

HOW TO HOST A VIRTUAL SITE VISIT

A great way to build a relationship with your elected official and demonstrate how important your company, and the solar industry, is to the community is to invite them to visit your company headquarters. Tours at your facility or a new project site provides a great opportunity for your elected official to meet your employees and to discuss your company's issues and concerns in depth. By seeing the operations first-hand, your elected official will also have a better understanding of how certain legislative and regulatory proposals may impact our industry and effect potential job growth in their district/state.

While the global pandemic has made hosting in-person events complicated, if there is one thing we have learned, it's that there is no limit to what can be translated to a digital experience.

Scheduling the Event

Most elected officials will be receptive and recognize your invite as a valuable opportunity to meet their constituents (potential voters) in a friendly environment. Scheduling the event will take some planning as elected officials have very busy schedules, though hosting a virtual event will make it easier since they will not have to worry about travel to a location.

When identifying your elected official(s), it is helpful to think not only about the district in which your home office is located, but also the areas in which your business has sales offices, projects and economic investment. It is likely that your company's reach extends across the country!

Most offices have information about how to request a meeting available on their website, but if they do not or if you are having trouble, please reach out to SEIA and we will pull the scheduler's email address for you.

To find your
elected officials, visit
seia.org/find-your-legislators

Things to Consider When Preparing for Your Meeting

Speakers:

Invite the elected official, but also consider requesting the attendance of their Chief of Staff or State/District Director. These are people you will also want to develop relationships with who will be more accessible on a day to day basis than the elected official themselves.

Determine who from your team to be your main speaker during the visit. This should be the person with whom the relationship with the elected official would be most valuable. This person should be able to easily speak about the details of the organization, site, and any other relevant talking points. SEIA recommends that you avoid using your lobbyists for this role to ensure that the conversation maintains a constituent tone.

Also consider other members of your team that have some valuable stories to share. Look for some hard hat employees and other constituents and prepare them with some things to say. The more you can do to connect your site to the state or district, the more impact you will have. Remember that your job numbers reflect investment and employees represent voting members of the state and district.

Location:

Consider the setting and how it will enhance the understanding of your business or program. You'll want the background to be interesting and representative of your business. Are you able to walk through an installation, project site, warehouse or manufacturing plant?

Another thing to consider is the lighting and sound quality on site.

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Technology:

Make sure you assess your tech needs and proficiency before the event. Work with the elected official's scheduling team to ensure you are using technology that the office is comfortable with, both with use of the technology and with the technology's security. We also recommend having a specific person designated to be the on-site technology manager that is not the main speaker.

Most importantly, set some time aside in advance to test everything and have a backup plan ready to go in case the technology fails!

Promotion:

Ensure that you gain approval from the elected official's office in advance of the event regarding how you intend to promote the event during and after. Have the answers to these questions before you request the event:

- Would you like your event to be open to the press?
- Do you want to share the event live on social media or record the event to be shared publicly?
- Are you able to take and share a screenshot or photo afterwards on social media to thank the elected official?
- Does the site have any legal pitfalls you should be aware of? Projects or product that have not been publicly released? Is it possible that there could be people in the background that have not opted in?

Content and the Ask:

It is important to know some background information about your elected official. Prior to the meeting we recommend you do some light research on them. You can also reach out to our team for any specific talking points and/or "asks" related to the elected official.

Determine your agenda for the meeting. Prior to the meeting you should review specific policy items to be discussed and the general legislative 'ask' of the elected official. If more than one person is attending the meeting, determine beforehand who is going to say what and in what order; it will help make the meeting run smoothly.

Make it personal and bring it all back home. All elected officials want to improve the economy and quality of life in their district/state. It is your job to familiarize them with your company and employees and educate them on overall solar policies which will have a beneficial impact on the people living in their state or district and ensure future job creation and increased economic output.

Don't feel that you have to be an expert on specific policy initiatives. Most elected officials are generalists. Be open to counter-arguments, but don't get stuck on them. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Offer to look into the question and get back to them—which is an excellent opportunity to stay in touch and create an on-going dialogue with their office.

Elected officials are always looking for facts and figures to support their arguments or guide their decisions. Follow up with an electronic information packet for your elected official and their staff. This should include the most recent solar market data and information on your company and the impact specific legislative policies will have on future job creation.

Following Up

If you were able to get a photo, share it on social media tagging the elected official and thanking them for their time and industry support. Participants should always send thank you letters after a meeting, especially if the official was specifically asked to do something. The key is to foster an ongoing relationship. Consider scheduling a follow up meeting with the official's staff. Keeping your elected official involved and informed about your company is the best way to create a strong and personal relationship that will help the association and solar industry overall.



We need to know about your advocacy efforts. Scan here to report your advocacy action back to SEIA, it's an important part of the process!