

Building a Successful Legislative Office (while avoiding trouble)

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Landscape

People are hurting & desperate

Government agencies and elected officials are seen as impersonal and untrustworthy

Technology – bulk email boxes, phone trees

“Don’t call us, we’ll call you.”

Loss of customer service culture in public sector

Remote work shortcomings

Staff Competencies

Professionalism

Writing and Speaking

Empathy

Advocacy

Analysis/Synthesis

Discretion/Insight


Organization/Workflow Mgmt.

Legislative Aide

- Functions as the lead staffer, possesses familiarity with the legislative landscape.
- Strategist to and advocate for the member
- Media relations.
- Prepare necessary analyses/briefs for member
- Discern important vs. unimportant
- Office administration, including office budget management and personnel duties.
- Legislative workflow management to include all bills, committees and session.
- Second set of eyes on all written correspondence
- Represent member at key district functions, workgroups, committee testimony, etc

Constituent Aide

- The frontline contact for office-to-district
- Constituent Casework management
- Schedule management
- Manage daily needs of the office
- Coordinate internships
- Capitol Tours & District Events
- Phones
- Additional opportunities based upon interest and experience.



“Not my Job” is not in
the vocabulary of a
successful office



“Only Contact Rule”

“Treat each outreach to your office as the only time that constituent will be in contact with their government.”

Organization/Time Management

Many good systems

Coherence across positions – Constituent Services, Policy Services and interns (and Representative!)

24-48 hour response rule; other timetables

Reciprocate level of personal touch – handwritten letter vs crate of petitions. Form for form, personal for personal.

STAFF MEETINGS!

Constituent Service: On the Phone (cont.)

Set clear expectations every time:

“Will get you an answer even if it’s not the answer we are seeking”

I will need your _____. Here is how it will be used, and how long it will be retained.

I’ve typically seen a response from the department within _____.

Let me find that out vs. I don’t know

Never passive! “They’ll be in touch with you. Call me back in a few days if you don’t hear from them.”

Always take responsibility for next step:

“You will be hearing from me by Friday.”



“Representative”

What's in a title?

Constituent Outreach Tips

“Weaving incumbency tight...”

Implement Courtesy Follow Up Program

Lamination Program

Booklet stations & schools

Constituent Contact Doors

Call Sheets

District Volunteers

Clip and save / Mail

Testimonials – tell their stories

Structure meaningful Internships

Self-Care: You Matter!

- Utilize support services and mentorship opportunities (peers, Business Office offerings, team building) vs going it alone.
- Space out interactions, particularly if subject matter or conversation is highly emotional.
- Resolve ethical dilemmas quickly and hold to established personal boundaries. It's ok to disappoint at times.
- Places and relationships of safety.
- Assess what is truly urgent or important!
- Prioritize work-life balance (Reward of organized workflow should be more work-life balance)

Discretion & Ethics

With Constituents

Be respectful of constituent privacy and sensitive information.

Share your office's policy about use/retention of social security numbers, case document or electronic record retention, etc., and then follow it.

Do not allow drifting into non-legislative topics

With the Lobby Corps

No interaction on non-legislative activities on state time or property


Easier or convenient doesn't mean proper or ethical

Be courteous but not deferential; you don't work for them.

Within your office

Know the law; set the tone; establish boundaries and follow them

Trust your instincts and any tension/conflict you feel – consult with others



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