

AFFORDABLE HOUSING ADVOCACY

HOW TO:

HOST A TOUR OF CONTEMPORARY AFFORDABLE HOUSING

GOALS

- Demonstrate the high quality architecture and design of existing affordable housing
- Recruit and bolster supporters through direct experience dispelling negative perceptions
- Reduce or eliminate opposition to a proposed development

KEY TECHNIQUES

- Organize a group of co-sponsors to help plan the tour and establish goals to guide all decisions
- Plan substantial time and effort to motivate your target audience to attend
- Remain flexible during the tour to adjust for unforeseen circumstances

Create a Planning Team for Core Decisions

- Choose co-sponsors for the tour who share your goals and can provide staff, contacts, mailing lists, shared funding, and access to projects.
- Identify target audience, including decision-makers and staff, as well as potential supporters such as people from environmentalist community and faith organizations. Establish a number of tour participants for planning purposes.
- Establish specific goals for the tour such as support for a specific policy or project, or good will towards developers. Test every critical decision you make by asking: will this help meet our goals?
- Decide on the format of the tour, including whether it will be a walking or bus tour. (You want to keep your group together so only use private vehicles for a very small group.) Consider whether there will be a formal program at some point during the tour.
- Establish budget for tour including bus rental, cost of mailing invitations, printing publications and refreshments. Determine who will pay expenses.

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Choose Sites for the Tour

- Select sites consistent with the goals and format for the tour.
- Choose a **tour leader** familiar with the sites. This person should also enjoy leading tours. Building the relationship with the audience through personal rapport is as important as knowledge.
- Choose sites that most deeply demonstrate the story you want to communicate, such as the range of neighborhoods, types of developments and how the development fits into the neighborhoods.
- Include buildings built or rehabilitated ten years ago if possible.
- Carefully limit the number of sites to be visited. Quality is more important than quantity.
- Determine what you will do at each site:
 - › Identify who will be the best guide for each site, for example, the tour leader, the project developer or on-site manager.
 - › Decide what points to make at each site. Possible points include financing, people served, and good property and tenant management.
 - › Plan how much time to spend at each site (allow lots of extra time.)

Invite Your Target Audience

- Discuss how you will invite and motivate your target audience to attend. Substantial effort may be required to produce a good turnout. This is particularly true if you are inviting opponents of a proposed development.
- Make tour logistics as convenient as possible, including selection of meeting place, time and date.
- Invitations should be personalized.
- Use peer pressure to encourage people to come, for example letting one Councilmember know that other members of the Council have confirmed.
- If project opponents are your target audience, let them know that decision-makers will be informed about your invitation and their response.
- Create a “hook” to grab your intended audience, such as:
 - › An upcoming decision or special event;
 - › Including certain kinds of housing, such as senior housing or buildings using “green” materials
 - › Using known and popular speakers as tour guides.

Maximize Opportunities To Make Points During the Tour

- Use the **travel time** to the first tour stop to elicit participants' concerns and fears about affordable housing. For example, ask "What are the most common concerns about infill/affordable housing that you have heard." This serves three purposes:
 - › Establishes a connection between the guide and the group;
 - › Provides sense of interests, concerns and sophistication of your group;
 - › Identifies points tour leader needs to make during upcoming presentation.
- **Allow sufficient time to answer guests questions** that arise after seeing one development before moving on to the next site.
- **Provide adequate numbers of well-informed staff** to see to guests' needs, without having staff outnumber the guests.
- **Augment your visit to each site with additional information** that emphasizes the points you are trying to make. Examples include:
 - › Pictures of a site pre-rehabilitation/construction to make a point about how it improved the neighborhood.;
 - › Including a slideshow or a small discussion panel as part of the tour program;
 - › Inviting current residents, property managers and neighbors to give their "testimony," as well as the project manager or a representative of the developer. (Be sure to go over their comments with them in advance.)
- **Provide printed materials to all guests.** This can serve several purposes:
 - › Reinforce your tour goals;
 - › Refresh the guests' memories after the tour;
 - › Share tour experience with invitees or staff unable to participate in the tour;
 - › Provide something to browse through during the inevitable "dead" time between buildings;
 - › Reduce the need to communicate large amounts of complex information in a short time.

Details

- **Assemble tour leader and staff** prior to the arrival of guests to run through tour schedule and practice presentations.
- **Provide simple refreshments**, such as cold drinks and cookies.
- **Provide ample notification** to the on-site manager and tenants about the tour and its purpose.
- **Identify someone to take pictures of the tour.**
- **Bring abundant supplies** of handouts and nametags for guests.
- **Plan time after the tour** for meeting planners to debrief about what worked and did not work in order to better plan for future tours.

Follow-up With the Tour Participants

- **Plan time at the end of the tour for participants to evaluate it.** This reinforces your interest in their concerns and could help you design more effective tours in the future.
- **If your target audience includes opponents, leave time in the program to elicit and respond to their concerns.** However, be very clear that the purpose of the tour is informational, not an opportunity for negotiation.
- **Send follow-up letters** to those who attended, thanking them, answering any unanswered questions, and directing their attention to the next step
- **Contact interested or enthusiastic participants** to recruit them for future work.
- **Using your original mailing list, send follow-up letters to those who did not attend.** The letter should include written materials from the tour and offer another opportunity to find out about affordable housing.