



Tips For Inviting a School to Become Your Sound Off Partner

Choosing a School

Sound Off can benefit students and families throughout your entire community. But the program is specially designed and tested to help families who are at highest risk of home fire. As a firefighter committed to Community Risk Reduction, you know the importance of using data to identify high-risk homes in your community. Use local fire department data to zero in on elementary schools that serve families who live in low-income/high call volume areas. They can be public schools, private schools, or parochial schools. Once you identify these schools, it's time to choose one and schedule a meeting.

Making Contact

If you already know someone on the faculty or staff of your target school, ask them who would be the best person to contact about Sound Off. If not, you should phone the main number of the school and ask the receptionist whom you can talk with about bringing a free home fire safety program into 2nd and 3rd grade classrooms. (If applicable, be sure to mention that your program provides FREE smoke alarms to participating families that need them.)

If the receptionist needs prompting, explain that you'd prefer to meet with the principal, assistant principal, a lead teacher for grades 2 or 3, or the curriculum supervisor for those grades. If you can't talk with your potential partner immediately, leave a message and ask for the person's phone number and/or email address so you can reach out directly.

Educators are extremely busy people, especially in an elementary school, so prepare to be persistent with your outreach. Once you make contact, briefly explain Sound Off and its record of success, then set a date and time to meet at the school so you can show off the program's resources.

Don't be surprised if your first contact suggests that you meet with someone else at the school instead. (How would you react if a "salesman" called you at work?) Take the new contact information and follow-up. Then keep at it until you schedule a meeting. Remember: you have life-saving information that the kids and families at your target school need to stay safe.

Prepare Your Pitch

- Pull incident data or create a hot map showing that the school is in an area with high call volume for home fires.
- Be authentic and caring. Use both facts and emotion as you explain that while your fire department cares about EVERY child in the community, you know some are at higher fire risk than others...including those at [name of school]. These are the families you most want to reach. And you can't do it alone.
- Print copies of the [Background for School Administrators](#) and explain that Sound Off aligns with Grade 2 and 3 Common Core Standards for Math, Language Arts, and Health. (See Sound Off Alignment with [Common Core Standards](#) at https://ymiclassroom.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/so21_standards.pdf) [NOTE: Some States do not follow Common Core Standards, but they typically follow guidelines that are very similar.]
- Bring several copies of the Sound Off Teaching Kit if you can. (If you are from an official Sound Off State, ask your Sound Off State Team Leader for copies. If not, plan to use a computer and print-outs to display the Sound Off classroom materials and to demonstrate the many online assets Sound Off provides.)

Talking Points for Your Meeting

- Explain that thanks to generous funding from the US Department of Homeland Security/FEMA, Sound Off is totally free of charge to schools and families.
- Explain how Sound Off works – that you would like to make three visits to 2nd and/or 3rd grade classrooms to teach the program's three core home fire safety lessons. Each visit will last 30 minutes or less.
- If your department has smoke alarms you could install free of charge, explain that home safety visits and free smoke alarm installations can be scheduled for families as needed.
- Show off the Sound Off resources — Storybook, Activity Sheets, videos, digital activities, and the Sound Off Safety App. Emphasize that all Sound Off resources are freely available online and most are in both English and Spanish. Reassure families that the Sound Off Safety App works on smartphones without internet so their child can play the Sound Off videos and games even if there's no internet.
- Express gratitude for any support the school can give your fire department in keeping kids and families who most need help safer from fire.

Building Your Partnership

- Start SMALL – in just one or two classrooms to begin. Once you are experienced in delivering the Sound Off activities you will be able to adapt them for your particular needs.
- Teachers love to share with colleagues. Bring extra copies of the Teaching Kit if available. Offer to continue working to expand Sound Off to other classrooms as quickly as time and resources permit.
- The Sound Off program has established State Teams in 20 States as of 2022 (ymiclassroom.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/so22_leaders-1.pdf). Our National Project Team is happy to help you make Sound Off a success in your community.
- Contact Meri-K Appy, Sound Off Project Manager, at 202-412-5387 with any questions you may have.