

# GUIDE TO HOSTING TOURS WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS



2011 Professional Design Honor Award Winner. City Garden, St. Louis.  
Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects  
Image Credit: Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS

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## Overview

The ASLA Guide to Hosting Site Tours with Elected Officials is an advocacy resource tool to help advocates showcase the landscape architecture profession and its important role in communities nationwide. Hosting a site tour can make an enormous impact in educating local, state, and federal policy makers on how landscape architects use design to create well-planned communities, neighborhood master plans, green streets, manage stormwater runoff, and plan state-of-the-art transportation corridors.

ASLA advocates are essential stakeholders in promoting the Society's advocacy priorities, and are well-qualified to provide elected officials with an overview of the profession's contributions in your community. By inviting policymakers for a site tour:

- You help policy makers learn the fundamentals of landscape architecture and help them understand the importance of supporting public policies that advance the goals, objectives, and mission of the profession.
- Elected officials can witness how landscape architects are ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of the general public.
- Elected officials can experience firsthand how their policy decisions affect your community.
- Policy makers see how landscape architecture projects spur job creation and economic development opportunities in urban, suburban, and rural communities across the country.

The ASLA Guide to Hosting Site Tours with Elected Officials will assist you and provide details on every aspect of the tour and the process for getting started. This easy-to-use guide includes:

- step-by-step instructions on how to select an elected official for a site tour
- template invitation and thank-you letters
- a comprehensive checklist on how to organize a site tour
- instructions on what to do during a site tour
- post-site tour activities



Central Park Tour  
Image Credit: Get Your Guide

## Before the Site Tour

Arranging a site tour requires advance planning and some level of flexibility. To ensure a seamless process, designate a site tour leader to manage all facets of the tour. This could be the chapter president, chapter advocacy contact, chapter association manager, or some other chapter designee. As a chapter advocacy activity, the site tour leader should establish an internal working group of chapter members to develop the framework of the tour. Each member of the site tour committee should be assigned a specific role. For example, volunteers are needed to complete one or more of the following tasks:

- Identify a site tour leader who will oversee the tour process from start to finish.
- Designate a tour coordinator to manage the site tour's logistical tasks.
- Develop a strategy to determine what policy issues to highlight during the tour.

- Establish a tour guide to facilitate the site tour.
- Identify a project(s) or site(s) to showcase.
- Research policy maker(s) to invite. Review their background, particularly on policy issues important to the profession, to determine their potential interest.
- Craft policy maker invitation letter.
- Follow up on the invitation(s) and confirm policy maker(s) attendance.
- Outline and prepare a map of the tour route.
- Develop the run-of-show and schedule.
- Prepare talking points about the site or project and a list of public policy questions to ask your lawmaker.
- Conduct the visit with the elected official.
- After the tour, follow-up with the policy maker(s) on any pending questions, comments, or policy issues.



*High Line Tour  
Image Credit: Liz Ligon*

## **Site Tour Selection**

Identify projects that have a direct connection to a local firm—a site that can be used as a powerful visual to feature the depth and scope of the landscape architecture profession. The selected project also should have a direct community benefit, demonstrate design and ingenuity used by landscape architects, highlight local economic development, and illustrate the benefits of specific policies, programs, and/or public funding. Although your elected officials are a part of your community, they often may not be fully aware of the various landscape architecture projects under way or recently completed. Hosting a site tour is a perfect opportunity for your elected official to stay informed.



2013 Professional Award of Excellence Winner. Lakewood Garden Mausoleum, Minneapolis, MN. Halvorson Design Partnership, Inc. Image Credit: Paul Crosby

## The Invitation Process

Once the site location is selected, the next step is to identify a policy maker to invite for the tour. For example, is the tour geared toward a member of Congress to urge their support of federal legislation important to the landscape architect community? Is it more appropriate for a state or local official whom you would like to educate on the various benefits and contributions of landscape architecture in your community? To learn more about your local officials, research their biographical, political, and public policy history and voting record to identify areas that coincide with ASLA's policy priorities. This task should also include an overview of the policy maker's committee assignments or state or local governing boards or councils. Browsing your elected official's Facebook timeline or Twitter feed is also a great method for finding out what is important to him or her. Examples of the various types of elected officials to invite are:

- City Mayors
- Local County Executives
- City Councilmembers
- Licensure Board Members
- Governors
- Members of Congress

Given the various demands on elected officials, and their active schedules, your invitation letter should be sent several weeks in advance of your preferred date for the tour. Also keep in mind that the best time to schedule a tour with a member of Congress is during a congressional district work period, when legislators return from Washington. State and local policy makers may be more flexible, given their close proximity to your community, but still keep in mind the legislative calendar and other time constraints. The invitation letter should include:

- proposed date and time
- name and location of the site or project
- the “hook” – specific details about the site or project that may interest your policy maker
- a clear explanation about the role of landscape architecture in your community
- highlights of the site’s community and economic benefits
- an overview of what your elected official will experience during the site tour

- proposed date and time
- name and location of the site or project
- the “hook” – specific details about the site or project that may interest your policy maker

The final step in the invitation process is to email or fax the request to your elected official for consideration. A template invitation letter is included in the appendix of this tool kit. Once the invitation request is sent, the next steps are to:

- Contact your lawmaker’s scheduler or executive assistant to check the status of your pending invitation request. Contact information can be found at the elected official’s website. Do not be discouraged if a tour is not scheduled immediately. Be patient, flexible, and persistent.
- Inform the ASLA Government Affairs (GA) team about your plans to arrange a site tour. The GA team can assist with the follow up process, provide you with the latest public policy and legislative actions important to the profession, and leave behind materials to provide to your policy maker. You can contact the ASLA Government Affairs team at [governmentaffairs@asla.org](mailto:governmentaffairs@asla.org).
- For a list of congressional district work periods, visit the U.S. House of Representatives website at [www.house.gov](http://www.house.gov) and the U.S. Senate at [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov). For state representatives and senators, visit your state’s legislature website.

## Organizing the Site Tour

Developing the framework for the tour does not have to be a laborious task. After the chapter confirms the policymaker, the next step is to organize the site tour. This comprehensive checklist will guide you through the necessary components to execute a successful tour with your elected official.

- ❑ Develop an internal working group to discuss the logistical components of the site tour.
- ❑ Map out the tour route to help you navigate your elected official through the site. This task should also include logistical information such as where the lawmaker should meet the designee tour guide to begin the tour.
- ❑ Develop talking points and a short script of what you plan to discuss and highlight during the site tour.
- ❑ Prepare a list of questions to ask your elected official on federal, state, or local public policies and regulations important to landscape architects.
- ❑ Assemble an information package (leave behind) for your policy maker that showcases the role of landscape architects, pending legislation important to the profession, and additional information on how the site or project benefits the community and advances economic prosperity.
- ❑ Designate a chapter member to take notes during the site tour to capture any follow-up

requests or questions your elected official may have.

- ❑ Create name badges for all site visit participants (elected official and any staff who accompanies him or her, as well as all chapter members participating in the tour).
- ❑ Take photographs to document the experience and to showcase on your chapter's website or newsletter.



*2013 Professional Design Honor Award Winner. Brooklyn Botanic Garden Brooklyn, NY. HMWhite, New York City. Image Credit: Aaron Booher*

***Note: For members of Congress requests, forward the invitation to the district office. Most congressional offices prefer meeting and invitation requests be sent via fax or email. (U.S. Postal mail to congressional offices in Washington, D.C. experiences a 3-4 week delay).***



## During the Tour

- Always thank the elected officials for their support of landscape architecture and the profession's contributions to the local community. If your elected official has opposing public policy views, use the tour experience as an opportunity to educate him or her on the fundamentals of community design.
- Stick to the script during the tour and maintain focus on the strategic policy issues outlined by the site tour's internal working group. Discuss the design and implementation of the site or project from a landscape architect perspective—while reinforcing ASLA's national and chapter advocacy priorities and other public policies important to the profession. Avoid delivering additional public policy messages (i.e., tax reform, immigration, or health care) that do not coincide with the Society's public policy agenda and priorities. Delivering such messages will affect the site tour, minimizing your intended purpose to educate your policy maker on the various elements and components of community design.
- Make it local by showcasing the community impact and benefits of the site. Explain the process landscape architects use to incorporate design into the project to manage stormwater runoff, develop neighborhood master plans, design green streets, or plan cutting-edge transportation corridors.

- Highlight the economic impact of the site or project, and how public policy decisions they make create small business opportunities for the profession in your local community.
- Make it social by sharing real-time photos of your elected official as well as quotes and comments he or she shares during the visit.



*Weber Estate Tour, Cultural Landscape Foundation.  
Image Credit: Asakura Robinson Company.*



Central Park Tour  
Image Credit: Katie Killary

site tour or to inform the team of any follow-up items.

## After the Site Tour

- Send a thank-you letter to your elected official shortly after the site tour. The letter should also offer the chapter as a resource to the policy maker on issues related to community design
- Offer to be an expert on landscape architecture issues. Provide your elected official with insight from a landscape architect's perspective on various public policy decisions.
- Keep in touch with your policy maker periodically, perhaps once a quarter, to cultivate the relationship created during the site tour. For example, forward articles or press releases on current or upcoming landscape architecture projects in your local community.
- Share your site tour experience with your colleagues at chapter meetings and other professional venues.
- Report back to ASLA Government Affairs and share your experience regarding the

## Template Invitation Letter

[Date]

The Honorable Claire McCaskill  
United States Senate  
506 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator McCaskill:

**Insert the chapter's name and date/time of the proposed site tour.**

On behalf of the St. Louis Chapter of the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), I would like to extend an invitation to you to tour one of the city's special gems – Citygarden on Saturday, August 9, 2014 at 10 a.m.

**Include the “hook” – specific details about the site or project that catch your policymaker's attention**

Citygarden, which recently celebrated its 5th anniversary on July 1, provides a stunning landscape that continues to be one of the city's signature civic spaces used by locals and visitors, and a prime example of the power of public-private partnerships to rejuvenate downtown St. Louis during the economic recession. A site tour will provide a firsthand experience on the cutting-edge approaches landscape architects employ to design sustainable landscapes, and how vital federal investments are to ensure that communities reap the benefits of these extraordinary places.

**Explain the role of landscape architects in your community.**

Landscape architecture plays an important role in the lives of Americans. Every day, landscape architects design well-planned livable communities throughout the St. Louis metro area and nationwide. A strong [local, state or, federal] commitment is critical to provide local amenities that are safe and beautiful, while protecting natural resources, and sustaining the natural and built environment.

**Showcase the community and economic benefits of the site or project.**

This special tour of Citygarden will enhance your understanding on how landscape architects employ design and ingenuity to transform unused and underutilized spaces into iconic community gems – benefiting St. Louisans and visitors to our great city. As an urban and civic space, Citygarden has a proven track record of economic prosperity and is a strong contributor to the success of downtown small businesses and commercial development. This urban space is also a public commons that unites City Arch River with Gateway Mall – attracting over a million visitors to downtown St. Louis each year.

**Explain what the elected official will experience and logistical information regarding the site tour.**

This site tour is an informal opportunity for you to see how landscape architects utilized site design, grading, drainage, and horticulture to create a special place in the heart of St. Louis. The site tour will also include an open discussion about the landscape architecture profession, its benefits and its contributions to our community. We expect the entire tour to one hour. To accept our invitation, please have a member of your staff contact me at [Phone Number] or [E-mail address].

**Thank the elected official for considering your request.**

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to providing you a unique experience of the wonders in Citygarden from a landscape architect's perspective. Thank you for all that you do on the behalf of our city and the landscape architecture community.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Title – Chapter President]

[Name of Chapter]

## Template Thank you Letter

[Date]

[Name of Elected Official]

[Office Address]

[City, State, Zip]

Dear [Name of Elected Official]:

On behalf of the **[name of chapter]**, I write to thank you for taking time to tour [name of site or project] on [date tour occurred]. Your visit provided us the opportunity to demonstrate the important role of landscape architecture in our community, and highlight how the profession uses design to foster the stewardship of the natural and built environments.

It was a great honor to showcase **[name of site or project]** from a landscape architect's prospective, and I hope the tour enhanced your understanding on how our profession employs design and ingenuity to transform unused spaces into iconic community gems. Also, I hope the site tour highlighted how vital **[local, state, or federal]** investments help business and commercial development in our community.

Again, it was a pleasure providing you with a site tour of **[name of site or project]**, and I welcome the opportunity to be a resource to you and your staff on issues important to our community.

Warm Regards,

[Name]

[Title – Chapter President]

[Name of Chapter]