



If you've reached out to lawmakers as part of your advocacy efforts, you may be considering inviting them to visit as the next step in building a relationship with them. As you plan for a potential visit, keep the following points in mind.

The Invite

When contacting your lawmaker at his or her local office, your audience will likely be staff members. In your email or voicemail, be sure to detail for them who you are, the property you represent, where your property is located and the number of residents you serve. You should also point out that you're following up on previous contacts from residents and list a few of the issues they're interested in. Mention the activities you've completed as part of advocacy efforts and explain why you'd like the lawmaker to visit. You can also briefly address what type of visit you're envisioning, such as a tour followed by a meeting with residents.

Don't be discouraged if you don't hear back right away. Members of Congress receive hundreds of emails each day and their staff members may need time to respond. If you emailed about a visit, try calling as a follow-up. You can also tag lawmakers you'd like to visit through social media if they haven't responded to your requests. For example, you could share a picture of your residents writing letters to a lawmaker, who should be tagged in the post. As part of the post, mention that your residents would love to meet him or her in person and give a tour of your property.

The Planning

In preparation for a lawmaker's visit, it's important to involve other property staff and keep residents informed because you'll want to put your property's best foot forward. Create a timeline and a list of duties for that day to be sure no detail is overlooked. For example, if you're planning a coffee meet-up with residents after the tour, be sure a staff member oversees setting up the event space, preparing the coffee and getting residents seated while you lead the tour.

It's also a good idea to stress to residents that it's OK to be critical of their elected officials, but they should be sure not to monopolize their time or become combative. If you have concerns about residents being argumentative during the visit, you may give the lawmaker's office a heads up as well as consider hosting a controlled question and answer session instead of an informal meet and greet. You can also collect questions from residents a few days before a lawmaker forum to ensure they are clearly and concisely posed by a moderator. Your property staff and the lawmaker's staff should work together to arrange a visit everyone is comfortable with and excited about.

During the planning process with the lawmaker's staff, you might also consider inviting local media to attend the event and report on it. If you don't know who to contact, most television news stations and newspapers have sections on their websites where you can submit news tips. You might also find contact information for reporters and editors by looking through the staff section of the news website.



The Visit

As the service coordinator, you have a clear understanding of your residents' interests and needs, so you should lead the tour with the lawmaker or staff member during the visit. While showing them around the property, explain how it and your position are funded as well as the demographics of the population. During the tour, plan to stop at a resident's apartment. This resident should be a volunteer who is involved in the planning process and is prepared to speak about the value of the affordable housing community and service coordination.

The tour can be followed with an event during which other residents can meet with or hear from the lawmaker. These events come in many shapes and sizes and will vary depending on the lawmaker's level of comfort, your residents' interests and the expected attendance. Types of events to host during a visit include:

- Forum, where he or she is asked to address pre-selected topics before an audience and then participate in a short Q&A session.
- Coffee and conversations, during which the lawmaker mingles with residents for a set period of time.
- Round table, where residents are grouped together based on the issues that matter most to them and the lawmaker goes group to group specifically addressing those issues.

Don't forget to send a thank you note after the visit to let the lawmaker and their staff know that you appreciate their time and efforts to address residents' interests.

