



HOSTING EVENTS WITH LEGISLATORS AT YOUR FACILITY

A TOOLKIT FOR HOSPITALS



TENNESSEE HOSPITAL ASSOCIATION



ENGAGEMENT WITH STATE LAWMAKERS IS CRITICAL

The experience of the pandemic and its impact on all aspects of the hospital industry has underscored the importance of hospital leadership developing strong relationships with state lawmakers. The more a hospital educates and communicates with its elected officials, the more successful it can be in addressing priority issues at any time, not just during a crisis.

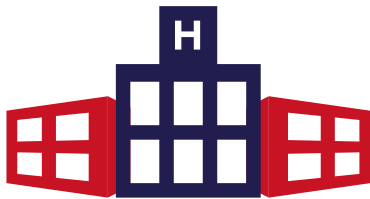
During the 2021 legislative session, hospitals across Tennessee will be faced with defending against a major push to reform or even repeal of certificate of need (CON) regulations, along with expected action on surprise billing, vaccine requirements and other critical issues. All of this will take place against the backdrop of an industry in crisis as the COVID-19 pandemic surges and places hospitals in an even more precarious position.

Holding in-person or virtual events will be key to addressing these concerns with state legislators as they make decisions in Nashville that will impact facilities statewide.

This toolkit provides helpful messaging suggestions, event strategies, social media tactics and other ideas on how to effectively communicate with state legislators.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH LEGISLATORS

Developing a relationship between hospital leadership and legislators is vitally important for your facility or system, as well as hospitals across the state. In hosting an in-person or virtual visit with your lawmakers, several opportunities are presented for telling various aspects of the hospital story.



Showcase the great work of your facility or system.

- When you share details about the accomplishments of your organization, legislators are better equipped to stand in support – and hopefully speak up – about hospital issues.
- Legislators enjoy sharing during committee meetings and floor sessions about the great work happening in their district and hospitals should be a central part of that story.

Educate about priorities and needs.

- It is vitally important to lay a foundation of understanding with legislators to help educate on the complexity of the healthcare system and hospital operations.
- During session, most conversations with legislators last less than fifteen minutes, which does not allow for a deep understanding of our issues. Leveraging any opportunity outside of Nashville to have a one-on-one conversation with a legislator to explain an issue in greater detail can further elevate hospital priorities.



Humanize and localize the issues.

- Legislators are inundated with information on countless issues once they arrive at the Capitol. Firsthand examples that personalize and illustrate the importance of hospital issues goes a long way to make our priorities memorable for legislators.
- As THA's lobbying team works with all legislators, your personal outreach and stories elevate our priorities in a crowded field.

Establish or enhance relationships between hospital leaders and legislators.

- Meaningful relationships between hospital leadership and lawmakers is critical ahead of key committee or floor votes on priority issues. Having the established relationship with your local legislators makes a call to action during session much easier.





PLANNING AND HOSTING A SUCCESSFUL LEGISLATIVE VISIT

Under normal circumstances, there are multiple options for hosting a legislative visit at your facility. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person events have become rare and require specific actions to mitigate associated health risks. As a result, virtual meetings have emerged as a great advocacy tool, just as they have for the normal course of business.

Considering these two options – in-person and virtual – following are helpful tips for making the most of your time with your lawmakers.

DECIDE ON THE GOAL OF YOUR MEETING

This may include general relationship-building, showcasing a new or exceptional service line, and reviewing legislative and policy priorities. Knowing the desired outcome of the visit is key to the planning process. Some options for structuring the visit include:

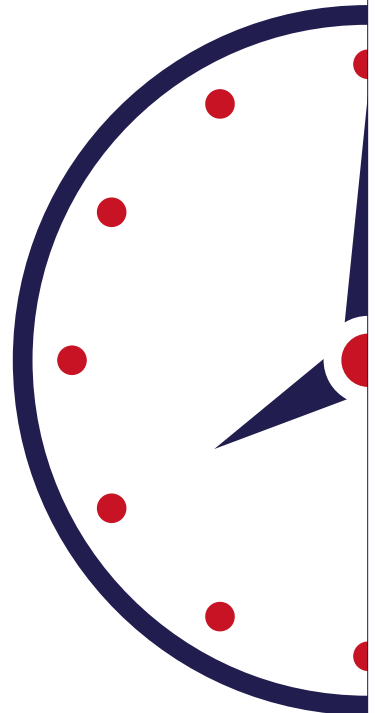
- Hospital tours – or tours of a specific department – will help tell your organization's story in an experiential way, especially if your goal is to share details about services and achievements. This also serves as the best introduction to your organization and how you benefit the community.
- Roundtable meetings with hospital leadership and applicable staff can foster deeper discussion on issues facing your community or policy priorities.
- Luncheons, dinners or receptions provide a more social environment to get to know lawmakers and forge closer relationships, while still addressing priority topics.



EVENT TIMING IS CRITICAL

State lawmakers are part-time legislators, meaning most have full-time jobs and limited availability. Hosting an efficient event that lasts between one and two hours will maximize your time while being respectful of the competing demands on legislators' time.

- Having a specific plan or agenda for the visit will ensure hospital leadership is able to keep things moving in a timely manner and that all priorities are addressed.
- Any hospital or system staff participating in the visit should be briefed in advance about the plan for the meeting to ensure an effective and successful meeting.
- During the legislative session (typically January through May), Fridays are the only reliable option for hosting a legislator due to the General Assembly's Monday through Thursday meeting schedule.
- Work directly with the legislator or their legislative assistant to find the best timing.
- When scheduling a visit with a group of legislators, it is best to provide two or three date and time options and select the one that works for the majority of the group.



ANNUAL VISITS OR EVENTS

Hosting annual visits or events is an ideal approach for allowing legislators to build a deeper understanding of your facility's needs and issues, as well as strengthening your direct relationship with the lawmaker.

- Many Tennessee hospitals and health systems host lunches and dinners near the end of the year as a way of introducing legislative and policy priorities for the coming session of the General Assembly.
- Late spring and summer events can provide an opportunity to thank lawmakers for their support and efforts on behalf of hospitals for the previous legislative session.
- Regardless of the timing or primary purpose, it is important to always promote any new accomplishments or recognitions of your organization. Use every possible opportunity to elevate the facilities status.

PROMOTE THE LEGISLATIVE VISIT

Sharing photos (take lots of pictures during the visit!) and thanks on your organization's social media channels and through traditional public relations efforts. This provides an opportunity to elevate your legislators to the community, while also further showcasing the work of your hospital.

- When posting on social media, be sure to tag legislators so they can easily share and/or respond to the post. This maximizes your reach and serves as a capstone to your successful event.
- When possible, also tag THA and/or use the #tnhospitals hashtag, which will make it easier for THA to share and repost the news of your legislative visit, further extending the reach of your posts.
- For traditional media, including quotes from hospital or health system leadership provides another opportunity to publicly thank legislators for their support.
- In addition to publicly thanking legislators, it is also a good idea to send a personal thank you note to lawmakers that participate.



#tnhospitals

VIRTUAL EVENTS

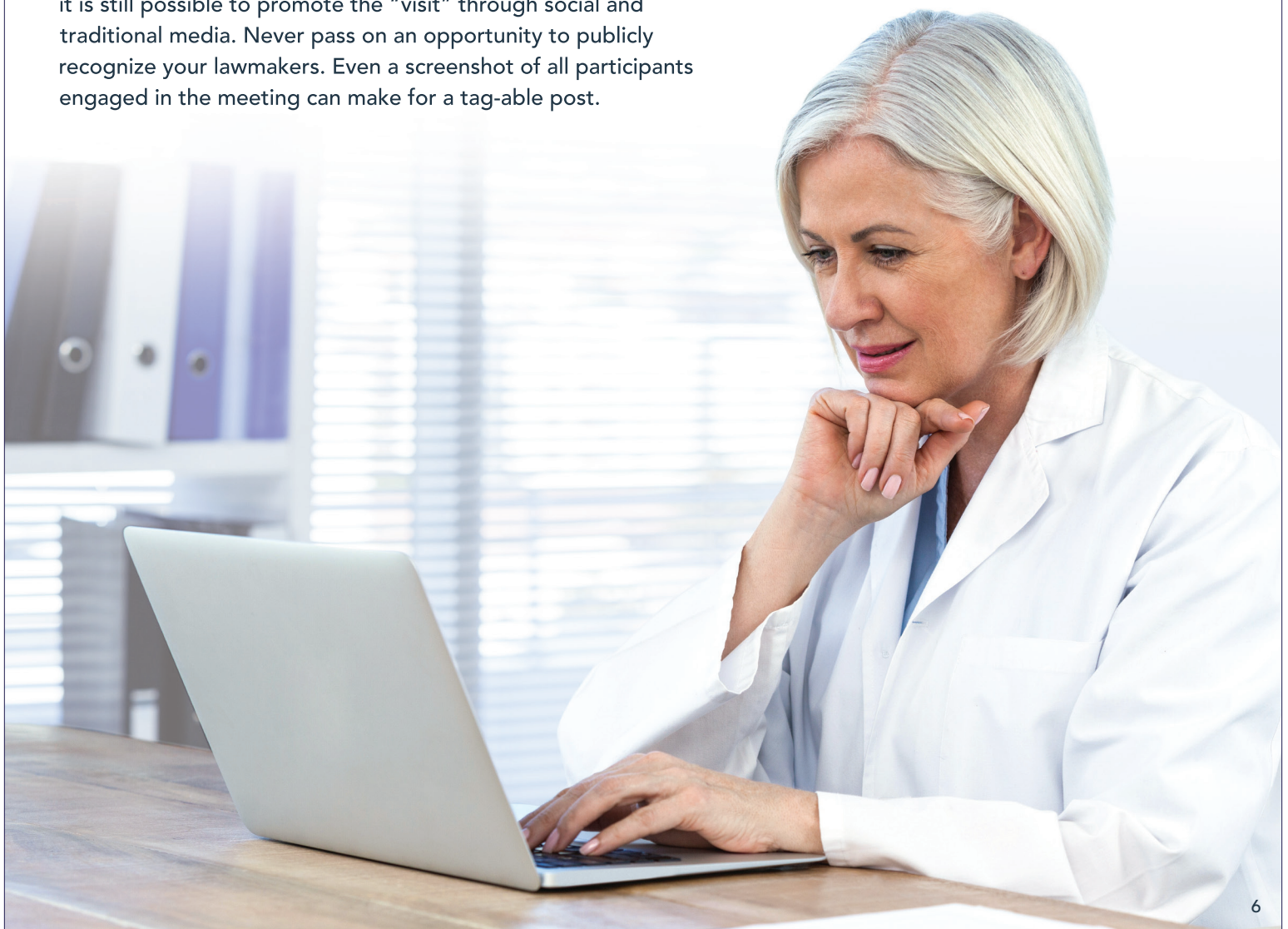
USING TECH TO CONNECT

For the near term, hosting an in-person visit may prove challenging – or even impossible – due to the pandemic. This does not negate the need for engaging with lawmakers and thankfully, multiple platforms exist for virtual engagement.

In these virtual situations, the process of identifying goals and participants for the meeting is unchanged, though you may have to get creative for how to meet those goals virtually.

- Showcasing hospital spaces and achievements through photos or short videos shared during the virtual meeting can take the place of an in-person tour.
- Having a detailed internal agenda for hospital participants to work from can ensure the ultimate success and efficiency of your virtual meeting.
- Given the realities of a virtual experience, it is also important to consider keeping the meeting to one hour or less, unlike the in-person approach where a longer engagement is more easily managed.

While the visual content from a virtual meeting is not as exciting, it is still possible to promote the “visit” through social and traditional media. Never pass on an opportunity to publicly recognize your lawmakers. Even a screenshot of all participants engaged in the meeting can make for a tag-able post.





LEGISLATIVE VISIT CHECKLIST

Choose a Format

- ☐ In-Person
- ☐ Virtual

Before the Visit

- ☐ Set Goals
- ☐ Develop Plan/Agenda
- ☐ Schedule Visit/Meeting
- ☐ Select and Brief Participants

During the Visit

- ☐ Highlight Accomplishments
- ☐ Educate Needs and Priorities
- ☐ Humanize Issues
- ☐ Build Relationships

After the Visit

- ☐ Promote on Social Media Platforms
- ☐ Promote with Traditional Media
- ☐ Send Thank You Correspondence to Legislators

THA SUPPORT FOR YOUR VISIT

As you plan visits with your legislators, THA staff are ready and willing to provide support all along the way. Whether it is messaging and materials on priority issues, coordinating with legislative offices or social media and public relations needs, we want to help ensure the success of your meetings. Please reach out to us any time – the more advance notice, the better – and we will be happy to assist. Contact information is as follows:

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