

Hosting a Legislative Breakfast

Hosting a legislative breakfast is one of the best ways to strengthen relationships between legislators and constituents. Breakfasts are fun, low-pressure ways to familiarize legislators with a cause and, ultimately, put a face on an issue.

The goals of a legislative breakfast are to:

- educate legislators (or their aides!) about workforce issues;
- showcase the efforts of an organization; and
- build relationships with your elected officials and become resources for them.

Legislative Breakfasts in a Nutshell

In the Planning Stages...

- Select a date. Ideally, you'll want to begin planning your event two months in advance. At the very least, plan for a few weeks away.
- Breakfasts should begin early in the morning and last for about an hour. Legislators are often free between the hours of 7:30 and 9am.
- Choose a location and reserve it, if necessary. This location should be easily accessible, close to the legislator's home area if your event will occur before the beginning of the legislative session and close to the LOB if it will occur after.
- Provide simple breakfast items that are easy to eat while standing and talking: bagels, muffins, pastries, coffee, tea, and juice are all great choices.
- Have a plan: Will there be speakers? A tour of your facility? Will you display artwork? Be creative in truly showcasing your organizations' efforts.
 - a. Focus on one or two key issues; have a specific "ask" that you can rally people behind. For example, request that legislators support a certain amount of funding or a certain number of constituents assisted.
 - b. You will need to be more structured if you're planning on accommodating a larger group; you can be less formal for a small group.
- Make sure you are organized; outline and divide the necessary tasks and make sure you have staff or volunteers to complete them. Don't forget to assign people as greeters, photographers and name-takers.
- Compile folders for the legislators to take with them, including information on the issues as well as your contact information. Have extras.
- Even if you organize formal remarks, many legislators will not be able to stay to hear them. They should not have to; get your message across quickly and effectively – early.
- Keep your presentation brief – all speakers should fit into a 15 minute window.
 - a. Overall, keep remarks positive and only describe relevant issues.
 - b. Remind everyone to take an informational packet before they leave.

Invitations and Outreach...

- If you have access to a lobbyist, make sure s/he can attend; this will link your event to your organization's presence at the LOB later on.
- Devise a guest list:
 - a. Include all senators and representatives in the towns your organization serves.
 - b. If there are particular legislators you would like to see, contact their aides directly; check for any conflicts and make sure the event is put onto their calendars. Be clear that you are scheduling the event around them.
 - c. Include community members, funders, and local municipal leaders – anyone who has an interest in your issue and could help make a difference.
 - d. Collaborative efforts are great; partner with other organizations or agencies if appropriate.
- Print and mail invitations to both home and LOB addresses.

- a. Postcards and letters on letterhead are acceptable. Keep the invitation simple and to-the-point!
 - b. Include directions and contact information in your invitation.
 - c. Include no more than a single information brochure and a response card.
 - d. Follow up with a phone call to their office a week after mailing the invitation.
 - e. Be persistent (friendly phone calls every four or five days) until you get an RSVP.
 - f. Make it clear that it is okay for them to send an aide; an aide's presence is just as valuable.
- Write press releases for local newspapers and websites; send reminders both a week and a day before.

On the Day Of...

- Photographs are important! These can be used in newsletters, on your website and – most immediately – included in the thank-you notes you'll send to the legislators you invited.
- Introduce yourself to each legislator; don't be offended if you've met before and they don't remember you. Treat an aide the same way you would treat a legislator; they are very often just as involved in decisions at the Capitol.
- Be prepared to answer legislators' questions or find them someone who can.
- Don't use technical terms; keep your conversations clear and to-the-point. Ask legislators what you can do to ensure that your issue receives support.
- Checklist:
 - Food
 - Cups, plates, napkins
 - Milk, sugar, stirrers
 - Paper towels for spills
 - Information packets
 - Name tags
 - Sign-in sheet at the door
 - Pens and paper

Following Up...

- Follow up by sending thank-you letters to all attendees. Recap the event briefly and include a fact sheet or newsletter that wasn't in your informational packet. Include your contact information. Personalize the thank-you notes to your legislators.
- Also send thank-you's to those who did not attend, also recapping the event and providing basic information.