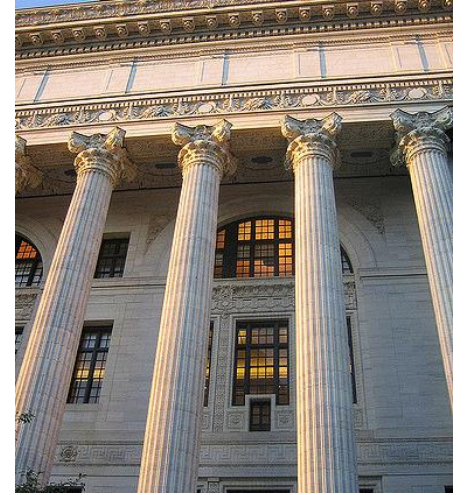


Grassroots Pocket Guide

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The Landscape

- Understanding the Legislative landscape is integral to effectively utilizing an organizations grassroots capacity. Legislatively effective organizations possess a working knowledge of the ABC's of governmental structure (Executive and Legislative branches), a general comprehension of the political beast that is New York State and relationships with members within the Legislative Branch.

Executive Branch

The Executive Branch

The fundamental structure of the Executive Branch is simple:

- The Executive Office is currently held by a Democrat, Andrew Cuomo, who previously served as the states Attorney General. Prior to that, he served the Clinton administration as both the Assistant and primary Secretary of housing and Urban Development.
- The Lieutenant Governor is Kathy Hochul, who hails from Erie County where she previously served as the County Clerk and a U.S. Representative for New York's 26th Congressional District.

The Legislative Branches

The NYS Assembly

- The state's lower house is constructed of 150 seats, with 106 Democrats, 1 Independent and 43 Republicans.
- The hierarchical structure of the Assembly begins with the Speaker of the House, Carl Heastie, who represents the 83rd District, which covers Williamsbridge, Wakefield, Edenwald, Eastchester, Baychester and sections of the Northeast Bronx.
- The Majority Leader is Joseph Morelle, represents the 136th District which includes the eastern portions of the city of Rochester, and the Monroe County suburbs of the Irondequoit and Brighton.
- The Minority Leader is Brian Kolb, who represents the 131st District which includes Ontario County and portions of Seneca County.

The Legislative Branches

The New York State Senate

- The state's upper house is comprised of 63 seats and a complex leadership structure. There are 31 Republicans, 8 Independent Democrats, 1 Caucusing Democrat and 23 mainline Democrats.
 - For decades, the Republicans held a strong majority, though, over the course of the last decade, they began losing seats to Democratic newcomers and as such, for a brief time in 2009, the Democrats held a clear majority in the upper house. However, partnerships and alliances began to take shape, initially, in the form of a coup, when a renegade group of Democrats allied with Republicans to wrestle control of the house. The ensuing chaos lasted for weeks as the chamber grinded to a halt for well over a month. One of the four deserters, retreated back to the Democrats, resulting in a 31-31 split at a time the state had no Lieutenant Governor (the tie splitting vote) because he was serving as Governor after the unexpected scandal and resignation of then Governor Eliot Spitzer.
 - The following election cycle, the Republicans regained marginal control, resulting in additional fractures on the Senate Democratic side. Blaming, their then Chief Election Strategist, Senator Jeff Klein, for the loss, Senate Democrats ousted Klein from the position. Klein and three other members would, as a result, in 2011, form what is known as the Independent Democratic Conference (IDC), an ever growing group, who have consistently partnered with the Senate Republicans, keeping them in the majority despite numerical electoral outcomes. Hence, the leadership in the Senate falls out of the rubric of the ABC's of the Legislature.

The Legislative Branches

The New York State Senate (cont.)

- The Senate Majority Leader is John Flanagan, a Republican representing the 2nd district which includes the town of Smithtown, and portions of Brookhaven and Huntington.
- Leader of the Independent Democrat Conference remains, Senator Jeff Klein, who represents the 34th district which encompasses parts of Bronx and Westchester.
- The Minority Leader is Senator Andrea Stewart Cousins, represents the 35 Senate District, which includes Ardsley, Dobbs Ferry, Elmsford, Greenburgh, Hastings on the Hudson, Irvington, Tarrytown, Scarsdale and parts of Yonkers, White Plains and New Rochelle.

The Legislative Calendar

- The New York State Legislative cycle begins each year in January with a State of the State Address from the Governor; a speech to the Legislature and public that offers the broad brush strokes of his upcoming agenda. Details of such an agenda are later revealed in the Executive's Budget Proposal (generally released in mid to late January).
- Following the release of the Executive Budget proposal, the Legislature spends several weeks in February holding Joint Budget Hearings (a great place to weigh in with your fiscal concerns and/or priorities).
- In late February or early March, each of the houses releases their "one house" budget bills, which outlines their respective priorities and responses to the Governors initiatives. At this point in time, negotiations are at full throttle with an enactment date of April 1.
- Once the budget is passed, the Legislature focuses on non fiscal legislative initiatives for the remainder of their session calendar (ending in mid to late June). Generally, speaking, July and August are quiet times at the capitol. In September, the Executive puts call letters out to his State Agencies, where they begin the process of identifying their priorities for next years' budget cycle. The fall months are a great time to do pre-session legislative visits, participate in (or host) Stakeholder Round Tables and begin discussions on your upcoming budget and legislative priorities.



How A Bill Becomes a Law



How A Bill Becomes a Law

Now that you have a sense of the structure of New York States Legislature, it's important to have a working knowledge of the basics... How a bill becomes a law, how legislative Committees are structured and how do you and your organization play a role in the process. Let's begin with the process of a bill.

- A bill always begins with an idea, often times that idea is rooted in the concept that there is a problem to be solved. Though one person's solution can easily become another's problem which is why the process of passing a bill is usually deliberative, contemplative and open to input from varying stakeholders.
- Once the bill moves from concept to actual language, it must be introduced by a member of the Senate or Assembly (preferentially it is introduced on both sides with the exact language known as a "same as" bill).
- When the bill is introduced, it's given a number and sent to the appropriate Committee.
- Once the bill is sent to Committee, they are analyzed and evaluated. This is the most opportune time for stakeholders (YOU) to weigh in with concerns or support, recommend language changes (amendments), and offer memorandum of opposition or support. This is also the time that the Committee may decide to hold Hearings or Roundtable meetings on the bill (a very effective vehicle of participation). If the bill gains an overwhelming amount of support from Committee members, stakeholders and the Committee Chair, the bill is put on a Committee Agenda, where it is voted on and "reported" out. Depending on the bill, it may be sent to another Committee, particularly if it has a financial implication. Bills with a financial impact will be respectively analyzed by the Senate Finance Committee and the Assembly Ways and Means Committee.

How A Bill Becomes a Law (Cont.)



- Once the bill is reported out of all pertinent committees, it is sent to “third reading” calendar where it must age for three legislative days prior to a full vote. There are several fates at this point - Amendments can again be suggested, it can be “starred” (meaning all further action will be suspended), “laid aside” (pulled off the calendar for the day or laid aside for floor debate,) recommitted (sent back to Committee) or voted on the floor – usually favorably (a lot of head counting has gone on before a bill hits the floor for a vote).
- If a bill passes in one house, it is then sent to the other house where it must go through the same process. If the identical bill passes both houses, it is then sent to the Governor (by the house that initially passed the bill) for his/her consideration.
- The Governor has ten days (excluding Sunday’s) to sign or veto the bill. Should the Governor fail to sign the bill in that ten-day period, the bill automatically becomes law.
- Bills that have been vetoed, return to the house that delivered it to the Governor, with a Veto Memo, outlining the Governor’s rationale for such action. The only opportunity for a vetoed bill to become law, is a 2/3 majority override vote from each house of the legislature.
- If a bill is sent to the Governor once the legislature is no longer in session, the Governor can take as many as 30 days to make a decision. Failure to make such a decision, will result in a “pocket veto.”

Legislative Committees

Function and Construction of Legislative Committees

- Most of the action on a bill is conducted through the committee screening process. Legislative analysis is conducted, stakeholder input is considered, and amendments are often recommended.
- Bills are assigned to Committee based on the topic area they address and/or impact. For example, a bill impacting high school curriculum, would be sent to the Education Committee, while a bill impacting health insurance benefits would be assigned to the Insurance Committee.
- In both houses, Senate and Assembly members are assigned to 3-5 Committees. Oftentimes, if a member has a particular expertise in a specific area, he or she will be assigned to a committee that will review bills in that same arena.
- Committee meetings are open to the public and are usually attended by stakeholders, advocacy organizations and lobbyists.
- To view a full list of members and the Committees they serve, simply log onto their respective websites at:
 - www.nyasembly.gov
 - www.nysenate.gov

How Do YOU Influence the Process

Big Idea!

The work of government is accomplished through the political process. Public opinion, interest groups, and political parties all play a vital role in that process.

Cultivating Relationships

The optimal time to cultivate a relationship with your legislators is now, as opposed to when your organization is facing a crisis. If you are successful, the likely result is that you will become a trusted resource on specific issues. There are, of course many means in which to engage:

- Organizational Hill Days
- District Office Visits
- Offering Opportunities for Engagement
- Sustained Communication

Visiting the Capitol

Visiting District Offices

Meetings – In the Capitol

There may be opportunities to visit the state capitol as part of your organizations Advocacy Day. In this event, the days are usually structured as follows:

- Morning Briefing on topic area
- Legislator Address (often a Legislator or two will address the group)
- Legislative office visits
- Debriefing

Meetings in the District Offices

Each and every state Senator and Assembly Member has (usually multiple) a District Office where they see constituents. It is important to remember that you have a voice they want to hear, after all, you're vote is integral to keeping them in office. Whether you see your legislator at the Capitol or in the district office, the following tips are important to consider:

- **Know your Legislator:** Read their online profile, familiarize yourself with their district map, know if they are a member of the Democratic, Republican or Independence Conference. Understand what their role is in the context of their conference – are they in a leadership position? Which Committees do they sit on and are they in a leadership position in the Committee? Are they serving on any special Taskforce's?
- **Be open to meeting with their staff:** Legislative staffers, both at the Capitol and in district offices, are an integral member of the team and heavily relied upon by legislators as ambassadors of the office. Meeting with and developing a relationship with a staffer can be just as important as with the Legislator.
- **Know why you are there:** What is the goal of your meeting? If it is simply a meet and greet opportunity, it is recommended you bring along materials about your organization, your constituency and upcoming events. We will discuss issue specific meetings later in the Tool Kit.
- **Know the Process:** Are they in session this time of year, or home in the district. Understanding their schedule will give you a clearer picture of their time constraints or availability to engage.

Opportunities for Engagement

Offer Opportunities for Engagement

- Invite the Legislators and/or their staff to participate in organization events.
- Invite them or their staff to take a tour of your organization.
- Participate in Local Hearings, Forum's or Roundtables your legislators are hosting or is participating in.
- Remember that relationships are a two-way street. How can you support your legislators? Ask them if there is a specific issue of significance (statewide or locally) they are working on at the Capitol? Perhaps you could serve as a resource, as you may have documentation to support or refute a bill they need to weigh in on (for example – the impact of curriculum mandates).

Sustained Communication

Sustained Communication

Consistent contact with your legislators is another key ingredient to building a successful relationship. While there may not always be a need to meet, or a participatory event opportunity, your organization can keep in contact with legislator's through a number of indirect means as well.

- Send your legislator's a copy of your Newsletters. This will give them a chance to get a snapshot of the vitality of your organization, its community impact, the constituencies served, and upcoming events they may be interested in participating in.
- Social Media: Most legislators have social media accounts, if your organization does too, connect the two. A simple Facebook post or tweet, can keep the line of communication open.
- Press Clippings: If your organization is putting out a press release, has written a Letter to the Editor or and Op Ed – share a copy with the legislator.
- Thank You Note: If you've noticed your legislators making headlines, policy decisions or statements in line with your organization's mission, goals and objectives, thank them! A simple thank you note signifying that you're paying attention will definitely be appreciated.

Building Media Relationships

Building Lasting Relationships with Your local Media

Media relations will play an integral role in any grassroots campaign, but its important to understand how to use the media tool, why to use it and when.

No matter the type of media you are seeking, building long-term sustainable relationships will be an effective campaign tool. Consider the following helpful hints when doing so.

- Building media relationships begins with some good old fashioned “sleuthing.” Scan your local TV and print coverage for topics related to yours. Who covers human interest stories, health, education, etc.,? (Media are very busy, reaching out to the appropriate person will be well received.)
- Invite reporters to engage in background briefing on issues of relevance to your campaign
- Welcome reporters to organizational meetings/ programs/ public forums. be sure it is succinct, to the point and offers facts. It is in essence a quick pitch. Provide them with the Who, What, Where, Why and When.
- Create an e-mail list of reporters and send monthly or bimonthly items of interest.





Types of Media

Three primary factors to consider when working with the media is: Understanding the different types of media entry, understanding what is “newsworthy” and employing steps to building relationships with your local media.

- TV
- Print Articles
- Op Ed’s
- Letters to the Editor

Identifying Newsworthy Activities/ Events (TV, Print Articles)

Consider the following questions:

- Is there a time sensitivity to your event? Does it highlight something that requires immediate action or has an imminent impact? A call to action?
- Is there a prominent speaker participating in your event?
Are you making a statement on a currently relevant hot topic issue?
- Is there a compelling human interest aspect?

Op Ed's and Letters to the Editor



- **Op-ed pieces** are written to garner the attention of various groups, often including elected officials, but also, community leaders, potential advocacy partners and the general public. An effective Op-Ed will employ the following components:
 - Be between 600-900 words (usually spelled out on their website)
 - The subject of the piece should be relevant / current news.
 - Express a clearly articulated single point of view, supported by verifiable facts and statistics.
 - Messaging should be powerful but appeal to wide audience.
 - Leave a lasting impression with a clear call for remedial action.
- **Letters to the Editor** are another way to reach a wide and varied audience. Letters can advocate for or against an issue, simply inform, or both. To capture readers' interest, they can blend emotions and facts. Should be relevant to recently published articles or news. Successful letters will employ the following components
 - Follow the sources guidelines for length – Often no more than 300 words.
 - If in reference to a recently published article, that title should be referenced right away. Also, Your most important points should be stated in the first paragraph.
 - Letters should be addressed "To the Editor" and should include your name, title and contact information.

Social Media



Social media platforms such as Facebook , Twitter, Instagram, and Youtube can:

- Serve as conversation catalysts,
- Increase awareness about your campaign,
- Grow membership,
- Increase member participation,
- Cultivate volunteerism,
- Strategically advance your campaign messaging.