



# LEGISLATIVE TOOLBOX



## Developing and Implementing a Legislative Plan

**P**lan the work and work the plan is an old saying, but it rings true for associations working to be effective in their lobbying and advocacy activities. It is important for associations to have a clear process on how the plan will be developed and who will do the work. Second, an association must have a clear idea of its legislative concerns and plan how to accomplish its goals.

### Who Decides?

It is best if an association clearly defines the process used to determine how the legislative plan is put together. Sometimes it is the Board of Directors, but most associations create a Legislative or Government Affairs Committee to do the work. It is key that a member of the board serve on this committee to help represent the views of association leadership. The Legislative Committee takes feedback from committee members and develops a plan, including a legislative platform. This process usually takes several meetings.

It is also important to start this process at least several months prior to the beginning of the legislative session to give the Board of Directors time to review and approve the plan. Also remember to give adequate time to communicate the platform to association members to generate grassroots support for the legislative platform.

### Things to Consider When Developing a Legislative Plan

A well-thought-out plan helps to clearly define the association's issues and provide solutions. It also makes it easier to get members involved and bring together elected leaders interested in the issues and policies important to your organization.

The key to developing and implementing a legislative platform includes analyzing the issues, gathering information

about any concerns, and determining the likely constituencies and decision-makers that need to be involved. Once this is done, subsequent plans should include goals, strategies, timelines and then an evaluation of the association's success.

Keys to putting together an effective plan include:

- Clearly defining what change is needed, determining how to change it, and setting clear and reasonable goals. If the best way to address an issue is unclear, involve others who may have those answers. It is important to clearly state the issue and discuss possible solutions. It's also important to consider what changes the association might oppose. If elected officials don't get a clear sense of what the association wants them to do, there is a risk of getting solutions the organization may not like, which may make the problem worse or even create new problems.
- Determining the easiest and best place to seek solutions to the association's problems. Before seeking legislative solutions, be ready to answer the question that legislators will doubtless ask: "Are there other ways to solve your problem? Have you tried them? What happened?"
- Defining who in the community or organization needs to be engaged. Think through other possible people or organizations that share an interest in the association's issues and make plans to include those people or groups.
- Finding elected officials to engage who are most likely to support the association's position.
- Determining which elected officials and groups are most likely to oppose the association's position and why. Can this be mediated?
- Developing a timeline. When do things need to be in place to move forward? When do you begin communicating with key elected officials? When do you need to engage supporters and volunteers?



- Preparing information and key facts to provide information on the organization's legislative plan to supporters and legislators.

A good plan paves the way to success. Remember, changes rarely happen overnight. Policy changes often occur incre-

mentally, but a well-thought-out and realistic platform helps educate elected officials on issues important to the association and will eventually lead to positive outcomes.