# Gathering and Sharing Stories of Impact: Afterschool and Summer Program Site Visits

Site visits can be important tools for state and system leadersto gain firsthand knowledge of the power of high-quality afterschool and summer learning programs andto gather stories of impact to share with other key stakeholders. When translated into tools like impact reports, blog posts, panel sessions, and opinion pieces, site visit stories can generate support for and awareness of the contributions that enhanced summer and afterschool programs are making in your community.

State and system leadersmay plan a formal, structured site visitorrequest a drop-in visit to document promising practices and innovation on the ground. As described in this template, a formal visit might include a group of visitors and feature a short presentation, observations of multiple classrooms and activity spaces, interviews with students and teachers, and a debrief with staff. A drop-in visit would likely include one or two visitors for a walk-through and a visit to one or two activities.

Use this template to plan high-quality, strategic site visits and capture key information that supports your goals for program quality and sustainability. Then, translate the information you gather into a narrative for communications pieces to reach your target audiences. When shared strategically, site visit stories can reach education leaders, policymakers, funders, teachers, and families and be paired with requests for financial, in-kind, verbal, and/or policy support for your programs.

## Summary of Site Visit Planning Steps

Preparing for the site visit

🞏 Select a suitable program to visit that showcases the practices and programmatic innovations that you hope to sustain

🞏 Set a structure/agenda for your visit in partnership with the program

🞏 Gather program background information and create an informational handout for site visit participants

🞏 Invite guests and prepare program staff

During the site visit

🞏 Capture descriptive elements of the environment through detailed observation notes

🞏 Ask “on the record” questions of program stakeholders

After the site visit

🞏 Review and finalize observation and interview notes

🞏 Gather additional information

🞏 Write and share your story

### Preparing for the Summer or Afterschool Site Visit

**Guiding Question: What are you hoping to sustain as a result of your summer or afterschool system and program investments?**

1. **Select programs for site visits that will help you observe your priorities for sustainability in action and gather with key stakeholders.** Use the following criteria and characteristics to identify programs or solicit recommendations of programs to visit. Consider a screening call or visit if the program is relatively unknown and you want to ensure it’s of high quality. Make sure that the program is willing and able to host a site visit, has a confident site leader or other spokesperson, can demonstrate your identified program elements and/or target population, and is able to share program photos/videos. Then consider these factors:

* What is the headline you want to share about the afterschool and summer investments in your district or state? How can your site visit show that progress in action?
* What aspects of your afterschool and summer programs do you want to sustain? What does that look like on the ground?
* What innovations or quality practices do you want to sustain, scale, or spread? Where are these practices visible?
* What is your “ask” for sustainability? Which decisionmakers can help you achieve that goal for sustainability? Whom can you invite to the site visit to maximize your opportunities for influence?
* How can you gather information and examples that will demonstrate that quality practices/investments are making a difference? What partnerships should you feature?
* Is there a particular geographic area that is more desirable to host a site visit based on whom you hope to invite or influence?

1. **Set a structure/agenda for your visit in partnership with the program.**

* Work with the selected site to identify a day for the site visit that will show off the key program elements. Avoid times with full-day field trips, as core program elements and daily activities may not be as visible.
* Confirm the date and time and send a “save the date” to invited guests.
* While the length and timing may vary, strive to include these elements in your site visit agenda:
* A brief welcome and orientation to the program and the agenda.
* An opportunity for guests to observe several activities.
* An opportunity for guests to speak with one or more program staff and possibly one or more students and/or other key stakeholders.
* A planned debrief for guests to share observations and memorable moments with program leaders and each other.

**Resources to help plan your agenda include:**

* Engage Every Student Tip Sheet: Sharing Your Story Through Stakeholder Visits (forthcoming)
* [SCRI Site Visit Checklist](https://www.bellxcel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/SCRI-Site-Visit-Checklist-5-20-2021.pdf)

1. **Complete the table below with basic information about the program(s) you will visit.** Consider using this information to create a one- to two-page summary document for program visitors.

| Program Information | |
| --- | --- |
| Name of program |  |
| Number, grade level, and any other descriptors/profiles of students they serve |  |
| Number of schools they draw from, if a feeder model |  |
| The mission of the program or school |  |
| The needs this program is meeting |  |
| Background on how long the program of choice has been in operation |  |
| Program outcomes documented by the program including improved grades, behavior, SEL measures, attendance, matriculation, etc. |  |
| Supporting links, including links to program photos |  |

1. **Make final preparations.**

* Ensure that all program staff and partners are fully aware of the site visit agenda and their roles in it.
* If family perspectives are an important part of your site visit agenda, ensure that family representatives have been identified, invited, and briefed.
* Prepare a one-page program brief based on the template above to share with guests both in advance of the visit and via hard copy during the orientation.

### During the Site Visit

**Guiding Questions: How is this program exemplary or unique? What difference is this program making? What do key stakeholders say about the program?**

1. **Capture descriptive elements of the environment through detailed observation notes in the table below:**

| Descriptive elements of the environment | |
| --- | --- |
| How is this program exemplary or unique? |  |
| Do students have access to activities, resources, or expertise that they might not have access to during the school day? |  |
| How are strategic investments showing up on the ground? |  |
| How has the program evolved over time? Does the program operate longer because of new investments? Does it serve more students? Does it offer new services/ benefits? Is the instruction of higher quality? |  |
| What innovations or quality practices are visible and evident? Look for examples of learning that is active, collaborative, meaningful/relevant, and/or novel. See [*Five Learning Principles for Afterschool and Summer*](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ofytVBOE2pjtedM5MEkLTCjaVuatRcaBSW60Bxp1suY/edit?usp=sharing) (Lowe Vandell and Noguera, 2022) |  |
| Is student work displayed? If so, what does it show? |  |
| Are there obvious indicators of positive relationships and engagement? What are you seeing and hearing? Be specific. |  |
| Do you see any examples of your “headline” or key program elements in action? If so, consider documenting what it looks and sounds like for one class or activity. |  |
| Capture extemporaneous quotes from students and teachers that advance your story. |  |

1. **Ask “on the record” questions of program stakeholders. Record your notes in the table below.**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Example Questions for Teachers/Staff** |  |
| Is there a particular student who is benefiting from this program in a noticeable way? What is their story? How is the program working for them? (Could also be asked about a group of students.) |  |
| What do young people need in their out-of-school time programs today? |  |
| How are you benefiting from teaching in this program? What resources have been provided to support your delivery of this program? |  |
| How is this program complementary to what is happening in school? Are there any innovations or practices from afterschool and summer programs that you’re carrying into the school year? |  |
| How would you be affected if the funding for this program went away? |  |
| Is this program helping students to master any key skills or competencies? What are the different ways they are demonstrating what they’ve learned? |  |
| [Add your own] |  |
| **Example Questions for Students** |  |
| What made you join this program? |  |
| What do you like best about the program? |  |
| If you didn’t have this program, what would you be doing right now? |  |
| How is this program helping you achieve the goals you’ve set for yourself? |  |
| What would you say to other young people who have the chance to join a program like this? |  |
| [Add your own] |  |
| **Example Questions for Families** |  |
| How is your child benefiting from this program? |  |
| What does this program do that goes above and beyond the school day/year? |  |
| As a parent/guardian, how does having your child in this program help you personally? |  |
| [Add your own] |  |
| **Example Questions for Partners** |  |
| How has funding supported and/or enhanced this program? |  |
| How is this program complementary to what is happening in school? |  |
| What do you think is possible if this program is offered long term? |  |
| What will it take to sustain this program long term? |  |
| [Add your own] |  |
| **Example Questions for**  **Policymakers and Community Leaders** |  |
| Why are programs like these important? |  |
| What do you think is possible if this program is offered long term? |  |
| What will it take to sustain this program long term? |  |
| [Add your own] |  |

### After the Site Visit

1. Read through your notes to ensure that they are as complete as possible. Gather any missing or extra information that came up during the visit, including the latest outcomes, program details, etc.
2. Schedule a site visit debrief call with your communications team or representative to brainstorm ways to share stories of impact, such as one-page impact briefs, panel sessions or talking points, an op-ed or blog post, or other methods of interest. Make sure you have a clear call to action tailored to your audience. Remember that support for afterschool and summer programs can include funding, verbal support, policy changes, in-kind support, and operational support.
3. Use stories of impact to generate support for and awareness of the contributions that enhanced summer and afterschool programs are making in your community!

This document was prepared by the National Comprehensive Center under Award #S283B190028 for the Office of Program and Grantee Support Services (PGSS) within the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) of the U.S. Department of Education and is administered by Westat. The content of the document does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the PGSS or OESE or the U.S. Department of Education. If you experience problems accessing the content in this document, please [contact us](https://compcenternetwork.org/get-involved).

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