

Arranging a Site Visit with Elected Officials

The National Trust for Historic Preservation, Main Street America, National Trust Community Investment Corporation (NTCIC), and preservation allies throughout the country are engaged in advocacy campaigns to build support for historic preservation and Main Street activities with Members of Congress, state legislators, mayors, and other officials. A site visit by an official can be an invaluable part of your advocacy.

Visiting a project or neighborhood provides legislators with a unique opportunity to see first-hand how their government is leveraging significant private investment through the reuse of our historic buildings. For example, during tours of a tax credit rehabilitation project, officials learn how many jobs are created during the construction phase, how the new use will spur broader economic activity in the surrounding neighborhood, how the historic character of the building is preserved, and challenges encountered.

Below are a set of recommendations for arranging your own successful site visit with an elected official:

- Decide which preservation project in your area offers the greatest opportunity to highlight the benefits of the program you're highlighting (e.g., Historic Tax Credit, Historic Preservation Fund, etc.). Offering a tour either during construction or after a property is placed in service are great ways to highlight different aspects about the value of a specific government program and/or governmental financial support. For events that require significant planning or financial commitment, like a grand opening reception, make sure the event would be a success even if the legislator has to cancel. Determine who your "core" team will be, the 1 or 2 people that have to be there to make the visit successful. Make this core team the priority in scheduling and in speaking with the legislator.
- Involve partners such as developers, state and local preservation and Main Street organizations, as well as National Trust advisors in planning a site visit as they may have connections to member you are trying to reach. Involving a variety of partners will also help you respond to a broader array of questions from the elected representative.
- Select several dates or a range of dates for a site visit based on calendars. For example, when your elected officials will be back home working in their Congressional districts is set at the beginning of each Congress. Be prepared to be flexible on dates in order to secure a commitment.
- Send a simple and direct invitation electronically. For Members of Congress, forward it to both the member's Washington, DC scheduler and if possible, the in-district Staff Director. You can find their contact information on the Member of Congress's webpage. Officials are more likely to accept an invitation if there are more constituent groups making the request. Be sure to coordinate site visit follow up requests with the team.
- Scheduling is the most difficult aspect of a site visit. If you do not receive a reply from an office after two weeks, plan to follow-up via e-mail and by calling the office. It is not unusual for schedulers to explain the official's schedule has not been set for the date you are trying to secure. Develop a rapport with the scheduler by being patient and graciously persistent. For example, if one Congressional in-district work period does not work, refocus on the next Congressional recess. You may also receive an offer for a staff member -- either from Washington or the district office -- to tour the project. Spending time with staff is highly valuable and can be instrumental in making the case for the program you are discussing. Accept such an invitation but politely explain you are still interested in having the official (e.g., member

of Congress) tour the property. Use the staff visit to develop your relationship with the office to become a trusted advisor and resource on historic preservation issues.

- Before the visit, meet with your team and decide who will tell which part of the story. For example, if you are visiting a historic tax credit project, decide who will describe details about financing of the project, impact on the neighborhood, and historic significance of the building. Ensure everyone has specific talking points to cover. For example, access the policy pages of the [National Trust](#), [Main Street America](#), and [NTCIC](#) websites for regularly updated talking points as a resource.
- Determine what printed materials to share. For example, a simple document showing how the financing gap is filled by the historic tax credit is recommended as it will clearly articulate the role and significance of the historic tax credit. You might also share a one-page document that describes the history of the building or the Main Street itself and its contributions to the community.
- Before the visit, discuss with the scheduler if the official or Member of Congress is interested in having media join the site visit. Would they prefer a behind-the-scenes tour or something that will generate media attention? If media coverage is requested, ask what materials the office would like to have in advance of the visit.
- On the day of the visit, you need to be in close communication with the official's staff to confirm arrival time and last-minute changes.
- During the visit, ask the legislator a specific request in support the bill, measure, or program. . For example, you could ask the official embers to consider co-sponsoring legislation that will make improvements to the program. On the Congressional level, for example, you could encourage the Member of Congress to mention their support of the Historic Tax Credit to colleagues who serve on the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee the value of the HTC or the Appropriations Committees the value of the Historic Preservation Fund.
- During the visit, the official may have questions to which you do not have an answer. It is entirely appropriate to simply state you do not have that information, but that you would be happy to follow up with their staff as soon as possible.
- In addition to a thank you letter, following up after the site visit is essential. You now have access to the elected official's office, and with strong follow up, you will be considered a key resource and local expert. . Plan to follow up with additional materials you think would be helpful and any information specifically requested by the official.
- Add the official (e.g., Member of Congress, state legislator, mayor, etc.) to your mailing list if they are already not on it already. Follow-up the shortly afterwards or the next week with a thank you for attending. Two to three weeks after the visit, follow-up with the officials's staff to see if they acted on your request (e.g., have they co-sponsored the bill)

Need Help? If you need assistance setting up a site visit for your elected official, please contact members of the National Trust's Government Relations Staff : **Shaw Sprague** - ssprague@savingplaces.org, **Lauren Cohen** - lcohen@savingplaces.org, **Hannah Stark** - hstark@savingplaces.org, or **Michael Phillips** at National Trust Community Investment Corporation - mphillips@ntcic.com or **Kelly Humrichouser** at Main Street America – khumrichouser@savingplaces.org