



## A “How To” Guide to Facility & Community Tours for Elected Officials

The purpose of this Guide is to help you arrange a tour of your facility or community for any elected official such as:

- U.S. Senators
- U.S. Representatives
- Governors
- State Senators
- State Delegates/ Representatives/ Assembly Members
- Mayors or other Elected Officials

**Tip:** Facility & community tours play a critical role in the American Health Care Association & National Center for Assisted Living’s educational and legislative efforts. They enable policy makers to see firsthand the issues that affect our industry, and most importantly, they see how their constituents are impacted by what they decide in Washington, the state house, or city council. As a result, tours have proven to be one of the long term care industry’s best grassroots lobbying tools.

The process is the same for any elected official and is very easy. If you need any help or have any questions about setting up a tour, please contact Matt Smyth, AHCA/NCAL’s Director of Grassroots, at 202-898-2817 or [msmyth@ahca.org](mailto:msmyth@ahca.org).

### Get to Know Your Legislators

Start by getting to know your elected officials, especially legislators — building personal relationships with them is important when trying to inform legislation. A good place to start is a meeting at your legislator’s local office. Meetings with legislators are mutually beneficial because:

- You are the expert on long term care issues. Due to their heavy workloads, legislators have to be generalists on a host of issues.
- As a constituent, you have the ultimate influence over a legislator-you vote!
- Legislators seriously weigh how every issue “plays back at home.” You provide them with a feel for that, as both a constituent and long term care provider.



When developing this relationship, it is important to meet with the legislator as soon as possible. Campaigns are a great time to get to know your legislators — legislators never forget the people that helped them in their campaigns. Additionally, regardless of whether the legislator is in session or not, stay in contact after the initial meeting so when issues arise, the legislator will look to you as a resource on long term care issues.

## **The Invitation**

To schedule a meeting or tour, email or call your legislator’s office and discuss potential dates with the legislator’s scheduler. When scheduling, be as flexible as possible. You should suggest numerous dates, giving yourself a better opportunity to meet. If you call to schedule the visit, follow up with a formal letter of invitation sent via email. Describe the facility/community, its operation, and the number of employees and residents. A sample invitation can be found at the end of this document.

The best time to invite a legislator to your facility/community is when Congress or state legislators are out of session. If the legislators are in-session, try to plan the tour when there are not pressing legislative activities and only on days when there are not any votes - typically Monday and Friday. Election season is also a great time to plan a facility/community tour.

**Tip:** Candidates welcome the chance to meet with constituents. A tour of a long term care facility can provide them with desirable photos and press coverage. Try to invite the legislator during a personal meeting, extending a formal letter.

## **Meeting with a Legislator**

- Know the issues. Contact AHCA/NCAL’s Washington office or your state association for issue papers and packets. Have a one-page issue paper that you can leave behind.
- Call closer to the date of the meeting and reconfirm the appointment. If possible, try to find out how long you will be able to spend with the legislator and prepare accordingly.
- Have one or two discussion topics planned and stick to them. A legislator’s time is valuable so be brief and to the point.
- Always ask the legislator to take a specific action.
- Invite the legislator to visit your facility or community.
- Let the legislator know that you are an informed, professional resource on long term care issues and are available if they need information.
- Follow-up with a thank you note after every meeting. Be sure to summarize the meeting in your note.



## Planning a Tour

After a personal meeting with your legislator, it is time to start planning the tour. A well-planned tour leaves a legislator with a better understanding of your facility/community and can make an impact on how he/she perceives long term care issues. A well-publicized tour can also enhance your visibility to the community.

Although you don't have to, it may be a good idea to tie your tour to a special event. All of the following special events are potential opportunities for legislators to share the public spotlight at the time they visit your facility/community:

- Groundbreaking for a new or expanded facilities or services
- National or state quality awards or other professional awards
- Scholarship presentations to staff, volunteers etc.
- Special event such as Employee of the Year Award
- Health observances (e.g. National Nursing Home Week, National Assisted Living Week)
- Launching of local civic, charitable or health care initiative
- Facility open house
- 100 year old birthday celebration

### Planning Your Tour: Step by Step

1. If more than one public official is invited for the same tour, be sure each one knows in advance that the others will be included. Unless it is a major event, plan to invite one elected official at a time.
2. Set aside at least one hour for the tour. Breakfast, lunch, or a reception should be included. Notify employees about the tour and provide them with background information on the visitors. You can request campaign pamphlets from the visiting candidates. They will appreciate that their message is being delivered.
3. Include residents and families in the process so they know you are actively involved on their behalf. Include alumni whenever possible who can attest to positive customer satisfaction as returning to home or the community.
4. Prior to the event, AHCA/NCAL can send a press advisory to local media announcing the tour and coordinate with the legislator's aide who will notify the media of dates and times.
5. Arrange for a good photographer to be on hand to take a selection of quality, non-intrusive photos of the event. Every elected official likes to have photos of meetings with constituent groups. AHCA/NCAL can help arrange for a photographer.
6. Make it possible for employees, residents, and family members to meet the elected officials or candidates. Schedule the visit so that the elected official or candidate will have time to make brief remarks to assembled employees.
7. Arrange for some time when you and your senior staff can sit down with the legislator in your office to discuss long term care issues. For talking points, reach out to AHCA/NCAL in Washington DC or your state affiliate.

8. The administrator should conduct the tour. Assign specific supervisors to explain the operation of their work areas, especially the therapy department or other special service areas. Alert all staff so they are comfortable and not surprised by the visitors.
9. After the tour, ALWAYS send a thank-you letter to the officials who made the visit. It is a nice touch to include copies of photographs or news articles related to the tour.

**Tips:**

- Do not try to plan anything elaborate or overly lengthy. Focus on presenting a simple explanation of the daily work of your care center, with a possible emphasis on special services offered, such as therapy services.
- Include in the early part of the program a one-on-one discussion with the legislator to discuss important long term care issues; be prepared to answer questions from the legislator and his/her staff members (check in with your state affiliate to support your efforts).
- Interaction with a wide variety of residents and staff is essential, perhaps in a reception room or main hall where the legislator can address a group of residents, staff, and families.
- Plan on providing refreshments (e.g. punch, cheese, pastries).
- Prepare a kit with various promotional materials and issue-related information and business cards as necessary.

**Prepare a Profile**

You should prepare a profile of your facility/community that shows:

- Number of residents and services provided
- Number of employees, specialties, consultants
- Dollars paid in federal, state, and local taxes by your facility/community
- Dollars paid in property taxes
- Number of vendors who support your facility/community (highlight local vendors)
- Unique services that you provide to your employees, residents, or the community (i.e., health seminar or check-ups; transportation)
- List of community service programs sponsored by your facility/community
- Five Star rating over the past several months

**Conducting a Tour**

**Getting your Message Across**

1. Always manage the actual tour yourself.
2. Before or after the meeting, show the legislator some of the realities of resident care and compliance with new or changing standards. Emphasize the quality of resident care during the tour and throughout the visit. Always be sure staff are aware of who is in the house and encourage interaction with staff and residents.

3. Show the legislator areas of the facility/community that are changing due to legislation, regulations, survey focus, or to address a community need, such as a new therapy department. Be sure to discuss quality as part of the conversation as well as items related to cost/benefits.
4. Point out the volume, time, and personnel that are needed to complete mandated paperwork, especially in areas of redundancy. Discuss new requirements of participation.
5. If there is a regulation that poses particular difficulties to your care center, point out to the legislator some of the “real life roadblocks” to compliance.
6. Highlight as many types of patients and outcomes as possible and discuss the range of care provided and the cost of care. Focus on value (e.g. number of discharges of patients to home or community settings). This will help to give a realistic and well-rounded picture to the lawmaker or other guest.
7. Along with a standard walk-through of the facility/community, consider focusing on a part of your operations that may convey a strong, positive message, such as your commitment to therapy services. Watch this short video, [The Power of Therapy](#), about two such therapy tours and then read more “**How to**” ideas here.

**Tip:** Be natural. Do not lobby them too much with political issues. By allowing them to see the daily operations of your facility, they will never look at long term care issues the same again.

### Communicating With Your Legislator

It is important that you include not only yourself but also other members of the staff in your meetings and tour with the legislator. While you are speaking with the legislator, ask “open ended” questions in order to elicit lengthier, thoughtful responses, for example:

- *“From your legislative perspective, what do you see as the key issues affecting long term care in America today?”*
- *“How do you think we should address the rising costs of long term health care in the years to come?”*
- *“Do you see the need for more community involvement in the legislative process? If so, what can we do together to help encourage more involvement?”*

Additionally, it is best to stick to the facts. Don’t give way to emotional arguments or unsubstantiated opinions and never stretch the truth. Also, be a good listener, even if the legislator disagrees with aspects of our position. Acknowledge where other views have merit, and stress that you want to work more closely whenever possible. Always try to end on a positive note and leave the meeting open-ended for further discussions.



### Follow Up After the Tour

- Send a “thank you letter/email” (see example at end of packet) the day after the facility/community tour, while the details of the tour are fresh in the legislator’s mind. Send the letter/email to the Washington office of the national legislator or to the office of a state legislator in the state capital. Also, send a letter/email to any legislative staffer who helped make the visit possible.
- To make your follow up memorable, add a personal note from the tour, such as a subject you discussed one-on-one with the legislator or a commitment they made to you about their continuing support of long term care issues.
- Send copies of the photographs taken during the tour, while they were meeting your residents and staff. Also, send any newspaper clippings about the event from the local press. Legislators appreciate visual materials because they can be used during campaign time, which can further strengthen your personal connection.
- If the local press did not cover the event, send the editor a brief write up and any good photos of the public official.
- Communicate with your state association and AHCA/NCAL’s Washington, DC staff. [Click here](#) to complete the Facility/Community Tour & Meetings form.

**Tip:** Make sure to follow up promptly by sending a thank you letter/email, as well as pictures and press clippings. An essential part of a successful political life is a prompt follow-up. Your follow-up should be immediate, courteous, and memorable.

### AHCA/NCAL is Ready to Assist You

The AHCA/NCAL team in Washington, DC is certainly the single most valuable tool you have to get involved in the national political process. They know how to get a legislator’s attention — and cooperation. They know the ins and outs of Capital Hill activities, committees, subcommittees, legislative process, and staff contacts.

AHCA/NCAL resources are there to help you. You can contact Matt Smyth, Director of Grassroots, 202-898-2817 or [msmyth@ahca.org](mailto:msmyth@ahca.org) to discuss and plan your tour. Please keep AHCA/NCAL informed about your planned activities in advance.

With the proper planning, agenda, and follow-up, conducting facility/community tours for national and state legislators can become an easy and enjoyable part of your grassroots political activism. It helps your particular facility or community while supporting your entire industry and AHCA/NCAL