



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

ENGAGING PUBLIC OFFICIALS IN SAFETY AROUND WATER PROGRAMS

Just as schools adjourn for summer, so does Congress! Congressional members are usually home for recess during the month of August. Use this opportunity to invite them to your Y and learn how Safety Around Water is saving lives and improving your community.

Contact:

Connect with a moderator in the [Advocacy community](#) on Link.

WHY YOU SHOULD ENGAGE PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Public officials need and want to hear from their constituents. As a Y professional you see community needs firsthand and how to best meet those needs. By telling the Y story, you can help influence policy decisions. It's part of being a cause-driven leader and a chance to engage public officials in the important work of your Y.

Congressional recess is a great opportunity for you to meet with your representatives and senators or their staff. State and local officials may have the ability to visit your Y throughout the year, but congressional members take recess several times each year so they are able to spend time with constituents in their districts or home states. This year, due to this being an election year, they will be home more than usual. Take advantage of these congressional recesses to invite your members of Congress to your Y and experience firsthand the impact you have on the lives of people in your community.

Y-USA's Government Relations and Policy Office has created the Engaging Public Officials toolkit to help you plan for and execute events and meetings with public officials. This guide provides information about how to invite a public official, how to structure an event/meeting, how to involve media, and more.

Visit the [Advocacy community](#) on Link to download the Engaging Public Officials toolkit.

HOW TO INCORPORATE SAFETY AROUND WATER IN PUBLIC OFFICIAL EVENTS

During any event, make sure to include local or state statistics so that public officials know about the scope of the problem and the potential community needs. Some impactful local statistics may include the number of drownings in the past year, the disparities in access to Safety Around Water programs in the community, and the potential impact of programs on vulnerable populations. Other key messages to consider at events are:

- The Y has been committed to water safety throughout its history.
 - 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 4 weeks in Newark, NJ.
 - During World War I, the Y taught soldiers how to swim.

YMCA OF THE USA

101 N Wacker Drive, Chicago IL 60606
P 800 872 9622 F 312 977 9063 ymca.net

- Given that two children drown and die every day in the United States, a commitment to water safety is as important as ever.
- Drowning is responsible for more deaths among children 1-4 than any other cause except birth defects and the second leading cause of injury-related death for children ages 5 to 14.
- In ethnically diverse communities, the youth fatal drowning rate is 2-3 times higher than the national average.
- 60% of African-American, 45% of Hispanic/Latino and 40% of Caucasian children cannot swim.
- In underserved communities, 79% of children who live in households with incomes less than \$50,000 have no/low swimming ability.
- In 2009-2011, drowning caused 91% of deaths of children with autism spectrum disorder ages 14 and under.
- Most of these tragic deaths are preventable. The Y is committed to reducing water-related injuries, particularly in communities where children are most at risk. In 2015, Y-USA launched the Safety Around Water Program. Safety Around Water is a program designed to reduce children's risk of drowning by teaching them basic water safety skills. In 2016, over 1100 YMCA branches reported delivering the SAW program. These classes are just one of the many swim programs that millions of people from toddlers to adults take advantage of at the Y's more than 2,200 pools across the country.
- Urge Members of Congress to support the US Consumer Product Safety Commission's *Pool Safety* grant program, which provides funding for state and local governments to hire and train enforcement personnel on pool/spa safety, and education on drowning/entrapment standards. The Y supports a \$5 million allocation to the grant program and the inclusion of national organizations to establish best practice standards, development of a national water safety plan and further scale programs, like SAW, nationwide.

Consider inviting public officials – local, state and federal – to learn more about your water safety programs and explain to them why they are important to your community. Here are some ideas, but feel free to come up with your own!

- Invite public officials to observe a class and hold a meet and greet with parents to talk about experience after class.
- 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 focus. 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.
- 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. 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. Take whatever opportunity might present itself to make a short introduction so they know the Y is present.