

## **Working with State Representatives**

### **1. Learn your state legislature's session schedule.**

State legislative sessions vary—some meet year-round, others hold sessions for only a few months or weeks out of the year, and some meet only every other year. Their offices might not be fully staffed while they are out of session. When they are staffed, it is not unusual for multiple offices to share the same administrative staff. The [National Conference of State Legislatures](#) lists the state legislative session schedule for each year and is updated annually.

### **2. Identify your state legislators.**

[Ballotpedia](#) can help identify your state and local officials, and provides links to their websites which should include contact information. There is also a brief [video on how to navigate the Ballotpedia website](#). Please contact your state or local officials to inquire how to schedule a meeting with them, as their processes might vary. Once you have a meeting scheduled, review these [best practices for a successful meeting](#).

### **3. Consult your state, territorial or provincial association for further guidance.**

They often have either state lobbyists or volunteer legislative committees who can advise you on the state political climate, legislative efforts relevant to psychologists, or state coalitions that are working on issues that interest you.

## **Developing a Communication Strategy**

- **Timing:** As a general rule of thumb, aim to make contact with your target offices once a quarter, with exceptions for when there are issues and bills that are especially important to you and your organization.
- **Selecting a Method of Communication**
  - Always think about the method of communication that works best with your message. If it's a quick, "Please vote yes on H.R. 1" message, a phone call is probably appropriate. Longer messages about the value of particular legislation lend themselves better to emails or meetings; however, if you are participating in a coordinated campaign for or against a particular piece of legislation, flooding phones tends to be more effective than email.
  - Your communication is going to be filtered through a staff person, regardless of the medium. The best way to make sure your message is noticed is to make a personal phone call and ask for the staff person who is handling your issue (e.g., the health staffer or the education staffer). Phone calls are especially important for time-sensitive issues (e.g., Congress is planning to vote on a bill that impacts school psychology tomorrow).
  - The second best way to ensure your message is noticed is through an email identifying yourself as a constituent. Remember, Members of the House of Representatives have no duty to assist citizens who are not residents of their home districts.
  - Overall, though, how you communicate, whether by email or phone call, is less important than what you say. Work more on the CONTENT of your message, as opposed to the delivery mechanism. If possible, use anecdotes from your Representative's district.

