

Legislative Toolbox



The Work is Never Done

How to be effective when legislators have gone home

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Each year, the legislature adjourns in May for the duration of the year. This is when state lawmakers head home to their respective districts, and oftentimes to their regular jobs and family responsibilities, and to campaign for re-election in election years.”.

As someone interested in and participating in government, you might think this is a time to take a break from legislative activities. After all, if the legislature is not in session making new laws, what work could a citizen or organization possibly do to influence legislative action?

This down time is the perfect opportunity to take a step back from the often frenzied pace of the legislative session to reflect on the session past and begin planning for the next session. Some questions you and your organization may want to consider are:

1. What were our successes during the last session?
2. Regarding any unattained legislative goals, which legislators were opposed to our position? What needs to be done to convince them to change their position?
3. Which interest groups were opposed to our position and what can be done to either bring them onboard or make them neutral on the issue?
4. Are there any emerging issues that may be detrimental to us? What action can we take to prevent legislative action in this area? What information should we prepare to defend our position if necessary?
5. Are there other routes to achieving our goal rather than a legislative change? Can our concerns be addressed through cooperating with others, through administrative changes, or through court action?

6. Should we reach out to other organizations and build coalitions to try to have greater success with our issue at the Capitol?
7. What can be done now to make sure any grassroots support for an issue can be easily energized when needed during session?
8. Did we thank the legislators and others who helped us?

This is also a good opportunity to spend time with your legislators back in their home districts and educate them on your organization's issues. The legislators will appreciate this opportunity to get to know their constituents' concerns. Members of your organization should find out who represents them at the state capitol and contact those representatives and senators. Some things you can do to interact with your local legislators and educate them on your position include:

1. Invite your senator and representative to tour your facility.
2. If your organization is having a monthly meeting or special event, consider inviting your legislator to speak at the event to listen to your concerns.
3. Attend legislators' town hall meetings.
4. Volunteer to help on their campaigns and/or attend their fundraising events.

These tools of the trade will help you and your organization be effective all year round by getting prepared for upcoming legislative activity and keeping your organization's issues on the minds of legislators.