



American Society of
Landscape Architects



The Meriden Green, Meriden, CT.
Milone and MacBroom.
(Image credit: Connecticut Chapter of ASLA)

ASLA Guide to Hosting Site Tours With Public Officials

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1.0 Overview

The ASLA Guide to Hosting Site Tours with Public Officials is an advocacy resource to help landscape architects showcase their work and the profession's role in communities and public protection nationwide. Hosting a site tour can make an enormous impact in educating local, state, and federal public officials on how landscape architects use design to create well-planned communities, neighborhood master plans, parks, and green streets; to manage stormwater runoff; and to plan state-of-the-art transportation corridors.

ASLA advocates are essential stakeholders in promoting the Society's policy priorities, and are well-qualified to provide public officials with an overview of the profession's contributions in your community.

Inviting public officials for a site tour has numerous benefits:

- Public officials witness how landscape architects are ensuring the health, safety, and welfare of the general public through the planning, design, and stewardship of healthy, equitable, safe, and resilient environments.
- Public officials learn the fundamentals of landscape architecture and better understand the importance of supporting public policies that advance ASLA's vision of healthy, beautiful, and resilient places for all.
- Public officials experience firsthand how their policy decisions affect your community.
- Public officials see how landscape architecture projects spur job creation and economic development opportunities, address climate change and resilience, and provide other benefits in urban, suburban, and rural communities across the country.

Let's start planning!



2.0 Preliminary Planning

2.1 Site Tour Selection

Identify a project or multiple sites (within close range) that can be used as a powerful visual to feature the depth and scope of landscape architecture. Although your public officials are a part of your community, there is the likelihood they are not fully aware of the various projects under way or recently completed. Your selected project should have a direct community benefit and must be able to accomplish the following during the tour:

TIP: If touring multiple sites, make sure the distance between them is walkable, bikeable, or transportation is provided.

1. Demonstrate the importance of licensure and how the project's design protects the health, safety, and welfare of the public.
2. If it is a public project, explain in detail how the project was funded by local, state, and/or federal public dollars.
3. Highlight the economic and social impact of the project, if known.

Additionally, the selected project should showcase the design and ingenuity used by landscape architects; and illustrate the benefits of specific policies, programs, and/or public funding.

Make sure you know your audience. While grand transformative projects are always the easiest to identify, they may not be the most effective. Big projects can have political baggage and as such, a public official's preconceived opinion could override the positive landscape architecture "story." Keep in mind that smaller incremental projects can be just as important. These projects are just as impactful on those who reside in medium to smaller-sized communities, as the large scale "rock star" projects are in major urban areas. Many of these smaller "under the radar" projects deserve just as much attention and can provide an effective narrative for the landscape architecture profession.

But how can chapters identify the projects for a site tour? ASLA recommends the following two options for identifying potential site tour projects:

1. Issue a statewide "Request for Proposal" for possible projects to tour, or
2. Consider your chapter's project award winners for ideas

Lastly, it's also important to remember your project site selection can be highly influenced by public officials. Chapters shouldn't expect most public officials to travel several hours to a site tour. If the chapter's objective is to influence a particular person, such as the chairperson of a State House or Senate Occupational Licensing Committee, your site must be convenient to them. On the other hand, if a public official is accustomed to traveling for their official duties, such as a Governor or U.S. Senator, don't hesitate to invite them to a site tour several hours from their residence.

2.2 Organizing the Site Tour

Please use the following comprehensive checklist to guide you through organizing a successful site tour.

Logistics

- Determine the logistical components of the site tour. Do you need a community room for a presentation? Do you need transportation? Will there be food and drinks? Will the chapter be offering LACES credit? Do you need a portable microphone?
- Map out the tour route to help you navigate your public officials through the site. This task should also include logistical information such as where the public officials and their staff should meet the tour guide to begin the tour.
- Assign responsibility roles to site tour volunteers. Especially for the specific site tour day-of elements.

TIP: For help with drafting talking points, use ASLA's public policies, Advocacy Day materials, and advocacy leave behinds.

Communications

- Develop talking points and a short script of what you plan to discuss and highlight during the site tour. Talking points should include:
 - project funding sources
 - health, safety, and welfare impacts of the project
 - economic, environmental, and social benefits
- Prepare a list of questions to ask your public official on federal, state, or local public policies and regulations important to landscape architects.
- Assemble a landscape architecture information package (leave behind) for your public officials 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.

2.3 The Invitation Process

Who to Invite

Once the site location is selected, the next step is to identify public officials to invite for the tour. We encourage you to invite your public officials at all levels of government; however, depending on the goal of your site tour, it may be more beneficial to target a specific group of public officials. Your committee must decide what you would like to achieve through the site tour, and then research your public officials' 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 public officials' committee assignments or state or local governing boards or councils.

Browsing your public officials' social media accounts, such as their Facebook or Twitter feed, is also a great method for finding out what is important to them. Examples of the various types of public officials to invite are:

- local officials
 - city mayors
 - county executives
 - city/county councilmembers
 - city/county public works officials
- state officials
 - licensure board members
 - key state agency officials
 - governor's office
- state and federal legislators (senators and representatives)

TIP: Consider including or hosting a site tour exclusively for key State Department of Transportation or environmental agency officials.

Given the various demands on public officials, and their active schedules, your invitation letter should be sent six to eight 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 public officials may be more flexible, given their close proximity to your community, but still keep in mind the legislative calendar and other time constraints. Make sure the staff of public officials are invited to come on their own as well as with their bosses.

Invitation Components

The invitation letter should include:

- ASLA chapter's name
- date and time of site tour
- 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 and benefits of landscape architecture projects in your community
- highlights of the site's community and economic benefits
- an overview of what your elected public official will experience during the site tour
- any important logistical information
- RSVP method and/or contact information
- Thank you for your consideration statement



The final step in the invitation process is to mail or email the request to your public 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 the public official’s scheduler or executive assistant, about two to three weeks after sending, to check the status of your pending invitation request. Do not be discouraged if a tour is not scheduled immediately. Be patient, flexible, and persistent.

TIP: Invitation requests for members of Congress should be forwarded to the district office. Most congressional offices prefer meeting and invitation requests be sent via email or webform. (U.S. Postal mail to congressional offices in Washington, D.C., experiences a three- to four-week delay).

NOTE: For a list of congressional district work periods, visit www.house.gov and www.senate.gov. For state representatives and senators, visit your state’s legislature website.



3.0 Site Tour Steps

3.1 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 site tour process. This could be the chapter president, chapter advocacy contact, chapter executive director, or some other chapter designee. The site tour leader should establish a small committee of chapter members to help develop the tour. Each member of the site tour committee should be assigned a specific role and responsibilities.

Use this checklist to identify volunteers and for completing the following pre-tour tasks:

- Identify a site tour leader/chair to oversee the tour process from start to finish.
- Identify a communications (public relations) manager.
- Designate a tour coordinator to manage the site tour's logistical tasks.
- Develop a strategy to determine what policy issues and public funding sources to highlight during the tour.

- Recruit tour guides to facilitate the site tour.
- Identify one or more projects or sites to showcase.
- Identify local, state, and/or federal public officials to invite. Review their background and policy opinions, particularly on policy issues important to the profession.
- Draft and send invitation letters.
- Follow up on the invitations and confirm public officials' attendance.
- Create name badges for all site visit participants including public officials and their staff.
- Outline and prepare a map of the tour route.
- Develop the schedule and timed agenda.
- Prepare talking points about the site or project and a list of public policy questions to ask your lawmaker.
- Develop a traditional and social media strategy to engage and inform the community about the event.
- Inform the ASLA Government Affairs (GA) team about your plans to arrange a site tour. The GA team can provide you with the latest public policy and legislative actions important to the profession, as well as leave-behind materials to provide to participants. The GA team can also assist with the follow-up process after the site tour. You can contact the ASLA Government Affairs team at governmentaffairs@asla.org.

Tip: Don't forget to include students and emerging professionals on the planning committee and/or on the tour!

3.2 During the Site Tour

- Always thank the public officials and staff for attending.
- Thank your supporters and advocates for their continued contributions to the local community.
- 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 architecture perspective, while reinforcing ASLA national and chapter advocacy priorities and other public policies important to the profession.
- Avoid discussing public policy messages that do not advance the Society's policy agenda and priorities. Delivering such messages will minimize and detract from your intended purpose(s).
- Keep the message 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 tweeting and sharing real-time photos of your public official(s) as well as any quotes and comments.

TIP: Don't forget to check the forecast and bring an extra umbrella (to share) or sunscreen and water if needed!

TIP: If your public officials have differing public policy views, use the tour experience as an opportunity to educate them on the benefits of community design and landscape architecture projects.

3.3 After the Site Tour

- Send thank-you letters to the public officials and any special guests shortly after the site tour. The letter should also include an offer for the chapter to be a resource on policies related to but not limited to community design, water issues, natural disasters, infrastructure, and climate change and resilience.
- After the tour, follow up with the policy makers on any pending questions, comments, or policy issues.
- 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.
 - Invite the policy maker to speak at a chapter-hosted event/conference/ceremony.
 - Feature the policy maker in your monthly newsletter.
 - Notify the policy maker of any award-winning projects in the district.
- 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 site tour or to inform the team of any follow-up items.
- Share your success through social media!



The Yards, Albuquerque, NM.
(Image credit: New Mexico Chapter of ASLA)

4.0 Appendix

4.1 Invitation Letter Template

[Date]

[Name of Public Official]

[Office Address]

[City, State, Zip]

Dear [Name of Public Official]:

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 and your staff to tour one of the city’s special gems: Citygarden on Saturday, August 9, 2014, at 10:00 a.m.

Include the “hook” —specific details about the site or project that catch your policy

maker’s attention. Citygarden, which recently celebrated its fifth 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 and state 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, and/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 more than a million visitors to downtown St. Louis each year.

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

This site tour is an informal opportunity for you to see how landscape architects used 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 take one hour. To accept our invitation, please have a member of your staff contact me at [Phone Number] or [E-mail address].

Thank the public 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 behalf of our community and the landscape architecture profession.

Sincerely,

[Name]

[Chapter Title]

[Name of Chapter]

4.2 Thank You Letter Template

[Date]

[Name of Public Official] [Office Address]

[City, State, Zip]

Dear [Name of Public 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 to 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 perspective, and I hope the tour enhanced your understanding of how our profession employs design and ingenuity to protect the health, safety, and welfare of the public by transforming 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 hosting you on our site tour and I welcome the opportunity to be a resource to you and your staff on issues important to our community.

Warm Regards,

[Name]

[Chapter Title]

[Name of Chapter]

4.3 Sample Public Outreach Timeline

A successful public outreach campaign begins before Site Tour Day arrives.

One to Two Months Out: Plan

- Decide on your message. When your lawmakers or members of the media walk away that day, what do you want them to remember above all else?
- Reach out to elected official's staff. Let them know you plan to invite the media to communicate with the media about your event. They may be able to provide you with contacts, helpful tips, or quotes. They may even be interested in speaking to the media themselves.
- Identify your target audience. Which local press outlets would you like to cover your event and which reporters in particular are you targeting?

One Month Out: Spread The Word

- Send [media advisories](#) and/or invitations to your targeted media to let them know about your site tour.
- Send reminders over social media. These can take the form of text posts, graphics, or pictures. Be sure to include the appropriate handles & hashtags.

Two Weeks Out: Follow Up

- Don't be afraid to follow up with members of the media. See if they plan to attend or have any additional questions.
- Keep your elected official's staff updated on all media outreach, including which members of the media plan to attend.
- Make sure your press materials for the day of your tour are drafted, proofread, and ready for printing (if necessary). These can include: [Press releases](#), fact sheets, [Op-Ed pieces](#), etc.

One Week Out: Be Ready

- If members of the media do plan to attend your event, ask them about their resource needs (wifi, electrical outlets, etc) and let them know what is or is not available on-site.
- Be sure everyone on the site understands your communications plan.
- Finalize your release and all press materials.
- Send reminders via email and social media.
- If an op-ed is part of your outreach plan, pitch it to members of the media. Be sure to check the submission guidelines, as these vary widely from outlet-to-outlet.

Site Tour Day: Execute Final Plans

- Send your press release.
- Promote via social media.
- Take pictures! Pictures of your lawmaker, their staff, and your chapter members interacting with the site are best. Try to avoid staged photos.

After Tour Day: Let People Know It Happened

- Write an op-ed and send it to your local newspapers. You can use the fact that your local lawmakers found this site important as a hook to get media interested.
- Post about the tour and its significance on your own blog and social media, or on your chapter's blog or social media.
- If your lawmakers are posting about it, copy those posts. Shar/like/follow those posts. Have your chapter, other chapter members, and friends do the same.
- If a member of the media publishes a story, post/link/share/like that as well - and have your chapter, National ASLA, and anyone else you know do the same.

4.4 Social Media Basics

Hashtags

Remember to use hashtags so ASLA National can follow along with your events, and to connect your social content to other Site Tour Month events.

#SiteTourMonth

#ASLAadvocates

Pre-Event

Site Tour Month is the rare event your chapter will not want to extensively publicize on social media prior to the event. This event isn't for the general public; it's for members as an educational opportunity and public officials to learn about the profession.

However, please do the following things to prepare for you event:

- Remember the event hashtags.
- Research the usernames/handles of any journalists (and their publications) or elected officials in attendance.

Day of Event

There are multiple social media platforms for you to utilize and get the most out of a site tour event. Here are some options of how to use those platforms:

- Instagram: Utilize the stories feature to curate the tour and allow your followers to virtually experience the tour. Here's an [example](#) of the Virginia Chapter using the platform to cover their annual meeting, which included a site tour.
- Twitter: Live tweet any speeches or pictures of elected officials speaking with ASLA members. Typically, statistics or facts about the site tour work well as content.

After the Event

- Facebook: Upload photos of the event to a Facebook Photo Album for people to see the event, and to highlight journalists and elected officials learning about landscape architecture. [Example](#).
- Twitter: Send thank you Tweets to elected officials who attended the site tour. [Example](#).



ASLA

For more information email governmentaffairs@asla.org or visit asla.org.

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