



# Working effectively with your legislator and vice versa!

As a local elected or appointed official, you're all about community service, fixing things, pulling the community together and moving forward.

Your legislators are about the same things.

As much time and effort as you spend in your communities being elected officials, it's also part of your job description to communicate with legislators - and most (if not all) want to hear from you.

Spend time communicating with legislators. They can impact you unintentionally. And they can also be very helpful!

How do legislators know what your city needs or doesn't want? You tell them. Repeat it and remain consistent (nothing ensures failure like officials from the same city disagreeing about your asks or positions on legislation).

## Lobbying 101 - helpful hints

### Communicate regularly with your legislators during session

How do other cities do it?

- By phone or e-mail works well - especially if they or their legislative aides know you. (Legislative aides are the gatekeepers for their bosses - knowing and being respectful of them can help you get and maintain access to their bosses!)
- Consider regularly scheduled conference calls with one or all of your legislators. Some cities do these on a weekly or bi-weekly basis - frequently less than ½ hour and in the morning.
- The more you make an effort to communicate, the more your legislators will seek your input and try to address your needs!

### Frame your issues as stories that are supported with data

Legislators are usually generalists and need to remember a little about a lot of things.

- This upcoming session in particular will be difficult - their budget woes are significant. Programs and things you need may go away. Project funding will be limited.
- Start collecting and share stories, impacts and lists of programs that are important to your community. Legislators start making decisions about cuts and priorities sooner than you may think!

- Local stories stick in a legislator's mind and make good points during debates - both in private and on the House or Senate floor.

### Get to know and meet with your legislators when they're not in Olympia

That's when they have time. During a legislative session, you may be lucky to get 15 minutes. At home, there's time to dig into your subjects.

- Legislators rarely turn down invitations to have coffee or lunch - especially during election season (every two years for representatives/four years for senators) Listen to what they care about as you share your interests.
- Consider regularly scheduled meetings, separately or as a delegation - preferably some of each.
- You don't have to contribute to their campaigns - they want to hear your issues. Sometime, you might consider hosting a gathering for coffee or in a meeting space to help them hear from constituents.
- Even though the Legislature is partisan, make and maintain contact with your legislators - regardless of party. 85% of legislation passed is unanimous. Many of the solutions you need aren't partisan wedge issues.
- In areas where legislators represent multiple local governments, look for shared interests and perspectives with other jurisdictions and communicate those.

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## **Adopt a legislative package for your city**

It's a great way to tell your legislators, citizens and businesses what's important to you! (AWC is posting samples on our website.)

- Have the council adopt it - adds credibility and maybe even gets some local press attention.
- Keep it short (if more than a page, it might not get looked at).
- Adopt it before the legislative session begins, and explain it to your legislators and others in your community. Be ready to state clearly what you want, why and who if anyone is opposed.
- If you want or need a capital project, include it along with your policy priorities.
- Look at AWC's legislative package and priorities (available in draft form by early October) and consider copying it along with some local examples.

## **Know which committee your legislators (and legislators in neighboring communities) serve on**

If you need a project or a change in a statute, it first goes through a committee (if you need help understanding committees and who's on them, contact AWC).

- Your legislator or one from a nearby community can be your champion.
- Alternatively, your legislator can find a champion for you if he or she doesn't serve on a particular committee.

## **Use your friends in your community**

Success in Olympia often requires help from others or a coalition.

- Is there a chamber at home with a similar position? A labor group? Talk to them/they can help. Pile on!
- Legislators keep track of how many contacts they get on a particular issue - pro and con. If you need something - you and your friends need to remind them.

## **Remember - everything that's important takes time!**

There's nothing wrong with putting your priorities together and teeing it up for next time around.

## **Finally...You're city officials**

How often do you get thanked? Thank your legislators - whether or not you always agree with them. Consider ways to recognize and publicize their successes for your community.

## **Cities conducting lobbying activities may need to report to the PDC**

Cities and towns that conduct lobbying activities either through a contract lobbyist or directly with in-house staff or city council members may need to report to the Public Disclosure Commission. Those that hire a contract lobbyist must file a report. If you have in-house staff or elected officials who spend more than four days a quarter directly lobbying the legislature, you may need to complete a report. For more information on reporting requirements and how to file a report visit the PDC's website at [www.pdc.wa.gov/filers/page.aspx?c1=0&c2=137&c3=138](http://www.pdc.wa.gov/filers/page.aspx?c1=0&c2=137&c3=138) or review the PDC's Public Agency Lobbying handbook at [www.pdc.wa.gov/archive/filerassistance/manuals/pdf/2009/2010ManL5.pdf](http://www.pdc.wa.gov/archive/filerassistance/manuals/pdf/2009/2010ManL5.pdf). Cities and towns that fail to comply with reporting requirements on lobbying activities may be subject to penalties from the PDC.