Every May when the legislative session comes to an end, many people believe that the window to connect with legislators or agency staff has closed, since there is no active lawmaking taking place. However, summer and fall present great opportunities to connect with legislators and their staff, as well as the Governor’s staff and others in the administration. One of the best ways to make these connections and have a positive impact is to invite them out to your work place or one of your association’s offices or locations. Scheduling a tour with your legislators or others is one of the most effective ways to connect with them on an issue. In addition, a tour of your facility provides an even better way to reach out to legislators, staff or others and educate them about your organization, what it is you do and why it should matter to them.

Scheduling and planning a visit may take a bit of time and thought. The following are tips for you and your organization to give an effective tour and leave a lasting impression with your guests:

• **Inviting and Scheduling a Visit:** The first step in setting up your visit is to send a formal invite to those that you wish to have visit. An invite might be done through letter, phone, email or even in person. However, make sure that you follow up with them or their staff to ensure that the invite was received. It is also important to remember to leave a sufficient amount of time between the invite and proposed date so that it may work with their schedule. You might also want to try and keep your date somewhat flexible if you can. Be sure to talk with either them or staff and confirm the date and length of time.

• **Develop a Plan for the Tour:** Prior to your invitation it is important to have a plan in place for your tour regarding the purpose of the visit. Once you have sent your invite and have a date on the calendar, it is key to plan your tour out accordingly. Make a list of items you want to cover, areas of concern you want to point out or success stories you want to promote.

• **Tour Guide:** An effective tour is only as good as the person that will be giving the tour. Be sure to pick someone that is knowledgeable of the facility, the process and other areas. A number of questions could arise during the tour and it is better to be prepared. It is also a good idea to make sure that your guide is well spoken and personable.

• **Promote Yourself:** Make sure that you are using this time to promote your facility, association or members for the work they do. Let your visitors know about your good work and the successes that you have achieved as well. Don’t be afraid to involve others or even have your guests participate in a project or activity. This is a great way for them to learn more about an area and gives them something to talk about the next time your association comes up.

• **Housekeeping:** While it might seem like a no-brainer, make sure that your facility is clean and presentable. Those attending the tour will associate your facility with your organization. It is key that you paint the picture you want for them. As they say, appearance is everything!

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• **Compliance:** Make sure that you are compliant with laws and are meeting regulations. The last thing you want to do is be non-compliant and then invite representatives of the state to your facility. It could make for a hard time down the road in getting any changes to policy made.

• **Other Items to Think About:** A few other items that you will want to think about when planning a site visit are possible media coverage, meals, transportation for a larger group, special accommodations such as handicap access and etc. It is best to talk with the person you are coordinating with for your guests to see what concerns they might with any of these other items.

• **Follow-Up:** Now that your tour is over and it was a success, there is one last step and that is to follow up with your guests. Make sure to send them a note thanking them for coming out to your site. Include your contact information so they can reach out to you at any time if they have questions or want to bring others back for a second visit. Also make sure that you get back to them with answers if any questions arose that could not be answered during the visit.

By following a few of these key steps in the planning process, any organization will be on the path to giving and effective tour that should leave a ringing endorsement with your guests.