



2023

## In-District Advocacy Guide

**In this advocacy guide, you'll learn:**

- ✓ Why in-district advocacy is essential to our success;
- ✓ Easy types of action you can take, whether you have just one minute, 10 minutes, 30 minutes, or more;
- ✓ How you can share your efforts and build momentum with your fellow ACTION Campaign members.

# Advocacy Starts at Home

## *In-District Activities Critical to Your Success*

While a picture is worth a thousand words, allowing Members of Congress to get out and see the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (Housing Credit) at work in their communities is the best way to get their support for the program. The longest Congressional Recess each year takes place in August, giving constituents a great opportunity to engage with Members of Congress at home, demonstrate the impact of the Housing Credit in their district or state, and secure their support for the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act (AHCIA), H.R. 3238 and S. 1557.

It is always important to cultivate and maintain relationships with your Senators and Representatives, but it is particularly critical to secure a good outcome for our Housing Credit priorities at present. Inflation and increased costs for materials and labor are stretching resources for producing and preserving affordable homes thinner than ever. And, at the same time, the caps from the recent debt ceiling deal are threatening funding for programs used to complement the Housing Credit financing, like the HOME Investment Partnerships Program and other federally appropriated resources.

This fall, the House and Senate will work to complete appropriations packages to fund the federal government for Fiscal Year 2024, which begins on October 1. This funding package, which often stretches into December with short-term funding measures called Continuing Resolutions, is most frequently the legislative vehicle for a tax title that would include our Housing Credit priorities.

The divided Congress and tight voting margins are a challenge to enact any large spending or tax package. To make sure we are positioned well for potential legislative vehicles, we must continue to build up support for the AHCIA. We need strong relationships and clear, consistent communication with Congress on the urgency to expand and strengthen the Housing Credit and your advocacy for the AHCIA is key.

### *Successful Actions and Messaging*

We must continue to advocate and demonstrate the importance of the Housing Credit and the difference it makes in low-income rural and urban communities. Experience from our past efforts has proven that best way to achieve this goal is by reaching out and educating Members of Congress when they are at home — especially if you have a Senator on the Finance Committee or a Representative on the Ways and Means Committee.

There is no substitute for a tour of a Housing Credit property, a ground-breaking, or taking part in a ribbon-cutting — events where legislators can meet and hear directly from constituents and local officials about the important role affordable housing plays in the community. This kind of interaction leaves a large and lasting impression of the effectiveness of the Housing Credit.

In this toolkit, you will find tips for powerful actions to cultivate a new relationship or nurture an existing relationship with your Senators and Representatives at home and — most importantly — show the importance of the Housing Credit in the face of persistent and stubborn shortage of affordable rental housing that is so pervasive in low-income urban and rural communities across the country.

- ◆ **Invite your Senators and Representatives to visit a project.** Show them firsthand why the work you do and the residents you serve is important to their state or district, and how that work is supported by the Housing Credit.

- ◆ **Meet face-to-face and bring some friends.** In-district meetings during recess are a great way to keep the issue in the forefront of their minds and reinforce what they have heard from us in DC. It also allows you to bring in residents to validate your message on the importance of the Housing Credit.
- ◆ **Write an op-ed.** Showcase the impact the Housing Credit has made in your community, grow public support for your work, and inform local leaders on the importance of the Housing Credit by connecting the dots between your work and community revitalization.

The good news is that you can take as little or as much time as you have to devote to action. While the activities listed above are the best opportunities to have an impact on your legislators, we have also listed some **quick actions that can be taken in an hour or less.**

We hope that these ideas will inspire you to take advantage of the upcoming Congressional Recess. Doing so will not only increase your power and influence on Capitol Hill, but also help ensure that our voice carries the strength that it needs to be heard on the issues that matter most. **We encourage you all to contact Max Brossy to let us know how we can help.**

Sincerely,

Scott Hoekman,  
Co-Chair,  
Enterprise Community Partners

Jennifer Schwartz,  
Co-Chair,  
NCSHA

## We Can Help!

### *Get Support for Your In-District Activities*

We are ready to provide ACTION Campaign members with answers to questions on details, provide guidance on how to carry out activities, and brainstorm ideas on activities. We can help draft and edit materials for meetings, as well as edit and strategize on op-eds and letters to the editor.

We would also like to help promote and share any events ACTION members are planning; regardless of how small or big, everything counts!

Contact Max Brossy at [mbrossy@enterprisecommunity.org](mailto:mbrossy@enterprisecommunity.org) for assistance. We look forward to hearing from you.

### *Where Can I Find the Congressional Calendar?*

The 2023 Congressional Calendars can be viewed online at:

<https://content.rollcall.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/2023CQRCCongressionalCalendar.jpg>

# The Housing Credit at Work in Communities

## *Invite your Senators and Representatives to visit a project.*

Having a Member of Congress make a site visit to a Housing Credit property is one of the most powerful ways to build a relationship and advocate for strengthening, protecting, and expanding the Housing Credit. By showing your Senators and Representatives the work that you do first-hand, how you serve your community, and how the Housing Credit supports your efforts, you can make a lasting impression. This is your opportunity to shine.

### **Showcase Your Organization**

- ◆ Always try to organize your event in such a way that your Senators and Representatives can speak to and meet with a significant number of constituents.
- ◆ Some ideas include inviting your Senators and Representatives to:
  - ◇ Meet your staff and members of the community who you serve, including residents.
  - ◇ Celebrate your organization or project's success at a ceremony and say a few words in support of your organization.
  - ◇ Receive an award from your organization for the good work that they have done in support of your cause.
- ◆ Connect the dots. You are not only showcasing your organization, but the Housing Credit program and how it supports your work. This kind of personal connection can help turn your Representative or Senator into a champion.

### **Make it About the Member of Congress**

- ◆ If your Senator or Representative responds strongly to business interests, be sure to have the event business-focused and give the investors or developers a prominent role. Remind your Member of Congress that the private sector, not the taxpayer, bears the risk for its involvement in the Housing Credit, and that the private sector has strong incentives to perform due diligence. The Housing Credit is also an effective tool for providing workforce housing.
  - ◇ Ensure the investor or developer will speak to the necessity of the Housing Credit to make these projects possible.
- ◆ If your Senator or Representative is on a committee that addresses the needs of a special population, such as veterans, be sure that they are featured prominently on the agenda. In short, match your program to the interest areas of your Member of Congress.
- ◆ Personalize the experience by inviting a constituent who has benefited from the project can share a personal story of how your organization impacted their life.
  - ◇ Individual clients or local government leaders can put a human face on the work you do.

## Things to Remember Before and During the Visit

- ◆ What two or three points on the Housing Credit and the AHClA do you want to drive home with your elected officials? Make sure flyers, handouts, and remarks reflect those points.
- ◆ Determine what day is the busiest at the site where you have chosen to hold the event. This is when you will want to try to hold the visit, since it will confirm the success of the project.
- ◆ **Invite your Senators and Representatives** (page 11) as far in advance as possible — they receive many invitations every day, so make sure your invitation stands out. Let their staff know you are flexible and willing to accommodate the Member's schedule.
  - ◇ Email the invitation to both the DC office (attention scheduler) and to their local office. Follow up with the scheduler after a few days, even if they confirmed it with you.
- ◆ Maximize the value of the visit by inviting local media to attend the event. Make sure the Member knows about the media's involvement in advance and offer to coordinate with the Communications Director in the DC office and the Press Secretary in their local office. Include a hashtag or information on ways to follow the event on social media platforms if you have the capability to do so.
- ◆ Be sure to send information on the event to the ACTION Campaign — we can help with contact information, invitations, and planning as needed and help promote the visit.
- ◆ Before and during the visit, volunteer your organization to serve as a resource for their offices.
- ◆ Take photos, and post live to social media, and be sure to tag other people and organizations who are participating in the event — this will help broaden your audience and amplify your message. Some ways to get other partners involved is by using the following hashtags: #HousingCredit #AHClA #AffordableHousing.

## Things to Remember After the Visit

- ◆ Send thank you notes (letters or emails), including any press releases, news articles, and photos from the event to the Congressional staff who helped plan it.
- ◆ Share photos and articles via email and through social media.
- ◆ Make sure that you provide the name, email address, and direct phone number of a person in your organization to serve as a constituent services liaison and overall resource for the Congressional office.

# Meet Face-to-Face with your Representatives

## *Keep the Housing Credit and affordable housing in the Forefront of Their Minds*

A face-to-face meeting with your Senators and Representatives, or their staff, to discuss the issues carries much more weight than signing a petition, sending a letter, or making a phone call. Make your visit successful by following these pro tips:

### Preparing for the Meeting

- ◆ Know the Member. Find out their personal background, information on the committees they're on, and other positions they hold (or used to) that might be relevant. Craft your talking points around this information. That will help draw a direct link between the Senator or Representative and your advocacy efforts. Even if you're only meeting with staff, they will appreciate that you took the time to research their boss and incorporate their story into your discussion.
- ◆ Focus on the Housing Credit. You won't have time to deal with more than one issue very well at the meeting; every additional issue that you raise could dilute the message received by the representative or their staff. Stay relevant!
- ◆ Know the issue. If you don't already know, learn the facts, figures, arguments, and counter-arguments surrounding the issue before your meeting. Knowledge is the cornerstone of advocacy. Check out our **key messages** (page 9) and **[national, state, and district fact sheets](#)** (Website under the Advocacy Toolkit page).
- ◆ Make it personal. Sharing a real-life example of how your organization has impacted their district will put a face on the work you do.
- ◆ Call us. We are here to help ACTION members successfully frame the issues and understand them inside and out. We can offer talking points, issue briefs, research, and specific information about the Senators and Representatives that you are going to meet.

### During the Meeting

- ◆ Don't skip the preliminaries. Introduce everyone present and their organizations briefly. Thank the legislator or their staff for the opportunity to meet. If you haven't discussed in advance how much time you have, confirm during the meeting and respect those limits.
- ◆ Designate one person as the lead speaker. Cutting down on the number of people talking shows consensus, allows the Senator and Representative – and their staff – to focus on the message, and reduces the chances of getting sidetracked.
- ◆ Listen. Finding out their views is just as important as conveying yours. Ask genuine questions and respect their answers. They often contain valuable information. If you don't know the answer to their questions, let them know you will find out and get back to them, and then do it. Reach out to us if you don't know how or where to find the answer.
- ◆ Most important: Be clear on your legislative "ask." Don't walk away from a Congressional meeting

without asking your Senators and Representative to take the specific action that you want them to take. For example:

- ◇ Convey your support of the AHCIA and ask that they prioritize its inclusion in “must pass” legislation this year.
  - ◇ Be sure to reiterate the important work you do and how it’s connected to expanding and strengthening the credit through the AHCIA — specific, local examples are particularly helpful. For more examples of the provisions to highlight, read the talking points on page 9.
- ◆ End with a thank you. Regardless of the outcome, thank your Senators and Representatives for the opportunity to meet and raise your concerns. Don’t forget to thank their staff as well. Exchange business cards as the meeting concludes, if you have them.

### **After the Meeting**

- ◆ Follow up. Send your Senators and Representatives a formal thank you note, including to their staff, forward any additional information discussed during the meeting, and create a written confirmation of any agreed-to actions.
- ◆ Send ACTION a note on how it went!

# Short on Time?

## *You Can Still Make a Difference*

### Do you have 5 minutes?

- ◆ Write a message on your elected officials' Facebook or Twitter pages using **key messages** (page 9) on the Housing Credit — and encourage others to share. Include **state- or district-specific information** (Website under the Advocacy Toolkit page) when you craft your short message.

### Do you have 15 minutes?

- ◆ Send a letter or email to your Senators and Representatives urging them to support the AHCIA. **Check out the organizational sign-on letter as an example.**

### Do you have 30 minutes?

- ◆ Write a letter to the editor
  - ◇ A letter to the editor is typically short, around 200 words, and is in response to an article the media outlet recently published. **Read tips on how to write and submit it** (page 10).

### Do you have an hour?

- ◆ Attend a town hall meeting
  - ◇ If you don't have the time or resources to arrange a town hall meeting, you can still use someone else's as an opportunity to engage your Senators and Representative. Visit your legislators' websites to find out the time and date of any upcoming town hall meetings.
  - ◇ Don't be afraid to stand up and ask questions. Make your questions precise, relevant, and direct! **Contact us** if you want help crafting questions.
- ◆ Write an Op-Ed
  - ◇ Submitting an opinion piece to your local or state press is a great way to bring attention to the impact of the Housing Credit in your community. Highlight the effect properties have had on community stability, as well as creating and retaining jobs where they are needed the most. **Find out how to write and submit it** (page 10).
- ◆ Create a short video
  - ◇ Seeing is believing. Create a video about a great Housing Credit project by interviewing a local community or tenant leader. Then send it to your Representative and Senators — don't forget to **share it with us too and we'll help you spread the word.**



# Talking About the Housing Credit

## *Key Messages on the Credit*

- ◆ **The Housing Credit is a model public-private partnership that delivers affordable housing across the country.**
  - ◇ The Housing Credit is also a model public-private program, where the federal government provides financing and baseline regulations while giving the states maximum flexibility to implement the program to fit their respective needs.
  - ◇ Housing Credit properties are located in rural and urban areas in all 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Northern Mariana Islands, and the US Virgin Islands.
  - ◇ The private sector, not the taxpayer, bears all the risk and is closely involved in compliance efforts under the threat of severe penalties from the IRS.
  
- ◆ **The need for affordable housing is dire.**
  - ◇ Currently, 11.6 million renter households nationwide are considered severely rent-burdened, meaning they pay more than half of their monthly income on rent, leaving far too little for other necessary expenses like healthcare, transportation, and nutritious food.
  - ◇ In order to afford a modest one-bedroom apartment at the national average fair market rent, a worker earning minimum wage has to work for 75 hours per week.
  - ◇ Nearly 2 million additional affordable homes could be financed across the country by the primary unit-financing provisions of the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act of 2023 (AHCIA).
  
- ◆ **The Housing Credit finances improved access to affordable housing while creating jobs and opportunities.**
  - ◇ From the program's inception in 1986 through 2021, the most recent year for which data is available, the Housing Credit has developed or preserved over 3.74 million affordable homes nationwide that have served over 8.06 million low-income households. Additional details of this activity include:
    - 6.08 million jobs supported for one year;
    - \$239 billion in tax revenue generated; and
    - \$688.5 billion in wages & business income generated.

**MOST IMPORTANTLY, don't forget to explain how the project and homes benefit the community at large.**

# Share Housing Credit Success Locally

## *Write an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor*

Submitting an opinion piece to your local or state press is a great way to bring attention to the impact of the Housing Credit in your community. Highlight the homes and the effect this program has had on factors like health and education outcomes, economic mobility for individuals and families, driving investment and other resources to underserved and marginalized communities, or even creating and retaining jobs.

Editors do not publish every letter or op-ed they receive, but they do pay attention — especially if it is well-written and timely. A letter to the editor is typically very short, around 200 words, and is in response to an article the media outlet recently published. An op-ed is a longer opinion piece that provides information on a subject that would be of interest to the outlet's readers. Therefore, it is important to demonstrate how the issue affects individuals locally. To find out how to submit a letter to the editor, call or email the outlet or look on its website.

- ◆ **Be timely.** Target your topic to a local or national headline. Inflation, supply or labor shortages, rising interest rates, and the health of the economy are a few top national issues that could be used as a lead-in. Other opportunities include stories noting a lack of affordable rental housing that could be made possible by increasing resources for the Housing Credit. For example, if a story runs on the lack of affordable housing, that would be a good opportunity to discuss a property that received Housing Credit financing, or a location that might be a great opportunity for a Housing Credit building. If another story runs on soaring rent prices, you could write about how the Housing Credit can keep rents affordable and benefits to the overall community.
- ◆ **Follow the rules.** Make sure to adhere to the outlet's guidelines on length and style. Spell everything correctly and pay close attention to grammar — letters are not usually edited; rather, the outlets select well-written letters that meet their guidelines. Include your name and contact information, if requested.
- ◆ **Be concise.** Include your main points in the first paragraph even if your media outlet's length guidelines are greater than 200 words. Two to three points are ideal.
- ◆ **Avoid jargon and acronyms.** Explain points in "plain English." This makes the information more understandable and accessible to a wider audience.

Email your letter to ensure timeliness. To do this, paste the text into the body of an email — **DO NOT SEND AS AN ATTACHMENT**, unless the outlet's instructions explicitly say that this is the only method. Sending it electronically is generally the preferred way to receive letters.

Lastly, be sure to copy us or forward your submission and we will have our PR firm follow up on placement. Remember, we are here and happy to help!

# Seeing Is Believing

## *How to Invite Your Member to Visit a Property*

[DATE]

The Honorable [NAME]  
US House of Representatives / U.S. Senate [ADDRESS]  
Washington, DC 20515 (House) / 20510 (Senate)

Dear Representative/Senator [LAST NAME]:

The nationwide housing crisis is dominating policy and media conversations in Washington and across the country. There is a nationwide shortage of 7.3 million available and affordable rental homes. As an [AFFORDABLE HOUSING / HOUSING CREDIT STAKEHOLDER], we use the Housing Credit to [do XYZ] to / for / on behalf of low- to moderate-income communities [IN THE CITY / STATE / REGION / AROUND THE COUNTRY]. The Housing Credit is essential to keep rental housing affordable in [OUR COMMUNITY], especially as interest rates have increased along with construction costs. We would like to draw your attention to the impact the Housing Credit has had on [our community], by inviting you to tour [PROJECT], a Housing Credit property located in [CITY], to hear from [RESIDENTS / CONSTITUENTS / LOCAL OFFICIALS / ETC.]. [OUR ORGANIZATION] is a member of the ACTION Campaign, which sent a letter to Congress in May signed by over 2,600 businesses, nonprofits, and other organizations in support of the Housing Credit. The letter called on Congress to support the Housing Credit and the residents who live in these properties by passing the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act of 2023 (S. 1557 / H.R. 3238).

[THIS PROJECT] is just one example of the impact the Housing Credit has had in communities throughout [STATE]. In addition to creating or preserving [#] units of quality affordable homes for [#] families in [STATE], investments in the Housing Credit have supported [#] jobs, generated \$[#] in tax revenue, and \$[#] in wages and business income.

We [OUR ORGANIZATION] would be honored if you would join us for a tour of [THIS PROJECT] and a discussion on the importance of the Housing Credit and its impact on your constituents. We would like you to join us from [TIME, e.g., 8:00-9:30AM, ON DATE], but we are flexible if a better time works for your schedule. [DESCRIBE HERE WHAT THE MEMBER WILL SEE, SUCH AS A TOUR OF THE PROPERTY, AN OPPORTUNITY TO MEET A FEW RESIDENTS, AN OPPORTUNITY TO MEET STAFF, ETC.]

I will follow up with your office on this request, or you may reach me at [PHONE NUMBER AND/OR EMAIL]. Thank you in advance for your attention and we hope to see you soon.

Sincerely,

[YOUR NAME]  
[TITLE]  
[ORGANIZATION]



[www.rentalhousingaction.org](http://www.rentalhousingaction.org)