

## How to Get Media Coverage When a Member of Congress Tours Your Apartment Community

When a member of Congress accepts your invitation to tour your apartment community, it becomes your opportunity to tout the benefits of apartment living to thousands of people. All it takes is getting the news media to cover your legislator's visit.

However, reaching out to the media is often relegated to the bottom of many people's to-do list. For some, it seems too difficult. For others, it feels downright scary. But it can be easy and comfortable to do if you know **why** media coverage is important to you and the apartment industry and **how** to go about getting it.

### Why:

You are your lawmaker's **connection** with constituents. Your residents put a "face" on the 17 million households who call an apartment "home" – and they watch local television news and read the local newspaper.

You also are your legislator's **link** to a segment of the local workforce. The number of jobs generated to construct your apartments, the number of the legislator's constituents you employ to manage them, and current local market conditions are important facts for both your elected official and the news media to know and communicate to others.

Equally important, you are your elected official's apartment industry **expert**. During the tour, you can share your expertise on industry issues and discuss the direction of housing policy on Capitol Hill. If you know the legislator is undecided on an industry issue under consideration in Congress, you have a golden opportunity to influence whether the official votes "yes" or "no."

And, always remember that media coverage of the tour is not only free but also an important third-party endorsement of both your apartment community and the multifamily housing industry.

### How:

These steps will help make your media pitch seamless:

1. **Work closely with the legislator's staff.** Ask permission to have media present and run the news release by the member of Congress's designated contact. If the district/state office decides to send out a news release, ask if you can do a joint one. Always let the office know exactly what you are planning and provide frequent updates.
2. **Develop a media list** based on who is most likely to cover the event. A legislator's tour of an apartment community makes a strong television segment as well as a good news/feature article in print publications. For your apartment community tour, target your local newspaper's political reporter or contact the city editor. For television stations, contact the assignment editor. When in doubt, call and ask.
3. **Develop your news hook.** Why is your legislator's tour of your apartment community newsworthy? What's going to happen during the event? Why would a news outlet's readers or viewers care about this?
4. **Invite the media.** (Tuesdays through Thursdays are the best days to reach them.) To interest the media in covering your event, choose any of the following methods:

- A **news release** includes all the pertinent facts and is written in a neutral, third-person format with the most important information first. It is disseminated via e-mail.
- A **media advisory** is a shortened version of a news release that outlines the “who,” “what,” “when,” “where,” “why” and “how” of the event.
- A **pitch** is a very brief communication and usually made over the telephone or by e-mail. It succinctly invites a reporter to cover the event based on the newsworthy angle you’ve developed.

### **Important Tips for Working Successfully With the Media:**

- Give the media enough lead time – at least several days, if possible.
- If you send a news release or other written communication, always have someone proofread it beforehand.
- Never call during deadlines. These days, many media outlets consider themselves on deadline 24/7. The rule of thumb is to call newspapers any time in the morning and contact television stations between 10 a.m. and 2 p.m.
- When you call, always identify yourself, your organization and ask either if it is a good time to call or if the reporter is on deadline.
- Be prepared to answer the media’s questions. If you don’t know the answer, say so and tell them you will find out and respond as soon as possible.
- Provide your contact information in all communications.
- When the big day arrives, have a designated member of your staff assist the media. That means doing everything from providing them with the agenda, pointing out local dignitaries, escorting them to reserved seats, and, of course, introducing them to you.
- Follow up with a brief note to thank each reporter for covering the event.

### **And an Important Tip for Building a Relationship with Your Member of Congress:**

**Always follow up with your member of Congress.** Along with your thank-you note, include a copy of the media coverage and several photos of the legislator with your residents and their children (with the apartment building in the background).

Now, that will remind your elected official just how important apartments really are to your locality.

### **If You Have Questions About Working with the Media:**

Contact Carole Roper, Manager of Public Affairs, at [Carole@naahq.org](mailto:Carole@naahq.org) or 703-797-0616.