

PLANNING A SITE TOUR

Facility tours enable policy makers to see firsthand the issues that impact our industry. It also provides officials with the opportunity to see how their decisions affect their constituents. As a result, site visits prove to be a highly effective way to share the industry's message with key elected officials. They remain one of the strongest grassroots tools in ICSC's arsenal.

SELECTING A DATE

- For U.S. Senators and Congressmen, pay close attention to when they are in recess and offer dates during those periods.
- Consider hosting a tour during the campaign season, when the legislator is actively looking to meet with constituents. The election season is also a desirable time to host a tour as it provides photo and press opportunities for the candidates.
- If you can only plan an event when the legislators are in session, try to plan it on a Monday or Friday. Typically there are not votes on those days, so you will have a better chance of a legislator being available.
- Try to avoid periods where there are pressing legislative activities, such as the beginning of a new session.

ISSUING A TOUR INVITATION

- To get started, call or visit your legislator's local/district office to obtain several dates when he or she may be available.
- Follow your call or visit with a formal letter of invitation to your event. In the invitation, include information about your center, the number of employees who work there and other information about your contribution to the community and the local economy. A sample invitation is provided at the end of this guide.
- When inviting multiple public officials to the same event, make sure to inform your guests who will be attending. As you work on your invitation list, you will want to consider any political sensitivities that may exist (i.e. controversial legislation, tension between individuals, etc.).

PLANNING THE ACTUAL TOUR

- A well-planned tour will enhance your reputation with elected officials and can even result in positive publicity within the community.
- Keep the tour simple. Your goal is to provide the legislator with a better understanding of your business, its impact on the economy and the shopping center industry as a whole.
- Show the officials sections of your business that have been affected by changing laws or new interpretations of existing regulations. Discuss how specific laws have helped your business or hindered projects and highlight the costs associated with compliance.
- Remember to schedule time for the legislator to address the gathered attendees during a breakfast, lunch or reception.
- Be sure to prepare a printed fact sheet about your property that includes economic contribution, and be prepared to answer questions from the legislator and his/her staff members.
- It is not necessary to plan your tour in conjunction with a special event; however, special events can serve as opportunities for legislators to share the public spotlight when they visit your shopping center. Here are several examples:
 - Groundbreaking for new or expanded shopping center
 - Launch of a local civic initiative
 - Scholarship presentations
 - Professional award ceremonies
 - Employee of the year awards
- Consider incorporating a theme. For example, did you just win an award for a green initiative? Use the award to focus on your sustainability efforts. You could also highlight other properties in the area that have implemented green programs to demonstrate the industry's combined efforts.

SUGGESTED PLANNING TIMELINE

2 Months from Event

Identify a committee that will plan the site tour. The events can be planned by 3-4 volunteers.

Lay out your agenda. How many locations will you visit? Will you spotlight one shopping center or highlight multiple centers? When will the public officials have an opportunity to address the group? Did you include time for the public official to meet with senior staff? A sample agenda has been provided at the end of this guide.

Contact local/district legislative offices to begin identifying dates. Follow up with a formal invitation to the public officials.

1 Month from Event

Arrange to have a photographer at your tour who will provide you with great pictures to promote your efforts throughout the community.

Coordinate necessary facility logistics such as catering for your breakfast/lunch/reception.

If you are visiting multiple centers, reserve transportation.

Identify employees who will participate in the event (i.e. leading the tour, providing presentations, participating in a roundtable discussion) and notify all employees about any breakfast, lunch or reception that you have planned in conjunction with the tour.

2 Weeks from Event

Prepare a fact sheet of your economic contribution and community service activities. Include tax revenue contributed, number of jobs, local organizations that you support, etc.

1 Week from Event

Assemble an information packet for the public officials and any staff attending. You will want to include your fact sheet and the ICSC industry fact card for your state. The fact card can be found at <http://www.icsc.org/srch/government/issues.php>. Also include any pamphlets about your center and community programs that you support.

Prepare and send out a press release for your event and share it with the public officials' staff, who will also notify the media of the dates and times.

Immediately Following Event

Send a thank you letter to the public officials within a few days of the event. If you have copies of photos that were taken during the event, include those with the thank you. Also remember to send a separate thank you letter to any of the officials' staffers who may have helped you coordinate the officials' attendance. A sample letter is included at the end of this guide.

If the media did not pick up your initial press release or cover the event, follow up with a summary write-up and any good pictures of the public officials at your event.

Share the details of your event with ICSC staff. We look forward to sharing your successes with the membership.

Sample Invitation

June 15, 2009

The Honorable John Smith
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Smith,

I would like to extend an invitation for you to visit **(Name of Center)** in **(Name of City)** at your convenience during the August recess. As a member of the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC), I look forward to introducing you to the shopping center industry and showing you our contributions to the community.

Shopping centers are our marketplace, representing economic growth, environmental responsibility, and community strength. Founded in 1957, ICSC is the global trade association of the shopping center industry. Its 72,000 members in the U.S., Canada and more than 85 other countries include shopping center owners, developers, managers, marketing specialists, investors, lenders, retailers and other professionals as well as academics and public officials. In the United States, one-in-ten, non-farm jobs are in the shopping center industry, and in 2008 alone, more than \$137 billion was generated in state sales tax revenues, on top of revenues from property taxes, fees, licenses and payroll taxes. Here in **(Name of City)**, **(Insert a couple of main points about your contributions to the local community here)**.

I appreciate you considering this request to visit our center and look forward to hearing from you about your availability to attend. If you have any questions, you may contact me at **(XXX-XXX-XXXX)** or **(jones@nameofcenter.com)**.

Sincerely,

J. Jones
General Manager
Name of Center

Sample Thank You Letter

August 14, 2009

The Honorable John Smith
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Smith,

Thank you for visiting *(Name of Center)* on August 13th. We appreciated the opportunity to show you the inner workings of our facility and providing you with more information about how the shopping center industry is an integral part of the community. That staff at my center and the other ICSC members who attended enjoyed speaking with you and hearing about your commitment to issues that impact our industry.

We especially appreciated your comments on sales tax fairness. As you saw, our center houses both large retailers and small “mom-and-pop” businesses. It is important to level the playing field for these businesses that provide so many jobs for our community. We were pleased to hear that you support sales tax fairness legislation and believe the time for Congress to act is now.

Again, thank you for sharing your time with us. I have enclosed several pictures from the event. If I may provide you with further information about the shopping center industry or the impact of certain policies on the industry, please contact me at *(XXX-XXX-XXXX)* or *(jones@nameofcenter.com)*.

Sincerely,

J. Jones
General Manager
Name of Center

Sample Program Agenda

- 2:00 pm – 2:30 pm** Welcome the public officials and other guests in a meeting room. Introduce the officials and read brief bios to the guests. Introduce the group and provide a quick rundown of the companies represented. Share a brief summary of the plan for the day.
- 2:30 pm – 3:15 pm** Conduct the tour, which includes time for interaction with staff.
- 3:15 pm – 3:30 pm** Break, assemble for light reception (coffee, snacks, etc.)
- 3:30 pm – 4:00 pm** Reception. Allow public officials time to address the guests with Q&A. End by thanking the public officials for their time.