

VIRTUAL LOBBYING 101

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought a temporary halt to life as we know it. While things aren't exactly business-as-usual, there are plenty of ways for you to support affordable homeownership from the safety of your own home. One thing you can do? Lobby virtually. With the Minnesota State Capitol Building mostly shuttered to visitors, it is essential that advocates continue to reach out to their lawmakers and speak up for affordable homeownership.

Read on to learn more about connecting with your state lawmakers while social distancing.

YOUR VIRTUAL LOBBYING CHECKLIST

1. Schedule your meeting.

- ☐ Look up your lawmakers.
- ☐ Contact your lawmaker's office.
- ☐ Let the Advocacy Team know once your meeting is scheduled.

2. Get ready to lobby.

- ☐ Decide who will join you for the meeting.
- ☐ Review your [meeting outline and talking points](#).
- ☐ Advocate!

3. Remember to follow up!

- ☐ Take careful notes on the conversation.
- ☐ Connect with your Twin Cities Habitat Advocacy Team.
- ☐ Send a quick thank-you email!

(1) Schedule your meeting.

First, **do you know who your lawmakers are?** If not, [look up your representatives here](#). Just enter your address, city, state, and zip code into the search bar and hit enter. Your State Representative and State Senator will be listed to the left. Click on the Contact button next to each of their names to find their contact information and committee assignments.

Contact your lawmaker's office to schedule a virtual meeting or call. In an email, introduce yourself, explain why you would like a meeting, and provide a list of dates that work for you. (Keep in mind that the legislative session is scheduled to end on May 18th!) Call their legislative assistant to follow up on your email. If you don't hear back within a day or two, try giving the legislative assistant another call.

Be prepared to be flexible. Especially as the end of session nears, lawmakers have full schedules and may be pulled into meetings without much notice. Build in a little extra time for yourself in case your meeting gets pushed back or moved. Also, lawmakers have various ways of engaging with constituents during the era of COVID-19. Some prefer email or phone calls, and others prefer virtual meetings. If your lawmakers are doing virtual meetings, they likely have access to video conferencing

software, such as Zoom or Skype. Have questions about video conferencing? [Let us know](#), and we'll help you figure it out!

Finally, **remember to let our Advocacy Team know once you've scheduled your meeting.** [Send us an email](#), and we'll make sure you have everything you need.

(2) Get ready to lobby.

First step, **consider who will join you for the meeting.** Lawmakers tend to prioritize meetings with their own constituents. Are any of your neighbors curious about advocacy? Do you have anyone in your network who has bought a home with Habitat for Humanity? Invite them to join you! And don't forget that Twin Cities Habitat is here to help. [Let us know when you've scheduled your meeting](#). We'll be happy to support you however possible, whether that involves attending the meeting, helping you prepare, or just checking in!

Next, **come up with a game plan.** Legislative visits are often brief - think fifteen minutes or less. How do you want to use your time to make an impact? Who will facilitate or "emcee" the meeting? Who is going to make the ask? [Review your meeting outline, legislative asks, and talking points](#). Figure out who is going to say what, and run through your part a few times so that you feel comfortable. (Remember, you don't have to be an expert!) Finally, personal stories are some of the most compelling tools we have. We've created [this worksheet to help you tell your story](#) effectively. Try it out and let us know what you think!

Advocate! We've included some of our tips for running an effective legislative visit in the meeting outline linked above. You may feel intimidated or nervous, but keep in mind that your lawmakers are there to serve you. You have every right to meet with them and you already have everything you need to be an advocate. That said, things don't *always* go as planned. In case your lawmaker isn't supportive, we included some guidance on how to respond effectively.

(3) Remember to follow up!

Immediately after your meeting, **write down as much as you can remember** from the conversation. Take careful notes. What did your representative say? Did they seem supportive? Did they request any information or other follow-up?

Connect with your Twin Cities Habitat Advocacy Team. We want to hear how your meeting went! How should we follow-up with your state legislator? How can we support you in your future advocacy? We'd love to chat and hear your takeaways. [Shoot us an email!](#)

Finally, be sure to **send a quick thank-you email.** Thank your legislator for their time and for their support for affordable homeownership (if applicable). Keep the tone positive, even if your lawmaker wasn't supportive. Say that you look forward to meeting with them in the future. Attach a copy of our [Legislative Leave-Behind](#) to serve as a future resource for your lawmaker.