



SUCCESSFUL SITE VISITS AND OTHER EVENTS

Inviting policymakers – federal, state, or local – to discrete events is an excellent way to build political relationships. Some possible opportunities include legislative breakfasts, constituent league meetings, and tours of the workplace. Honoring political officials who have supported nursing education and health care issues is another way to foster linkages.

Scheduling a site visit or other local event is a terrific way to cultivate access to lawmakers and generate support for the NLN's policy issues. Site visits offer several strategic benefits:

- A site visit demonstrates that the NLN has a presence at the district level (i.e., potential voters and check writers have a stake in your issues).
- Mobilizing your grassroots for a site visit at the district level may be easier than asking advocates to travel to Washington, D.C., or to the state capitol.
- Because they are interested in stories about the nexus of local organizations and elected officials, local media may cover your event.
- Tours provide a more interesting and memorable background on your issues than any briefing document could.
- Local representatives may be more available in your district than on Capitol Hill or your state capitol.

A good tour, however, takes careful planning. First, **decide whom to invite**. Site visits are appropriate for elected officials or staff. Consider starting with a district staff person and working up to a visit from the elected official. A staff-level visit can be just as important as a visit from an elected official.

Send the invitation to the legislator and staff explaining who you are, what you would like to show them, and how long it will take. Remember to include directions to the facility.

Scheduling a successful site visit requires you to provide some incentive for the invited legislator. Legislative schedulers are besieged with visit requests. Your written invitation should communicate the mutual benefit of the guest's attendance.

Here are some tips for crafting invitations that lawmakers will find hard to resist:

- Make the policymaker the center of attention. Provide a forum in which the legislator will be publicly introduced and given the opportunity to speak.
- Arrange media attention. If the news media are likely to cover a local event, invite your lawmakers to share the limelight.
- Provide coverage in your publication. Feature the site visit in your institution or state NLN publication to provide welcome exposure for the lawmaker and targeted access to the district.
- Present an award or photos. Give the lawmaker a plaque or event photographs to display in his/her office.
- Provide safe and direct access to district voters – for example, a forum in which legislators can glad-hand real voters.

These elements will serve as powerful incentives to attract invited legislators to your site visits. Remember, the way you structure your local events is far more critical than how you address an envelope to a scheduler.

Place a phone call to the official's scheduler to make sure they have received the invitation. Keep in mind that you will have to arrange the tour around the legislator's schedule. Besides formal recesses, members of Congress are most likely to be in their home districts on Mondays and Fridays. Do not be discouraged if a visit is not scheduled immediately. Be flexible and persistent.

Choose the location. Determine the best location for the visit, making sure to obtain any necessary consent beforehand. If your institution has public – or community – relations staff, involve them from the beginning. They may be able to provide you with much needed help and resources.

Prepare the information. A packet of materials for the visitor should include pertinent names, addresses, and phone numbers; background materials on the NLN and NLN's Public Policy Agenda.

Work out the logistics. Do not assume that the congressional office will take care of any aspect of the trip, from travel arrangements to supplying an umbrella on a rainy day. A detailed agenda should clarify who will do what and when.

- How will the guest get to and from the event? Will the office provide transportation?
- How much time can the member commit to the event? Do not try to cram too much into a short visit. Make sure you hit the highlights. If this visit is going to occur during a regular mealtime, consider setting up a discussion over an informal buffet or box lunch. Often, elected officials do not have time to eat between meetings. They will appreciate your recognition of that fact.
- You cannot control the weather, but you can be prepared for all possibilities. Make sure you have all necessary accoutrements to make the visit pleasant for everyone.

Record the event. Be sure to capture the occasion.

- Consider hiring a photographer or have someone designated as such.
- Although you do not want someone recording the visit verbatim, assign someone the task of preparing a written report about the visit. You can turn these notes into an article for your newsletter or an editorial for your local newspaper.
- Legislators and other officials like their constituents to know that they are attending to the needs and interests of the district. One great way to do that is to have the media document these site visits. Be sure to check with the congressional office before inviting members of the media. Usually, you will find that the office is willing to help.

Follow up promptly. Once the tour is over, send a thank-you letter to the legislator and staff. Reiterate the key issues you discussed, and offer to answer any questions. If the local media ran any positive articles on the visit, include copies with your letter. Finally, include a photo of the visit for the official to use.