

A Guide for Speak Hard Youth Conference Sponsors

Thank you for agreeing to be a sponsor and for bringing a group of young advocates to the upcoming Speak Hard Youth Conference in Jefferson City. This will be our 15th annual event, and we are gearing up for a great conference! In order for this event to be a success, we need your help to prepare your students on what to expect while attending. With your guidance, we know this will be a memorable and educational day for Missouri's great students!

What is Speak Hard?

This tradition of advocacy began in 2005. It's a day that Missouri teen voices unite in Jefferson City, become educated on issues surrounding underage drinking and substance use, and speak to their legislators about the concerns in their communities. The itinerary will consist of prescheduled legislative appointments, followed by educational workshops, lunch, and an Outstanding Youth Awards ceremony in the hotel's ballroom. If someone in your group is a recipient of this award, please feel free to invite their parents/families to attend.

Where is Speak Hard?

This year we are starting the day at the Capitol. Aside from committee meetings, this should be an ideal time to meet with legislators before they go to their chambers for General Session at 10:00. You can either find a parking spot around the Capitol, some of which are metered, drop off your group, or park at the hotel and walk. If your group **does not plan** on legislative visits, you can register at the hotel outside of the main ballroom anytime between 8:00 and 8:45am. We will have a workshop to attend between 8:45-10:15 leading up to the keynote speaker at 10:30. For groups that are meeting legislators, check in at Hearing Room 2 in the Capitol's basement to register your group and pick up your packets. Angela Bonine will offer the "At Home in the Dome" training for navigating the Capitol and the legislative process at 8:30 am. That will also begin in Hearing Room 2.

We will be returning to the Capitol Plaza Hotel this year for the training portion of the conference. The address is 415 West McCarty Street, Jefferson City, 65101, and their phone number is (573) 635-1234. The hotel has a parking lot in front and additional parking in the garage below. Bus parking can sometimes be a problem so please call ahead or talk to someone at the front desk when you arrive for the best parking option for your group.

What is expected of me?

Sponsors are responsible for the youth throughout the day at the conference and must stay at the hotel if your group arrives the night before. Youth may split up for different sessions even if the adult sponsor cannot attend, but we do ask that you help make sure youth are finding their sessions and getting to and from scheduled events. Please try to arrive early so you will have ample time to register your group. Explain to your students what a "conference" entails such as "breakout sessions", the importance of punctuality, and showing respect for each presenter.

What is the code of conduct?

Attire: Because you will be attending workshops in a professional setting and meeting with lawmakers, sponsors and their students should dress in “business casual” attire. Khakis or dress pants with a collared shirt is ideal. Wear comfortable shoes because we will be walking around the Capitol.

Cell Phones: To be respectful to the speakers and other attendees, please keep cell phones on silent, or don’t bring them at all. Even vibrating phones can be distracting.

Professionalism: Due to the amount of attendees and short time frames, it is imperative that you keep a schedule and get to each session punctually. The presenter has a limited time restraint, so your cooperation and promptness will enable everyone to get the most out of each workshop. Please advise your group to follow directions from you, ACT Missouri staff, or any other adult.

How should I speak to my legislator?

Appointments: Please contact your representative(s) and senator **at least two weeks in advance** to make your appointments during the allotted time slot between 8:30 and 10:00 am. If you need ACT Missouri to help with scheduling appointments, give us a call at (573) 635-6669 or email info@actmissouri.org. **Call to confirm your appointment the day before you come.**

When you call to schedule your appointment, tell the legislative assistant the nature of your visit, how many will be in your group, and that you will only require a few minutes of their time. Lawmakers will be very busy going to committee meetings, hearings, general sessions, and meeting with other constituents, so please be very respectful of their time. They also may have something that comes up last minute that forces them to miss your appointment, so be prepared to provide some information about your group and your intentions to their assistant. You may want to leave an informational packet that includes what your group is doing for your community, pertinent contact information, and possibly a giveaway item. More suggestions on speaking with your legislator and effective advocacy strategies can be found on our website: <https://www.actmissouri.org/advocacy/>.

Talking Points: ACT Missouri will provide you with talking points in advance, so please have your students practice them prior to their appointment. We also encourage them to come up with their own talking points. They can each say one, do them as a group, or whatever makes them the most comfortable. Don’t be nervous, be prepared! Legislators enjoy hearing from their young constituents about their concerns. Just be polite, confident, and professional, announce clearly and stick to your talking points. Thank them for their time upon completion of your visit.

Follow up: When you return home, write the legislators a group (or individual) thank you note telling them that you appreciate their time and regard for youth issues. They are more likely to remember your visit or request you as a resource if you follow up with a call or note. If they asked you for more information during your visit, be sure to include that as well.

Miscellaneous information

Encourage your students to have fun! It is possible to learn, behave professionally, make a positive impression, and enjoy yourself all at the same time. They should decide which breakout sessions they wish to attend before arriving to avoid overlap. It may be more beneficial for your students to not attend the same breakouts as others from their schools so they can acquire varied info to take back.

Coach your attendees to meet new people instead of sticking with their pack. This is their opportunity to learn about other communities and what they are doing to reduce underage drinking and substance use.

Use your travel time to practice talking points, facilitate conversations about the conference, discuss initiatives that can be applied in your community, and provide constructive criticism of the day. This may also be an ideal time to brain storm ideas on how to apply their newly acquired knowledge to the existing prevention efforts that their community or coalitions are doing.

Additional Resources

If you need additional assistance during the day, do not hesitate to ask. ACT Missouri will have both staff and volunteers available for that purpose.

Thank you again for sponsoring your group. We look forward to the best Speak Hard Youth Conference yet, and we are confident that this can be achieved with your assistance and preparations!