles of event/visit with the official's staff.
- Continue to keep in touch by sending them relevant updates and newsworthy items.

What if organizing a site visit seems 'too much' right now?

- Offer to host a community call while the Member is in DC or Albany.
- Request that NWA or the WIC Association of NYS Board members conference call you in on an office meeting they have with your elected official so that you are able to participate remotely.
- Send photos and messages from your program and participants so that Members can 'see and hear' about the great work you are doing from afar.

Please share outcomes and the experience of your event with your Regional and NYS WIC Associations.