

Washington State Legislative Service Project: Legislators 2013

Full Report – Spring 2014

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*The **Legislative Service Project** examines the views of key individuals involved in the Washington state legislative process to determine how changes to this process have affected legislative civility. Study participants include legislative and agency staff, registered lobbyists and legislators who served during the 1990 to 2013 legislative sessions. Participant responses provide insight into the legislative process, public perception of the process, the dynamics of legislative civility and member interactions, and issues impacting work performance from the perspectives of staff, lobbyists and legislators. The ultimate goal of the **Legislative Service Project** is to improve the current Washington State legislative process and better prepare the next generation of leaders for public service in the Evergreen State.*

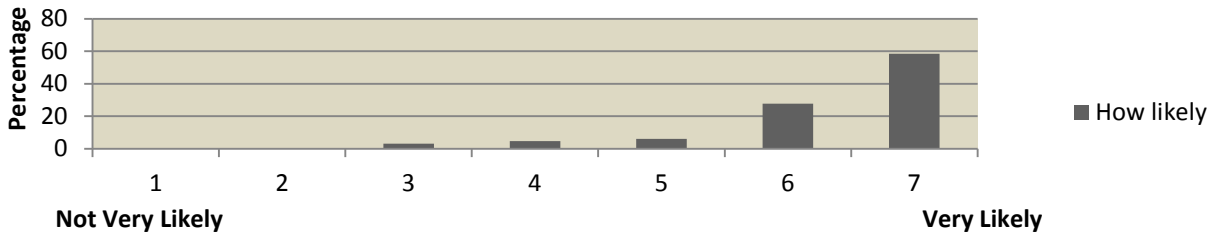
Legislative Service Project – Legislators 2013

*The legislator portion of the **Legislative Service Project** focuses on legislators who served during the 1990 to 2013 legislative sessions of the Washington State Legislature. State legislators were contacted by mail and asked to participate anonymously in the research, with assurances that their individual responses would be kept confidential. Survey questions covered the areas of: legislative public image and effectiveness, civility and working relationships, campaigns, leadership/management styles, and work/sleep performance effects. Of the 513 legislators who served during this 20+-year period, addresses were located for 402 of the legislators. A total of 69 legislators participated in the research by completing mail surveys, and another dozen agreed to off-the-record conversations and interviews with the researchers in lieu of filling in mail survey instruments.*

Overview of legislator responses on significance of the legislative service experience

*Following the trends of previous surveys conducted by the **Legislative Service Project**, legislator participants continue to find their work very worthwhile, and if given the opportunity to go back in time they would make the same choice to serve in the Washington State legislature. Legislators indicated that previous elected local government and special purpose district experience, related formal education, business experience, and their engagement and investment in their own respective local communities best prepared them for their service in the state legislature.*

If you had the opportunity to go back in time and re-live your life, how likely would you be to once again choose to serve in the Washington State Legislature? Average 6.34



What were two jobs or life experiences which you believe *best prepared you to serve as a legislator*?

- *Most frequently mentioned:*
 - Local government elected experience
 - College education
 - Business experience
 - Community volunteer

Public perception of government

In evaluating previously recommended ways to improve citizens’ perception of state government, legislators indicated that the recommendation that would be the most effective to improve such perceptions of government would be “work for the good-of-the-state and not personal/partisan agendas.” The recommendation in this area which would be easiest to implement is “increase transparency of the process.” The recommendation viewed as having the best combination of being effective and also being implementable was that of “improve communication to citizens.” The prior recommendation with the greatest difficulty in implementation and also considered to be the least effective was “focus on budget completion first.”

The results of previous legislative surveys recommended the following ways to improve citizens’ perceptions of state government. For each item please indicate how effective the item would be to improve citizens’ perceptions of state government and how difficult it would be to implement.

Effectiveness	Recommendation to Improve Citizens’ Perceptions of State Government	Implementation Difficulty	Difference
Average	Low (1) – 7-point scale – High (7)	Average	
4.26	Work for the good-of-the-state and not personal/partisan agendas	3.78	0.48
3.94	Increase citizen education regarding the legislative process	3.55	0.39
3.80	Increase civility among and between legislators	3.15	0.65
3.77	Increase citizen involvement in the process	3.68	0.09
3.75	Improve communication to citizens	2.95	0.80
3.62	Complete legislative work during the regular session	3.26	0.36
3.31	Increase the transparency of the process	2.89	0.42
3.05	During the legislative session, focus on budget completion as the first order of business	3.81	-0.76

In your view, what is one other action the Washington state legislature can take to improve its image?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Avoid partisan politics
- Increase transparency
- Focus first on solving the state’s problems

Legislative effectiveness

Legislators rated **“party leaders encourage working cooperatively across the aisle”** as the most effective prior recommendation to improve the legislative process. This recommendation was also found to be the best overall in that it produced the greatest difference between level of effectiveness and level of implementation difficulty. The recommendation which was found to be easiest to implement was that of **“limiting the number of committees a legislator can serve on.”** The recommendation expected to produce the least effective results in this area was **“change rule timelines so bills can move slower.”** **The recommendation expected to be the most difficult to implement was the one expected to produce the greatest result: “party leaders encourage working cooperatively across the aisle.”**

While the legislators agree that partisan politics is a factor in the reason for the number of legislative special sessions, they also feel that the legislator’s part-time status, increased issue complexity, and poor time management also play a role. To reverse this trend, legislators tend to look to their leadership, narrowing work focus, and lengthening sessions. Legislators indicated that it is not as much the legislation they pass as it is making time to meet with and listen to constituents which insures that their constituents feel well represented in the process. The constituent groups that legislators believed were not adequately represented include the average apolitical person, the poor, the undereducated, and ethnic and racial minorities.

The results of previous legislative surveys recommended the following ways to improve the overall effectiveness of the legislative process. For each item please indicate how effective the item would be to improve legislative effectiveness and how difficult it would be to implement.

Effectiveness	Recommendation to Improve Legislative Effectiveness	Implementation Difficulty	Difference
Average	Low (1) – 7-point scale – High (7)	Average	
3.85	Party leaders encourage working cooperatively across the aisle	3.52	0.33
3.09	Increase legislative nonpartisan professional staff/resources	3.05	0.04
3.05	Review the rules for ways to modernize them	2.94	0.11
2.61	Limit how many committees a legislator can serve on	2.42	0.19
2.49	Increase the length of session	3.20	-0.71
2.43	Incorporate a week break in the middle of the session	2.63	-0.20
2.37	Limit how many bills a legislator can introduce	3.15	0.22
2.36	Reduce the hours spent in meetings each day during session	3.13	-0.77
2.26	Change rule timelines so bills can move faster	3.20	-0.94
1.95	Change rule timelines so bills can move slower	2.98	-1.03

In your view, what is one other action the Washington state legislature can take to improve its effectiveness?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Plan realistic time allotments for the work which needs to be done
- Spend more time planning so the direction is better understood and less time is necessary for implementation
- Specific rule reforms

Twenty of the last thirty years has required at least one legislative special session. Why do you believe there have been so many special sessions?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Partisan politics
- Trying to do too much with the legislators only being part-time professionals
- The state has increased in complexity
- Not budgeting the required amount of time

What needs to change for the legislature to complete its work during the regular session?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Commitment of partisan leadership
- Focus first on the work of the budget
- Increase session length
- Disincentives for not completing work during regular session

Some legislators feel that the increase in legislative workload, moving from part-time to full-time, is the reason for not finishing during regular session and that the solution is to increase the length of the regular session. Do you agree with this recommendation?

Yes- 25%

What are ways you work to make sure all constituents feel represented?

Most frequent responses:

- Try to meet with everyone who requests a meeting
- Personally respond to everyone who make contact
- Show respect and actively listen
- Attend as many public events in the district as possible

Are there any constituent groups that you think are not adequately represented?

Most frequent responses:

- The average citizen who isn't attached to a special interest group
- Poor
- Uneducated
- Minorities

Legislative civility and member relationships

Legislators tend to believe that the most effective way to improve legislative civility and relationships among members is to “show respect for other people and their opinions.” This recommendation was also found to be the best when combining the factors of likely effect and implementation difficulty. The easiest to implement recommendation was seen as that of the encouragement to “eat meals with other legislators.” The recommendation identified as having the greatest implementation difficulty and being the least effective was “changing seating assignments so the parties are intermixed.”

When comparing legislative interactions during session with those taking place outside of session, legislators were found to have substantially more work and social interactions with other legislators during the legislative sessions. Legislators are much more likely to interact with legislators from their own party than with legislators from the opposition party. Likewise, legislators are more likely to respect, trust and confide in members of their own party – BUT, **members of both parties indicate that they respect, trust and even confide in some members of the other party.** There is clearly evidence of a basis upon which to build on the across the aisle initiatives which have been promoted in recent years.

The results of previous legislative surveys recommended the following ways to improve legislative civility and relationships. For each item please indicate how effective the item would be to improve legislative civility and relationships and how difficult it would be to implement.

Effectiveness	Recommendation to Improve Legislative Civility and Relationships	Implementation Difficulty	Difference
Average	Low (1) – 7 point scale – High (7)	Average	
4.56	Show respect for other people and their opinions	2.58	1.98
4.38	For legislators to be an example of statesmanship	3.10	1.28
4.22	Be willing to work with those with whom you don’t agree on bill of mutual interest	2.70	1.52
4.18	Work with legislators from the other party on joint projects	2.48	1.70
3.65	Eat meals with other legislators	2.18	1.47
3.40	Hold social functions which are limited to legislators	2.28	1.12
3.31	Spend time with other legislators outside of session	2.64	0.67
3.26	Visit other legislators in their legislative district	2.52	0.74
2.58	Change office assignments so parties are intermixed	3.06	-0.48
2.45	Change seating assignments so parties are intermixed	3.32	-0.87

In your view, what is one other action the Washington state legislature can take to improve legislative relationships?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Show respect
- Leadership take the lead

As a legislator how often did you interact with legislators from your party or the other party in the following ways?

Your Party	How often do you interact with legislators from...	The Other Party
Average	1-Daily, 2-Weekly, 3-Monthly, 4-Less Often	Average
1.72	Socially during session	2.09
2.97	Socially outside of session	3.47
1.18	Work-related during session	1.48
2.79	Work-related outside of session	3.28

While a legislator, how many legislators from your party or the other party...

Your Party		The Other Party
Average	1-All, 2-Most, 3-Some, 4-Few, 5-None	Average
1.50	Had you met	1.94
2.18	Did you respect	2.46
2.49	Did you trust	2.99
3.29	Were you willing to confide in	3.84

For the following scenarios, rate how civil the following actions are:	Civility level
Very Uncivil (1) – 5-point scale – Very civil (5)	Average
An individual disagrees with you about a political issue and tells you the reasons for their stance on that issue	4.48
A legislator disagrees with you about a political issue and tells you that you are wrong	3.03
An individual does not vote for you entirely due to your party affiliation	2.57
A legislator does not vote for a bill you sponsor solely due to your party affiliation	2.10
A legislator disagrees with you about a political issue and starts an argument with you	1.91
A legislator disagrees with you about a political issue and chooses to avoid working with you on any other issue	1.84
An individual removes your campaign sign from your supporters' yards due to oppositions to your political stance	1.41
An individual interrupts/heckles your public speech due to opposition to your political stance	1.34

Legislative campaigns

When evaluating recommendations to improve the campaign process, legislators identified the easiest to implement and most effective way to be “hold joint freshman orientations which involve both parties.” The recommendation which was rated most difficult to implement and least effective was “allow opponents to see campaign ads prior to their release.”

The results of previous legislative surveys highlighted concerns about the effect of hostile campaigns on legislative working relationships and recommended the following ways to improve the campaign process. For each item please indicate how effective the item would be to improve the campaign process and how difficult it would be to implement.

Effectiveness	Recommendation to Improve the Campaign Process	Implementation Difficulty	Difference
Average	Low (1) – 7-point scale – High (7)	Average	
4.26	Hold joint freshman orientations which involve both parties	2.17	2.09
4.21	Avoid being hostile	3.23	0.98
3.97	Follow the same civility standard for inter and intra party races	3.15	0.82
3.82	Party leadership be proactive to repair damaged relationships	3.48	0.34
3.78	Change state law to require truth in advertising for campaigning	3.76	0.02
3.74	If you have been attacked, get over it	3.31	0.43
2.50	Have opponents meet one-on-one after the campaign	3.24	-0.74
2.09	Allow opponents to see campaign ads prior to their release	4.30	-2.21

Technology impacts on the legislative process and working relationships

Legislative survey participants, for the most part, are happy with the current level of technology applied to the legislative process, but did tend to feel that there is room for improved technology applications in the areas of improved video conferencing, broadening the diversity of citizen engagement, increasing multiple language communication options, and expanding the use of remote testimony. Legislators also see advances in technology providing ways to improve social engagement with citizens and town hall meetings. Legislators also acknowledged that they are taking advantage of the current televising of the legislative process to communicate to not only those observing the process live, but also to those who access the proceedings either by television or online.

While a legislator, what percentage of time was spent speaking to the people present, and what percentage of time was spent speaking to the “televised/online audience” away from the proceedings?

	People Present	Televised/Online
You	82%	18% (should equal 100%)
Legislators in general	70%	30% (should equal 100%)

The use of video conference technology as a way for committees to receive public testimony is being proposed. Should video conferencing be used to allow for constituents to provide remote testimony?

Yes - 72%

What are ways new technology can be used to improve the legislative process?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Satisfied with current technology
- Video conferencing
- Develop direct democracy

What are ways new technology can be used to improve communication with constituents?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Increased use of social media to directly communicate with constituents
- Town halls meetings using video conferencing and teleconferencing

Legislative decision-making processes and leadership/management styles

*When asked about voting with regards to legislative decisions, most legislators reported that they are most likely to vote based on the “best solution” even if their constituent majority doesn’t agree with that solution. Results from past surveys conducted as part of the **Legislative Service Project** indicate that the staff and lobbyists who work most closely with legislators have an understanding of how legislators make decisions which differs from those of legislators themselves. When asked about this difference in how they believe they make decisions and how others see them do so, the legislators explain this difference as a reflection of the fact that the non-partisan staff and professional registered lobbyists, working without a partisan political agenda, and not having full understanding of the negotiation process underlying legislative bill movement, often misunderstand legislators’ reasons for taking the votes they do.*

*When asked about what leadership office style promotes the most effective legislative work, legislators were almost equally split between the responses “emphasize teamwork and working together in harmony” and “set the end vision and allow staff considerable freedom in how they get there.” When asked about legislative management style, most legislators responded that the style that promoted the most effective legislative work was to focus on **proactive listening** to staff and making staff successful in their legislative careers by the **assignment of progressive responsibility for legislative work**. Staff*

responses related to the best leadership and management styles matched these legislator responses. Legislators generally believed that they have the necessary resources to make the best decisions most of the time. When asked what additional resources would be most helpful to them in order to come to better decisions, legislators most frequently responded more time, supplementary unbiased information and additional access to staff.

When making a contentious legislative decision were you more likely to:

- 12.7% Vote based on your constituent majority's preference even if you don't agree that it is the best solution
- 87.3% Vote based on best solution even if your constituent majority doesn't agree with that solution

The results of previous legislative surveys revealed that legislators and legislative staff/lobbyists have differing opinions concerning how legislators tend to process information and make decisions. Why do you feel that the staff/lobbyists who work closest with legislators have an understanding which differs from legislators concerning how legislators make decisions?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Staff differ from legislators by being non-partisan, objective, and without a political agenda
- Staff are not elected and don't have a full understanding of the process
- Legislators don't always communicate correctly

What are ways legislators can better communicate the process they follow when processing information and making decisions?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Be honest/open
- Take time during individual meetings/events to communicate this
- The decision-making process is not something that the legislators are required to communicate

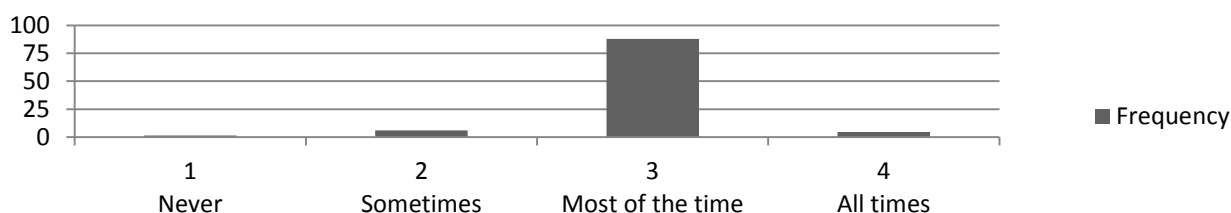
The results of previous legislative surveys indicated that legislators and staff as have differing opinions concerning the preferred legislative leadership office style. Based on the top two selected styles, which legislative leadership office style do you feel promotes the most effective legislative work?

- 46% Emphasize teamwork and working together in harmony
- 54% Set the end vision and allow staff considerable freedom in how they get there

The results of previous legislative surveys also identified that legislators and staff have differing opinions concerning the preferred legislative management office style. Based on the top three selected styles, which legislative management office style do you feel promotes the most effective legislative work?

- 63% Focus on proactive listening to staff and making staff successful in their legislative careers
- 23% Provide the legislative assistant great flexibility in making decisions on behalf of the legislator
- 14% Decision are cleared by the legislator for nearly everything

How frequently did you have the necessary resources to make the best decisions? Average 2.95



In order to come to better decisions, what additional resources would be most helpful for you to have?

Most frequently mentioned:

- Time is the resource which has the greatest scarcity
- Data/information which is unbiased and represents all sides of the issue
- Additional and better trained staff

Sleep and legislative work performance

The majority of legislators were in agreement with the results from past legislative surveys conducted as part of the **Legislative Service Project** which reported that “during session legislators get tired sooner, go to bed later, take longer to fall asleep, wake up more often at night, sleep fewer hours, get up earlier, and have a harder time getting up.” Legislators also indicated that during the course of the legislative session there are clear signs of erosion in their personal and work relationships, quality of sleep, and personal and work satisfaction. The greatest decreases, during legislative session, occur for legislators in the area of their sleep quality.

When measuring productivity, legislators’ measure productivity for themselves based on their personal evaluation of their work, constituent satisfaction, fulfilling commitments, and successful bill passage. They measure office productivity based on constituent satisfaction, work effort, and timeliness of work accomplishments.

The results of previous legislative surveys indicated that during session legislators get tired sooner, go to bed later, take longer to fall asleep, wake up more often at night, sleep fewer hours, get up earlier, and have a harder time getting up.

In general, do you feel that the previous statement matches most legislators' experience?

Yes 72%

As a legislator, do you feel that the previous statement also matched your legislative session experience? Yes 58%

Beginning of session	Rate each of these items in relationship to the beginning and end of your last legislative session	End of session	Change
Average	Poor (1) – 7-Point Scale – Excellent (7)	Average	
3.74	Your sleep quality	3.15	-0.59
4.09	Your personal enjoyment	3.62	-0.47
4.02	Your overall quality of life	3.55	-0.47
4.38	Your personal attitude about life	3.95	-0.43
4.23	Your family relationships	3.82	-0.41
3.85	Your job satisfaction	3.55	-0.30
4.02	Your legislative work relationships	3.82	-0.20
3.98	The quality of legislative decisions you made	3.97	-0.01
3.65	The number of mistakes you made (excellent=few, poor=many)	3.65	0.00
3.68	Your personal legislative productivity	3.74	0.06

What measures of legislative productivity do you think are reasonable?

Most frequently mentioned:

- How do I feel about the job I did
- Meeting constituent needs - The level of constituent satisfaction
- Making all my meetings and commitments
- The number of personal bills introduced/passed

What are ways that you measure productivity for your office?

Most frequently mentioned:

- The level of constituent satisfaction
- Whether everyone in the office did their best
- Whether everything in the office is getting done on time
- How much constituent communication is happening