

# WEDA Legislative Action Guide: *Take Action for Economic Development*

This **WEDA Legislative Action Guide** offers tips and suggestions on proven ways to connect with your legislators and community leaders who can support WEDA and your organization's legislative priorities. WEDA will support you in your advocacy efforts with an annual Legislative Agenda, weekly Legislative Reports during the legislative session, staffing and strategic guidance through the WEDA Legislative Committee, and direct advocacy by our Executive Director and lobbyist. **Please sign up** for WEDA's weekly Legislative Reports if you aren't receiving them and **Take Action** when we need you!

## The challenge for Economic Development in Olympia

Washington State has historically had a limited role, few tools and low investment in economic development. The regulatory environment and increases in taxation on businesses, particularly in the 2025 legislative session have created additional challenges for competitiveness. In the 2025 legislative session, the State's investment in economic development was drastically reduced. **Washington State is missing opportunities to grow jobs, increase economic opportunity and increase state and local revenues with its limited role in economic development.**

Building economic vitality and opportunity across all of Washington will continue to take intentional work, strategic partnerships and smart investments. The transition of Washington's Governor and a significant number of legislative seats has created a tremendous opportunity to recommit to economic competitiveness and establish a thoughtful and bold economic development strategic plan. Washington's economic developers are at the forefront of creating the State's economic opportunity, but they need sufficient resources, tools and support. We need all of WEDA's nearly 200 economic development organizations and supporters of economic development statewide to **"Take Action for Economic Development"** and remind legislators of the import and return on investment of investing in economic development.

## WEDA's Legislative Agenda: *Working Together for Economic Vitality & Opportunity Across Washington*

As Washington State's only trade association laser-focused on economic development, WEDA is committed to retaining, recruiting and expanding jobs and investment across all of Washington.

While WEDA updates its Legislative Agenda for 2026, economic developers and supporters should be delivering WEDA's fundamental messages. Once the Legislative Agenda is established, WEDA members must convey a clear and focused message for the 2026 Legislative Session. We must be specific and united in our agenda.

WEDA's strategic goals are to empower communities across Washington with tools to foster economic vitality and opportunity, assisting employers large and small in competing globally and growing jobs, while supporting an equitable economy and inclusive economic development.

Among the many issues and legislation on which WEDA will be advocating are our "foundational pillars":

### 1. Strengthen the Economic Development Ecosystem

WEDA believes a robust economic development ecosystem at the state, regional and local levels is crucial for sustained economic vitality, resilience and job growth.

### 2. Foster Catalysts for Job Growth & Economic Opportunity

WEDA supports investments in infrastructure and programs that catalyze business retention, expansion and recruitment.

### 3. Increase Economic Vitality for all of Washington

WEDA supports policies and investments that ensure that all parts of the state, and all people, benefit in economic growth through inclusive economic development. The economic vitality of rural and underserved urban areas is critical to the long-term health of the entire state.

***We need all of WEDA's nearly 200 members -- including cities, counties, ports, economic development councils, tribes, business, education/workforce and community-based organizations that prioritize economic development to use your collective voice and "Take Action for Economic Development."***

## What can you do? Start now.

A critical responsibility of WEDA's members is to advocate for WEDA priorities prior to and during the upcoming state legislative session. All members need to be engaged in this process. There's no better time than **now** to **"Take Action for Economic Development."**

Advocacy is about making your voice heard on issues that impact your community and helping policymakers identify solutions. It is about building relationships, educating policymakers and amplifying your organization's impact. You are an important voice in convincing legislators that strong economic development returns investment to the state and local communities, and increases economic vitality and opportunity. Face-to-face meetings and relationship building are the most effective ways to influence your legislators.

You should also engage your regional and local policymakers and community leaders in your advocacy. The goal is to create a strong relationship with your state leaders and a team of regional and local advocates who are ready and willing to join you in the fight for economic development. Legislators need to know how their decisions impact your ability to do this important work and your community, from a variety of perspectives. Without that outreach, economic developers will continue to see an erosion of our funding and limited tools that we have experienced in recent legislative sessions. Make a commitment **now** to be involved in the legislative process, talk with your legislators and get your organization and local/regional leaders talking to your legislators.

## Working effectively with legislators

As an economic developer, you're all about creating community opportunities, finding solutions, pulling the community together and moving forward. Your legislators have similar interests. We recognize how much time and effort you spend working in your community, but it's also a critical part of your job to communicate with legislators – and they need to hear from you.

**Spend time communicating with legislators about the issues and opportunities in your community.** Provide concrete examples of how reductions in economic development operating funds, infrastructure funding and unfunded projects affect their communities. If your legislators don't know what is going on in your community, they may unintentionally support measures that harm their communities. When they are well-informed, they can be very helpful!

**How do legislators know what your region/community needs or doesn't want?** You must tell them, over and over again, and remain consistent in your messaging (nothing ensures failure more than leaders from the same region or community disagreeing about your positions and confusing your legislators).

**There is a role for everyone in working with your legislators.** Don't assume it is just the job of the County,

Port, Mayor or city manager to advocate. Economic developers, staff and your board members and elected officials can all be helpful in communicating what's important to your community. Take some time to coordinate so that everyone is working together to take advantage of opportunities and share your message with your legislators. Even if you have never been involved in the legislative process — **now** is the time!

## Lobbying 101: helpful advocacy hints

Legislators are usually most receptive to talking when they have time during the Interim/off-session. During a legislative session, you may be lucky to get 15 minutes with them. At home, there's time to dig into your interests.

- Legislators rarely turn down invitations to have coffee or lunch — especially during election season (every two years for representatives/four years for senators).
- *Listen* to what they care about as you share your interests.
- Consider regularly-scheduled meetings, separately or as a delegation — preferably some of each. Also consider a tour, with a chance to meet constituents who will be impacted by a project or proposal.
- You don't have to contribute to their campaigns — they want to hear your ideas, priorities and concerns. Consider hosting a gathering for coffee or a casual meeting in a public space to help them hear from constituents.
- Even though the Legislature is partisan, make and maintain contact with your legislators — regardless of party. Eighty five percent of legislation passed is unanimous. Many of the solutions you need aren't partisan issues.
- In areas where legislators represent multiple local governments, look for shared interests and perspectives with other jurisdictions and communicate those with one another. Consider joint lobbying efforts across multiple governments and partners.

## Focus: Adopt a Legislative Agenda

Have a clear and focused Economic Legislative Agenda for your region/community. Agenda development helps unify your elected officials and community leaders and keeps everyone on the same page. What's important is that legislators have a clear sense of your common concerns.

- Review WEDA's annual Legislative Agenda and consider integrating it along with some local

examples. Your agenda can be a relatively short and focused one-page handout that includes WEDA's priority issues, with your organization's logo and website address, key contact information and some local flavor about the import of state funding for economic development and infrastructure in your community.

- If you want funding for a capital project, include it along with your policy priorities.
- Some governments and organizations formally adopt their agendas through Council, Commission or Board

## Tips on setting up legislative meetings

- **Start early!** You will likely need to play e-mail or phone "tag" to get meetings confirmed.
- Find contact information for your legislators online. Remember, your region/community may be represented by more than one legislative district, so make sure to reach out to all of your legislators.
- Pre-session meetings can be at your offices or in a local coffee shop, or perhaps near an economic development or infrastructure project your community is trying to fund. Meetings while the legislature is in session are likely to be held in the member's office, but sometimes staff will reserve a conference room in their office building.
- **LAs Matter!** You will likely schedule meetings through a Legislative Aide (LA). LAs are the gatekeepers for the legislators – don't underestimate their importance. Knowing and being respectful of them can help you get and maintain access to their bosses!
- Understand the time restrictions when meeting with legislators. For Olympia meetings, particularly in a short legislative session, expect 15-minute meetings.
- After your first scheduling request, you should follow-up with a phone call to make sure they received your request and respond to any questions. If you leave a voicemail message or send an e-mail, make sure to thank the member for considering your invitation, and provide contact information. Provide specific dates and times that work best but be flexible.
- For meetings in Olympia during WEDA's annual Winter Conference or Advocacy Days: Please try to schedule around WEDA's meetings and conference sessions.

action (which ideally would by mid-December but could still occur in early/mid-January), while others prepare a letter to legislators from the organization leader.

- You can also consider sharing your agenda with the media through a public meeting, community blogs, social media and/or a media release.

Remember — everything that's important takes time! There's nothing wrong with putting your priorities together and teeing them up for the future.

## Once you are "in": Tips for meetings with legislators

- **Be Prompt and Patient:** When it is time to meet, be punctual and be patient. Dress professionally and arrive about 10 minutes before the appointment time. Legislators are often very busy and their schedule changes. It is not uncommon in a busy legislator's office to have to wait because of constantly changing schedules. During session, legislators often have committee meetings or Floor action that will arise on short notice. If interruptions do occur, be flexible. Also, be prepared and willing to speak with staff. Since staff does the background work and often make policy recommendations, it is not necessarily a snub to have the meeting changed from the actual policymaker to staff.
- **Be Friendly, Polite and Respectful:** Introduce yourself to the legislator or their staff member. Always say "thank you" before you say "please." Even if you disagree with your elected official's positions on some issues, they are more likely to listen to you if you've found some way to praise them at the beginning of the meeting. Look for common ground and always try to end the meeting on a positive note.

***Always say "thank you" before you say "please."***

- **Be Concise, Specific and Have a Plan:** Try to establish a personal connection, but avoid too much small talk, especially in session when time is very limited. After a minute or two of "small talk," review your priorities, but allow for the legislator to ask questions or share observations. If you are meeting with a legislator as a group, organize before the meeting the focus, agenda, and discuss the importance of staying unified and keeping messages simple.
- **Be Prepared:** Whenever possible, bring handouts to the meeting, but keep them simple. Include bill numbers if you have them. Not every legislator will be

well-informed or have past experience in the issues. Materials should be concise, with information on how to receive additional information if desired. Bring extra copies in case staff members request them and also be prepared that some offices will ask for handouts in advance and not accept and/or keep them. You can offer to email copies to the legislator and staff for future reference. Anticipate questions, and if you don't know an answer, say so – then get the answers right away and follow up.

- **Keep it Local:** Demonstrate the connection between what you are requesting and the interests of your mutual community. When possible, use local data, examples, estimated fiscal impacts and stories. Local stories stick in a legislator's mind and make good points during their debates. Provide legislators with concrete examples of how a successful economic development project has helped create jobs and economic impact, and performance metrics about your year-round work.
- **Make the Ask:** Be clear on your request and ask for a commitment. Do you want the legislator to vote yes or no on an upcoming bill, or to support or oppose a

## Communicate regularly with your legislators during session

Prior to session, organize a communications plan for regular contact with your legislators through the session. Consider regularly-scheduled virtual meetings with some or all of your legislators. Some regions/communities do these on a weekly or bi-weekly basis — frequently less than a half hour in the morning, and some include their chamber, Port and local Labor leadership, key education or other civic leaders in the meetings. Establishing a communications plan prior to session will help limit “phone or e-mail tag” and will keep your community on top of the mind for your legislators on a consistent basis.

During session, phone calls or e-mail work best. Like everyone, legislators get a lot of e-mail and phone messages so it is a good idea to keep these messages short and to the point. If you can get their mobile number, it is valuable but use it sparingly and do not share it with others.

Be sure to ask and *listen* to your legislators' priorities, how bills they are sponsoring are doing and *ask* how you can support them. The more you make an effort to communicate, the more your legislators will seek your input and try to address your region/community's needs.

particular budget request which would impact your region/community? Do you want him/her to cosponsor legislation? In many cases, the response will be “I don't know yet.” Having asked, however, puts you in the position of following up more strategically.

- **Be sure to level-set and don't make assumptions:** Assume the lawmaker is not persuaded or fully aware of the issue. Be sure to avoid acronyms or jargon.
- **Follow Up:** Take notes, particularly if follow up is required. Follow up the meeting with a **thank you** note that highlights the priorities covered during the meeting and send along any additional information and materials requested. If you asked for a commitment but did not get one, politely repeat the request and note that you look forward to a response. Follow up is important, because it confirms your commitment to your requests and helps build a valuable relationship between you and your legislator.

## Know on which the committees your legislators serve

If you need a project funded or a change in a statute, it first goes through a committee (<https://leg.wa.gov/about-the-legislature/committees/>). If you need help understanding committees and who's on them, feel free to contact WEDA.

- Your legislator or one from a nearby community can be your champion.
- Alternatively, your legislator can find a champion for you if he or she doesn't serve on the appropriate committee, but your legislators should remain engaged on your priority.

## Mobilize key leaders for your Legislative Agenda

Success in Olympia often requires help from others or a coalition, and partnerships with other organizations. We often think of advocacy as building relationships with legislators. However, effective advocacy includes community mobilization and coalitions. Some of your most valuable advocates are the residents, Labor, community and business leaders in your region/community. Many times they can capture the attention of your legislators better than you can as an economic developer. So don't

overlook how significant they are to your efforts. Getting your constituents/residents involved will require some effort, but a well-timed and well-executed grassroots campaign can create a team of local advocates who will not only understand, but eagerly support, your position on important legislative issues.

Many communities hold breakfasts, lunches or meetings at the local economic development council or chamber of commerce for local legislators to join key regional and community leaders to review and discuss your legislative priorities. During early December or the week prior to session typically works well for such a meeting. This also provides your legislators with a forum to share their priorities for the session. Legislators need to hear directly from their constituents and that means extending your advocacy team.

Setting up an informal group meeting when regional/community leaders can “join forces” with business and labor leaders and other key community leaders to highlight regional/community priorities will strengthen the power of your communications.

- Is there another economic development organization or local chamber of commerce with a similar position? A community, business or labor group? Talk to them to explore if you can partner in advocacy on that issue.
- Reintroduce your constituents to their community by hosting a tour or open house of a successful or pipeline economic development project. This is your opportunity to educate them on how tax dollars are being spent wisely, as well as the multitude of economic development services you provide. More importantly it is an opportunity to hear their issues and gather stories for your advocacy efforts about the impacts of state and local decisions on economic development.
- Spend some time visiting local business owners and discuss what new legislation means to their business and how it will affect their bottom line. Ask those who agree on your issues to join you in a meeting or call with legislators or hold your meeting at the business and share their stories onsite.
- Legislators keep track of how many contacts they get on a particular issue — pro and con. If you need something, you and key community leaders need to remind them. Once isn't always enough. Keep the calls and e-mails coming. (*But – avoid form letter type communication — those are usually ignored.*)

***“I can't emphasize enough the importance of staying connected with your regional/local legislators and making sure they know what you need to be successful with your economic development strategies.”***

***- Suzanne Dale Estey, WEDA  
Executive Director***

## Engage local media and social media

Create partnerships with your local news media. Invite reporters for an exclusive tour of your economic development projects and make sure they know the results you have delivered and your long-term plans. Also keep them abreast of your Legislative Agenda and your efforts to engage the community. Reporters are always looking for stories for their viewers or readers. What's better than regional leaders and businesses coming together to support their community?

- Consider meeting with your local newspaper editorial board and writing an op-ed piece.
- Don't forget to leverage your website, community blogs and other social media tools! Many legislators engage with social media – be sure they are following your organization's platforms and invite them to join the conversation!
- Actively engage with WEDA on Facebook and LinkedIn and encourage others to do so, too. Feel free to copy and “repurpose” WEDA's messages for your organization.

## Follow PDC lobbying rules

Organizations that conduct lobbying activities, either through a contract lobbyist or directly with in-house staff or city council members may need to report to the Public Disclosure Commission (PDC). Those that hire a contract lobbyist must file a regular report. If you have in-house staff or elected officials who spend more than four days a quarter directly lobbying the legislature, you need to complete a report. For more information on reporting requirements and how to file a report visit the PDC's website at [www.pdc.wa.gov](http://www.pdc.wa.gov). Organizations that fail to comply with reporting requirements on lobbying activities may be subject to penalties from the PDC.

## Back-to-the Basics - Legislative Timeline and Terms

Annual Calendar - Washington State Legislature:

- **Regular Session:** “Long Session” – January-April (*odd-numbered years: 105 days*); “Short Session” – January-February (*even-numbered years: 60 days*)
- Each legislative session starts annually on the 2nd Monday in January, but has different durations year to year. The legislative cycle is two years long and is called a biennium. The Washington State Legislature meets annually in a regular session, which begins on the second Monday each January in Olympia. Odd years (for example, 2023) consist of a long session of 105 days with a focus on writing the state budget for the biennium (January through April). Even years (for example, 2024) consist of a short session of 60 days with a focus on policy (January through March). Washington State Legislature: “Interim” – Spring through December. The Governor can call a special session at any time during the year.
- The Interim is the period of time during the year when the legislature is not meeting in Olympia. State legislators are back in their home districts.
- The Washington State Legislature is made up of two houses, or chambers: the Senate and the House of Representatives. Washington has 49 legislative districts, each of which elects a Senator and two Representatives. Senators serve four-year terms and Representatives serve two-year terms.
- The Senate and House of Representatives meet in session each year to create new laws, change existing laws, and enact budgets for the State.
- You can identify your district(s) and state legislators here: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/districtfinder>
- **Legislative Information:**

The Washington State Legislature website is a great resource for all kinds of information:  
<https://leg.wa.gov/>

For more information, contact:

**Suzanne Dale Estey**  
Executive Director  
Washington Economic Development  
Association  
206-769-4217  
[suzanne@wedaonline.org](mailto:suzanne@wedaonline.org)

**Jim Justin**  
Government Relations  
Consultant/Lobbyist  
360-870-2618  
[jim@jimjustingov.com](mailto:jim@jimjustingov.com)

The website includes information and directions on:

- Finding Your Legislator
- Visiting the Legislature
- Agendas, Schedules and Calendars
- Bill Information
- Laws and Agency Rules
- Legislative Committees
- Legislative Agencies
- Legislative Information Center
- E-mail Notifications
- Civic Education
- History of the State Legislature

### **WEDA Needs Your Active Engagement!**

WEDA will support you in your advocacy efforts with an annual Legislative Agenda, weekly Legislative Reports during the legislative session, staffing and strategic guidance through the WEDA Legislative Committee, and direct advocacy by our Executive Director and lobbyist. Through our “WEDA Weekly” Legislative Reports, you can learn about proposed legislation important to economic development across our state, as well as a step-by-step process for how to implement the best action plan for making your voice heard in Olympia (sign-in pro and con on bills, submit written testimony to committees, provide possible Zoom or in-person testimony during public hearings).

**Please sign up** for WEDA’s weekly Legislative Reports if you aren’t receiving them and **Take Action** when we need you! **Rapidly Respond to Action Alerts from the WEDA** on specific issues and forward them to others in your region and community. WEDA Action Alerts often include timely, prewritten messages that you can customize and send electronically to your legislators. You are more likely to receive WEDA Legislative Action Alerts during the legislative session (January to March/April).

[www.wedaonline.org](http://www.wedaonline.org)

