



**LEGISLATIVE  
ENGAGEMENT GUIDE**

**FIVE EASY STEPS TO  
LEGISLATIVE  
ENGAGEMENT**

## Key Dates - 2017 SESSION DATES

Regular sessions of the Legislature begin on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in March and continue for 60 consecutive days, which may be extended by a three-fifths vote of each house. Special sessions may be called by the Governor, or may be convened by joint proclamation of the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives. Special sessions may not exceed 20 days, unless extended by a three-fifths vote of each house.

August 1, 2016	Deadline for filing claim bills (Rule 4.81(2))
December 2016 – Week of the 12th	Committee meetings
January 2017 - Week of the 9th	Committee meetings
January 2017 - Week of the 23rd	Committee meetings
February 2017 - Week of the 6th	Committee meetings
February 2017 - Week of the 13th	Committee meetings
February 2017 - Week of the 20th	Committee meetings
January 27, 2017	Deadline for submitting requests for drafts of general bills and joint resolutions, including requests for companion bills
March 3, 2017	Deadline for approving final drafts of general bills and joint resolutions, including companion bills
March 7, 2017	Regular Session convenes (Article III, section 3(b), Constitution), and deadline for filing bills for introduction (Rule 3.7(1))
April 22, 2017	All bills are immediately certified (Rule 6.8). Motion to reconsider made and considered the same day (Rule 6.4(4))
April 25, 2017	50th day—Last day for regularly scheduled committee meetings (Rule 2.9(2))
May 5, 2017	60th day—last day of Regular Session (Article III, section 3(d), Constitution)
May 20, 2017*	Governor must sign or veto legislation within 15 days of transmittal, or it becomes law without his signature.

\*According to Article III, Section 8 of the Florida Constitution, the Governor has only seven days to act on a passed bill if he is presented with the legislation during the first eight weeks of session.

## Step 1: Focus Strategically

**Focus on WHO is most important.** It can be a monumental task in managing legislative relationships. The Florida Legislature is comprised of 160 Legislators (40 Senators, 120 Representatives). For purposes of strategic importance, each Legislator is categorized into one of three groups: Critical (**red-bold**), Essential (**blue-bold**), and Supportive (**green-bold**). Categorization assist in helping network leadership maintain focus on the relationships that can assist us in achieving our strategic objectives.

**Critical Legislators** are Legislators that hold (or could hold) key leadership or committee positions critical to the strategic interests of the Florida SBDC Network. It is a shared responsibility between CEO and Regional Director to have frequent communication and engagement with these Legislators. These “Critical” Legislators should have extensive and intimate knowledge and unquestionable champions for the SBDC program.

There are 58 “**Critical Legislators**” in the Florida Legislature:

21 Senate, 37 House; 38 Republicans, 20 Democrats

Florida Senate	Senate
Senate President	Joe Negron (R)
Majority Leader	Wilton Simpson (R)
Minority Leader	Oscar Braynon II (D)
Appropriations Committee <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chair</li><li>• Vice Chair</li></ul>	Jack Latvala (R) Anitere Flores (R)
Appropriations Subcommittee on Higher Education	Bill Galvano (R), Chair David Simmons (R), Vice Chair Rob Bradley (R) Jeff Clemens (D) Gary M. Farmer, Jr. (D) Tom Lee (R)
Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Tourism, and Economic Development	Jeff Brandes (R), Chair Bobby Powell (D), Vice Chair Frank Artiles (R) Lizbeth Benacquisto (R) George B. Gainer (R) Audrey Gibson (D) Kathleen Passidomo (R) Kevin J. Rader (D) Wilton Simpson (R) Perry E. Thurston, Jr. (D)

Florida House of Representatives	Representative
Speaker of the House	Richard Corcoran (R)
Speaker pro tempore	Jeanette Nuñez (R)
Majority Leader	Ray Rodrigues (R)
Democratic Leader	Janet Cruz (D)
Democratic Leader pro tempore	Bobby B. DuBose (D)
Appropriations Committee <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chair</li> <li>• Vice Chair</li> <li>• Democratic Ranking Member</li> </ul>	Trujillo, Carlos [R] Moraitis, Jr., George R. [R] Moskowitz, Jared Evan [D]
Higher Education Appropriations Subcommittee, All Members	Ahern, Larry [R], Chair Porter, Elizabeth W. [R], Vice Chair Lee, Jr., Larry [D], Ranking Member Alexander, Ramon [D] Cortes, Robert "Bob" [R] Edwards, Katie A. [D] Gonzalez, Julio [R] Grant, James "J.W." [R] Leek, Thomas J. "Tom" [R] Mariano, Amber [R] Miller, Alexandra C. "Alex" [R] Ponder, Mel [R] Rodrigues, Ray Wesley [R] Silvers, David [D] Smith, Carlos Guillermo [D]
Transportation & Tourism Appropriations Subcommittee, All Members	Ingram, Clay [R], Chair Drake, Brad [R], Vice Chair Jenne, Evan [D], Ranking Member Beshears, Halsey [R] Cortes, Robert "Bob" [R] Fant, Jay [R] Geller, Joseph [D] Grant, Michael [R] Jacquet, Al [D] Killebrew, Sam H. [R] La Rosa, Mike [R] McGhee, Kionne L. [D] Santiago, David [R] Trumbull, Jay [R] Watson, Barbara [D]

**Essential Legislators** are Legislators that hold (or could hold) senior or leadership positions, leadership on key committees, or demonstrate a willingness to sponsor and/or champion legislative causes on behalf of the Florida SBDC Network. It is the primary responsibility of the Regional Director to have frequent communication and engagement with these Legislators and Headquarters leadership to provide support as needed. Essential Legislators should have extensive knowledge of the SBDC program and understanding of how program services benefit constituent business and create impact for the economy.

**Supportive Legislators** are all other Legislators. These Legislators do not (or expected to not) hold key positions and/or serve on key committees important to the Florida SBDC Network. It is the primary responsibility of the Regional Director to have regular communication and engagement with these Legislators. These Legislators should be familiar and understand the SBDC program and how program services benefit constituent businesses and create impact for the economy.

## **Step 2: Schedule Meeting**

**Make the call.** During session, Legislators are usually in their Tallahassee offices Monday through Thursday. While it is usually more convenient to visit Legislators in their respective districts, it is crucial that all network leadership visit them in their Tallahassee office during session (March - April).

SBDC network leaders should start scheduling engagement appointments at least one week in advance of the intended visit. Headquarters has compiled a directory of Legislators with contact information for Capitol office locations, including key contacts and Legislator information. A current copy of that directory is posted on the intranet.

When you call:

- Identify yourself and briefly describe who you are and your network.
- Explain why you want to visit and ask to set up a time to come in to speak with the Legislator.
- If the Legislator is unavailable during your visit, ask when and how you can schedule time to speak with them in their district office. Legislators are back in their district offices often and generally more accessible and available during these times. However, do not ignore the importance of visiting them in Tallahassee.
- Be aware, you may be requested to send a written request to schedule a visit. Send a written request, if necessary. The letter should include who will be part of the visit – names and affiliations – and a short description of why you want to meet with the Legislator. Address your letter to “The Honorable [Legislator name]”; for example, Mark Twain would be “The Honorable Mark Twain.”

## **Step 3: Get Ready**

The most important thing when preparing for your meeting is to know your audience. Understanding your Legislator will help customize your message and ensure for a productive meeting.

**Know your audience.** Review the Legislators biography (available on the web – [www.flsenate.gov](http://www.flsenate.gov) and [www.myfloridahouse.gov](http://www.myfloridahouse.gov)). Know their party affiliation, committee and subcommittee membership, issues that they have passion, and past record on the issues you will be discussing. It is also helpful to know their occupation. Often, if the Legislator isn't an attorney, they are a small business owner. Knowing this will help guide your discussion and demonstrate that you have adequately prepared for the visit.

**Prepare your message.** Messaging goes beyond the simple presentation of collateral materials. You must be prepared to deliver a clear, concise and consistent message that results in further education, understanding and support for the SBDC program. Remember, we are not there to lobby but to educate and champion support for the SBDC program.

When preparing for your meeting it is critical that you develop and deliver a uniform message that results in your Legislator walking away prepared to support the SBDC program. Your message should enhance their understanding of small business needs and how your SBDC and the America's SBDCs help respond to those needs. Your message should also define your networks work; explain why it is essential, and outline how the Legislator can help.

The following introductory script has been developed to assist you achieving that objective:

*Thanks again for taking the time to meet with [me/us]. First, we want to thank you for your past support for the Florida SBDC program. Thanks to you and your colleagues, and the funding we receive from our federal, state and host university partners, the Florida SBDC has been able to create real impact to Florida's primary job creators. I look forward to sharing with you what we are doing for the small businesses in your district.*

*We also there has been a lot of conversation and concern about economic development investment already this session. I hope that our meeting will demonstrate how we differentiate from other economic and business development organizations and programs, and are a wise investment for Florida and the businesses in your district.*

*Now let me share a few of the things we are doing and the difference we are making in your district.*

*[PROVIDE LOCAL EXAMPLES].*

As you continue to engage, to your best ability try to keep the focus on what you are doing locally in the Legislators district. Important points to highlight include:

- The Florida SBDC is part of America's SBDCs; the country's leader in small business development assistance. With 46 offices and nearly 250 employees located at leading colleges and universities dedicated to growing Florida's economy, Florida SBDCs are on the front lines helping create jobs for Florida's families by helping Florida's greatest job creators – small businesses.
- SBDCs serve real business needs that help businesses grow.
  - Discuss how SBDC consulting capabilities focus on helping business grow strategically - selling internationally or supplying government with critical services and products.
- The Florida SBDC program leverages state funding with federal and local investment. In 2016, state funding was leveraged nearly 3 to 1 with federal and local funding support.
- Highlight cost effectiveness and ROI, statewide and within the legislators district. Highlight jobs impact and cost per job. These are the two most important ROI figures valued by most legislators. The more local you can make it the meaningful the message
  - Since 2011, Florida SBDCs have provided 401,475 hours of no-cost, professional business consulting to 45,502 small and medium sized businesses, resulting in 217,849 jobs created, retained and saved; \$29.3 billion in sales growth; \$2.1 billion in government contract awards; \$947.4 million in capital investments; and 3,857 new businesses started.
- Highlight one to two appropriate business success stories that demonstrate how services directly helped the client business expand and add jobs.
  - For Critical and Essential legislators, the business should preferably be from the legislator's district.

**Your support materials.** Headquarters has prepared legislative pieces and packets that highlight network and district-level activity and impact and support or re-enforce the message. When possible, success stories from the legislator's district have been included. Region specific information should supplement, not replace, network pieces.

An example Legislator collateral folder may include:

- A cover letter addressed to the Legislator from the State Director.
- A one-page district fact/impact sheet, with success story
- A one-page network fact/impact sheet
- Network Annual Report
- State of Small Business Report
- Your business card

**Prepare you and your team.** Your meeting time is limited, generally no more than 15 minutes, to deliver your message and make your point. Take the time before the visit to formulate a strategy with everyone attending the meeting.

If more than one person participates, decide who will lead the engagement. Others should contribute in a support role only. More than one talking head can confuse the intent and purpose of the message.

Don't "wing it." Have your facts and figures lined up prior to the meeting. Rehearse your pitch and know what your materials include and what they say in advance.

Remember to stay focused and on topic. The ultimate goal is to gain support for the Florida SBDCs strategic objectives. Be prepared to discuss funding sources, specific funding challenges, and possible solutions. Also, be prepared to discuss what level of current investment is being appropriated to the Legislator's district, if known, and what an additional investment will bring.

#### **Step 4: During the visit**

Be punctual and be friendly. Legislators and staff are extremely busy dealing with a dozen different issues in any given day during session. Greet the Legislator and/or staff representative and thank them for their time. Introduce yourself and everyone in your group and make sure to exchange business cards.

**Deliver your message.** The script and talking points above was developed to deliver a cohesive, concise and effective message. Do not digress or get caught up in lengthy dialog off topic. Your time is limited.

**Stay positive and on point.** Remember, the SBDC program is Florida's best provider for small business assistance. We are the biggest AND best at what we do proven by our results. What happens when issues or counterpoints are raised that you did not expect? Remain calm, listen and answer directly...if you know. If you don't know, it's okay to tell them so and offer to get back to them with the information. Follow up with the State Director and he will assist you developing a response.

#### **Step 5: Follow-up (Key)**

Visits to Tallahassee should not be a one-time event. It is important to incorporate visits with elected Federal and State officials as part of a regular routine. The important element in visits with Legislators is establishing a connection that will continue in the future. In order to maximize effectiveness, there should be a plan as to how this visit fits into a more extensive advocacy agenda. When your Legislator is called upon to show leadership for small business issues, he/she may draw upon your relationship. They may even call upon you to assist them; provide testimony, assist in the drafting of bill language, etc.

**Follow-up Immediately.** Follow up with a thank you email outlining the high points covered during the meeting, and include any additional information, if it was requested.



**Report Back.** Network leadership are continually prioritizing and strategizing which Legislators to target to further our priorities and interest. Share what you learned with them. By informing them about any key visits with **Critical** and **Essential** Legislators, they can better plan our marketing, positioning and legislative efforts.

**Stay Engaged.** It is a best practice to continually stay engaged with Legislators, during session and throughout the year. At a minimum, Regional Directors should send each **Critical** and **Essential** Legislator a quarterly update highlighting service activity and impact, preferably for their district. It is also a best practice to add Legislators and staff to network mailing lists. Further, ask your champions, including clients, advisory board Legislators, host leadership, etc., to write letters to key Legislators. These letters can be an effective way to ensure we continually stay on the radar and demonstrate our value continuously.

It is also a good idea to be subscribed to your Legislator's social media. This will keep you informed about what's happening, what's most important to that Legislator and what opportunities exists to partner and conduct in-district visits.

In conclusion, a single visit alone provides little value if it does not accompany continuous follow-up. Make follow-up and continuous communication with elected officials a regular part of what you do.