

LEGISLATIVE RELATIONSHIPS:

Alan's Ten Tips

Texas Municipal Clerks Association /
Texas Municipal Clerk Certification Program

Legislative Update

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Alan J. Bojorquez, Principal
Bojorquez Law Firm, PLLC
12325 Hymeadow Dr., Ste 2-100
Austin, Texas 78750
p: (512) 250-0411
f: (512) 250-0749
e: alan@texasmunicipallawyers.com

It simply makes good sense for municipalities to dedicate time and resources toward interacting with state senators and representatives. Toward that end, I'm providing you with ten suggestions I developed over the years. I am not a lobbyist, and have never seen the legislative process from the inside-out. But I have watched several sessions and worked a few bills. These are not necessarily rules, but are just tips from me to you.

In summary, all of the items below relate to the same overall maxim:

To be effective, you must get to know your senator and representative personally.

You should be on a first name basis. Don't wait until you have a problem with a particular bill to call your delegation for the first time.

- 1. Timing:** The best time to establish a connection with your legislative delegation is during the interim. The worst time to attempt to forge a relationship with legislators is during a legislative session.
- 2. Contact Info:** Be sure to keep your legislator's contact information handy at the Municipal Building and at your home: phone, fax, address, email, and mobile phone.
- 3. Topics:** Legislators like to hear about your goals, projects, challenges, and recent achievements. They hate hearing that you are opposed to the bill they sponsored, which just happens to be scheduled for a committee hearing the afternoon you called.
- 4. Speaking:** Many legislators love to hear the sound of their own voices. Thus, they tend to appreciate opportunities to speak in front of their voters and local power brokers. It's a good idea to invite your delegation to speak at a Council meeting at least once a year.
- 5. Recognition:** It takes a lot of pride and self esteem to run for state office. Perhaps the city can score some points by periodically presenting them with a proclamation, award or reception in their honor. A plaque from constituents back home looks awfully good on the wood-paneled walls at the Capitol.
- 6. Dining:** Senators and Reps are very busy people who are often pressed for time. Even so, they usually take a few minutes each day to ingest sustenance. That's why meeting for a meal is both common and customary. Buying a legislator lunch does not mean you bought their vote; instead, you simply got a few uninterrupted minutes of their time.
- 7. Staff:** To get to know a legislator, you must get to know their staff. Chances are it is the staff who will know the most about the bills you are interested in. And it's the staff you'll actually reach on the phone in a crunch. As with most state employees, legislative staffers are over-worked and under-paid, so they appreciate a nice meal from time to time. Front seats to local events are also appreciated.

8. **Support:** It would be nice for city officials to stay abreast of the senator's / representative's agenda. What are their goals? What are their priorities? How can you *help them* move their agenda forward?
9. **Campaigning:** Like most elected officials, state legislators often look forward to being re-elected, which takes money and positive public exposure. As the elected leaders of the community, city officials are in a unique position to present your state representative and senator to your voters and offer support, endorsements, and money.
10. **Accountability:** In the end, what matters most is whether your legislative delegation is accountable to you and your citizens. If not, *there must be consequences!* If your senator or representative disregards your concerns, fails to champion your causes, or neglects to return your phone calls, you must be willing to take action— be it testifying in Austin on the legislation at issue; endorsing their opponent at the next election; forming a political action committee (PAC) to educate the voters; or running against them yourselves. Think in terms of a simple *cost/benefit* analysis. For example, if there is no cost to opposing your legislative delegation, and there is a clear reward for supporting his opponents, the choice is very simple.

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- Elections & Voting Rights
- Environmental & Utilities
- Home-Rule Charters
- Litigation & Appellate Advocacy
- Personnel Matters
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