

Strolling Thunder

Recruiting Families



Parents with children ages 0 to 3 are some of the strongest advocates for babies and toddlers. And as constituents, they have the ear of their policymakers when sharing their stories and advocating for what they as parents need to be successful. Here are some suggestions to help you recruit families to participate in your *Strolling Thunder*[™] event.

Tips to Engage Families

How you recruit families depends on the number you want to engage and your direct access to them. As you think about criteria for recruiting families, we encourage you to think about geographic, economic, racial, disability, LGBTQ, and issue diversity as well as residency in target districts.

Here are a few suggested strategies:

- Make the ask in person to parents with whom you interact on a daily basis.
- Work with partner organizations who interact directly with parents, or to expand your reach to other areas of your state.
- Send out a request through your social media channels and e-newsletter.

Depending on your recruitment process, you may want to ask families the questions in the next section to ensure their stories align with your policy priorities. Once you have families on board, you will want to have them sign a release form (see example below), which will give you permission to share families' stories with reporters, through social channels, and on your website.

Ask Questions to Engage Families

We have used the following questions to recruit a diverse group of families; get a sense of parents' stories; and assess their ability to share their stories and needs with policymakers so you have a sense of how you can support them. You can use these questions as a script or send them in a Word document to families to provide written answers.

- Tell me about your family, particularly your baby or toddler.
- What has been one of the more challenging parts of parenthood/guardianship?
- What have you noticed about your baby's development recently? How did they learn it?
- Thinking about your own experience, what types of support do you feel all parents/guardians need to be successful?
- Tell us about programs that have supported your baby and family.
- Tell us what you wish your policymakers knew about one or more of these programs.

- Why do you think it is important for your policymakers to *Think Babies*?
- Do you have a personal experience or story you'd like to share as part of *Strolling Thunder*?
- How are you an advocate for babies and families in your community and in your state?

Tips to Support Parents during *Strolling Thunder*

Families with babies and toddlers are at the heart of every *Strolling Thunder* event, but it can be challenging for parents to travel with their infants and toddlers and spend the day or afternoon meeting with policymakers. For virtual events, navigating technology can be a challenge. Here are a few tips to help make your *Strolling Thunder* event go smoothly for parents.

- Be respectful of the routines parents have for their children, but encourage them to stick to your *Strolling Thunder* agenda as much as possible. It can be a long and unpredictable day but remind parents that it's okay if their babies get fussy in a meeting with a policymaker—it's a vivid illustration of what babies need!
- Consider conducting an in-person training with parents ahead of meetings with policymakers. We recommend covering the following in the training:
 - Review key messages (no more than 4, short and sweet);
 - Review "asks" of policymakers, and if relevant, advocacy/lobbying guidelines;
 - Review meeting materials and each parent's story;
 - Provide an overview of your state capitol/meeting spaces; and
 - Role play meeting with policymakers and have families practice telling their story.
- Prepare a schedule of meetings or activities and other important materials for parents, such as a map of the state house or city council, and guidance on the best way to get around if parents will be traveling to meetings on their own. Be sure to prepare a printed packet for them to reference with everything they need at their fingertips (and one less thing to think about).
- Encourage parents to take brief notes about their story to have on-hand in meetings with policymakers. While you won't want parents to read from a "script," many families will appreciate having notes.
- Make sure you have a dedicated group of staff or volunteers who are available that day to help families. Give parents contact information for someone on your staff who will be accessible throughout the day in case they have questions, or something comes up during the *Strolling Thunder* event.
- Give parents advance information about the dress code for meetings and reassure them that nothing special is necessary. This is something they think and care about.

- Give recommendations where parents can get family-friendly meals during the day. Also, consider making some baby supplies available, like diapers, wipes, and other essentials as well as age-appropriate healthy snacks and beverages for parents and children to grab and go.
- For virtual events, it's important to take time to prepare families before your event so they know exactly how things will go logistically. Help them think about a place where the lighting is good, and they feel comfortable about the background. Consider sharing with families the option to use a background if they feel uncomfortable having their home visible. Also, expect to play the part of tech support to families participating in your event. If you are planning a live event or meeting, schedule practice time to ensure that all technology is working, and families feel comfortable with it. For more tips for engaging families during a virtual event, visit our *Think Babies* Virtual Events: [Tips for Engaging Families Toolkit](#).