

NAEYC Virtual Congressional Meeting Toolkit

During this difficult and unprecedented time, elevating the experiences and raising the voices of child care providers is as important as it has ever been. Active and targeted advocacy is necessary to ensure that policymakers at all levels understand that without significant and sustainable investments in child care, early childhood education programs are at risk of closing their doors forever. There is no economic recovery without child care and public support for safe, quality programs is urgently needed.

This toolkit is meant to provide early childhood educators and advocates with the tools necessary to connect with the offices of their federally elected officials through virtual meetings. There are no greater experts on child care than child care providers, and there are no stronger voices in advocacy than those of constituents.

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Introduction

The information that follows presents a timeline and “to do” list designed to coordinate and track the necessary steps to prepare for a virtual Congressional meeting.

In addition to ensuring everyone is on the same page and knows what to say and when to say it, the goal of the “run of show” script is to tie together the data, experiences, and priorities in a way that amplifies key messages. The meeting should feel conversational and driven by people and solutions!

Once these meetings are complete, Congressional leaders and staff should walk away with a deeper understanding of the challenges children, families, educators, programs, and businesses are facing as a result of the impact of the pandemic on child care. They should also know why and how substantial, targeted, direct federal investment in child care will help.

Meeting Format Options: Which one is right for you?

When not in a pandemic, traditional Hill visits typically involve 1-10 constituents visiting an office on Capitol Hill to meet with the staff of their Senator or Representative, and/or the Member her/himself. In a virtual context, there may be three options to consider for a meeting:

- ★ If you have between 1 - 10 individuals for the meeting, we recommend a “*Virtual Traditional*” meeting. This will likely be the set-up for most of your meetings with Representatives, who will often only meet with individuals from their specific districts.
- ★ If you have more than 10 individuals, which may be the case for many Senate meetings, we recommend either:
 - a “*Storytelling*” virtual meeting or
 - a “*Virtual Town Hall*”

Each of the three meetings options have a lot in common (educators tell personal stories; advocates provide compelling data; updates and recommendations are shared), but the flow and format is adapted slightly to accommodate the number of individuals and types of engagement:

“Virtual Traditional” Meeting

- Best for fewer than 10 educators (4-6 is ideal)
- One person acting as “facilitator”
- 1-3 people sharing stories and data
- Typically lasts 20-40 minutes
- Generally informal, with some script / talking points

- Includes at least one specific ask (increase in funding, invitation to virtual site visit, co-sponsorship of legislation, etc.)

“Storyteller” Meeting

- Best for more than 10 educators
- One person acting as “facilitator”
- 1-2 people tell stories to illustrate the “state of play” in their community / state, integrating pre-prepared talking points to ensure major issues are addressed and appropriately communicated
- Staffer / Member offers reactions to descriptions and facilitator will focus on questions like “what more would be helpful from us to inform your thinking?”
- 1-2 people act as “chat box” *facilitators* to consolidate and report out questions/comments
- 1-2 people act as chat box *responders*, sharing links and elevating data
- 1-2 people managing polls that allow everyone to engage (i.e., what age group do you work with; have you lost staff since the onset of the pandemic; etc.)
- Likely to last 30-45 minutes
- Includes at least one specific ask (increase in funding, invitation to virtual site visit, co-sponsorship of legislation, etc.)

Virtual Town Hall

- Works best with more than 15-20 educators
- One person assumes role of skilled “moderator”
- Frequently features the member of Congress, but could also be a staffer
- Typically begins with the member sharing their perspective on child care and early learning, followed by the moderator calling on pre-selected educators to provide a short framing story with a pre-prepared question
- Provides an opportunity to learn more and ask about support of key policies or legislation

Most virtual meetings will likely be traditional or storytelling meetings, which will be reflected in the materials found below. In the instances where a Virtual Town Hall is possible or desirable, please reach out to advocacy@naeyc.org for additional planning support.

Initial Preparations Checklist

- Identify 4-5 providers who would be comfortable speaking on their experience in a virtual meeting format and are representative of the diversity of the child care sector in your state;
- Reach out and confirm providers for the meeting;
- Identify 2-3 main issues / talking points that are specific to your state/community; examples may include (but aren’t limited to) helping the policymakers understand:
 - how the children of essential workers were served

- the typical budgetary challenges of a child care program, and the ways in which those challenges are heightened by operating with needed, increased public health and safety requirements
 - how important skilled, competent and compensated educators are to support children and families during this difficult and traumatic time
 - the role of federal and state child care relief funding - what they've done so far to help, and what more is needed
 - the mixed delivery system in child care and the responses of families in this time
 - the lack of PPE and the challenges of keeping staff, families, and children safe and healthy while supporting their social and emotional development
- ☐ Identify potential organizational partners in your state who can co-organize these sessions (depending on your state, and the member of Congress, may include state advocacy organizations, provider groups, parent groups, grassroots organizers, Chamber of Commerce, etc.)

Setting Up the Meeting

In many cases, NAEYC is working with you to set up your meeting, but perhaps you're doing your own outreach as well! (If you're not sure who is in your federal delegation, check it out here: [Senate](#) and [House](#)). We know that sometimes it can feel intimidating to reach out to Capitol Hill, but remember, they are here to help. The staffers work for your Senator or Representative, public servants who were elected to represent you and families in your community - and they spend so many hours a day answering phone calls and responding to email from constituents that they appreciate interacting with someone who is kind, excited, and helpful!

Finding the Right Person

- If you already have an existing relationship or previous contact with a staffer in these offices, start there! That person will likely either be able to help you schedule a meeting, or put you in touch with the staffer who handles child care and/or the office scheduler.
- If you have not previously reached out to this office, there are a few ways to initiate contact and find out who handles child care issues.
 - *Option 1:* Find your district on this map: [Members of Congress & Congressional District Maps](#). Click on your district and the names and office numbers of your Senators and Representative will be displayed
 - *Option 2:* Call the switchboards
 - Senate - you may phone the United States Capitol switchboard at (202) 224-3121. A switchboard operator will connect you directly with the Senate office you request.
 - House - You can find them and their office phone number on this alphabetical list: <https://www.house.gov/representatives>

- *Option 3: Ask NAEYC for help*
 - If the previous two approaches are yielding no results, reach out to advocacy@naeyc.org for contact information for the offices you need or templates for the timely email you want to send or telephone script you'd like to use.
 - Here's an example of a [Sample Invitation to a Legislator for a Site Visit](#) that you can use and adapt for a virtual meeting as well.

Pre-Meeting To Do List

After providers and partners have been identified and confirmed, roles/responsibilities need to be assigned prior to the “dress rehearsal” and the virtual meeting with the legislator’s office.

- Confirm who will provide introductory remarks at the top of the call
- Confirm who will serve as Moderator/MC of the call
- Once the 4-5 providers and 2-3 issues have been chosen, discuss and confirm with the group who will be speaking to which issue, who will be sharing a personal story, etc. Remember each speaker will only have about 2 minutes for their remarks.
- Create a script that provides a “to the minute” run of show (template below).

Additional Notes:

- Remind, prepare, and help people keep responses to 2-3 minutes. There is a lot to cover in these meetings, and it is important to hear from everyone!
- Congressional offices may request the names and mailing addresses of all participants. Make sure to collect this information once all speakers have been identified.
- Plan to elevate your meetings using social media (see below). In preparation, decide who will take pictures of your meeting screen and who will be responsible for posting.
- Consider what additional information you want to have on-hand during your meeting. Options to consider include [these state fact sheets](#) and any [additional information](#) about the current state of child care in your community.

“Run of Show” template for the meetings

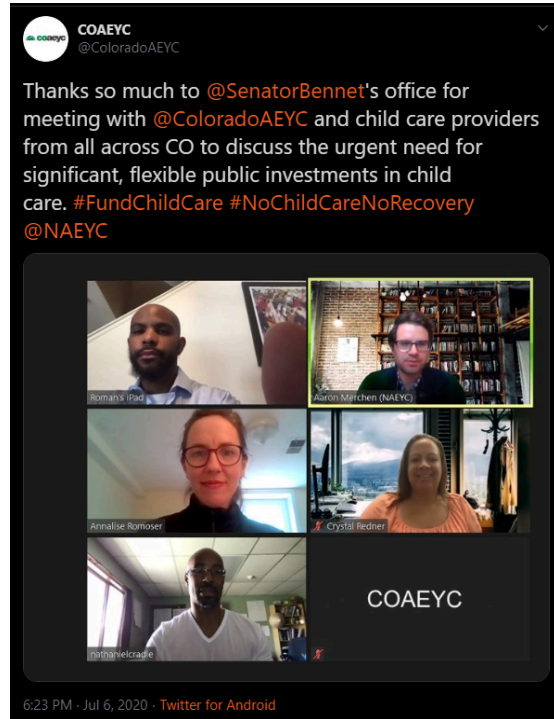
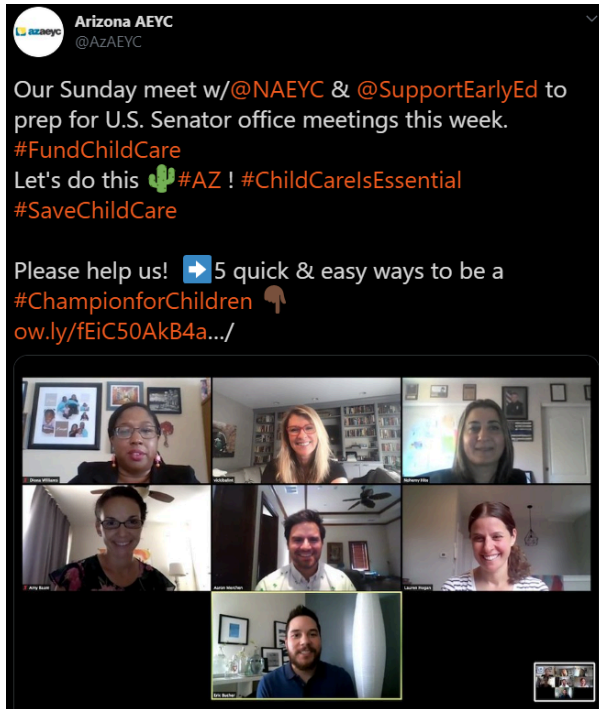
- Opening: National partner staff [00:00-00:03]
 - Brief overview of national data, describing the scope and scale of the crisis
 - Thanks office for relevant actions (ie, cosponsoring the Child Care is Essential Act; supporting the bipartisan resolutions, etc.)
 - Introduces [state partner] and [name] who will be moderating the discussion
- Setting the Stage: State-based moderator [00:03-00:10]
 - Thanks Congressional member / staff for participation
 - Introduces partners (as needed)

- Gives brief overview of [State] level data
 - Identifies issues 1, 2 and 3
 - Introduces all providers
 - Hands off to [Provider A]
- Provider A [00:10-00:12]
 - [TBD: personal story/Community data+anecdote/desired policy change]
 - Introduces Provider B
- Provider B [00:12-00:14]
 - [TBD: personal story/Community data+anecdote/desired policy change]
 - Introduces Provider C or Partner 1
- Provider or Partner [00:14-00:16]
 - [TBD: personal story/Community data+anecdote/desired policy change]
 - Introduces Provider or Partner
- Provider or Partner [00:18-00:20]
 - [TBD: personal story/Community data+anecdote/desired policy change]
 - Introduces Provider or Partner
- Moderator [00:20-00:23]
 - Summarizes, reiterates top issues/priorities/asks
- Questions from Member / staff [00:23-00:30]
- Last round of Thank Yous

Social Media

- It's always a great idea to promote your meetings with your elected officials, both before and after. It elevates the advocacy work you are doing and publicly thanks your Representative or Senator for their time. Win-win!
- Consider using the hashtags: #FundChildCare #ChildCareIsEssential #SaveChildCare #NoChildCareNoRecovery in your posts.
- Make sure you tag (@Rep/Sen Name) in your posts. You can find social media handles for [everyone in Congress here](#).

Check out examples from Arizona AEYC and Colorado AEYC doing exactly this via Twitter:



Learning from Experience: Organizing Virtual Congressional Meetings

This video features leaders from MaineAEYC and Advocates for Children of New Jersey sharing their experiences, insights, and tips for organizing a successful and impactful meeting with your Representatives and Senators. **(Double click to view video)**



00:00-00:14: Intro Slides

00:15-03:55: Opening Remarks

03:55 - 5:15: Introduction of Panelists

05:15 - 13:06: Question for Panelists: What were some of the most important lessons you learned in the preparation phase leading up to the meetings with Senate staffers?

13:07 - 21:21: Question for Panelists: What are the most important insights you took from the actual meetings themselves?

21:22 - 22:07: Post meeting follow up and continuing the conversation

22:08 - 30:09: Q&A and NAEYC Policy Team Contact Info

Provider's Perspective

Reflections and reactions from providers after virtual meetings:

- *"I enjoyed being a part of something bigger than myself, and also of having the feeling that I might be helping to make a difference. In that way, it was quite enjoyable. Also, after hearing from other providers, I appreciated the diversity in our programs and the communities that we serve even more."* - Cynthia Randolph-Vaughn, BA, NDC, Indianapolis, IN
- *"Though it was a new experience for me, I felt supported, valued and heard. It was a rewarding experience and I'm grateful for the opportunity."* Tammy Dant, South Bend, IN

"Things to Keep in Mind"

Sometimes, there are words that are better to use than others, and it's helpful to think about those in advance. For example:

- ❑ **Keep it 501c3.** You may be talking to a Republican or Democrat, but we always need to be careful to use non-partisan language.
- ❑ **We educate and care for children, not days.** Please avoid the use of the term "daycare" and use "child care," "early childhood education," and "early learning" programs instead.
- ❑ **Don't sell yourself short.** It's wonderful that so many early childhood educators love what they do. In a meeting where we are focused on investment in early childhood education, try to avoid saying things like, "I just do this because I love it," or "We aren't in this for the money" or "We don't care about the money, we're here for the families." If you undervalue yourself, it makes it easier for policymakers to undervalue you, too.
- ❑ **Don't trash the regs.** When discussing rules and regulations related to child care operations in the time of COVID, it's important to use language that references "**public health and safety guidelines**" as opposed to "burdensome regulations." Our goal is to get investments that allow businesses to flourish AND keep children, families, and educators safe. Don't give policymakers an option to focus only on the regulations, while ignoring the investments needed to meet them.
- ❑ **Remember: unemployment benefits aren't too high; compensation is too low.** When discussing how folks are making ends meet, use "**unemployment assistance**" rather than "benefits." If you also want to speak to the fact that educators may be earning more on

unemployment than by working in their programs, be sure to emphasize the fact that this is rooted in a challenge of having educators who are vastly undercompensated for their skills and competencies, and that our focus should be on raising compensation so that we are able to attract and retain a robust workforce that is able to deliver on the promise of high-quality early childhood education.

Example of a personal and powerful story (in 3 minutes!)

From Crystal Redner of Colorado:

Good Morning, my name is Crystal Redner, and until recently I was the Director for Bent County Early Learning Center (BCELC) in Bent County, Las Animas, Colorado. Las Animas is in the SE corner of the state and our county has one of the highest poverty rates in Colorado. Prior to 2015, BCELC temporarily shut down due to financial strain which left the county without a child care program. A group of community leaders soon realized the dramatic and negative economic impact not having child care had on the county and quickly began a rebuilding plan. Bent County became a financial partner and BCELC become a county entity, reopening in 2015. We were licensed for 36 children and have served over 200 families and 280 children from 2015-2020. Our average percent of CCAP children was around 64% with our high being 82%.

BCELC really benefited from having a physical location in the community nursing home. I cannot think of a better pair of businesses to benefit from each other's services. On March 20, 2020 BCELC had to close because of the risk for children, families and the elders. Still today BCELC remains closed - it devastated the families, children, staff and community as we are the only licensed learning center in Bent County. This has put a huge hole in our community.

Due to the risk to the nursing home, we attempted to find a new location for the child care program in Bent County, but this was unsuccessful. I then had to find other employment to support my family, so my family and I were forced to move to Parker so I could take on a new position. I have witnessed another whole set of challenges the past few months in Parker - lack of cleaning supplies, lack of PPE, budgets dramatically impacted by low class size, group size max, not being allowed to combine classes, keeping teachers as separated as possible. If centers have more than one building, making sure each building is self-sufficient, and not sharing staff, keeping parents out of the building - all to keep our children, families and staff as safe and healthy as possible. In the meantime, my original program at BCELC is still closed ...they are unable to find a director and staff to reopen. Being that childcare is such an underpaid profession it has become almost impossible to find well qualified employees, especially in rural Colorado.

On behalf of rural and urban Colorado, I want to thank you for signing the bi-partisan letter and would greatly appreciate your support for the Child Care is Essential Act as it is a MUST for rural Colorado. Without public investment in flexible funding, child care is going to become nonexistent and our communities will begin to die off. We cannot let this happen in any part of our beautiful state. Thank you so much for your time and support.

Resources

NAEYC Survey Data can be found at: <https://www.naeyc.org/pandemic-surveys>

- [Child Care in Crisis \(March 17\)](#)
- [A State-by-State Look at Child Care in Crisis: Understanding the Early Effects of the Coronavirus \(March 27\)](#)
- [From the Front Lines: The Ongoing Effect of the Pandemic on Child Care \(April 17\)](#)
- [State-by-State Look at the Ongoing Effects of the Pandemic on Child Care \(May 20\)](#)
- [Child Care & the Paycheck Protection Program \(May 12\)](#)
- [Holding on Until Help Comes: A Survey Reveals Child Care's Fight to Survive \(July 13\)](#)
- [State-By-State Data \(July 29\)](#)
- [NAEYC Virtual Congressional Meeting Toolkit \(July\)](#)
- [Families Suffer Without Child Care Relief from Congress \(September\)](#)
- [Child Care Programs are Being Forced to Raise Tuition or Close for Good \(October\)](#)
- [Sacrificing to Stay Open, Child Care Providers Face a Bleak Future Without Relief and State-By-State Data \(December\)](#)

- [America for Early Ed](#)
 - [Three Actions You Can Take](#) (2 minute video)
 - [Share Your Story](#)
 - [Contact Your Elected Officials](#)
 - Webinar: [Developing a Shared Understanding: Federal ECE Policy](#) (Public Policy Forum Prep: February 2021)
 - [Issue Areas](#)
 - [Build Your Advocacy Skills](#)

- [Child Care Stabilization Fund Toolkit](#) (Child Care Relief)
- [Child Care Is Essential Act Toolkit](#) (Center for American Progress)

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