



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

YOUR IMPACT, OUR STORY

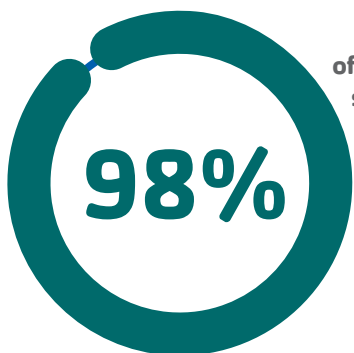
Engaging Public Officials
YMCA OF THE USA



U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (YMCA Metro Chicago)

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98% of congressional staff surveyed indicated that attending district or state events was either somewhat important or very important to helping Members of Congress better understand constituent views and opinions.

(Source: Congressional Management Foundation 2015 survey of congressional staff, including Chiefs of Staff, Communications Directors, Legislative Directors, and Legislative Assistants.)

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

“We cannot accomplish all that we need to do without working together.”

—Bill Richardson

Building and maintaining relationships with public officials should be something you do YEAR-ROUND to tell your Y story, show your impact and help advance policies that strengthen communities.

Why do we need to do this? Public officials make decisions that influence things that happen inside our Ys and things that affect the individuals and families we serve. It's great for them to hear from lobbyists who sit in an office in DC, but really, you know best about what your community needs.

Public officials WANT and NEED to hear from their constituents. If they don't hear from you, they won't have all the information they need to make the best decisions. Reaching out to the official and their staff regularly ensures that you are in control of your own story, rather than letting other people tell it for you.

Interaction with federal lawmakers back home is a key strategy for building relationships. In fact, a Congressional Management Foundation survey recently asked congressional staff the best way for members of Congress to gain an understanding of constituent views—“attending events in the district/state” was the top answer, with 98% of congressional staff noting its importance. These events paint a picture for the public official—bringing home for them the very real way in which Ys impact the community day in and day out.

There are several opportunities throughout the year to engage public officials at the local, state and federal levels either at your Y, in your community or in their offices. This toolkit focuses primarily on showcasing the Ys impact through public official visits to your Y.

View the calendar for the
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

View the calendar for the
U.S. SENATE

CONGRESSIONAL RECESS

Congressional recess is when Members of Congress head home to spend time with constituents in their districts or state. It is a great opportunity for you to meet with your representative and senators or their staff. Take advantage of these district work periods to invite your members of Congress to your Y and experience firsthand the impact you have on the lives of people in your community. View the calendars for the U.S. House and Senate to learn when your Members of Congress might be home. The summer recess in August is a great time to invite your members, but there are also work periods throughout the year. **The purpose of this toolkit is to help YMCAs deepen relationships with members of Congress, but these strategies can also be used with state and local officials. You can include them in any activities/ events you hold with your federal lawmakers.**

SHARE YOUR SUCCESS

Don't forget to share photos and stories from your visits with the rest of the Y Movement! Participate in the **Summer Recess Photo Contest**. Submit photos of your Members of Congress or other public officials engaging in programs at your Y. A winner will be selected and receive free registration and hotel for National Advocacy Days in Washington, DC in 2019. Email your photos to y-usagovernment.relations@ymca.net, or **tweet them with the hashtag #YAdvocate**. Be sure to use Y-USA's photo/video release. Photos for the contest will be accepted through September 30.

ELECTION YEAR

In an election year many public officials who are running for office will be looking for opportunities to campaign. It is important that you do not let an official's visit to your Y become a political event. Please be conscious of the following campaign and election dos and don'ts to ensure that your Y remains nonpartisan and effectively navigates campaign season as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit.

CAMPAIGN AND ELECTION DOS AND DON'TS

The federal government sets clear and generous rules to allow not-for-profits to engage in advocacy and lobbying. IRS Code does, however, strictly prohibit "participating or intervening in any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office." YMCAs should also avoid the perception of partisan political activity. Here are a few dos and don'ts regarding political involvement for 501(c)(3) organizations:

DO:

- Remember that you're a private citizen! YMCA staff and volunteers can participate in elections (donate money, volunteer, etc.), provided anything they say or do is as a private citizen and not as a YMCA representative (or taking place at YMCA property).
- Conduct nonpartisan candidate forums to educate voters on candidates and promote civic engagement.
- Extend invitations to all candidates to tour your YMCA and learn more about your mission, community impact and program and services.
- Inform candidates and voters of your YMCA's positions on issues related to your mission.
- Register voters and encourage voting (impartially).
- Offer your facility as a polling location on election day.
- Advocate for legislation, policies or regulations that further your mission, during election time and any other time.

DON'T:

- Participate, endorse, work for or intervene in any campaign (federal, state or local) for or against any political candidate.
- Oppose any candidates or political campaigns.
- Sponsor a political action committee (PAC).
- Give money, in-kind or any other contributions to candidates, parties or political action committees.
- Use federal funds for any political or lobbying purposes.
- Mobilize supporters to elect or defeat candidates.
- Collect and/or distribute candidates' statements, questionnaires, voting records, or sell membership lists to candidates (while legal within specific parameters, it is recommended YMCAs avoid this).

Hosting Candidates

While it sounds straightforward to avoid endorsing or opposing a candidate for elected office, questions do arise when it comes to hosting candidates. As community leaders and conveners, YMCAs often have candidates (local, state and federal) for public office in our buildings. Sometimes it's the Y issuing the invitation for a public forum and sometimes it's a candidate asking to come to the Y. Whether a person is campaigning for the school board, the state house, or even the presidency, it's just as important to meet the letter of the law as it is to meet the spirit and avoid the perception of partisanship.

THE IRS REQUIRES THAT YOU DON'T:

- Play favorites – if you invite one candidate, invite everyone running for that office (they don't all have to attend). If you rent space to one candidate, allow others.
- Allow use of office services that could be construed as an in-kind contribution.
- Imply endorsement through introductions, t-shirts, buttons, signage, web sites, etc.
- Waive any "customary and usual" room rental rates.

Y-USA ALSO RECOMMENDS THAT YOU CONSIDER:

- Any programs or services that may be displaced.
- If you're renting a space with significant Y signage (like a gym) the Y logo may appear in photos or media reports. Also, the Y will be listed as the location in communications.
- If political fundraising will take place. It's allowed with rental space, but not when the organization invites the candidate for voter education.

The IRS has published a **Frequently Asked Questions about the Ban on Political Campaign Intervention by 501(c)(3) organizations**: https://www.irs.gov/pub/irs-tege/501c3_polcampfaqs.pdf

Specific Issues/Ballot Initiatives/Referendums

Legally, public charities can take a stand on local ballot initiatives. Examples may include supporting a smoking ban or a bond for the public schools. A few questions to consider:

- Does this advance the mission of the Y? Often, the Y's endorsement carries great weight in a community. It's okay to remain neutral.
- Is there a perception that this is partisan? If the issue is divisive in the community, take great caution before aligning the Y with one side over another.
- What do your CVO and board think?

Always consult your board to discuss options and prepare to defend your position in the media and with members. Please contact Y-USA's Government Relations and Public Policy Office to discuss any specific circumstances.



**ENGAGING PUBLIC OFFICIALS
AT YOUR Y**

YOU'RE INVITED

There is no better way to show the Y's impact in your community than by inviting a public official into your Y. Here are some ideas for themes and key messages that will resonate with your elected officials and tie back to legislative priorities that will advance the Y's cause of strengthening communities:

Invite a public official to visit your EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION CENTER and read with your children. Consider having your young readers read to the public official.

Key messages

- The Y is proud to help provide young children in our community with a strong foundation to ensure they start kindergarten ready to learn.
 - We believe the Y has a role in helping to prepare children for academic and lifelong success and supporting working families by delivering quality early childhood programs.
 - Our Y plays a critical role in this community by:
 - » Serving infants, toddlers, and/or preschoolers.
 - » Offering full workday and/or part-day programs for families year-round.
 - » Providing Head Start and/or Early Head Start, state-funded preschool, or participating in the state's childcare subsidy program.
 - » Supporting children as they transition from our early childhood programs to elementary school.
 - » Linking our early childhood education programs to local economic development or military readiness initiatives.
 - Early childhood education is a resource for the whole family; young children and their families need to learn and grow together, and participation in YMCA programs achieves just this.
 - Community-based organizations have great expertise in early childhood education. Ys have in-depth knowledge of early childhood development as well as the capacity and infrastructure to deliver high quality programs and take them to scale.
- Ask your public officials to support investments in early childhood education and thank your congressional members for increasing funding for the Child Care and Development Block Grant (if you participate in your state's child care subsidy program).**

Invite a public official to visit your OUT-OF-SCHOOL TIME or ACHIEVEMENT GAP INITIATIVE PROGRAMS and participate in engaging enrichment activities.

Key messages

- The Y plays a critical role in providing the academic and enrichment support youth need to cultivate the values, skills and relationships that lead to positive behaviors, better health and educational achievement.
- Afterschool and summer programs are key strategies in tackling achievement gaps and boosting in-school success, building and nurturing 21st Century skills and helping to meet the needs of the whole child.
- We are working to improve the educational readiness, engagement and outcomes in our community by:
 - » Partnering with area schools to deliver locally-designed afterschool and summer programs using 21st Century Community Learning Center funds; and
 - » Implementing evidence-based programs that help to close achievement gaps, such as:
 - » The Y's Summer Learning Loss Prevention Program, the Power Scholars Academy program, or the Afterschool Program.
 - » The Y's STEM Learning Initiative which creates experiences for youth to engage in hands-on STEM activities, explore STEM careers and develop 21st century skills.

Ask your Congressional member to support funding for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program which provides academic enrichment opportunities to youth before school, after school and during the summer.

Through federal investments in 21st Century Community Learning Centers, the Child Care and Development Block Grant and Head Start, the Y supports working families, enhances the education and well-being of children and helps build the future workforce.

YOU'RE INVITED

Invite a public official to have breakfast, lunch or a snack with participants in your SUMMER OR AFTERSCHOOL FOOD PROGRAM(S) or to participate in an enrichment activity offered in conjunction with a meal.

Key messages

- The Y works to address child hunger by providing healthy meals and snacks to thousands of youth through the USDA's Child and Adult Care Food Program (CACFP) for afterschool meals and the Summer Food Service Program (SFSP) for summer meals. Be sure to mention whether your Y:
 - » Serves as a USDA food sponsor responsible for food distribution and administration, or
 - » Partners with other organizations who are USDA sponsors. Please mention who you partner with to nourish children (e.g., food banks, schools, faith-based organizations).
- Alongside these meals, the Y offers enrichment programming to complement and support all domains of youth development and to increase nutritional quality and physical activity among youth during the out-of-school time.
- The Y's efforts to feed children help to ensure their healthy development so that children are better able to learn when they are in school, and are less at risk for adverse health outcomes and summer learning loss.
- **In 2017, Ys provided more than 22 million meals to over 476,000 youth.**
- Continuing these important federal investments will ensure that the children you just met—and millions more—will continue to have access to healthy meals and snacks when school is out.

Ask your Congressional member to help increase access to summer and afterschool snack and meal programs by investing in SFSP and CACFP and streamlining childhood hunger programs.

Invite a public official to meet with participants from a CHRONIC DISEASE PREVENTION OR MANAGEMENT PROGRAM. Have participants tell them what class is like and how it has impacted their health.

Key messages

- Chronic diseases, such as heart disease, cancer, chronic lung diseases, stroke, Alzheimer's disease, and type 2 diabetes, account for the most deaths in the United States and globally. Chronic diseases are responsible for 7 in 10 deaths among Americans each year, and the vast majority of health care costs.
- The Y has developed programs to prevent or control these diseases, including preventing diabetes, controlling arthritis and hypertension, reclaiming health from cancer and helping children living with obesity to achieve a healthy weight.
- Half of ALL adults in the U.S. have at least one chronic condition. Key risk factors for chronic disease include poor nutrition, lack of physical activity and tobacco use.
- The Y works closely with CDC's Chronic Center to lead and coordinate efforts that improve quality of life, increase life expectancy and reduce health care costs for Americans across the lifespan by testing, implementing and scaling evidence-based health programs.

Invite public officials to observe other EVIDENCED-BASED HEALTH PROGRAMS.

Key messages

- The Y has been taking several evidence-based health programs to scale in partnership with federal agencies and foundations, including the National Diabetes Prevention Program, LIVESTRONG® at the YMCA, Enhance®Fitness, YMCA Blood Pressure Self-Monitoring, and Healthy Weight and Your Child.
- Each of these programs has been shown to improve the health of participants. These programs can help restore health to millions of Americans and help the nation save billions of dollars in health costs.
 - » The **National Diabetes Prevention Program** has been proven through clinical trials to reduce the risk of incidence of type 2 diabetes by 58% in people at risk, and 71% in at-risk adults over age 60. Nearly 84 million Americans have prediabetes, including half of all Medicare recipients. Started in 2018, Medicare now covers the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program for seniors. The Medicare DPP pilot showed that Medicare could save \$2650 per participating senior. The Y's program currently operates in 46 states and has served more than 58,000 individuals living with prediabetes.

» **LIVESTRONG® at the YMCA** has been proven through clinical trials to improve cardiovascular function, strength, and physical fitness and to reduce fatigue in cancer survivors. As of December 2017, the Y has served more than 55,000 survivors in 41 states by helping them reclaim their health and wellbeing. While cancer survivors go to a hospital or cancer center to get treatment, they can come to the Y to heal and feel welcomed in their community.

» **Enhance®Fitness** helps those with arthritis and other physical limitations become more active, energized and empowered for independent living. Arthritis is the number one cause of disability in the country and two-thirds of those with arthritis are under 65 and of working age. Studies have shown that participants in the program have fewer hospitalizations and save \$945 in health care costs per year. As of January 2018, the Y has served more than 23,000 participants in 43 states.

» **YMCA Blood Pressure Self-Monitoring** is an evidence-based, self-monitoring program aimed to help participants better manage their blood pressure. One of every three American adults have high blood pressure and less than half have it under control. High blood pressure contributes to the two leading causes of death for Americans: heart disease and stroke. As of January 2018, over 4,000 participants in 28 states have participated in the program.

» **Healthy Weight and Your Child** is an evidence-based program that empowers 7-13 year-olds and their families to reach a healthy weight and live a healthier lifestyle. The family-centered program emphasizes three elements: healthy eating, regular physical activity and behavior change to elicit a positive life-long lifestyle transformation. The program engages the child and adult, so together they can understand how the home environment and other factors influence the choice that lead to a healthy weight. Since its launch, the program has impacted over 1,100 children across the country.

- For additional information about these programs, access the current legislative priorities from the [Advocacy community](#) on Link.

Tell your member of Congress to invest resources in programs that can improve the health and well-being of millions of Americans by funding agencies like the CDC to help scale these programs in partnership with community-based organizations like the Y.

Invite a public official to visit your DAY OR OVERNIGHT CAMPS to see kids engaging in hands-on activities, playing in nature, exploring STEM, building peer relationships and engaging in physical activity.

Key messages

- Camps are a life-changing experience that provide an exciting and safe environment for young people to explore the outdoors, build confidence, develop skills and make lasting friendships and memories.
- Camps create opportunities for campers to achieve and excel.
- Y camps provide exciting training and employment opportunities for young people who serve as counselors.
- Camp is a place where kids learn to be both more independent and develop a sense of belonging to a very special community.



State Rep. Tyrone Thompson (SkyView Y Las Vegas, NV)

YOU'RE INVITED

CHILD SAFETY

- Child safety is a top priority for youth serving organizations. Access to comprehensive background checks, including FBI fingerprint background checks, is a critical issue.

Invite public official to observe SAFETY AROUND WATER

Key messages

- The Y has been committed to water safety throughout its history.
 - » The world's first indoor swimming pool was opened at the Brooklyn, NY, Central YMCA in September, 1885.
 - » In 1906, George Carson, a Detroit YMCA staffer, invented the first group swimming lesson and went on to teach over 800 boys how to swim in just four weeks in Newark, NJ.
 - » During WWI, the Y taught soldiers how to swim.
- Given that two children drown every day in the United States, this commitment is as important as ever.
- 70% of African-American, 60% of Hispanic/Latino and 40% of Caucasian children cannot swim.
- Drowning is the leading cause of fatal unintentional injury for ages 0-4 and second leading cause of death for children 5-14.
- The Y is committed to reducing water-related injuries, particularly in communities where children are most at risk.
- The Safety Around Water program is a standardized program to reach children, ages 4 to 14, at risk of drowning and teach them basic water safety skills.
- In 2016, over 1 million children learned to swim through a YMCA program. National organizations like the Y can further scale safe swimming program that help all children at risk of drowning.

Here are some additional ideas for building relationships with your members of Congress and other public officials during Summer Recess:

- **Host a forum on an issue important to your community.** The Y is both a convener and leader around issues related to our areas of impact. Hold an event where other community leaders join you to discuss the issue and invite the member of Congress as a special guest. These types of events can be open to the public or by invitation only.
- **Arrange a meeting during the academic school year** with youth participating in Achievers, Youth and Government, etc.
- **Schedule a meeting with your member of Congress in their district office.** Building and enhancing relationships with your members of Congress does not have to take a lot of time. A short office meeting is a great opportunity to connect one-on-one or in a small group. Consider taking a board member or a program participant with a compelling story to tell, or even a local partner or collaborator that can speak to your community impact. Don't be disappointed if you end up meeting with his/her staff. Remember, their role is to be a liaison with the community and they will brief the member and help coordinate meetings for the member in the future—next time it could be at the Y!
- **Attend town hall meetings or other public events that the member is hosting.** If you are unable to schedule a meeting or host your own event/tour, consider going to an event that the member is hosting, or one at which they are scheduled to appear. Take whatever opportunity might present itself to make a short introduction so they know the Y is present.



State Rep. Tyrone Thompson & City Councilman Richard Cherchio (SkyView Y Las Vegas, NV)

HOSTING A PUBLIC OFFICIAL AT YOUR Y

Public officials want to hear from the Y. Inviting them to visit your Y is an effective opportunity to educate them on how the Y impacts and strengthens communities every day. Ys are encouraged to meet with and host congressional members, as well as state and local policymakers, to deepen relationships, advocate in support of legislation, showcase model programs and to share the Y story to illustrate our impact.

THE INVITATION

STEP 1.

First, make your request by email to the scheduler. Be sure to send along a program brochure or some background materials about your Y. Immediately follow up the initial request with a phone call to the member's local district/state office and Washington, D.C. office. If the scheduler is unavailable, leave a message and follow up with another phone call. ([Sample invitation letter](#))

- Tell the scheduler you have emailed an invitation for the member to visit your Y and learn more about either a specific program that impacts the community, or a variety of programs during the next congressional recess.
- Suggest specific times and dates during the congressional recess. It is ideal to schedule the visit when your programs are in full swing, but be flexible.
- It is helpful to have a copy of the invitation letter when you call the member's office.
- Be clear in your request. Include logistics (time, place, location) and a designated point of contact.
- Paint a picture of what the event will look like.
- Be sure to mention your impact in the district and why the meeting is important.
- Point out how your Y's program(s) relate to the member's interests (improving academic achievement, making communities healthier, etc.).
- Get to know the person on the phone—they are a key relationship. They may end up preparing the member for the meeting and can help set the tone for the visit.
- Be sure to mention that Y staff and members will be on hand for the visit and offer to invite media as well.
- Ask if the policymaker might have time for media availability before or after the visit (if appropriate).

STEP 2.

One week before the visit, call to confirm the date and time with the scheduler and ask for the name and contact number of the staff who will be accompanying the member. Be sure to find out how much time you will have with the senator or representative.

PREPARE FOR THE VISIT

STEP 3.

Identify board members, youth, volunteers, program participants or staff who can tell the Y story effectively.

You should aim to have a small group of about 4–6 people for the meeting during part of the visit for the most effective outcome.

Be prepared. One of the most important pre-meeting activities is planning out how the visit will proceed. Meet with YMCA participants to make sure everyone is clear about the goals and purpose before the visit.

- **Research:** Review the senator or representative's website to learn more about their background interests—you may have a common personal connection! Reach out to Y-USA's Government Relations and Policy Office to learn more about the member and where the member stands on our federal legislative priorities. Learn more about Y-USA's legislative priorities on Link.
- **Delegate:** Assign roles to each member of the group. One person should be the lead facilitator/greeter, while others should tell a compelling story, share specific data or examples and ask for support, if appropriate. Designate a member of the group to take notes during the visit for future reference.

STEP 4.

Create informational packets. The packets should include your community benefit fact sheet (your state CB fact sheet as well), annual report, press release, program/schedule of visit and brochure about programs and initiatives. You may also want to include copies of any articles, youth essays, parent letters, awards or other documents that highlight your Y's programs or community impact.

Be flexible. Keep in mind that the legislator's schedule can change without notice. If he/she is no longer available, request that a member of their staff visit your Y instead or reschedule for another time.

HOSTING A PUBLIC OFFICIAL AT YOUR Y

STEP 5.

Create a proposed schedule. Tailor the visit based on the length of time allotted. The congressional office will appreciate this in advance of the visit and will likely request it.

Sample

Proposed Schedule for One-Hour Visit: Lunch with Summer Food Program Participants

Noon

Representative or Senator arrives at the Y and is greeted by the CEO, Board Chair or State Alliance Chair.

12:05–12:45 p.m.

Lunch with children/families. Representative or senator talks with youth, parents, staff, etc. Plan for key photo opportunities, especially with the Y logo displayed.

For example, ask parents to share their perspectives on the program's value, have a local principal talk about students' increased attendance and improved behavior as a result of their participation in your programs.

12:45–1:00p.m.

Facilitate a discussion about the Summer Food Program, including key messages that tie back to the legislative priorities/key messages highlighted above. Showcase aspects of your community benefit data, such as financial assistance, as you tour programs supported by such initiatives, like early childhood or afterschool programs.

Educate the representative or senator about things they may not know about the Y. Of key importance is the fact that the Y is a charity, that it is inclusive, and that no one is turned away for an inability to pay.

1:00 p.m.

Thank the representative or senator and their staff for visiting your Y. Let them know if you have plans to attend future National Advocacy Days, and that you will make a future appointment with their office.

STEP 6.

Engage media. Ask the congressional office if it is okay to invite media. Work with the member's press staff to send a media alert to invite press and to prepare a press release for the day of the event. ([Sample media alert and press release](#))

INVITING A MEMBER OF CONGRESS TO VISIT YOUR YMCA:

Helpful Hints

On average, a Member of the House will receive approximately 20 requests per week to attend events or meetings in the district—many will be turned down. In 2014 the Congressional Management Foundation surveyed key congressional staff to identify best practices for in-district events. Here are some tips based on that survey to increase the chance that your member will visit your Y/attend your event:

- Be flexible with timing. Timing of your event and whether it conflicts with other events on the calendar is the top logistical factor that influences scheduling decisions. Work with the public official's staff to identify a day and time that works best. Provide them with some options to ensure they are visiting at a time when they will be able to see your programs in action.
- When you call to schedule the visit, mention that there will be constituents present. This is one of the top strategic factors that matter to a policy-maker when making scheduling decisions (the number of VIPs attending was the least important).
- Avoid last minute requests. According to the staff surveyed by CMF, the ideal time to make a request is:

More than 6 weeks	Town hall-style meeting
5–6 weeks	Formal speech or community event (parade/festival/rally)
3–4 weeks	Site visit, district meeting, meeting outside the district office, informal talk, issue forum/conference/roundtable
1–2 weeks	News conference

- Check with the policy-maker's office before inviting media.
- Be understanding. If for some reason a visit is not possible during your preferred time frame, indicate your understanding, and mention that you'd like to keep in touch and schedule a visit at a future time.

HOSTING A PUBLIC OFFICIAL AT YOUR Y

STEP 7.

Get a camera. Share the photos with your local newspaper, feature them in your Y or State Alliance newsletter, and post them on Facebook and Twitter with the hashtag #YAdvocate or in a spotlight on your website. Participate in Y-USA's Summer Recess Photo Contest to win free registration and hotel stay for 2019 National Advocacy Days.

Please use Y-USA's photo/video release. It must be signed by all participants of the event. If children are involved, parents must sign in advance. The Y-USA photo release must be signed in advance in order for Y-USA to be able to share your photo with others. Your YMCA release is not sufficient for this purpose.

STEP 8.

Notify the Government Relations and Policy Office.

Send an email to y-usagovernment.relations@ymca.net or call (800) 932-9622 to let our office know about the upcoming congressional visit. Be sure to inform the Government Relations Office of any necessary staff follow-up they should conduct.

DURING THE VISIT

On the day of the visit, wait outside the Y to greet and direct the representative or senator, media and visitors to the right location. Be sure to distribute the informational packets to all attendees.

TIPS

- Welcome and introduce the representative or senator to the group. Explain who is represented, including title/position. If the person is a volunteer, be sure to highlight the vital role that volunteers play at the Y.
- Respect the legislator's schedule—start on time and stay on schedule. Be prepared to end the tour early, if necessary.
- Stay positive when conversations turn contentious. Phrases such as, "I certainly see how the issue might be viewed that way; however, if I may add..." may garner a greater opportunity to continue the dialogue.
- Ask what the Y can do to help advance or be a resource to a cause supported by the member of Congress.
- Remember the purpose of this visit goes beyond discussing the issues, it is also to establish a lasting relationship with the member and their staff.
- Encourage the member to participate in an activity.

AFTER THE VISIT

STEP 9.

Send a personalized thank you letter with a picture from the visit to the member. ([Sample thank you letter](#))

TIPS

- If you volunteered to send follow-up information or if new information emerges, send it with the thank you letter. It never hurts to include the newspaper article mentioning the member's visit to your Y. It will serve as a helpful reminder of the pleasant visit and reinforces the relationship.
- Add the member and staff to your email and snail mail distribution list—newsletter, press release and relevant events. Even if the member is unable to attend, it is a great way to share the important work your Y is doing and to keep the Y on their radar screen.



SCHEDULE AN OFFICE VISIT WITH A PUBLIC OFFICIAL

Members of Congress want to be responsive to their constituents and their needs. Developing personal, ongoing relationships with your elected officials is the most effective way to secure their support on the critical community issues in the Y's areas of impact. You can build these relationships through in-person meetings at their office.

SCHEDULE YOUR IN-STATE CONGRESSIONAL MEETING

Senators and representatives are eager to get to know their constituents, especially organizations with the deep community reach of the Y. They may not have the time to visit your Y, but that should not stop you from connecting with them in person. A meeting in a state/district office is a key time to update the member on current needs of the community and what the Y is doing to address those needs. The Y can play a vital role in educating legislators about a variety of issues, including our expertise in the areas of youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Therefore, you are a valuable resource to the senator, representative and their staff. Follow these steps to schedule a meeting with your elected official at their district office:

STEP 1.

Locate your representative or senators [HERE](#): Please try to meet with all three of your members of Congress at some point during the year, especially during the congressional recess.

STEP 2.

Submit a meeting request in writing by email or fax and follow up with a phone call to the scheduler.

([Sample meeting request letter](#)) In the letter, include what you would like to discuss and the names and titles of those planning to meet with the representative or senator.

STEP 3.

Call their district office and ask to speak to the scheduler to arrange a meeting. Prior to calling, determine the dates and times that will work for the meeting attendees. While on the phone, get to know the staff—they are a key relationship!

STEP 4.

Choose the meeting participants carefully for maximum impact. Remember, too large of a group can be counterproductive. Include:

- Volunteers—they are at the heart of the Y Movement and are our best advocates;
- Staff who are involved in the issue or program and who will stay involved;
- Consider a Youth and Government, Y Achievers or Y Leaders participant.

PREPARE FOR THE FACE-TO-FACE MEETING

STEP 5.

Meet with YMCA participants to make sure everyone is clear about the goals and purpose before the meeting. Consider the following:

- If a group, clarify who will take the lead or who will stress particular points.
 - » Who will open the meeting?
 - » Who will share specific data, research or other information? Remember to keep it brief.
 - » Who will share a compelling personal story?
 - » Who will ask for the member's support in voting for a bill, talking with colleagues, sponsoring legislation, etc., if appropriate?
 - » Who will ask about next steps: day-to-day point of contact? Timing of when you should hear from his/her office?
 - » Who will take notes during the congressional meeting?
 - » Who will be responsible for follow-up on information requests?
- Review the senator or representative's website to learn more about the member and their interest—you may have a common personal connection! It is also valuable to know where the member stands on legislative issues. To learn more about Y-USA's national legislative priorities, visit [Link](#).

REPORT YOUR EVENTS AND MEETINGS

Please help us keep track of meetings and events with public officials. Go to www.ymca.net/action and click Log Interaction once you have signed in to tell us about the visit. Or, send us an email at y-usagovernment@ymca.net.

STEP 6.

Bring informational materials to leave with the legislator and staff. A one-pager that outlines your Y's programs and accomplishments is best.

TIPS

- Be sure your contact information is easy to find.
- Include general information, such as a flyer or brochure showing the impact of the YMCA in your state or community. This material should highlight the YMCA's charitable status and community benefit.

STEP 7.

Take a camera. Share the photos with your local newspaper, insert them in the Y newsletter, feature them in the state alliance newsletter and post them to your Facebook or Twitter (make sure to use **#YAdvocate**), or on your website. Participate in Y-USA's Summer Recess Photo Contest to win free registration and hotel stay for the 2019 National Advocacy Days.

STEP 8.

Y-USA Government Relations and Policy staff are here to help. If an issue comes up during the meeting that you are unaware of, let the legislator know you will follow up with them on our position within a few days. Immediately contact the Government Relations and Policy Office to seek input or guidance on the issue. Email y-usagovernment.relations@ymca.net or call (800) 932-9622.

If follow-up by Government Relations staff would be beneficial, please contact us via email.

DAY OF THE MEETING

TIPS

- Be well-prepared, friendly and positive in your message, even if your legislator does not share your perspective. It is important that they understand the basis for your position.
- Remember, you have knowledge and expertise to share, as well as front-line news from the community.
- Do not forget a call to action and bring in a one-page fact sheet on the issue(s). How might the member support Y-USA's legislative priorities in areas of mutual concern?
- Offer to provide relevant follow-up contact or materials after the meeting.
- Thank your legislator and his/her staff for their time and any commitments they made during the meeting.

AFTER THE MEETING

STEP 9.

Send a personalized thank you letter with a picture from the meeting (if one was taken) to the member.

[\(Sample thank you letter\)](#)

TIPS

- If new information emerges, send it with the thank you letter. It never hurts to include the newspaper article mentioning the member's visit to your Y. It will serve as a helpful reminder of the pleasant visit and reinforces the relationship.
- Add the member and staff to your email and snail mail distribution list—newsletter, press release and relevant events. Even if the member is unable to attend, it is a great way to share the important work your Y is doing.

CUSTOMIZABLE MATERIALS

Sample Invitation Letter



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT*
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

[Date]

The Honorable [First Name & Last Name]

U.S. House of Representatives OR U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515 (for U.S. House) 20510 (for U.S. Senate)

Dear Senator or Representative [Last Name]:

On behalf of [Name of YMCA], I would like to invite you and your staff to visit [our Y OR program OR attend an event (name event, for example, Summer Food Program, Early Childhood Program OR the YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program)]. We'd be honored if you would participate in the program by (example of activity such as having lunch with Food Program participants). Members of our staff and volunteers from our community will be there to discuss all that the Y is doing to strengthen community through nurturing the potential of youth, promoting healthy living and fostering a sense of social responsibility in [city or community]. Your visit will include (be specific about activities). If your schedule permits, may we suggest that you visit on [DATE]. [If other elected officials will be present or have been invited, be sure to provide that information. For example: We have also invited Mayor Jones and the members of the City Commission. If the visit is intended to take place during a specific event at the Y—such as Healthy Kids Day—be sure to spell that out with details of the event, such as notable attendees and the number of people expected to attend].

[Provide more information about the program or topic that will be highlighted during the visit. You can also use this space to talk about concerns in the community and what the Y is doing to respond to community needs.]

We appreciate your leadership in helping youth and families in our community learn, grow and thrive, and we know you will find support for your efforts at the Y. Let me thank you in advance for considering my request. I look forward to seeing you in [INSERT MONTH OF VISIT].

Sincerely,

[Name]
[Position]
[YMCA]

YMCA NAME
123 Anystreet, Anytown US 99999
P 888 888 8888 F 222 222 2222 ymcaofanytown.net

Request A Meeting At Your Elected Official's Office



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT*
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

[Date]

The Honorable [First Name & Last Name]
U.S. House of Representatives OR U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515 (for U.S. House) 20510 (for U.S. Senate)

Dear Senator or Representative [Last Name]:

As the [your title] of the [name of your local YMCA], I would like to request a meeting with you on [DATE OF THE MEETING] between [INSERT TIME RANGE, I.E, BETWEEN 10AM-5PM] in your [State/District Office]. Joining me will be [name and title of any volunteers/youth leaders that will be coming with you], who serves on the YMCA's board of directors [or some other capacity].

During our meeting, I would like to discuss the YMCA's legislative goals: 1) controlling chronic disease and health care spending by preventing obesity, diabetes and heart disease, 2) investing in the nation's youth by supporting early childhood, afterschool and summer learning, and 3) making philanthropy possible for more Americans by supporting a universal charitable deduction. As one of the leading charitable organizations in the country, the YMCA is also committed to advancing legislative reforms that will help ensure the entire nonprofit sector is held to the highest standards of governance, accountability and transparency. I look forward to sharing some of our local success stories with you and learning about how I can be a resource to you and your staff on issues affecting our community.

Please contact me at [include phone number or email address] and let me know what time is convenient for you to meet on [DATE OF THE MEETING]. I look forward to hearing from you soon and seeing you in [STATE LOCATION OF MEETING].

Sincerely,

[Name]
[Position]
[YMCA]

YMCA NAME
123 Anystreet, Anytown US 99999
P 888 888 8888 F 222 222 2222 ymcaofanytown.net

Thank You Letter



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT*
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

[Date]

The Honorable **[First Name & Last Name]**

U.S. House of Representatives OR U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20515 (for U.S. House) 20510 (for U.S. Senate)

Dear Senator or Representative **[Last Name]**:

Thank you for taking time to visit the **[INSERT FACTS ABOUT THE PROGRAM OR HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE VISIT]** at the **[NAME OF Y]** **[INSERT MEETING HIGHLIGHTS]** on **[DATE OF VISIT/MEETING]**. It was good to hear your ideas regarding **[INSERT ISSUE]** and to share with you how the YMCA strengthens our community.

Again, thank you for visiting our Y **[OR meeting with us to hear about our Y]**, and we hope you enjoyed your time with **[our Y children, hearing from Y staff or YMCA's Diabetes Prevention Program participants]**. I look forward to working closely with you to help nurture the potential of kids, promote healthy living and foster a sense of social responsibility within our community.

Sincerely,

[Name]
[Position]
[YMCA]

Enclosure: Picture from **[your visit to the Y OR Congressional meeting]**

YMCA NAME
123 Anystreet, Anytown US 99999
P 888 888 8888 F 222 222 2222 ymcaofanytown.net

MEDIA RESOURCES

In this section you will find customizable media resources to alert the press about your visit from the member of Congress. Whether or not you invite the press, a press release is a great way to say thank you and reinforce promises made during the visit. Be sure to include some pictures with your release. You can also adapt this release into an article for your newsletter. If your member of Congress is running for re-election, be careful to thank them for specific legislative actions rather than providing an endorsement. Contact Y-USA Government Relations at (800) 932-9622 if you need additional assistance.

Customizable Media Alert



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

[Name]
[Name of YMCA]
[Phone]
[E-mail]

****MEDIA ALERT/PHOTO OPPORTUNITY****

[Rep. /Sen. Name] to Tour [Name of YMCA] on [Day of Tour]

WHAT: [INSERT SEN. /REP. NAME] will visit the [NAME OF YMCA] to [INSERT ACTIVITY THAT MEMBER WILL PARTICIPATE IN AT YOUR YMCA].

WHO: [List attendees: SENATOR, REPRESENTATIVE, YMCA CEO, BOARD MEMBERS, COMMUNITY LEADERS, etc.]

WHEN: [INSERT TIME]

WHERE: [INSERT LOCATION. Be sure to include the zip code as many media use online map services to get directions to your location.]

CONTACT: [INCLUDE NAME, PHONE NUMBER, E-MAIL].

###

Customizable News Release



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

[Name]
[Name of YMCA]
[Phone]
[E-mail]

[Senator/Representative Name] Visits [Name of YMCA] to [Name Program/Activity]

[CITY/COMMUNITY, DATE]—Today, [Senator/Representative NAME] visited the [NAME OF YMCA] to get a firsthand look at the [INSERT PROGRAM OR ACTIVITY] that demonstrates the Y's work to nurture the potential of youth, improve our communities' health and give back to our neighbors in [NAME OF CITY]. **[Provide more information about the activity, program or topic discussed during the visit.]**

"One of the best ways to tackle **[closing the achievement gap, obesity, etc.]** is when we work side-by-side with our neighbors, community partners and elected officials," says [CEO], [TITLE], [NAME OF YMCA]. **[INSERT SPECIFIC BACKGROUND INFORMATION {For example, Senator Smith has been a long-standing leader and ally for after school programs and supports the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Programs, greatly benefitting Ys.}]**

[QUOTE FROM THE SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE]

[SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE NAME] was greeted by **[NAME OF EACH PERSON AND TITLE]**.

As an advocate of the Y, **[SENATOR/REPRESENTATIVE NAME]** plans to:

[List the priorities/issues he/she agreed to champion. If available, include facts or data to support.]

- Support funding to nurture youth by **[supporting robust federal investments in the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) and 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC)]**.
- Improve the nation's health and well-being by **[supporting the National Diabetes Prevention Program at CDC, supporting funding that seeks to strengthen communities with opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity]**.
- Oppose any caps or limits to the charitable tax deduction, because Ys are committed to providing support to our neighbors and opportunities for kids, adults and families to learn, grow and thrive.

For more information about the **[NAME OF YMCA]**, visit **[website]** or contact **[name of staff person]** at **[telephone number and/or e-mail]**.

###

End with your YMCA's boilerplate (e.g.: About the **[name of YMCA]**) or use the following.

About the Y

The Y is one of the nation's leading nonprofits strengthening communities through youth development, healthy living and social responsibility. Across the U.S., 2,687 Ys engage 21 million men, women and children – regardless of age, income or background – to nurture the potential of children and teens, improve the nation's health and well-being, and provide opportunities to give back and support neighbors. Anchored in more than 10,000 communities, the Y has the long-standing relationships and physical presence not just to promise, but to deliver, lasting personal and social change. ymca.net


MEDIA RESOURCES

WEBSITES, NEWSLETTERS, ANNUAL REPORTS, FACEBOOK AND TWITTER

There are several additional ways to highlight these interactions with your Congressional delegation, which helps to further strengthen your relationship. Include photos and articles in your member newsletters, on your website and in your annual report. Don't forget to share photos with your Facebook and Twitter followers as well.


Samples

#1

 **Your YMCA** @YourYMCA • 3h
Excited and honored to host @SenatorX at @YourYMCA today! Looking forward to a great tour and discussion about important issues! #yadvocate


↩️ ↻️ 2 ⭐️ 16 ⋮

#2

 **Your YMCA** @YourYMCA • 3h
Big thank you to @RepX for coming out to @YourYMCA today! We hope you found the visit as productive and enjoyable as we did! #yadvocate

↩️ ↻️ 2 ⭐️ 16 ⋮

#3

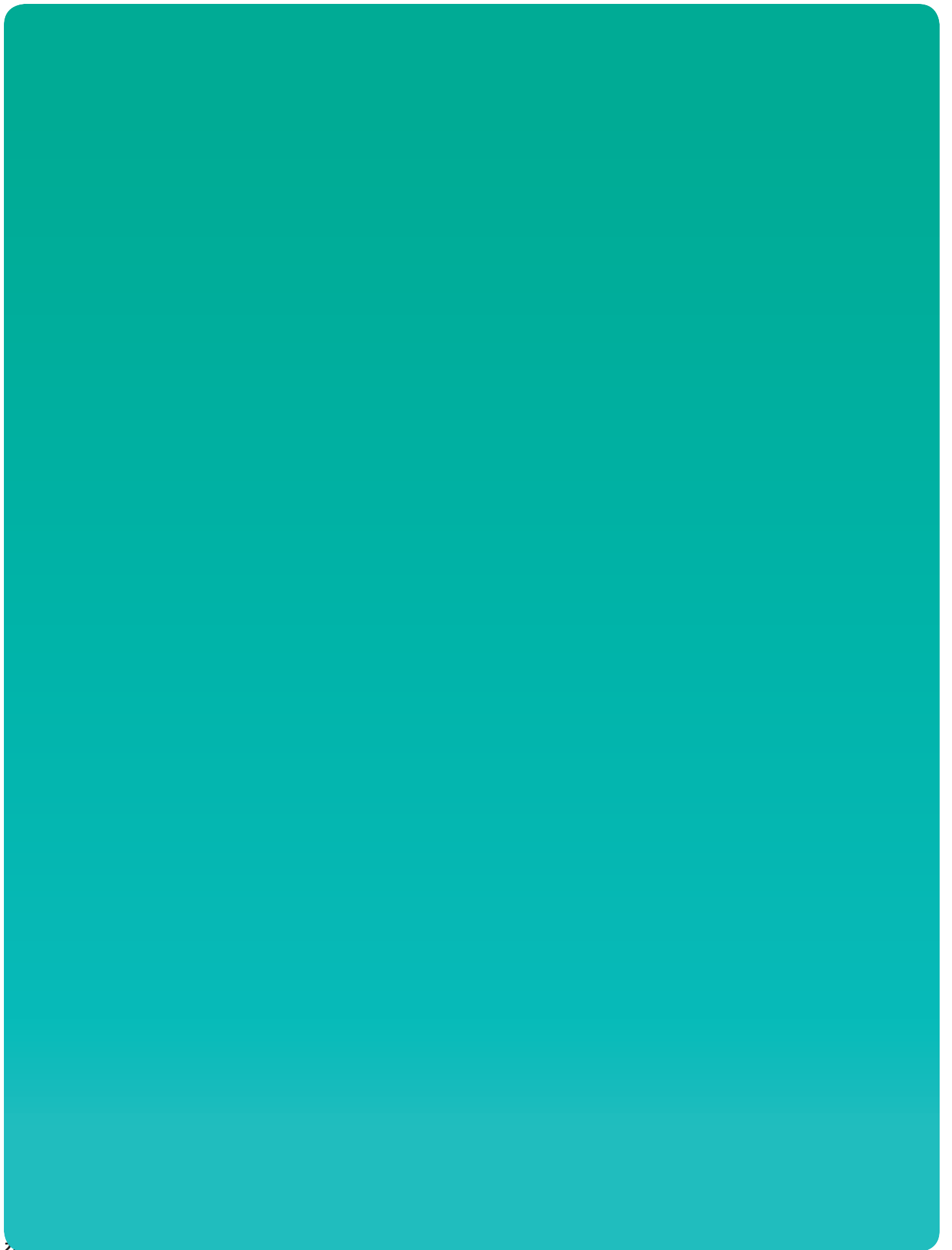
 **The Y**
April 14 at 1:00pm · 🌐

Excited to meet with Representative X at his/her office today to discuss important issues facing the Y!
#yadvocate

Like · Comment



U.S. Rep. Joe Kennedy III (MetroWest YMCA)





YMCA OF THE USA
101 N Wacker Drive
Chicago IL 60606
P 800 872 9622

link.ymca.net