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Arranging a Congressional Site Visit

The Main Street America, National Trust for Historic Preservation, and partners throughout the country are engaged in many advocacy campaigns to build support for historic preservation and community revitalization legislators on Capitol Hill. As of August 2020, Main Street America is engaged in a specific advocacy push to include additional funding for the Economic Development Administration, including a \$100M competitive grant program to fund Main Street programs and small businesses, in the next COVID stimulus package. A visit to a Main Street district at this key moment can provide legislators with a unique opportunity to see first-hand how the federal government is leveraging significant private investment through its programs and incentives. Members of Congress also learn how many jobs are created, how preservation activities are spurring broader economic activity in the surrounding neighborhood, and how Main Street programs have provided essential technical support to help small businesses survive the pandemic. Below are a set of recommendations for arranging a Congressional site visit.

- Decide which Main Street project or projects in your area offers the greatest opportunity to highlight the benefits of the program. Offering a tour either during construction or after a business is launched is a great way to highlight different aspects about the value of the program. For events that require significant planning or financial commitment, like a grand opening reception, make sure the event would be a success even if the legislator has to cancel.
- Involve partners such as business owners, community developers, state and local preservation organizations, as well as elected officials in planning a site visit as they may have personal connections to member you are trying to reach. Involving a variety of partners will also help you respond to a broader array of questions from the elected representative.
- Select several dates for a site visit based on the Congressional recess schedule. When your elected officials work in their Congressional districts is set at the beginning of each Congress. Be prepared to be flexible on dates in order to secure a commitment.
- Write a compelling invitation and forward it to both the member's Washington, DC scheduler and the in-district Staff Director. Plan to send the invitation both electronically and through a phone call. Members of Congress are more likely to accept an invitation if they know there are more than one constituent groups making the request. Be sure to coordinate site visit follow up requests with the team. *See final page of this document for an outreach email template.*



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- Scheduling is the most difficult aspect of a site visit. If you do not receive a reply from a Congressional office after one week, follow-up via e-mail and by calling the office. It is not unusual for schedulers to explain the member's schedule has not been set for the date you trying to secure. Develop a rapport with the scheduler by being patient and persistent. If one Congressional in-district work period does not work, refocus on the next Congressional recess (upcoming October 2020). You may also receive an offer for a staff member—either from Washington or the district office—to tour the project. Spending time with Congressional staff is highly valuable and can be instrumental in making the case for the HTC. Accept such an invitation and also politely explain that you are still interested in having the member of Congress tour the Main Street district. Use the staff visit to further develop your relationship with the office with the aim that you become a trusted advisor and resource on economic development, small business and historic preservation issues.
- Before the visit, meet with your team and decide who will tell which part of the Main Street story. For example, who will describe details about the impacts of COVID, impact on the local businesses, and the historic significance of the neighborhood? Check the Main Street America website for regularly updated talking points as a resource.
- Determine what printed materials to share. Checkout the [Main Street Forward Advocacy page](#) for COVID-related advocacy resources. If you are comfortable doing so, a simple document showing how your Main Street program has tried to address the pandemic impacts can illustrate why congressional funding is critical to recovery. Also, a one-page document that describes the history of the program and its contribution to the community can be helpful as well.
- Before the visit, discuss with the scheduler if the member is interested in having media join the site visit. Would your representative prefer a behind-the-scenes tour or something that will generate media attention? If media coverage is requested, ask what materials the Congressional office would like to have in advance of the visit.
- On the day of the visit, you need to be in close communication with the member's staff to confirm arrival time and last minute changes.
- During the visit, ask the legislator to support of the proposal as the House and Senate tax appropriations committees develop their respective COVID relief packages. **Specifically, ask members to consider supporting legislation that will include congressional funding for the Economic Development Administration and the Main Street Community Recovery and Revitalization proposal.** Encourage the legislator to mention to colleagues who serve on the House Appropriations Committee and the Senate Appropriations the value of supporting Main Streets in this way.



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- During the visit, the member of Congress may have questions to which you do not have an answer. It is entirely appropriate to simply state you do not have that information, but that you would be happy to follow up with the member's staff as soon as possible.
- In addition to a thank you letter, following up after the site visit is essential. You now have access to the member's office, and with strong follow up, you will be considered a key resource on COVID relief for small businesses and historic preservation. Plan to follow up with additional materials you think would be helpful and any information specifically requested by the legislator.
- Add the Member of Congress to your mailing list if they are already not on it already. Two to three weeks after the visit, follow-up with the Member's staff to see if they have supported the request.

Need Help? If you need assistance setting up a site visit for your legislator, please contact campaign staff:

Kelly Humrichouser – khumrichouser@savingplaces.org, **Shaw Sprague** - ssprague@savingplaces.org, or **Renee Kuhlman** - rkuhlman@savingplaces.org.

Site Visit Request Email Template:

To: Washington, DC & In-District Scheduler
CC: Office Staff Subject: Main Street Site Visit Request

Dear [Scheduling Staff],

We would like to extend an invitation for Rep/Sen XXX to visit [Your Main Street] during the October congressional recess. Our Main Street community has worked hard to support a vibrant downtown community, and we continue to play a critical role in our community's recovery during the COVID pandemic.

[Insert 2-3 sentences on what your Main Street has done to support the community since March.]

We would like to share with Rep/Sen XXX how the Main Street Community Recovery and Revitalization proposal would greatly assist our ability to provide technical assistance and direct grant funding to our small business community. Specifically, Main Street America is urging Congress to provide additional funding for the Economic Development Administration to support our efforts to provide on-the-ground economic assistance to our nation's downtowns. In a Main Street America survey of over 5,800 small businesses, 57 percent reported a decline in revenues of more than 75 percent since the onset of the crisis. We would like to share what we are hearing from our downtown business owners and describe the support that is needed.



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Please let us know whether Rep/Sen XXX is available for a walking tour of downtown [XXX] during the October recess, and we will follow up with you to make the necessary arrangements. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely,

Your name/organization Phone number