



# Strong Cities Pocket Guide

5th Edition • Legislative Session 2017





# Strong Cities Pocket Guide

Serving our members through  
advocacy, education and services

*AWC's Strong Cities, Great State*  
campaign brings cities and towns  
together to achieve greater results and  
deliver stronger services.

# The 2017 legislative session is a game-changer

This legislative session will be lengthy and difficult. Pressure is building for the Legislature to address fiscal and policy challenges – foremost among them is the looming K-12 McCleary funding gap. Decisions made to address this gap will impact cities and towns – for better or for worse.

## **A new biennium, new faces & new opportunities**

Along with a new biennium, come new opportunities. New and experienced legislators are in Olympia to work with a second-term Governor. Our challenge is to help legislators and the Governor recognize and embrace that the state's success and cities' and towns' success are inexorably linked.

This guide offers tips and advice on how you can help ensure legislators know that the state is only as strong as its cities and towns.

# 2017 City Legislative Priorities

Cities need the Legislature to support and act on these priorities:



**Public records:** Modernize the Public Records Act so that cities can continue to provide open and transparent government services to our residents.



**Homelessness, housing & human services:** Enhance efforts to increase affordable housing, decrease homelessness, and improve a strained behavioral health system.



**Local infrastructure:** Revitalize key infrastructure assistance programs that support job creation, health and safety, and quality of life.



**Local authority:** Respect city authority to respond to local needs.



**City-state partnership:** Maintain critical funding of key services and programs.

Check [awcnet.org](http://awcnet.org) for more information on city priorities, including issue briefs and updates.

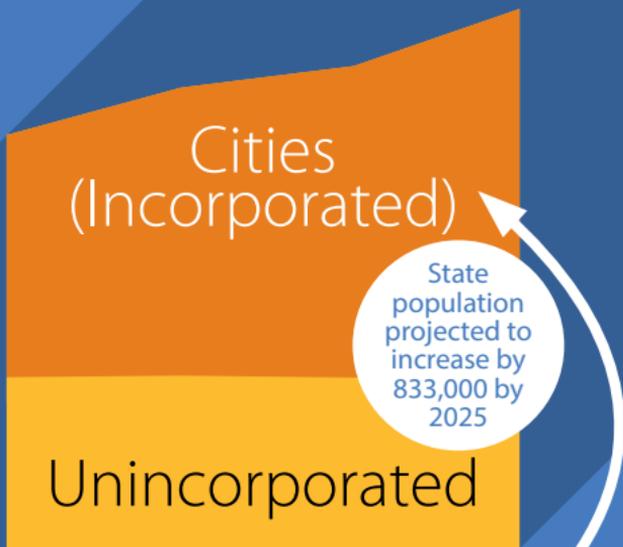
# Share your city's legislative agenda

Tell your legislators what you want from them. Sharing your city's legislative agenda is a simple and effective way to get your legislator's attention. It's best to adopt your legislative agenda in the fall. However, if your city hasn't already done this, you can do it at the beginning of the legislative session.

- Keep it short and simple – one page only.
- Include capital needs along with policy priorities.
- Incorporate AWC's Legislative Priorities into your agenda.
- Make it public. Post it on your city's website, put it in your newsletters, and insert it into utility bills.
- Work with your local media for coverage.

# Strong cities and towns are the key to a great state

Cities are where the majority of Washingtonians live, learn, work, and play. Legislators must understand that in order for the state to thrive, Washington's cities and towns must be strong.



City population as a share of the state's total population continues to grow.



Nearly all of the state's GDP is generated within the economic influence area of its cities.

2/3 of the state's population live in cities.



# Use key timelines to your advantage

The Legislature works under strict timelines. It's important you know when to weigh in, express thanks, or share a concern.

- January to mid-February – Legislators consider bills in committees.
- Mid to late February – Policy bills must clear a subject committee or they are technically “dead.” Bills still “alive” at the end of February must pass the Rules Committee.
- Early March – Policy bills clear one chamber. Bills necessary to implement the budget have different timeline and rules, and can stay alive past cut-off.
- March through April – Bills pass through the opposite house. The pace quickens and consequences intensify.
- April – Consideration of budgets gets serious and legislators start dividing into groups to discuss specific issues. Getting legislators’ attention on something you care about can be difficult.
- April 23 – Sine die. Legislators either pass their budgets or go into overtime.
- May to June – If the 2017-19 budgets are not passed, the Governor calls the Legislature in for extra session(s). This scenario is likely.

## **Other key dates to remember**

January 18 **Mayors Exchange**

February 15-16 **City Action Days**

April 3 **AWC Lobby Day**

### **Remember:**

It's not over 'til it's over. Your legislators need to hear from you throughout the entire legislative session. Regularly tell your legislators what your city needs and ask for their support of AWC's priorities.

# Act strategically

Communicate what your city needs early and often. Frame your city's issues in a way legislators can understand and remember.

- Don't just send an email – meet in person! Speak with your legislator or the legislative aide.
- Stories stick! Frame your city's "ask" with a local story. Too many charts and graphs can make brains spin.
- Respect staff and use time wisely. Staff are busy! They appreciate clarity and brevity.
- Ask for frequent meetings or calls with your city, or a group of cities. These can also be brief.
- Talk about specific bills or budget priorities and tell stories about real impacts on your constituents.
- Speak up even if you think it may not be necessary. If legislators don't hear from you on something deemed important, they may assume you don't care.

# Make the most of your meeting

Once you have a meeting with your legislator, it's important you make the most of it.

- Time with your legislator is brief. Appointments are usually 15-minutes.
- Legislators are busy, so be concise.
- Stories are best illustrated in terms of impacts to constituents, not as impacts on government.
- Most legislators do not have time to read big packets of materials during session. Keep your materials short. Offer to provide more detail to staff.
- Don't try to cover too much, 3-5 issues at most.
- Ask for clear commitments to work on your issues.

# Work to get your local media to cover your city's needs

Develop a relationship with your local media. This is a great opportunity to educate community members about what your city needs. This helps spur action and holds legislators accountable.

- Choose an issue where the benefit to people in your community is very clear.
- Be honest and clear about which legislators are helping and who you still need help from.
- Draft an opinion editorial and submit it to your local paper.
- There is power in numbers. Join forces with your neighboring communities if you share similar challenges.

# If you aren't communicating with your constituents, who is?

You and your legislators have the same constituents. Make sure your shared constituents know how decisions made in Olympia affect them at home. This is a powerful way to create accountability.

- It is your responsibility to let the public know how their legislators are supporting your community. No one else will do this.
- Communicate with your constituents through city council meetings, public access TV, social media, and newsletters.
- Use your influence with community groups to make sure they know the full story.

## **A note about constituent communications**

There are important legal restrictions on using city resources for grassroots lobbying campaigns for your constituents on legislative issues. Instead, focus on providing information about the impact of legislation, and the actions taken by your legislators on legislation. Visit [pdc.wa.gov](http://pdc.wa.gov) or [awcnet.org](http://awcnet.org) for more information.

# Encourage your legislators to join the Local Government Champions Caucus

Several legislators, in both parties and in both the House and Senate, are again working to form a Local Government Champions Caucus as a forum to articulate and advocate for city issues.

- Ask your legislators to join and participate in these caucuses.
- Explain that they can help your city by joining forces with similar-minded legislators.
- Refer legislators to AWC's Government Relations Director Dave Williams to learn how to plug in.

# Are you our next Advocacy All-Star?

AWC's Advocacy All-Star award recognizes city officials who made an impact advocating on behalf of all cities. Here is how you can become an All-Star:

- Fight for things that benefit all cities. Go beyond your city's projects and priorities.
- Step up your game. Speak with the media and become a persistent and trusted resource for legislators.
- Make yourself available. Sometimes short meetings can make a big difference.
- Organize colleagues or other stakeholders. Bring added pressure to the cause.



## Accept no more excuses

“This upcoming 2017 session is all about education funding.”

Yes, a strong education system is important. Strong schools need safe, secure and prosperous cities to flourish. Funding for schools should not come from revenues traditionally shared with cities.

“Cities pay more for employees than the state, control your own costs.”

Teacher salaries vary by region, as do public service costs. Cities must respond to the economic market, and it's not all within our control. We've repeatedly approached the Legislature for help controlling personnel costs and haven't received much support – from Democrats or Republicans.

## "I'm not on the committee."

Your legislator's job is to fight for your district! They need to advocate for your interests with colleagues who are on the committee tasked with considering your issue. You can help by arming them with stories and data to help!

## "I had to follow my caucus."

The only way for your community to get what you need is for your legislators to fight within their caucus to support you. No one else can fight for your city. Suggest they join the Local Government Champions Caucus to gain allies who will help advance bills good for cities and help block those bad for cities.

## Accept no more excuses

“City funding is not our problem.”

Remind legislators that 96% of the state’s GDP, 86% of retail sales, and \$1.4 billion in property taxes for the state school levy are generated within cities. Cities are both society’s backbone and the state’s economic engine. Investing in funding and making sure tools necessary to keep cities strong are in place, is *not* optional and *is* their problem if things aren’t working.

“Cities are doing better than the state.”

Statewide, on a per capita basis, cities’ revenues are growing more slowly than the state’s. However, your response to this statement will depend on how your city is doing. If your city is still struggling, explain the reasons why. For those that are faring better, remind your legislators that the vast majority of the tax dollars generated by economic activity flow to the state and not to your city. Strong cities provide more resources to the state.

# Follow and weigh in on issues that matter

Throughout the session, stay connected with AWC for updates and action items.

- *Legislative Bulletin* – Every Monday, our Bulletin briefly describes bills and hot topics, and gives you what you need to know about issues you care about, including how to take action on city priorities.
- *CityVoice* – On Wednesdays, our *CityVoice* newsletter contains broader city news. Look for the Capitol Calling section to get updates and stay tuned in to Olympia happenings.
- Action Alerts – Every so often you might receive a time-sensitive action alert that asks you to call, email, or meet with your legislators to help them understand city perspectives. We issue these only when truly needed.
- Social media – Watch our social media channels and video clips for updates about important news.

# When the 2017 session is over – then what?

## Summer

- Publicly thank legislators who supported city issues. You can do this at ribbon cuttings, through newsletters, and when talking to the media.
- Hold legislators who did not support city issues accountable. Let constituents know how your legislators voted on city priority issues.
- Set up meetings with legislators, give them city tours, and tell them your challenges.
- Attend AWC's Annual Conference in June.



# Fall

- Adopt your city's legislative agenda and share it publicly with media and legislators.
- Meet with your legislators and ask how you can support them.
- Prepare for session before the end of the year.



# Contact us

**Peter B. King** • peterk@awcnet.org

*AWC Chief Executive Officer*

**Dave Williams** • davew@awcnet.org

*Director of Government Relations*

**Candice Bock** • candiceb@awcnet.org

*Emergency management, law & justice, liability, marijuana, pensions, personnel & labor relations, public records*

**Victoria Lincoln** • victorial@awcnet.org

*Energy, general government, municipal finance, state budget, telecommunications*

**Carl Schroeder** • carls@awcnet.org

*Environment & water, housing, infrastrucutre, land use, state building codes*

**Jane Wall** • janew@awcnet.org

*Economic development, human services, infrastructure, transportation*

**Logan Bahr** • loganb@awcnet.org

*Government Relations Analyst*

**Dave Catterson** • davec@awcnet.org

*Government Relations Analyst*

**Serena Dolly** • serenad@awcnet.org

*Government Relations Analyst*

**Regina Adams** • reginaa@awcnet.org

*Government Relations Coordinator*

**360.753.4137**

**awcnet.org**



[awcnet.org](http://awcnet.org)