



Center for Social Development

GEORGE WARREN BROWN SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

Tips for Facilitating State IDA Legislation

In policy making, every state is different. The process for passing legislation in a state usually develops over years. As a policy advocate, you will need to know how things work, politically and fiscally, in your state. Below, we discuss factors that might affect efforts to pass IDA legislation.

State-Level Political Issues

- State governance may be set up in a non-typical fashion (e.g., home rule, unicameral) or convene every other year, instead of annually.
- The political party balance in your state may be very even or very uneven.
- The political agenda for any given year may be influenced by the previous session (i.e., time spent on bills that were “timed” out).
- Regional conflict (such as urban versus rural issues) may affect the legislation process in your state.
- Legislators may develop positive or negative associations with any legislation, based on previous experiences.
- Key legislators may be at odds, or may be good friends.
- Legislators often make deals for support of various bills.
- The governor, or another high-ranking state official, may greatly affect process in a positive or negative way.
- Special interest groups may have developed effective lobbying efforts, which could work for or against any legislation.

State-Level Funding Issues

- State general funds may be scarce for administrative and/or other appropriations.
- Tax revenue may be low in your state, or your state may be experiencing a budget shortfall.
- Any new legislation may be perceived as too costly by key political figures or groups.

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Important Things to Know, or Find Out About Your State's Legislative Process

How to Gain Political Support

- **Are you a part of an IDA coalition? If so, have any of the coalition members worked with legislators to sponsor and/or promote previous legislation?**
Having legislative “friends” is a great plus. Particularly helpful are those who have successfully championed social and economic development legislation or community renewal legislation for low-income populations.
- **What is the time frame for the annual legislative calendar in your state?**
Does your state work through the calendar year, or is there a down time for pre-session planning and/or special sessions? Are there sporadic breaks for legislators during the year? Are legislators on the chamber floor five days out of the week, or do they get days off for planning and other legislative work? Knowing your state's legislative calendar and the time constraints and work patterns of your legislators is key to successful policy work.

Drafting Legislation

- **Can you use pre-session months to promote the sponsorship and drafting of IDA legislation?**
Pre-session time can be used to determine likely bill sponsor(s), acquaint them with IDAs, and forge bill content. It is important that you serve as an authority on IDA legislation, and provide examples of how it has been drafted in other states. This, of course, requires you to become knowledgeable on the subject. You need to know what well-crafted IDA legislation contains, and how to fit it to the policy needs of your state. As you come to an agreement with your bill sponsor(s) on the program design that will most likely achieve the policy goals you have set, you can benefit from your sponsors' knowledge of the state process, and take into consideration what type of legislation he/she thinks is likely to succeed.
- **Is bill pre-filing helpful in your state? When is it done?**
If the pre-session period culminates in a bill pre-filing period, you will need to encourage the bill sponsor to file your bill as early as possible. In many states pre-filing determines how quickly a bill goes to committee and/or the floor of the legislature.
- **Who drafts legislation? Are you in a position to help draft the legislation?**
You may have some good ideas about what IDA legislation should include. However, even if you hand your sponsoring legislator a complete bill, it will probably be changed. A legislative sponsor may want to add or subtract something, the committee hearing the bill will likely make changes, the person drafting the language may change it to the commonly accepted forms of your state government, and it may be even be amended on the floor, after it is proposed.

The process requires that you and the bill sponsor be flexible, while monitoring whether or not key points are getting lost along the way. It is best to keep the bill language as simple as possible, while retaining elements that establish the core program you desire. After the legislation is passed, and becomes law, it is difficult to

make changes and will require legislative amendments in a future session. All changes should be monitored and accepted by the majority of the bill supporters and proponents before going to the floor of the legislature. Administrative rules, created for most new laws, can be used to more clearly define the IDA program. A bill may need to be withdrawn if it changes into something that does not reflect the original intent of the authors, to be re-proposed in a future session.

- **Could the IDA legislation be added to a bill that is similar in nature, and likely to be passed?**

If, by the end of a session, it looks like the IDA bill you support may not get introduced, or has not gained the necessary support, your sponsor(s) may be willing to propose amending the IDA bill to legislation that is likely to pass. The ideal legislation to attach an IDA bill to would pertain to similar community or economic development issues. Several states have passed, and funded, IDA legislation using this method, including Minnesota, Illinois, and Missouri.

How to Gain State Funding for IDAs

- **Do you know what your state budget looks like, and what the state fiscal picture is?**

Get a copy of your state budget. It is not as complicated as you may think to get a quick picture of what issues and programs money is being allocated toward. It is important to note budget surpluses or shortfalls, especially at the time your bill's fiscal note is proposed.

- **Have tax credits been used in your state to fund community development initiatives?**

If so, learn how to connect with a current program or gain support for a new tax credit for IDAs.

Moving IDA Legislation Forward

- **Are you required to register as a lobbyist in your state to disseminate informational materials? Can you?**

Many states require you to register as a lobbyist if you visit legislators other than your own legislators to promote specific legislation. Providing information about a concept or initiative and supporting a particular bill are two different things. Registering as a lobbyist is usually a simple process. However, some non-profit organizations put restrictions on employee lobbying, or do not allow it at all. Check this out with your organization before you begin this process. If your organization allows political lobbying, you might save yourself some time and stress if you train a qualified intern (or part-time employee) to lobby with you or your coalition. Another option would be to share lobbying duties among members of the coalition.

- **Are several key legislators (those in traditional leadership positions) on board with IDAs?**

Even with respected and knowledgeable legislative sponsors for your bill, you will need the support of legislators known for being able to make or break legislation. Identify these legislators and make special attempts to convince them that your legislation should become law. Hand deliver materials and make follow up phone calls; personal contact is most effective. If possible, schedule visits of thirty or more

minutes in length, but be brief and to the point in your explanations. Reserve plenty of time for the legislator to ask you questions. If you don't know the answers, give the legislator assurance that you will find out and get back to him. This has the added advantage of keeping the idea fresh in the legislator's mind.

- **What legislative committee or group routinely deals with issues similar to IDAs?**

Your state legislature probably moves filed bills into specific committees (health, community development, social services, economic, business, or other issue-based committees) for approval and/or amendment before introducing them on the floor. If this is the case in your state, you will need to consider the committee that would be the best fit for your bill, and voice your opinion.

- **Is the sponsor of the IDA bill on the selected committee, or does he/she know someone on the committee?**

It is probable that one of the IDA bill sponsors will be a member of the house or senate committee that hears the IDA bill. Even better would be for a sponsor to be the head of the committee. You should discuss the possibilities of seeking these advantages with the legislators sponsoring the IDA bill.

- **Do you have people ready to testify?**

You, or someone of your choice, may be asked to provide expert testimony on the usefulness of IDAs. Expert testimony can greatly affect the support of legislators. The testimony of current or past IDA program participants can also be very effective at this juncture.

- **Do you have informational packets available for legislators?**

Legislators deal with so many bills and so much information in a year's time that they are particularly appreciative of a short, concise, informational packet. The packet should include contact information for a person at a pertinent organization, and several one-page fact sheets on IDAs (including definition, how other states are supporting IDAs, the details of a local IDA program, and a summary of any available program evaluation data).

- **When are special group or caucus meetings held? May you present at them?**

If the bill sponsor is a member of a particular party caucus, or special concerns group, he/she can set up a presentation on IDAs at one of the scheduled meetings. If you can arrange this, take enough materials along to hand out, and try to arrange for one or more IDA program participants to go with you to explain how having an IDA has affected their lives. This is a very effective way to reach several legislators at one time.