



Arranging a Congressional Site Visit

The National Trust for Historic Preservation and preservation allies throughout the country are engaged in a campaign to build support for the historic tax credit with legislators on Capitol Hill. Visiting a historic tax credit project provides legislators with a unique opportunity to see first-hand how the federal government is leveraging significant private investment through the reuse of our historic buildings. Members of Congress also learn how many jobs are created during the construction phase, how the new use will spur broader economic activity in the surrounding neighborhood, and how the historic character of the building is preserved. Below are a set of recommendations for arranging a Congressional site visit.

- Decide which historic tax credit project in your area offers the greatest opportunity to highlight the benefits of the program. 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 the program. 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.
- 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 for a site visit based on the Congressional recess schedule. When your elected officials work in their Congressional districts is set at the beginning of each Congress. Be prepared to be flexible on dates in order to secure an commitment.
- Write a compelling invitation and forward it to both the member's Washington, DC scheduler and the in-district Staff Director. Plan to send the invitation both through the regular mail and electronically. Members of Congress 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 a Congressional 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 member's schedule has not been set for the date you trying to secure. Develop a rapport with the scheduler by being patient and persistent. 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 Congressional staff is highly valuable and can be instrumental in making the case for the HTC. Accept such an invitation but politely explain you are still interested in having the member of Congress tour the property. Use the staff visit to develop your relationship with the office with the aim that you 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 tax credit story. For example, who will describe details about financing of the project, impact on the neighborhood, and historic significance of the building. Check the National Trust and NTCIC websites for regularly updated historic tax credit talking points as a resource.
- Determine what printed materials to share. 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. It is also important to have a one-page document that describes the history of the building and its contribution to the community.
- Before the visit, discuss with the scheduler if the member is interested in having media join the site visit. Would your representative prefer a behind-the-scenes tour or something that will generate media attention. If media coverage is requested, ask what materials the Congressional 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 member's staff to confirm arrival time and last minute changes.
- During the visit, ask the legislator to support of the historic tax credit as the House and Senate tax writing committees develop their respective tax reform proposals. **Specifically, ask members to consider co-sponsoring legislation that will make improvements to the program.** Encourage the legislator to mention to colleagues who serve on the House Ways and Means Committee and the Senate Finance Committee the value of the HTC.
- During the visit, the member of Congress 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 the member's 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 member's office, and with strong follow up, you will be considered a key resource on the historic tax credit program. Plan to follow up with additional materials you think would be helpful and any information specifically requested by the legislator.
- Add the Member of Congress to your mailing list if they are already not on it already. Two to three weeks after the visit, follow-up with the Member's staff to see if they have co-sponsored the bill.

Need Help? If you need assistance setting up a site visit for your legislator, please contact members of the NTHP/NTCIC Historic Tax Credit Campaign: **Shaw Sprague** - ssprague@savingplaces.org, **Renee Kuhlman** - rkuhlman@savingplaces.org, **Carl Wolf** - cwolf@savingplaces.org or **Michael Phillips** at National Trust Community Investment Corporation - mphillips@ntcic.com.