



GROCERY 101: A GUIDE TO HOSTING A STORE TOUR FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

Why host a store tour? Essentially the store tour gives your elected officials an opportunity to gain greater insights into your business and to hear about industry issues firsthand. The tour is a terrific opportunity to educate our elected officials and to give them a chance to see how their laws work in real life! Tours can offer a real “win-win” opportunity for both the legislator and the retailer providing the tour. Store tours also help the Wisconsin Grocers Association down the road as we are lobbying on your behalf.

This guide is designed to help you prepare for and conduct a successful store tour for any elected official such as:

- U.S. Senators
- U.S. Representatives
- Governor
- State Senators
- State Representatives
- Mayors or local Elected Officials

The process is the same for any elected official and is very easy. If you need any help or have any questions about setting up a tour, please contact Mike Semmann, WGA's VP of Government Affairs and Communications at 608.244.7150 or msemmann@wisconsin-grocers.com.

Get to Know Your Legislators

Start by getting to know your legislators—building personal relationships with legislators is key when trying to influence legislation. A good place to start is a meeting at your legislator's office. Meetings with legislators are mutually beneficial because:

- You are the expert on your business and issues that affect grocery stores. Due to their heavy workloads, legislators have to be generalists on a host of issues.
- As a constituent, you have the ultimate influence over a legislator-you vote!
- Legislators seriously weigh how every issue "plays back at home." You provide them with a feel for that, as both a constituent and business owner.

When developing this relationship, it is important to meet with the legislator as soon as possible. Campaigns are a great time to get to know your legislators - legislators never forget the people that helped them in their campaigns. Additionally, regardless of whether the legislator is in session or not, stay in contact after the initial meeting so when issues arise, the legislator will look to you as a resource on retail and other business issues.

The WGA also conducts a “lobby day” every year in the Spring. This is a great opportunity for retailers to walk the halls of the Capitol and meet with their elected officials on their turf. The WGA provides briefings on every issue and role plays meeting with a legislator so the experience is comfortable and pleasant.





Arranging the Tour

When you are ready to arrange a tour, the WGA is happy to assist in planning the tour and providing the necessary information materials. It is important to be as flexible as possible when scheduling these visits and, if possible, to have a few options for dates. Usually the store tour will be arranged by the office scheduler and because of the hectic schedule of many lawmakers, sometimes there are last-minute changes that may occur so a host should be prepared for such alterations.

The best option for extending the invite is to write a letter inviting the legislator for a store tour. Otherwise, personal phone calls to their office or an e-mail invite are also appropriate.

If you are unsure of which legislators represent your store, you can go to www.legis.wisconsin.gov/waml and type in your store address to receive the names and contact information of the elected officials that represent your store.

Checklist for Organizing the Store Tour

-  The store owner, store manager and/or distribution center representatives should be available to conduct the tour and accompany him or her through the store.
-  Although you will want to have discussed a plan of the store tour, legislators will also likely want to wander around the store to greet employees so you should be prepared for this.
-  While an understanding of the most pressing legislative issues facing our industry is important, it may be better to avoid lobbying the legislator about specific issues and, instead, focus on educating the lawmakers about your store and the general issues facing our industry.
-  It is helpful to have someone available to take pictures throughout the tour.

- ❗ Review the background on your guest – both biographical information and political information, such as what committees the member serves on, so that you can identify some areas of common ground which can be found on their website.
- ❗ Lawmakers are typically pressed for time, so ensure the tour does not run longer than one hour or the allotted time discussed with their office.
- ❗ The tour route itself should be easy to maneuver. Obviously, it is important to observe all safety precautions and to ensure that there are no OSHA or food safety violations.
- ❗ If you feel comfortable highlighting the tour, you can include the information on your marquis, or post the information on a store flyer or other mechanism.
- ❗ Find a success story within your company to highlight such as an employee that has been with the store for a long period of time. Otherwise, highlight your community involvement efforts.
- ❗ Provide some information on the impact your company has on the legislator's district – such as how many employees you have and the history of your company.
- ❗ Wisconsin has very strict laws on campaigns and “pay for play” activities. Therefore, if you were a contributor to their campaign now is not the time to remind them or discuss it.

Following Up After the Tour

The purpose of the store tour is to promote a greater understanding on the part of our elected officials as to the importance of our industry and, in particular, your business. It is important to follow-up after the tour to make sure that your lawmaker remembers your store.

For this reason, you will want to write a thank-you note which should include some reminders of the key points you made in your tour. You may want to extend an invitation to the lawmaker to visit again anytime or invite him or her to any upcoming events such as remodels, fundraisers or other community events.

You may also want to include photos from the event – legislators enjoy receiving these pictures which often are used in their own newsletters highlighting their connections with their constituents.

If any of the legislator's staff were included in the tour it is a good idea to send thank you notes to them as well. These people are key contacts for you and your store and frequently advise the lawmakers on issues of importance to our industry.

Above all, enjoy the event and know that through your efforts you have helped to promote the best interests of, not only your company, but the retail food industry as well!

Thank you!

Please contact Michelle Kussow or Brandon Scholz at the Wisconsin Grocers Association with any questions and for assistance with the store tour.



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