



Strong Cities Pocket Guide





Serving our members through
advocacy, education and services

Strong Cities Pocket Guide

AWC's Strong Cities, Great State campaign brings cities and towns together to address the Legislature with a single unified voice.

Work with your legislators

Establish a working relationship with your legislators year-round

Part of your job as a local elected official is to make sure legislators understand how their decisions in Olympia affect your city and community members. This requires year-round contact. Ask how they prefer to be contacted and get their cell phone number. Ask for periodic meetings or calls throughout the year. The relationship you cultivate will facilitate a stronger city-state partnership.

- Develop year-round communication with your legislators.
- Use the time between legislative sessions (the “interim”) for longer and more relaxed meetings.
- Travel to Olympia at key points during the legislative session to share what your city needs and how legislation will impact your community.

During the interim

Develop your city's legislative agenda and share it

Tell your legislators what you want from them. Sharing your city's legislative agenda is a simple yet effective way to get your legislator's attention. It's best to adopt your legislative agenda in the fall. However, you can also do it at the beginning of the legislative session.

- Keep it short and simple – one page only.
- Include capital needs along with policy priorities.
- Incorporate AWC's Legislative Priorities into your agenda.
- Make it public. Post it on your city's website, put it in your newsletters, and insert it into utility bills.
- Work with your local media for coverage.

During the interim

Use your bully pulpit

Create consequences for your legislators' decisions – good or bad. Publicly thank legislators who have helped your city be successful. Be candid about those who haven't done as much. You owe it to residents to candidly share how much help, or lack thereof, you've gotten from Olympia.

Is a local project or program facing difficulties because of declining state support?

- Let beneficiaries know what role state funding plays in advancing your city's priorities and projects.
- Understand how your legislators have or have not helped support state capital programs that benefit cities.
- Publicly acknowledge the need for state programs and funding at civic meetings, and openly share what you need from your legislators.

During the interim

Talk about your budget challenges

The impacts of state budget decisions on your city's day-to-day operations are not always clear to your legislators. Invite them to be part of your budget updates or briefings.

- Brief your legislators on your city's budget as it is being developed.
- Share your challenges and opportunities related to such things as growth, fiscal shortfalls, public safety, infrastructure, and economic development.
- Give specific examples of how actions by the state influence your budget – positively or negatively.
- Always thank them, and ask about the state's fiscal challenges. Remind them of the importance of addressing both state and local needs.

Talk about the city-state partnership

If you aren't communicating with your constituents, who is?

You and your legislators have the same constituents. Make sure your shared constituents know how decisions made in Olympia affect them at home. This is a powerful way to create accountability.

- It is your responsibility to let the public know how their legislators are supporting your community. No one else will do this.
- Communicate with your constituents through city council meetings, public access TV, social media, and newsletters.
- Use your influence with community groups to make sure they know the full story.

Talk about the city-state partnership

Work to get your local media to cover your city's needs

Develop a relationship with your local media. This is a great opportunity to educate community members about what your city needs. This helps spur action and holds legislators accountable.

- Choose an issue where the benefit to people in your community is very clear.
- Be honest and clear about which legislators are helping and who you still need help from.
- Draft an opinion editorial and submit it to your local paper.
- Join forces with your neighboring communities if you share similar challenges. There is power in numbers.

During the legislative session

Make the most of your meeting

Time with your legislator during the legislative session is brief. Once you have a meeting with your legislator, it's important you make the most of it.

- Be concise. Plan what you want to say in advance.
- Stories are best illustrated in terms of impacts to constituents, not as impacts on government.
- Legislators do not always have time to read big packets. Keep your materials short.
- Offer to provide more detail to staff.
- Don't try to cover too much, 3-5 issues at most.
- Ask for clear commitments to work on your issues.

During the legislative session

Act strategically

Communicate what your city needs early and often. Frame your city's issues in a way legislators can understand and remember.

- Don't just send an email – meet in person or call them! Speak with your legislator or the legislative aide.
- Stories stick. Frame your city's "ask" with a local story. Too many charts and graphs can make brains spin.
- Respect staff and use time wisely. Staff are busy! They appreciate clarity and brevity.
- Ask for frequent meetings or calls with your city, or a group of cities. These can also be brief.
- Talk about specific bills or budget priorities and tell stories about real impacts on your constituents.
- Speak up even if you think it may not be necessary. If legislators don't hear from you on something deemed important, they may assume you don't care.

Accept no more excuses

"I'm not on the committee."

Your legislator's job is to fight for your district! They need to advocate for your interests with colleagues who are on the committee tasked with considering your issue. You can help by arming them with stories and data to help!

"I had to follow my caucus."

The only way for your community to get what you need is for your legislators to fight within their caucus to support you. No one else can fight for your city. Suggest they join with other local government champions to gain allies who will help advance bills good for cities and help block those bad for cities.

"City funding is not our problem."

Remind legislators of the statistics on the following pages of this pocket guide. Cities are both society's backbone and the state's economic engine. Making sure that the tools necessary to keep cities strong

Accept no more excuses

are in place, and investing in funding is *not* optional and *is* their problem if things aren't working.

"Cities are doing better than the state."

Your response to this statement will depend on local conditions. But overall, on a per capita basis, cities' revenues are growing more slowly than the state's. If your city is struggling, explain the reasons why. For cities that are faring better, remind your legislators that the vast majority of the tax dollars generated by economic activity flow to the state and not to your city. Strong cities provide more resources to the state.

"Cities pay more for employees than the state, control your own costs."

Teacher salaries vary by region, as do public service costs. Cities must respond to the economic market, and it's not all within our control. We've repeatedly approached the Legislature for help controlling personnel costs and haven't received much support – from Democrats or Republicans.

A note about constituent communications

There are important legal restrictions on using city resources for grassroots lobbying campaigns for your constituents on legislative issues. Instead, focus on providing information about the impact of legislation, and the actions taken by your legislators on legislation.

Visit pdc.wa.gov or AWC's website for more information.

Are you our next Advocacy All-Star?

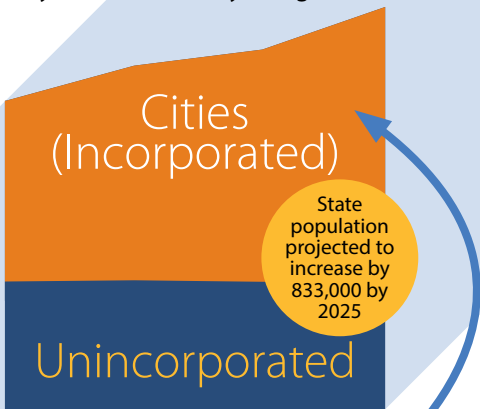
AWC's Advocacy All-Star award recognizes city officials who made an impact advocating on behalf of all cities. Here is how you can become an All-Star:

- Fight for things that benefit all cities. Go beyond your city's projects and priorities.
- Step up your game. Speak with the media and become a persistent and trusted resource for legislators.
- Make yourself available. Sometimes short meetings can make a big difference.
- Organize colleagues or other stakeholders. Bring added pressure to the cause.

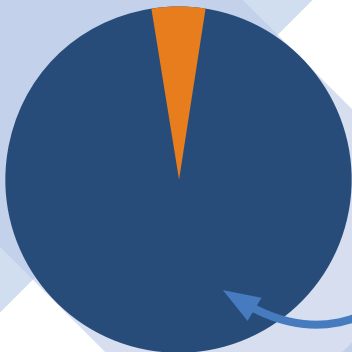


Strong cities and towns are the key to a great state

Cities are where the majority of Washingtonians live, learn, work, and play. Legislators must understand that in order for the state to thrive, Washington's cities and towns must be strong. Use the following facts and figures with legislators to illustrate why cities are the key to a great state.

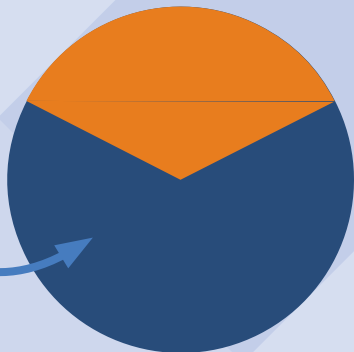


City population as a share of the state's total population continues to grow.



Nearly all of the state's gross domestic product (GDP) is generated within the economic influence area of its cities.

2/3 of the state's population live in cities.



Engage legislators on important city issues all year round

Incorporate this checklist into your seasonal work plan:



- Publicly thank legislators who supported city issues.
- Hold legislators accountable if they did not support city issues.
- Consider personally endorsing candidates who support city issues.



- Attend AWC's Annual Conference in June.
- Educate your community about what your legislators do to help cities.
- Set up meetings with legislators and candidates, give them city tours, and tell them your challenges.



- Adopt your city's legislative agenda and share it publicly with media and legislators.
- Meet with your legislators and ask how you can support them.
- Prepare for session before the end of the year.



- Session begins in January. The relationship you've cultivated over the interim will facilitate a stronger partnership.
- Attend AWC's City Action Days in Olympia.
- Schedule at least one visit or call with your legislator during session.



Strong Cities, Great State

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