



New York State Psychological Association

**Guide to
Effective
Grassroots
Action**

NYSPA Guide to Effective Grassroots Action

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INTRODUCTION

ARE YOU READY TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Whether you are new to grassroots advocacy, or are interested in strengthening your skills, this manual is for you. It includes tips and useful knowledge designed to help you ensure that policy makers in Albany, NY and in Washington, DC are responsive to issues that affect the profession of psychology and the psychological needs of their constituents.

Every year there are ongoing battles with insurance regulations, access to care, competition among health care professions, scope of practice issues and specific bills introduced. All of these issues ultimately affect patients and quality of psychological care. Addressing these issues to gain successful outcomes requires strategy, patience and a plan.

Your commitment and involvement to grassroots advocacy will help ensure that political interest and attention to psychological issues will not wane. It will also make certain that programs and vital laws that are in place, like Timothy's Law, are adequately funded and continue to be available for those in need for years to come.

Why Lobby?

Government has huge cost of doing business when you consider what you pay local, state and federal taxes, state workers compensation insurance, and complying with state and federal regulations. Participating in the lawmaking process at the local level (or grassroots lobbying) means that you have the opportunity to reduce these expenses, create a favorable business environment, minimize unfavorable legislation, and establish contacts within government before a crisis arises.

Making contacts before you need to call on them for support is more effective than opening your introductions with your hands out for help.

Specifically related to psychology, lobbying is important to advance the profession and to make sure that elected officials understand the overall implications of mental health issues. If psychology does not take the measures to inform and educate the officials that make the laws that govern the profession, you can be assured that someone else will. Legislators will listen more intently when your message emphasizes the effects that positive mental health legislation will have on the public, their constituency - their voters.

Grassroots lobbying is not difficult to do. We all participate in lobbying regularly, we persuade others to our point of view, in family settings with spouses and children, in discussing campaign issues or when we ask for a raise. Your role as a **legislative grassroots lobbyist** is the same though somewhat more formal and specific.

The Lobby/Politics Game

Rules of the Game

Communicating with lawmakers requires an understanding of how business is conducted on the political landscape. If the objective is to get your point across then it is important to understand these rules of the game:

- **Time is precious.** Letters, phone calls, and office visits to your lawmaker should be concise and to the point.
- **A lawmaker's staff is very important** since they are often the ones who prepare the issue summary and vote recommendation. Don't be offended if you are scheduled to meet with a staff member instead of your legislator. In many cases meeting with the staff is the best way to accomplish your mission.
- **Take advantage of the strength of numbers.** Many issues are decided on the volume of individualized communications a lawmaker received on a topic.
- **Personal commitment.** The more responsibility and involvement you assume, the more vigorous the commitment and support you can expect from your lawmaker.
- **Always follow-up** with letters, calls, and any information you promised to provide. This demonstrates a commitment to your cause. Notes of appreciation, hand written thank you notes, for time and visits will set you apart from the hundreds of other constituents visiting/calling that week.
- **Understand the issue or principle you are fighting for** so you can explain it in simple and straightforward terms. Don't use professional "jargon" use layman's terms to avoid alienation.
- **Be informed.** Learn as much as you can in advance about the legislators that you are trying to influence. To be most effective, tailor your approach to what you know about the person.
- **Have materials in writing** to leave behind. Use any opportunity to provide your lawmaker with a position paper.
- **Be patient** since the process is designed to move slowly sometimes.
- **Know your opposition.** Acknowledge the rough spots of your position early and work on them with your lawmaker instead of just "glossing over" the tough questions. Be prepared with answers to the opposition that is sound, factual and fair.
- **Be flexible.** Understand that compromise is part of the legislative process.
- **Use the news media** (letters to the editor, guest editorials, news stories, etc.) to help create public support for your positions. Send copies of positive coverage to your legislators.
- **Be honest and factual.** Be sure the information you provide is accurate so you establish and maintain credibility. Never lie since anything less than full honesty will erode your lawmaker's faith in you and your message.
- **Stay professional** and avoid partisan positions or comments.
- **Balance.** Do be a good winner and a good loser since your adversary on one issue might be your ally on the next.

The Game Plan

The Legislature is an unpredictable place, a political institution made up of people with different personalities, political persuasions and goals. Trying to sketch out the Legislature's rules and strategies, which can affect the legislative process, is difficult. Both the rules and the strategies change frequently and often without notice.

Political agreements that create laws are ultimately deals made among individuals. These individuals, both staff members and legislators, are subject to personal whims and come to the Legislature with different ideologies, experiences, and ambitions. Imposing a rigid game plan on the group is impossible and only leads to frustration.

Flexibility and willingness to modify strategies and positions are critically important to passing NYSPA's legislation. An ability to respond quickly to changing events is essential. For instance,

- NYSPA cannot control when a bill will be put on a committee agenda, or the committee schedules
- There are often issues, like the state budget, that take precedent over everything else
- Legislators are bombarded with information from all angles on an ongoing basis and they have to do their best to answer to ALL of their constituency, there will be times when compromise is required to get a bill introduced or passed

Beginning on page 18 of this document is a general timeline of how local advocacy networks should proceed and how the legislative process unfolds. Remember, everything may change on short notice.

"Those who do not know the plans of competitors cannot prepare alliances. Those who do not know the lay of the land cannot maneuver their forces. Those who do not use local guides cannot take advantage of the ground."

Sun Tzu, the Art of War

Getting Started

The first step is to poll your group to see where you stand on current relationships. Ask everyone that you represent to answer the following questions:

- Who is your Senator? _____
- Do you currently have a relationship with your Senator? ____ Yes ____ No
 - If yes, check all of the items below that describe the relationship.
 - ___ I know him/her personally.
 - ___ We are related.
 - ___ Strong, we have mutual interest and I can easily get an appointment
 - ___ I contributed to his/her campaign
 - ___ I have met formally at an event
 - ___ I have visited his/her office in the past to discuss an issue
 - ___ Other _____

- Who is your Assembly person? _____
- Do you currently have a relationship with your Assembly person? ____ Yes ____ No
 - If yes, check all of the items below that describe the relationship.
 - ___ I know him/her personally.
 - ___ We are related.
 - ___ Strong, we have mutual interest and I can easily get an appointment
 - ___ I contributed to his/her campaign
 - ___ I have met formally at an event
 - ___ I have visited his/her office in the past to discuss an issue
 - ___ Other _____

Once you have determined the strength of the relationships within your group you can pair people so that those that are more experienced can work with those that are just getting started in their advocacy efforts.

Even if your group is experienced at advocacy, it would be a good idea to schedule an advocacy training session from NYSPA. NYSPA's legislative committee will arrange for the NYSPA/NYSUT lobbyist to attend. The lobbyist will be able to review the process of the legislature and bring everyone up to date on the current issues. The legislative committee leaders can organize role-playing activities that will help those that have not made advocacy calls before more comfortable with the process and better understand the expectations of the introductions and advocacy sessions.

It is very important that the results of all contacts are reported to the legislative committee. The lobbyist is able to use this information in follow-up with the legislators and the committee can better organize follow up materials that have been requested by the legislative offices.

The best first visits are local visits.

There are several ways to take the first step and become politically involved. When legislators are in Albany there is a lot of demand for their time from many different sources. If you are not known by the legislator then you will most likely get an appointment with a staff person. Your first introduction is best to made in a setting where you can have the legislator's focused attention. Once you begin to build this relationship your legislator, the goal is to become a "reliable and trusted" source of information on topics related to psychology and mental health.

A few simple ways to get attention at a local level:

- While the legislator is in town (away from Albany), invite them to speak at a local public education event, civic meeting, religious event or other organized activity where they can be in front of constituents in a positive manner. This is especially favorable during an election year.
- Become involved with voters registration campaigns. Be sure the legislator receives a notice that the campaign is active. They cannot participate, but knowing that you/your profession are actively recruiting more voters in his/her district will get attention.
- Begin educating your lawmaker about issues by arranging for a town meeting of your colleagues and other business people to discuss topics important to psychology, access to care and patient concerns. Make the issues relevant to the constituency.
- Introduce your legislator to programs that will benefit their community relationship – Psychologically Healthy Workplace program; Mind/Body Health Awareness; YMCA partnerships addressing psychological issues; Community Mental Health Fair.
- Finally, when you can, give a little back by contributing time or financially to your legislator's campaign or to the NYSPA Political Action Committee – PLANYS. This is always noticed and noted by legislators.

These lobbying efforts will pay off by:

- Creating or maintaining a favorable relationship that allows for the legislator to rely on you for information regarding legislation that involves psychology
- Enhancing a legislator's opinion of psychology as a vital part of the continuum of care
- Minimizing unfavorable legislation toward psychology related issues
- Establishing contacts within government before a crisis arises will make urgent contacts more productive when a quick turnaround is needed

GETTING TO KNOW YOUR LEGISLATOR

To educate and influence your legislators, psychologists need to know something about them. Obviously, this is an ongoing process. Noted below are some items you should know about your elected representatives, most of this information can be found on their biography page.

What you should know about your legislator:

- *Education* – Where did they go to school? Do you have any ties with the school? Similar degree, fraternity, sorority, activities, etc.
- *Profession* – Where do they work and what is their previous work experience? Is there a family business? Are you a patron of the business?
- *Organizational Affiliation* - What groups are they involved with, civic, religious, etc? Do you share common memberships or affiliations?
- *Political History* – How long have they been in office? By what margins have they won their past elections? What previous posts have they held? Who are potential opponents in the next election and are they a serious threat?
- *Record* – What is their voting record on important issues? What issues are they most involved in? What are the key issues affecting your community? If you can thank them for past support this would be well received and noted.
- *Political Support* – Who are the main contributors to their campaign? Who are their allies? What neighborhoods, towns or villages provide support? Who influences them? Are you affiliated with a union, company or other group that supports them?

Obtaining this information is easy. Remember they are a public official; therefore their lives are no longer private. Knowing this information will help when deciding how to communicate your message effectively. Even if you do not agree with the position of the legislator, they are the elected official of the moment and their support is still needed when the vote is called either from their committee(s) or the full Assembly or Senate.

Biography pages can be found at:

Senate	http://www.nysenate.gov/senators
Assembly	http://assembly.state.ny.us/mem/

Additional information can be obtained through the following sources:

- Call legislator's office and ask to be placed on their mailing lists to receive newsletters and news alerts.
- The *New York Red Book* provides biographical sketches of all New York legislators. The sketches are written by the members and include useful information. The *Red Book* is usually available in public libraries.
- Newspapers are a good source of information. Psychologists can keep current on local political events and their legislators' activities by following the local press. In New York City, the major dailies will only focus on the "big" issues and the "big" players, but community papers carry columns written by elected officials and information about local legislators.
- Information on who funds a legislator's campaign is public record and has to be disclosed by the NYS Board of Elections. The information can be obtained by writing to the NYS Board of Elections, One Commerce Plaza, P.O. Box 4, Albany, NY 12222 or visiting the website <http://www.elections.state.ny.us/contribandexpend.html>.

Building a Relationship with Your Legislator

Annual meetings through group efforts such as Lobby Day are not enough to create and strengthen a relationship with a legislator. Establishing meaningful legislative contacts usually involves addressing mutual concerns and interests. Here are some ideas on how to proceed:

- **Identify opportunities**, which lead to contact or **joint projects** with a legislator. An outgrowth of this contact might be collaborative work to address the issue. Working collaboratively on an issue will, at the very least, improve communications and establish a rapport; at best it could win support on other issues.

For instance:

- If your Assemblyperson/Senator is active on issues relating to a particular social issue that has a mental health connection –
 - assist them with opportunities to be visible by holding a public education seminar in your community and inviting them to say a few words
 - provide supporting information that will help them advance the issue
- **Introduce your Assemblyperson/Senator to the Psychologically Healthy Workplace Program.** They may identify a company within the community to nominate; this will provide them with positive PR while educating them on a strong psychologically healthy message.
- **Identify known allies** of the legislator who might be helpful. These might be neighbors, religious leaders, health care administrators, other elected officials, etc. These individuals can

provide an introduction and be enlisted to provide credibility for psychologists when they first approach a legislator.

- **Attend a community meeting** where your legislator is speaking. Use this as an opportunity to introduce yourself. Unless the event is focused on psychologist-related issues, it might not be a good idea to ask a detailed question about mental health issue. It may put a legislator in an awkward spot trying to answer a question on an unfamiliar topic. It's better to ask general questions in public sessions, ("Do you feel mental health care is receiving adequate attention in the governor's health reform program?"). Follow up by scheduling a meeting at his/her office to further discuss particular issues.

DO NOT – embarrass the legislator by putting him/her on the spot, asking a complicated question in a public forum, or appear to be “attacking” in your approach to get an answer or make a point. Even if you do not agree with the person's politics, you may need their support on an issue while they are in office.

- If you see a legislator taking a position on any issue, which you support, let him/her know that you appreciate them and their support. Legislators rarely feel appreciated and it will be noticed and noted that someone has **thanked them**. Writing a letter to the editor of your local newspaper commending the legislator is even more appreciated as it provides public recognition.
- If you, or someone you know, are involved in **community work** (e.g. food bank, youth center, etc.) invite the legislator to visit the site. Highlight the legislator's visit in a newsletter. While showing the legislator around, raise the fact that you are a psychologist and would like to meet on psychology related issues in the future.
- **Invite your representative** to meet with a group of psychologists. The meeting could take place in a legislator's office, or better, at a site (outpatient program, youth center, etc.) where psychologists are employed. This is a good opportunity to help the legislator understand the profession and to advance NSYPA's agenda.

You should begin to see a pattern in the relationship building. Provide opportunities for positive interaction with your legislator. Call on them to provide assistance and offer support **BEFORE** you call on them to ask for support or to help with making changes. Build the relationship.

“All politics is local”

Tip O'Neil, former House

HOW TO LOBBY YOUR LEGISLATOR

Now that you have developed a relationship with your Legislator it is time to get to the business of lobbying and raise those issues that are important to you, a constituent. The most effective way to raise issues with a legislator is to schedule a meeting on a specific topic. Meeting legislators in their districts is much more effective than traveling to Albany. Some legislators require a letter prior to scheduling a meeting explaining the purpose of the meeting; for others a phone message is sufficient. Even if not required, give the legislator's scheduling person the purpose of the meeting, the specific issues to be raised and who will attend. This avoids surprises and allows a legislator to prepare for the meeting. Catching them off guard will only make them uncomfortable and create a bad impression.

Meeting With Your Legislator

When you initially contact your lawmakers to propose a meeting introduce yourself and make it clear that you are a constituent. Tell them precisely who you are, what the purpose is, and mention others who will attend the meeting.

Be courteous and relaxed. While we should show respect for our elected officials, we do not need to be intimidated by them. They are neighbors, friends, parents - real people with real concerns and problems similar to your own. They are genuinely interested in how their constituents feel and are eager to learn relevant facts.

Below are some tips to keep in mind when scheduling the appointment.

- **Scheduling the meeting several weeks in advance** by contacting your legislator's district office, generally, legislators are in Albany from January to July, and from Monday to Wednesday each week. If possible, try to have the meeting near the end of the week in a setting that gives the legislator a feel for the profession, such as community mental health center, hospital or school. You are more likely to get a positive response to the meeting if you have a small group of constituents at the meeting, with a specific topic to address.
- If feasible, **send a confirmation letter with a small packet of materials** (e.g. bills, background papers) prior to the meeting with the legislator. Your letter should explain the enclosed materials and express your application for being able to meet with the legislator.
- In most situations, the **meeting should be small** (fewer than five people). However, in some circumstances, it may help to bring a larger group to show the breadth of support for a position. **Ideally, the meeting should include constituents – voters receive priority.**
- Don't be surprised if there are **last-minute changes**. Legislators' schedules are full and unexpected events may take precedence. If the legislator does not attend the meeting, do not take it personal. It is still very valuable to meet with a **staff member as they are very important**; legislators rely on these individuals to provide them with specific information on the many issues that they address every day. It is a good practice to have a positive relationship with key staff; they can many times be the gatekeeper that determines whether or not you get an appointment. Be sure that you make it clear, without slighting the staff person you still want to meet with the legislator at a later date.

- **Indicate that you will bring a camera.** Legislators love a photo opportunity with constituents. This will also reiterate with the legislator that you are anticipating meeting with them in person.
- Psychologists should **strategize and organize** before the meeting. Identify a person who will keep the group and legislator focused. Since several people may want to present information, determine roles, speaking parts and speaking order. Establish who will speak, and for how long. Keep in mind, the legislator is not a psychologist (in most cases) and will have lay person knowledge, at best, on the issues. Information needs to be explained in simple terms and in an organized manner. The legislator may also attempt to change the subject, have a plan to get them back on track.
- **Set the goal** of the meeting before it begins. Is it to get the legislator to sponsor a bill? Hold a hearing? Come to a community meeting? Vote for a bill in committee? Don't be satisfied with a general message of support. Get specific about exactly what you want the legislator to say or do. Stay on track with the goal.
- **Be prepared.** Know the issues, the status of the bill and whatever else is needed to accomplish the goal. Know the arguments in opposition, since the legislator may have already met with those offering opposing views. Don't talk too much. Let the legislator ask questions and express an opinion. However, try to avoid letting the meeting drift. Keep it focused and watch the clock. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't bluff. Simply state that you do not have the answer now, but you will get it and offer to supply them with an answer at a later date - then promptly do it.
- Ask the legislator the **name of a staff person** who will work on this issue. This person may be the one to follow-up with regularly. Copy all correspondence to the legislator to this staff person. Staff support is key.
- **Never be rude.** Be forceful in raising an issue, but never lose your temper or threaten the legislator. Threats usually are ineffective and only harden positions and cause bad impressions not only for the individual, but the profession and NYSPA.
- Ask lawmakers to state their position. If it differs with yours, ask what information or show of public support is necessary to change that position. If they've not decided, ask what information and public support you can supply to help with the decision making. Listen carefully to their answers.
- Ask the legislators if they will let you know when something comes up which involves your business. Offer to be a resource and provide them with a business card. Always have "position papers" or "leave behinds" which clearly state your positions and logic.
- **Follow-up the meeting with a letter thanking the legislator**, restating any specific commitment the legislator made or repeating your argument. Follow-up with appropriate action to ensure everything promised to be done has been accomplished. Promptly provide additional information if the legislator requested.
- **Communicate all correspondence with NYSPA's Legislative Committee.** It is essential to provide information about your meeting with NYSPA. NYSPA's Legislative Committee will be able to provide information that will allow a consistent message, provide recent information on relationships with the legislator whether favorable or opposing, and have our lobbyist join you for maximum impressions. Be sure to send a copy of the Legislative Contact Form (Appendix A) immediately following the meeting. This will help NYSPA's lobbyist coordinate activities and keep abreast of new developments.

Writing and Calling Your Legislator

The Written Letter

Letters do make a difference! Legislators read and in most situations respond to the letters they receive. They gauge their response to issues from the position of their constituents.

Legislators receive hundreds of letters a week. To make your letter memorable, remember the basics:

- Personal, concise and correct.
- Use your own personal stationery or office letterhead.
- State your reasons for writing and explain who you are.
- Avoid exceeding the one page/subject per letter.
- Identify the bill number and the name of the bill early in the letter you are writing.
- Additional material can be provided in attachments to your letter.
- Personalize the letter by providing examples of how the subject you are writing about impacts you personally or in your business- and how it affects the constituency.
- If possible, offer solutions and don't take it for granted that the legislator understands the subject matter. Remember you are the expert.
- Ask for a reply stating the legislator's position.

In your letter ask the legislator to state their position; don't be surprised if they give you the run around. If they do, write again or telephone and ask for an appointment. Stress the importance of the issue to you. If their answer is an emphatic "no," don't threaten or "burn a bridge" — they may be with you on future issues. If their answer is "yes," a follow-up letter with a thank you is appropriate.

Don't forget to report the good news too. Tell your legislator about exciting psychological breakthroughs, for example. If there is an excellent article on a critical issue send a copy to your legislator or their legislative assistant who handles mental health affairs. Become a "pen pal" — a source of information that you're elected officials and their staff can depend on.

Properly Addressing the Letter

The procedures below should be used in email messages, as well as through the Postal Service.

New York State Legislature

Letter salutations should address the legislator with the appropriate title:

Senate: Dear Senator (full name)
Assembly: Dear Assembly (man/woman) (full name)

Address Envelopes and letter address block in the following manner:

Governor _____
Executive Chamber
Albany, NY 12224

Senator (Full name)
NYS Senate
Office Building & Room #
Albany, NY 12247

The Honorable (Full name)
NYS Assembly
Office Building & Room #
Albany, NY 12248

Federal Correspondence

Addressing Members of Congress

Letter salutations should address the legislator with the appropriate title:

Senate: Dear Senator (full name)
House of Representatives: Dear Representative (full name)

To Your Senator:
The Honorable (full name)
(Room #) (Name) Senate Office Building
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

To Your Representative:
The Honorable (full name)
(Room #) (Name) House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Communicating by Telephone

A well-timed phone call can produce results. Calls are particularly valuable before an important vote either in committee or on the floor.

- Identify yourself as a constituent and be specific about what you are supporting or opposing. Give bill numbers if you have them.
- Leave your name, address, and phone number and ask to be kept up-to-date on this issue and your legislator's position.
- Most likely, you will not speak to the legislator. Ask for a staff person who works on mental health issues. At times, you may only be able to leave a brief message of support/opposition for a specific bill with an administrative staff member. Even this contact is worthwhile, since many legislators keep a tally of calls for or against a bill.
- To contact your legislator in Albany, go through the Assembly/Senate switchboard. Call the main number and ask for your legislator's office.

Assembly Switchboard (518) 455-4100
Senate Switchboard (518) 455-2800

U.S. Capitol Switchboard (202)224-3121
Ask for your senators' and/or representative's office.

Developing Your Local Grassroots Efforts

Most regions and Divisions have representation on the Legislative Committee. These representatives should be your key contact for updates from the overall issues. If you do not know who your contact on the Legislative Committee is, contact NYSPA to get a list of representatives and contacts.

Legislative Committee Representatives will help to organize local efforts.

The first step for local organization would be to schedule an advocacy training session for your group. This session can be scheduled by contacting the Legislative Committee Chairs or Central Office. We will make an effort to have the lobbyist and Executive Director at each meeting, along with experienced NYSPA members to demonstrate through role playing exercises the best way to conduct a meeting with your legislator.

- Members of the Region/Division will need to bring together interested psychologists to discuss current issues facing the profession. Use a discussion item, such as managed care or health care reform, to attract psychologists to a meeting. This may also be an agenda item at your regional or division meeting. Spreading the word about a specific topic that will be discussed may attract more psychologists to your meeting.
- Following the discussion, concentrate on the need for psychologists to become active on public policy issues. Discuss the need to influence local officials and suggest ways to increase psychologists' involvement in public issues. Reassure newcomers that many other psychologists are involved in similar efforts and that there is strength in numbers.
- All psychologists that are participating in the grassroots efforts will need to know who their state and federal legislators are and how to contact them. This information can be located at <http://nymap.elections.state.ny.us/nysboe/>.
- Concentrate on continuously recruiting new members to your grassroots efforts. Keep focused on achievable goals and make sure the committee is action-oriented. Avoid becoming a discussion group of psychologists who only talk to each other. Look at opportunities for action, such as convening meetings with legislators, attending receptions for elected officials, planning coordinated letter-writing campaigns, placing op-ed articles, etc.
- Communicating with legislators requires an effective internal communication system. Whether notifying colleagues about an upcoming meeting or urging them to call a legislator before a key vote, you region should develop mechanisms for timely, effective communication.
 - a) Prepare a monthly or bimonthly e-news announcement with updates about ongoing and future events. List legislators' phone and fax numbers and other practical information. This will keep everyone up-to-date on the issues and progress as they develop.
 - b) Develop a phone/fax/e-mail tree to use when information must be quickly transmitted. The tree uses one psychologist to contact a handful (5-10) of other psychologists. Each of those individuals in turn is responsible for contacting other psychologists. A tree multiplies a small individual effort and speeds a response on developing issues.

- c) Integrate non-psychologist supporters into your communications network. Community members, friends, family members, colleagues in other professions (e.g. lawyers, teachers, etc.) may be willing to call a legislator.
- Finally, individuals will only stay involved if their experience is rewarding. People should enjoy meetings and find challenges in their work. Of course, some work, like stuffing envelopes, may not be immediately gratifying. However, the overall legislative experience needs to be. Keep this in mind as you create and strengthen you local efforts. Look to NYSPA’s Legislative Committee for support.

GETTING ELECTORALLY INVOLVED

As individuals, not as an association, you may wish to get involved in local election campaigns. Working on a campaign is a highly effective way to build ties with elected representatives.

Volunteer to campaign for a person you support. Always identify yourself as a psychologist active in legislative issues. You can get involved by:

- Volunteering at campaign headquarters or going door-to-door;
- Inviting colleagues to a “get to know the candidate” night at your home;
- Making a personal financial contribution to a campaign;
- Raising money from colleagues;
- Attending a fundraiser for a candidate;
- Putting up a lawn sign for a legislator;
- Writing a position paper on mental health issues.

Psychologists are encouraged to get involved in campaigns. It’s the strongest message of support a legislator can receive.

Voters Registration Campaign

Another way to get legislators attention is to get involve with a voter’s registration campaign. This may be a partnership with your region or division and a student group. Students can host the event on campus with select groups. This will show psychology’s involvement both to legislators and young professionals. If you are interested in organizing a voter’s registration campaign contact Central Office for support.

LEGISLATIVE CALENDAR

The New York State Legislature is in session January – June of each year. There are occasions when there will be special sessions called outside of those months. These special sessions are not typically planned and are due to circumstances outside of normal operations.

The New York State Legislative Session Calendar establishes a schedule for the Legislative session and provides dates important to the legislative process. The Session Calendar is intended to afford Members of the legislature flexibility in conducting legislative business in Albany and planning activities within their home districts. The Session Calendar will foster orderly and timely consideration of legislation. Unforeseen events may require modification of the Session Calendar.

The Senate and Assembly calendars are posted at the websites indicated below:

Senate	http://www.nysenate.gov/calendar
Assembly	http://assembly.state.ny.us/leg/?sh=cal

When the Legislature is out of session in Albany they are typically available in their home districts to meet with constituents. It is recommended that you contact the staff at the district office near you to schedule the appointment early. District office information can be found on the following websites. Information will include address, phone number and email contact for each legislator.

Senate	http://www.nysenate.gov/senators
Assembly	http://assembly.state.ny.us/mem/

MONTH –BY-MONTH OUTLINE

The monthly outline is a suggested plan of action for each month. The activities of each month are subject to change based upon the activities of the current landscape. It is a general guideline to help the local activities stay focused and work strategically.

JANUARY

Legislature

- The legislators return to Albany to begin the session. New York State runs on a 2 –year session with the 1st year in the odd numbered year and the 2nd year in even numbered year. January of 2010 will begin the 2nd session of the current 2 year session. This means that any bills not passed in the first session can still be addressed.

If it is the 1st year of the 2-year session, all bills that did not pass have to be re-introduced.

- On the first Wednesday following the first Monday in January, the governor releases the State of the State Message, which outlines his legislative objectives for the coming season.
- In mid-January, the governor presents the Legislature with his Executive Budget for the next fiscal year. The Executive Budget details proposed state spending and revenue.

Grassroots

- By the end of January, meetings with key legislators should be scheduled for February and March. By now, you will have received additional materials about NYSPA's priority issues. You will also have some idea of what bills may be moving to committee and other calendar items to note.

FEBRUARY/MARCH

Legislature

- The Legislature reviews and amends the governor's proposed budget during February and March. The last weeks of March are usually longer sessions, with a final marathon session that may run through the weekend, concluding with passage of the budget around April 1.

Grassroots

- Regional groups should reach out to the other professional associations, particularly nursing and social work, and local consumer groups (e.g. Alliance for the Mentally Ill. etc) to coordinate advocacy around a particular issue. NYSPA's Legislative Committee will provide information on key organizations that should be contacted.
- During this period, NYSPA and the NYSPA/NYSUT lobbyist will also meet with Legislators in Albany to secure their support for NYSPA's proposals. Until bills are introduced, a legislator cannot become a co-sponsor. You should, however, urge your legislator to sponsor a bill when it is introduced. We will keep you abreast of sponsorship developments.

The legislative committee will provide information on which legislators need to be contacted and what message should be conveyed. There is a lot of strategy in gaining support for bills, it is very important they the messages to the legislators be simple, consistent and unified with the profession. Otherwise we appear divided and no one wins.

APRIL/MAY

Legislature

- Lobby Day is typically in April, check the dates with NYSPA at www.nyspa.org. For 2015, Lobby Day is Tuesday, April 28th.

- There will be a recess that coincides with Easter/Passover holidays. After the recess, committees consider the bills. If NYSPA's bills are introduced by this time, its likely committees will consider them. NYSPA will keep you posted on timing.
- The budget does not always pass on time. Several years ago it was not completed until late June, so this can affect the timing on other issues.

Grassroots

- Following the recess, it's important to keep the pressure on legislators. Send letters to them. As part of your local group's activities, recruit potential allies to increase support on NYSPA's issues. Remember to get your colleagues, consumer groups, providers, friends, etc. to write letters to state lawmakers.
- This time of year it is possible that there could be very timely contacts required. This is where the phone tree will come in to play (page 15). Bills may go to committee for a vote with very little notice. When that happened we will need all of the legislators in that committee to be contacted with the message of "pass" or "do not pass" – whatever the issue is that we have been fighting.

Again, work with the NYSPA legislative committee to make sure that the message is consistent with the overall message that NYSPA has been delivering.

JUNE/EARLY JULY

Legislature

- June is a frenetic month, as the Legislature moves to end its regular session. Hundreds of bills are passed in the final weeks. During this time, it is difficult to reach legislators in their local offices. If it is the 2nd year of a 2-year session it is even more important for bills to pass.
- The fate of most of NYSPA's bills will be decided now. Bill language changes daily. Contact the NYSPA Legislative Committee chair(s), your representative on the committee, or NYSPA's Central Office for the latest developments.

Grassroots

- Again, this month may be a time for the phone tree to go into effect. Stay tuned to your committees correspondence to know where we stand on the issues. Be sure to report visits or phone calls to NYSPA's Legislative Committee so they can be documented for future reference.

JULY

Legislature

- Bills passed by the Legislature are now forwarded to the governor. The governor may either veto or sign into law bills passed by both houses of the Legislature. If the governor gets a bill, which he may veto, mobilizing on a grassroots level is necessary.

Grassroots

- At this point – if the legislative season is on schedule our focus may need to shift from lobbying the senators and assembly people to lobbying the governor. Calls and letters may be needed to encourage the governor to sign a bill into law.
- This would be a good time to send a thank you note to a legislator that signed onto or voted in favor of a bill that was lobbied for by NYSPA. The bills and their supporters will be supplied by the NYSPA Legislative Committee.

AUGUST - NOVEMBER

Legislature

- The legislature is on their summer recess, they may have special sessions depending on the activity of the previous sessions. This is the time to regroup and get organized for the next year.

Grassroots

- These are the months to plan your visits in the home district offices. Be sure to report visits to NYSPA's Legislative Committee so they can be documented for future reference.
- If you do not have a list of your legislators in your region, begin to compile this information. (See the "Know Your Legislators" section.)
- This would be a good time to follow up with legislators that were helpful in the previous session, introduce yourself to a new legislator, invite legislators to speak to your division or region (be sure to schedule as far in advance as possible) and introduce yourself to the staff of the legislator.
- If the next year is the 1st year of the 2-year session then there may be bills that will need to be re-introduced or there may be new issues that you will need to become familiar with.
- If it is the 2nd year of the 2-year session it is time to review the bills that did not pass and work with the NYSPA Legislative Committee on new strategies and alliances. If your legislator is

one of the opponents of the bill, now would be a good time to schedule a meeting with several constituents. You should involve the NYSPA/NYSUT lobbyist.

- In even years, the election season begins. Legislators facing primary challenges in September will be aggressively campaigning. Keep your eyes and ears open and get involved. Public officials are most representative to their constituents during elections.
- Local meetings with legislators should be held. Depending on the closeness of the relationship with particular legislators, these may be introductory sessions to explain the practice of psychology and present an overview of NYSPA issues or in-depth discussions on specific bills

The goals of these meetings include:

- a) Developing or improving a relationship with the legislator;
- b) Obtaining a commitment to sponsor a bill when it has been introduced;
- c) Obtaining support for NYSPA's managed care agenda and a commitment to sponsor this legislation when it is introduced.

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER

Legislature

- The cycle begins again. Regardless of who wins the election, the Legislature resumes in January. Late November through mid-December is a good time in an election year to renew acquaintances with legislators who have been re-elected, and begin to build relationships with the freshman legislators.
- The cycle is continuous and groups with perseverance often emerge victorious.

Grassroots

- Organize your local advocacy network. Regions are at different development stages, but this is the time to make plans to move ahead.
 - a) Convene a meeting of psychologists interested in scope of practice issues, managed care or other NYSPA issues.
 - b) Form a communications network that links psychologists with legislators. For example, all psychologists in a particular Assembly and Senate district should be identified and put onto a fax/phone/email tree for community (e.g. health care administrators, family members) who will assist in advocacy efforts.

APPENDIX A

Legislative Visit Report Form

NYSPA Representatives: _____

Person Completing Form: _____

Office Visited: Sen/Assem. _____ Was the legislator present? Yes No

Staff person you met with (*be sure to get his or her name and title*):

Items discussed, include as much detail as possible, bill numbers, topics, regulations, etc.

Response from the Legislator or staff, include comments, pro and con:

Please return this form to NYSPA at the following options:

Fax: 518-437-0177

Email: nyspa@nyspa.org (Subject: Legislative Visit)

Mail: 3 Pine West Plaza, Ste 308, Albany, NY 12205