

## **Bench-Bar Coalition**

### **Best Practices for Planning Local Legislative Outreach Activities**

Bench-Bar Coalition members who have successfully hosted local legislative outreach activities have prepared the following guidelines to assist justice system partners who plan to host similar activities or events. The best practices presented here are designed to attract participation, build new relationships, and strengthen existing ties with legislators and key staff through ongoing contacts in the legislators' districts. While prepared with legal practitioners in mind, they may be used successfully in partnership with local courts and other justice system stakeholders.

#### **Effective Local Outreach Activities**

Examples of activities that have successfully garnered legislative attendance and participation within the district include, but are not limited to, those presented here. Organizations may wish to partner with other stakeholders who have a presence or share mutual constituents within the legislator's district to cosponsor outreach activities.

- Legislative Breakfasts/Luncheons
- Townhall Meetings
- Receptions and Dinners
- Leadership Installations
- Press Conferences/Announcements
- Groundbreakings
- Award Ceremonies
- Scholarship/Benefit Events

#### **Best Practices for Relationship Building**

The following are recommended best practices for bar/LSO practitioners who, in partnership with their local courts, desire to foster open communications and goodwill with members of the legislative and executive branches on issues of mutual concern:

1. Local bar association's president, president-elect and executive director meet quarterly with local court's presiding/assistant presiding judge and executive/assistant executive officers.
2. Partner with local court leaders on legislative district office visits.
3. Partner with local court leaders to invite legislators and key staff to "Day on the Bench" local court visits.
4. Receive email communications from local elected officials' listservs and participate/attend community functions hosted by legislative offices.
5. Communicate positions to legislators on legislation affecting legal practitioners.
6. Encourage legal services organizations to establish relationships with local legislators through local office contacts, and educate legal services staff about permissible advocacy and outreach activities.
7. Compile anecdotal information on the impact of judicial branch budget reductions to local court practitioners and the public, and present that information in outreach to legislators/staff. Example: Contra Costa County Access to Justice task force "man on the street" anecdotes from the public attempting to use court services during cutbacks.
8. Produce and distribute *State of the Judiciary* Reports: San Diego and Sacramento county bar associations have studied the impacts of judicial branch budget reductions and formalized their findings into reports which were shared with legislators.
9. Invite legislators to bar/LSO luncheons/dinners/receptions that recognize members of the bench and bar as a means of building relationships and providing learning opportunities about the courts and justice system partnerships.

10. Identify bar leaders with existing relationships with the Governor and his administration, and develop strategies for leveraging those relationships on the local level. Consider participating in the [Legislative Liaison Program](#) which provides helpful tips on potential outreach activities.

### **Timing of Activities**

When planning local outreach activities, organizations should observe the following considerations:

1. The Legislative Calendar typically runs from January through September in odd-numbered years and through the end of August in even-numbered years.
2. Calendars for the Assembly ([www.assembly.ca.gov](http://www.assembly.ca.gov)) and Senate ([www.senate.ca.gov](http://www.senate.ca.gov)) can be found on their respective Websites. The calendars detail legislative holidays and fiscal and policy committee deadlines that should be avoided when scheduling events. Check the online calendar when setting event dates to facilitate participation by legislators and staff:  
Assembly Calendar: <http://assembly.ca.gov/legislativedeadlines>  
Senate Calendar: <http://senate.ca.gov/legdeadlines>
3. Generally, avoid scheduling activities in the district during the following periods when legislators are approaching major deadlines that may require their extended presence at the State Capitol in Sacramento:
  - The week prior to the bill introduction deadline (usually late February)
  - Weeks with policy and fiscal committee deadlines
  - For legislators serving on budget committees, the week prior to the deadline for passage of the state budget (mid-June)
4. Many legislators schedule district activities on Thursday afternoons upon returning to their districts from Sacramento or on Fridays.
5. The Legislature generally recesses for one week in the spring, one month during the summer, and for 2-3 months in the fall (see #1 above). Legislators and staff may take vacation time during the recesses, but others find the recesses a good time to schedule and attend district events.

### **Contacting Legislators and Scheduling Considerations**

When contacting legislators regarding local activities, observe the following to ensure that your invitation is received in a timely fashion for consideration by the legislator and staff:

1. Legislators' individual calendars are maintained by scheduling secretaries who may be located in the Capitol or district office (or both). Always direct scheduling inquiries and follow-up calls to the scheduler's attention. Contact the district office and ask for the scheduler's contact information and preferred method of delivery for invitations. District office address and telephone information can be found on the [Senate](#) and [Assembly](#) Websites.
2. Because legislators' schedules fill up quickly, invitations should be forwarded no later than four (4) weeks prior to an event.
3. Legislators typically return to their district offices on Thursdays immediately following the Thursday morning Floor Session, typically set for 9:00 a.m. Thursday afternoons and Fridays are usually reserved for meetings and activities in the legislators' district.

4. Please note that Floor Session is held on Fridays before most Monday holidays, therefore, most legislators will remain in Sacramento on the Thursday afternoons and evenings before the holiday.
5. Anticipate that cancellations may occur, but keep in mind the importance of meeting with legislators and key staff. Take advantage of opportunities to engage staff in the district offices as well as at the State Capitol. If the legislator is not available to attend an event locally, he or she may offer to send the chief of staff, district director, or other legislative aide who is assigned to cover legal and/or judiciary –related subject matter.
6. Be conscious of the overall program and agenda item time slots. Shorter is better as legislators are often on tight schedules which are subject to change, and he or she may not be available for the entire duration of the program.

### **Program Content**

When planning program content to attract legislative participation or attendance, consider the following:

- If you are inviting the legislator to appear or speak on an event program, build in enough flexibility in case there is a last-minute schedule change or cancellation. Be clear in your invitation if the legislator will have a speaking role at the function or is being asked only to appear at an event.
- It is a good idea to acknowledge prior participation, support, or accomplishments involving the legislator when he or she is being introduced during your event.

### **Selecting Locations**

- Legislators often book appearances at concurrent events, so when feasible, select a location for your local activity that is familiar, easily accessible, and that offers ample parking.
- Keep in mind that, for political reasons, some legislative offices are sensitive to booking appearances at certain facilities.

### **For more assistance:**

For more tips and suggestions when planning local legislative outreach activities, please contact the Judicial Council's Governmental Affairs office at (916) 323-3121.

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