

Planning and Conducting an Effective Site Visit

Inviting elected officials on a tour of your program is a powerful way to move your policy agenda. Members of Congress are persuaded to take action on federal policy when they understand the direct impact that policy has on real people and programs. Be prepared to tell personal, organizational and community-wide stories of success during the visit. You are more likely to gain support from your Member on a particular issue if you demonstrate your organization's ability to make effective use of federal resources. Site visits are also a great opportunity to bring media attention to the success of your facility.

Scheduling your Site Visit

- ❖ **Schedule your visit** by faxing an invitation (attn: scheduler) to the DC office (*See: Sample Invitation*). Copy the appropriate staff person that works on the policy issue you are pushing.
- ❖ **Follow up with the scheduler** to confirm your meeting. Members are subject to last minute change so confirm your visit again as it gets closer.

Who to Invite

- ❖ **Invite** a broad spectrum of people to demonstrate widespread support for your program and policy issue. Ideas include: a board member, local/state elected officials, service providers, consumers or someone who has a relationship with your Member already.
- ❖ **Invite local media** to give you and your Member positive press attention.

Preparing for the Site Visit

- ❖ **Determine** your message and which policy issue you want to push during the visit.
- ❖ **Prepare an agenda** with a strategic route that allows them to talk with particular staff and clients. Identify speakers who will be "on message".
- ❖ **Make sure a consumer prepares a story** of how your program impacted their success (*See: Telling Your Story*).

- ❖ **Prepare handouts** of materials about your program and your policy agenda.
- ❖ **PRACTICE.** Make sure speakers are prepared. It is important that the visit be brief and focused on your message.

Things to Remember During the Visit

- ❖ **Site visits are similar to Congressional meetings** (*See: How to do a Hill Visit*).
- ❖ **Points made** during the visit should be “on message” with your policy request.
- ❖ **Continuously make the connection** between what the Member and Congressional staff are seeing and the policy issue you are advocating.
- ❖ **Take pictures** with your Member of Congress and attendees.
- ❖ **Ask your Member of Congress** to take specific action in support of the policy issue (examples include: Co-sponsoring legislation or writing a letter).
- ❖ **Ask when and who you should follow up with** on what you have asked him/her to do.

Follow up

- ❖ **Send a thank you note** summarizing what action you have asked him/her to take and how this will affect your program and homelessness in your community.
- ❖ **Put pictures from the visit in you newsletter** and add their office to your mailing list.
- ❖ **Call the Congressional staff** person you were told to follow up with at the time suggested, send any information requested on the site visit and answer any unanswered questions that were asked by your Member or Congressional staff on the visit.
- ❖ **Continue to follow up on your policy request** with letters, phone calls, meetings, and media outreach.
- ❖ **Work with the Alliance year round** to learn how best to continue to strengthen relationships with your Members of Congress by contacting Sarah Kahn at skahn@naeh.org or 202-942-8259.