**Why is a Briefing Necessary?**

Organizing a briefing at your state capitol is a useful way to engage with legislators and their staffs and to influence their thinking. You can use the time to introduce your organization and demonstrate its expertise on a subject. As the saying goes, “if you’re not at the table, you’re on the menu.” A public briefing is a way to gain a seat at the table and to influence the debate on the issues taking shape in the legislature. Below are a few key suggestions for how to organize an effective briefing at the Capitol:

**Choose a Location, Date, and Time in Advance**

Nailing down a location for your briefing may be harder than you think. Doing so requires the consideration of convenience, timing and affordability. Any potential location must be convenient for you, your potential speakers and attendees. If you are willing to host your briefing off capitol grounds and can pay a fee, you will have multiple choices for locations. But choosing a location “off campus” means you potentially jeopardize attendance—especially among legislators and staff. Hosting your briefing on the capitol campus is convenient for legislators and the space is usually free. However, the number of spaces will be limited and securing a location may require the support of a legislator. Getting that support will depend on whether there is a legislator or legislators who might be willing to associate his or her name with your organization and sponsor the event. The timing of your event is also crucial. If your target audience is elected officials, you will want to schedule your briefing for when the legislature is in session.

**Nail Down a Briefing Topic, Set Your Agenda, Invite Speakers**

After you have a location and time, you will want to fine-tune the general topic of your briefing, create a detailed agenda, and reach out to potential speakers or panelists. Be sure to give the legislator who is sponsoring your event an opportunity to speak. Often, they will want to welcome attendees and explain why they are concerned about the topic of the briefing.

**Invite the Right People**

If your target audience is legislators and staff, you will want to focus on targeting those legislators who work on issues impacting the topic of your briefing. You want to invite any legislators who have voiced an interest in your subject as well as legislators on the relevant committees and their staffs. You might also consider inviting key state and local officials (e.g., staff from the governor’s office, state department of education and/or higher education commission, and local superintendents) as well as colleagues in other associations or organizations who work on the topic of your briefing. Remember to work closely with the office of any legislator who agreed to sponsor your event, and to make sure that they have input on the invitation list.

**Organize the Room for Maximum Impact**

You will want to work closely with your speakers when deciding how to arrange the room for your briefing and you will want to visit the room well in advance. You need to be familiar with the room’s dimensions before you can decide how many people to invite and how the room should be set up. Next, you need to touch base with your speakers to ascertain their audio-visual needs. Do they require a laptop projector or a screen? Must the room have handicap access? Their needs will impact the physical layout of the room. Once you understand the logistical needs of your speakers, you can reach out to the people responsible for setting up the room to discuss layout and seating arrangements.

**Include Refreshments and Time for Networking**

Beyond learning about your topic, people will come to your briefing to network. Beginning or ending the program with social time accompanied by food and beverages provides an opportunity for the type of informal interaction where much of the work of advocacy and governing takes place. Because building these informal, personal connections is so important, some state associations host purely social events at the state capitol. Catering doesn’t have to be lavish, but providing an opportunity for camaraderie and conversation is essential.

**Prepare Handouts Carefully**

The handouts you provide at your event should be determined by the topic of your hearing and the needs of your speakers. As you consider handouts, you may want to review this webpage for the ‘how to’ on creating one-pagers. Providing handouts is not an excuse to inundate legislators and their staff with every bit of information on a subject. Legislators and staffers want to be informed, but they do not want to be overwhelmed. Instead, choose your handouts carefully. And, where you can, target the message to the audience.

**Recommended Checklist for the ‘Day Of’:**

* Arrive early to ensure that the room and refreshments are set up the way you instructed.
* Set up a sign-in table near the entrance so that you can capture the names and contact information of all attendees.
* Test any AV equipment.
* Go over the speaking order with panelists when they arrive. Agree on time allotments and anything else that might impact the process and progress of the briefing.