Legislative Tour Template

Why are Legislative Tours so Important?

Legislative tours are one of the most effective tools in our toolbox to educate and *show* legislators the work our districts are doing in our respective communities throughout the state. As you are likely aware, elections are always changing the composition of our elected officials at the local, state and federal levels. As a result, our legislature’s “institutional memory” is often limited, and new officials are not familiar with the work of the conservation districts. It is critical for our state association with the participation of our members to *continually* engage in advocacy and legislator education efforts throughout the year.

When to Start Planning?

Everyone has different times of the year when they are busier than others. It’s recommended that you start planning your event **3 months** prior to the day of your tour. It’s recommended that you work with your district’s Board of Directors to organize the event. It is most certainly within the responsibilities of district board members to advocate on behalf of your district with politicians at the local, state, and their federal member(s) of congress. If necessary, your board may want to consider forming a committee to plan an advocacy day in your District accordingly (Keep in mind that more than 2 full-board members meeting to plan or handle board business constitutes a quorum, and thus you would be required to adhere to the open-meetings act. However, if the event is a public event such as a legislative tour, all board members can and should attend). These sorts of committees are also excellent opportunities for associate Directors to get involved with the advocacy and “booster” efforts of your district. 3 months is a good time frame that should give you sufficient time to find venues, identify projects you wish to highlight, or identify speakers who would be excellent additions to the program.

Timeline of Planning Steps

1. **Select a date** where all, or as many as possible, of your directors are able to attend.
   1. June, July, and August are typically legislative breaks, where legislators are in district. You will likely get better participation from your legislative delegation.
   2. Summer is also usually a better opportunity to be outside, showcasing CD projects.
2. **Reach out to your legislators**’ offices as soon as you’ve confirmed a date to invite them to attend, so that they can get it into their very busy calendars. You can send a message to their district inbox, available on their official website, then follow up the email with a phone call to their office. If you speak to their scheduler on the phone, be sure to get that staff person’s email address, so that you can provide any details the legislator may require. In all communications, be sure to indicate that staff are welcome, as staff are just effective in receiving our message, and sometimes have a longer amount of time in our Legislature than legislators themselves. Building relationships with legislative staffers is just as important as building relationships with legislators themselves. Also, indicate they’re welcome to participate in all or part of the day, to provide some flexibility. Legislators often are double booked and have limited time to participate. Follow up any phone conversations with a detailed email to their district inbox or to their scheduler to ensure the official has all details needed for the event. Be sure to indicate how the official should dress, suggest boots or other shoes they don’t mind getting dirty if they’ll be out in the field.
3. **Identify venue(s)** that would be appropriate to host, this could entail your District’s office if you have the space, or perhaps a local farm, nature center, or other location of a project. Field tours are preferred, especially if you can demonstrate a recent project at completion. Don’t limit legislative invites to solely legislative tours, send invites for ribbon cuttings, ground breaking events, annual meetings, and other events.
4. **Identify clients, constituents, key partners, and anyone else** who’s benefited from your CD’s programming. If you’ve confirmed participants, follow-up with legislators to let them know. For example, if you know folks from Farm Bureau, commodity associations, etc. will be in attendance, it provides an additional incentive for legislators to attend. There is a “Fear of Missing Out” that happens among leaders, so be sure to let them know who will be there. This is also helpful in that legislators prefer to hit multiple constituencies at once.
5. **Suggested Individuals to Invite -** (If lunch will be provided, be sure to ask about any vegetarian, vegan, or other dietary needs when inviting officials)
   1. MASCD - if we know far enough in advance, we can likely participate and attend.
   2. Neighboring Conservation Districts - State Legislative districts don’t adhere to county lines, so if legislators’ districts are in other counties, be sure to work with those other Conservation Districts.
   3. U.S. Senators (Regional Reps for their Office like to attend these sort of events)
   4. U.S. Members of Congress (Again, their district staffers will likely attend if they can’t)
   5. State Representatives- Find a list of your local representatives at <https://mgaleg.maryland.gov/mgawebsite/Members/District>
   6. State Senators
   7. USDA - NRCS
      1. State Conservationist
      2. Area Conservationist
      3. District Conservationist
   8. County Commissioners
   9. County Executives or Administrators
   10. County Treasurers
   11. Drain Commissioners
   12. Other Municipal Leaders
   13. MDA, DNR, MDE officials (Sending a letter directly to Directors of these agencies will be kicked down the ladder, and their presence will benefit the tour/discussion).
   14. Federal “Quality of Life” Departments / Agencies, pending the project. For example, if there are local people from Fish and Wildlife Service who are involved, be sure to invite them.
   15. Local Media - they’re always looking for interesting stories to cover, this is a good opportunity for both the elected officials present as well as your district.
       1. Print
       2. Radio
       3. Television
       4. Local Blogs/Other
6. **Draft a Media Advisory** to send to press contacts twice: one week before the event, and then again two days before the event. You can easily find templates on the internet, if you’ve never drafted one before.
7. **Sample Itinerary for the Day**
   1. **8:30am** - Light Refreshments (Coffee, donuts, etc.) and networking, start right at the first stop on the tour, and plan for the weather, including pop-up tents to provide shade.
   2. **9:00am** - Welcome Introduction (CD Board Chair)
      1. Recognize CD Board Members present
      2. Provide Overview of the work your district does
      3. Talk about the need for funding conservation districts, the need for staff retention, and other recommended talking points from your state association. If you have questions or need help with this, reach out to Jen Nelson or Missy Cannon Helgason at MASCD.
      4. Thank everyone for showing up.
   3. **9:15am** - Provide confirmed officials an opportunity to address the crowd. If you have many officials, try to be cognizant of time. Give more time to the higher level officials, less to state, and do not give local officials time unless it’s a mayor or county executive wherever the event is taking place. If there is a local official, encourage them to describe the benefit of the local project you’re demonstrating, i.e. Drain Commissioners, Treasurers, etc.
   4. **9:45am** - Begin tour of your first site, appropriate enough time to where it’s useful, but not so long to where officials feel like their time is wasted. Use your best discretion.
   5. 1**0:45am** - If going to a second location, the second location should be where you host your lunch. Try to keep sites limited so there isn’t too much traveling between spots.
   6. **11:30am -**  Lunch - be sure to include Vegetarian, Vegan, or other dietary needs.
   7. **12:15pm** - Panel Discussion - include staff members so they can talk about their programs/projects. Allow for a Q&A, so that officials can ask questions and learn more about specific topics.
   8. **1:00pm** - Conclude event - be sure to thank everyone!
8. **Suggested Packlist**
   1. Water, granola bars, or other snacks so folks have something to eat/drink while outside. This is important especially on hot summer days.
   2. Ice and coolers
   3. District Pamphlets, Literature, or Reports. Copies of Annual Reports are always good resources for officials. Copies of MDARD Operations Grant Report.
   4. The latest MACD Advocacy Handouts - Ask Dan for the .pdf files, he’d be happy to send them.
   5. Paper maps, if you’re moving locations.
   6. Hand-Sanitizer
   7. Printed Itineraries
   8. Sign-in Sheets
   9. Clipboard
   10. Pens / Writing Utensils
   11. Notepads
   12. Portable tables / chairs
   13. Pop-up tents
   14. District SWAG (water bottles, pens, notebooks, t-shirts, etc.)
9. **Event Roles to Assign to Staff/Volunteers** - Many of these roles can be filled by a single person, don’t feel like you need a different person for each of the roles below.
   1. Point of Contact for Legislative Offices to extend invitations, etc.
   2. Point of Contact for Media
   3. A cell phone point of contact the day of, in the event an official is lost and can’t find their way.
   4. Staff photographer or volunteer professional photographer to document the day
   5. A Registration / Sign-in table volunteer
   6. Runner, to handle any miscellaneous tasks throughout the day.
   7. Setup / Tear-down - having extra hands to break down chairs, pack, etc. is always helpful.
   8. Note taker, someone to mark down questions or other information where a follow-up might be necessary with the legislative office.
   9. Food coordinator - Gets breakfast/refreshments ready in the morning, and lunch ready in the late morning/early afternoon, or works with a caterer who’s providing the food.
10. **Follow-up**
    1. Reach out to thank officials for attending:
       1. Sending hand-written notes or thank you cards go a long way. Provide a business card for District Admin/Manager in these cards.
       2. You might want to also provide a copy of the “attendance list” so they can reach out to anyone they may have met at the event.
    2. Post on Social Media, include any photos from the day, be sure to tag the accounts of any officials present, this will boost your reach.
    3. Draft a Press Release to send to your local media contacts that highlights what happened at the event. Again, if you’ve never drafted one, you can find templates online.
    4. Consider a post-event survey/evaluation. Either to be filled out at the event or as a Google form/survey monkey link to be sent to attendee’s email addresses.
    5. Add a Report item to your agenda for your next Board Meeting to identify any other follow-up actions.
    6. Draft a summary to include in your annual report, do this as soon as possible following the event so the information is fresh in your mind.
    7. Include the event summary in any newsletters or other communications.
    8. While it’s fresh in your mind, start planning the next one.