



Washington State Legislative Service Project: Lobbyists 2012 **Executive summary – Winter 2012**

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The Washington State Legislative Service Project examines the views of key individuals involved in the state's legislative process to determine how developments in this process have affected legislative civility. Study participants include state-wide elected official; legislative and agency staff, members of the media, lobbyists and legislators who served during the 1990 to 2012 legislative sessions. The lobbyists aspect of the 2012 Legislative Service Project focuses on individuals who were registered lobbyists during the 2012 legislative session. Survey questions included the areas of: public perceptions of the state legislature, observance of civility norms, bipartisanship and collaborative problem-solving, work/sleep performance effects, and the perception of leadership/management effectiveness of state legislators.

Lobbyists frequently have considerable experience with the legislative process. Almost all (94%) of survey respondents have been involved with the legislative process for at least 5 years, and 60% have 20 years or more of experience. Respondents were more likely to have been legislative or executive branch staff than having been an elected official, and one quarter had been a student intern in their college days.

Lobbyists tend to find their work very worthwhile, and if they had the opportunity to go back in time they would very likely choose to work again as a lobbyist. Their prior legislative process experience, formal education, presentation skills, mentoring, and passion for their issue is what best prepared them for their work as a state legislative lobbyist. The aspects of their work which they least expected to encounter were the partisanship, too frequent incivility, the power of deep-seated beliefs and anecdotes in the thinking of legislators, and the amount of time required to get a presence before legislators. Lobbyists feel that the best way to influence the legislative process involves developing personal relationships with legislators and their staff, providing credible research-based information, and demonstrating honesty, subject knowledge, and the potential for grassroots mobilization.

When evaluating various aspects of state government, lobbyists graded the performance of the State Judiciary highest, followed by the Governor and then State Agencies. The Legislature received the lowest grade. The aspects of the legislative process which lobbyists feel are most favorable to citizens include an open and transparent process, governmental access and responsiveness, bipartisanship, and staying focused on what is best for Washington state. The aspects which are least favored include excessive partisanship, waste and misuse of public funds, government largesse, and negative media portrayals. Lobbyists felt that the legislature could improve its image through improved communication and greater transparency, sustainable budgets, citizen engagement, completing work during the regular session and statesmanship. Ideas for improving legislative efficiency included increased transparency, citizen engagement, bipartisanship, improved communication, and focusing on budgeting.

Lobbyists defined civility to include respect, collaboration with individuals who don't share all of your views, open communication and honesty in deliberations. In general, lobbyists felt that they were more civil than others involved in the governmental process. When evaluating which aspect of government is the most civil, the Judiciary rated the highest, followed by the Governor, the Legislature, and then state agencies. Citizens were rated as more civil than legislators, and special interest groups were rated less civil than any of the aspects of government. Lobbyists felt that a legislator should be held to a higher civility standard than the average citizen, and that legislative civility is on a decline. Lobbyists also agreed that some of the factors effecting legislative incivility are ideologically-driven media outlets, special interest groups, and constituent expectations. The majority of lobbyists feel that the polarization taking place in Washington D.C. and other states is also occurring in Washington State.

Almost all lobbyists agreed that cross-party legislative interactions improve the working relationships of legislators. To improve legislator interactions, lobbyists recommended the following: multiparty legislative meals; integrating seating and office assignments; and greater pursuit of bipartisanship among legislative leadership. To encourage willingness to collaborate across the aisle, lobbyists feel that citizens should elect legislators expressing these priorities. Lobbyists indicated that some of the best ways to repair legislative relationships affected by hostile campaigns would include more civility and joint party new legislator meetings.

Based on lobbyists' observations, legislators' quality of sleep is worse during session, more legislators are "morning" people outside of session and "evening" people during session, and legislators' peak performance during session is from 8am to 1pm. Lobbyists identified the most common legislative personality to be one which is more likely to focus on people than projects, rely on what is certain as opposed to being open to explore new insights, decisions are made based on values or personal beliefs, and that most legislators prefer a planned stable life.