



advocacy

**CAPITOL DAY
A HOW-TO GUIDE**



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CAPITOL DAY:

A How-to Guide

What is a capitol day?

A capitol day—sometimes called a lobby day, day on the hill, advocacy day, or interior design day—is an event that allows interior design advocates to connect with elected officials and their staff through meetings and awareness events at the state capitol. Typically, advocates meet with legislators and their staff; however, sometimes advocates also meet with executive branch staff or agency staff. The objective is to raise awareness of and support for favorable interior design legislation. Coalitions and Chapters should use “capitol” as opposed to “capital,” since the activity refers to the actual building where legislation is passed and not the city or town.

Why should we have a capitol day?

Capitol days are an important tool that allows interior designers to connect with their legislators. Personal interaction from constituents is an extraordinarily effective method for affecting change with legislators. In fact, studies show that the most effective way to influence a legislator is a personal relationship with a constituent. When a group of interior designers arrive at the capitol, it amplifies the message of those interior designers and has a lasting impact on legislators.

When should we have a capitol day?

Any Chapter or coalition with committed advocates can benefit from a capitol day. It should be held annually or during each session of the legislature. It is most effective when the organization has a specific “ask,” such as encouraging support for or opposition to a specific bill.

How do we get people to participate?

It takes more than just sending out an action alert email. While that is a fantastic place to start, emails are not going to compel most people to attend a capitol day. Chapters and coalitions need to market their capitol days. Physical materials can include collateral like brochures or postcards that can be distributed to firms or at industry events; online marketing should include information on the Chapter’s and coalition’s websites as well as on social media networks. If possible, issue a press release to the newspaper in the capital city or to local industry publications. Place an article or column in the coalition’s newsletter, as well as in partner organization’s newsletters. Additionally, IIDA HQ can share Facebook or Twitter posts from the Chapter about upcoming capitol days. Make sure that all materials clearly state the date, time, location, purpose, and a link to a webpage that has all the details. Engage all organizations that are partners in the coalition, and use all of the networks available to you to create as much buzz around the event as possible.

Finally, ask people to participate. Often, the best way to get individuals involved is to ask them by phone or in person. Encourage board members or advocates to ask colleagues, IIDA Members, and other interior designers to attend. It is much harder to say “no” to someone directly than it is to ignore an email.

Key points to consider when creating marketing materials:

- Let advocates know why their voice matters as a constituent.
- Make it clear to attendees that they’re agreeing to meet and talk with legislators at the state capitol. Provide tips and talking points to help them.
- When advocates register for a capitol day, make sure the registration captures all the information you need to match individuals with their legislators.
- Establish an early bird deadline, so it will be easier to schedule meetings.

STEPS TO ORGANIZING A CAPITOL DAY

1. Prepping

Once the coalition or Chapter decides to have a capitol day, it is essential to organize and prep thoroughly to ensure a quality event that achieves its goal.

First, the coalition or Chapter needs to decide if it will be a standalone event or connected to another event, such as an advocacy week. The Chapter will need to decide on a date, which is dependent on when a legislature is in session. A lobbyist can help determine the best time. In addition, organizers should consider the length of the event since some advocates may only be available for part of a day. It may be worthwhile to be flexible about when advocates have to be there. If an advocate is only available for their meeting, they should still attend.

Organizers should ask themselves:

- When is the state legislature in session?
- Are there too many capitol days at the same time? Some organizations and causes have very large capitol days; it is in the best interest to schedule an interior design capitol day on a different day.
- Will the issue be considered during budget hearings? Typically, state legislatures take up the state's budget during a set period of time. Very rarely will interior design legislation be considered during budget hearings. It would be best to schedule a capitol day before or after.
- When will attendees be available to attend?

The Chapter or coalition also needs to determine if any partnerships are feasible, such as industry members, firm owners, and associations representing related professions. The strength of a message can be increased with more and varied voices. However, prior to establishing a partnership for the event, organizers must be assured that the partner has a common policy issue, there are not an overwhelming number of asks, and a process for coordinating and sharing information is established.

Typically, Chapters or coalitions cover the costs for the event by hosting fundraisers prior to capitol day. Depending on available funds, some Chapters and coalitions provide transportation to and from the capitol; others help organize carpools to minimize the cost of travel; still others ask advocates to provide their own transportation. Be sure that advocates are aware of the travel options to the capitol.

Capitol day organizers will also need to decide who will set up the meetings. There are three basic options:

- Advocates schedule their own meeting.
 - » Advocates are responsible for scheduling their own meetings with legislators. This takes less work for the organizers. However, it puts more work on attendees who may resist reaching out to make appointments. Additionally, advocates in the same district may schedule meetings with the same legislator at different times. Advocates may also schedule meetings on a different day or at the district office. Furthermore, the organizers may not be aware of all the meetings.
- Organizers schedule the meetings.
 - » Organizers have names and addresses for all the attendees. The organizers then determine the legislative districts of the attendees. Based on this information, organizers schedule meetings. This is more work for organizers, but keeps things more organized and easier to group advocates from the same district together and have multiple voices in one meeting with a legislator.
- Lobbyists schedule the meetings.

- » If the coalition or Chapter has hired lobbyists, those lobbyists can help facilitate the meetings. Often times, lobbyists may be more successful in scheduling meetings, particularly with leadership.

2. Collecting Information

After determining the organization of the event, organizers need to collect all the needed information.

- Legislator contact information: District, office location, phone number, email, biographical information, committee assignments, staff names, and if the legislator is in leadership.
- Advocate contact information: Home address, cell phone number, email, association affiliation, and business address. Ask advocates if they already know or have a relationship with their local elected legislator. Organizers absolutely need the ZIP codes for addresses in order to match advocates with their legislators.

Organizers need to be able to keep track of everything. This can be done with in-depth spreadsheets or databases. Vendor software can also be used to keep track of everything.

3. Initiating the meetings

Initial meeting requests should be made approximately four to six weeks prior to the capitol day. Meeting requests should include: Constituent name(s), constituent city and state (if from a large city, include neighborhood), the policy ask, and details on time constraints (morning or afternoon). Please note that legislators may not be able to accommodate your schedule. Be polite and flexible.

Additionally, the organizers should reach out to the capitol's facility staff to reserve a meeting or conference room at the capitol or legislative offices building. This gives the capitol day a meeting location and a location for training, lunch, etc.

4. Scheduling

Only 10-20 percent of legislators' offices will respond to the initial request. This means that the person scheduling all the meetings will have to follow up with legislators' offices. Be persistent; call and email their offices until the meetings are scheduled.

If multiple advocates are from the same district, be sure to alert the legislator's staff that multiple advocates will be attending. Additionally, it may be a good idea to assign a "leader" to each group of advocates from the same district. The leader should be a more experienced advocate and will likely be the person who makes the policy ask.

Key questions to consider:

- Who is most important to meet with? Should advocates meet with committee members, sponsors, and leadership?
- Do the organizers have all the correct information, especially the advocate's address?
- Have the organizers considered all the logistics? How long will it take to walk between offices? Are all the offices in the capitol or are they in an attached building? Do any advocates require ADA-compatible spaces? How long are the meetings? Have you scheduled time for bathroom breaks or lunch?

5. Planning other activities

Organizers should consider planning other activities during the capitol day in addition to meetings. Almost all capitol days should have time at the beginning of the day to prep advocates. This prep should include a policy briefing and include background and overview of introduced legislation. This prep should also include what to expect in a meeting, an advocate's role, practice making the ask with a coordinated message, and the importance of filling out the feedback form. Organizers should also consider offering lunch if the capitol day lasts most of the day.

Other activities to consider during a capitol day include an opening reception, a closing reception, an advocate awards dinner, a dinner for legislators, and informative briefing on professional development, museum/monument/interior space tours, or general downtime.

6. Organizing

Organizers should provide materials for advocates, including:

- One-pager about issue.
- Other informational or educational leave-behinds about the value and impact of interior designers for legislators.
- Capitol map.
- Meeting schedule with details (who, what, where, when).
- Information on legislator with bio and position.
- Meeting feedback form.

Organizers should have:

- Master list including names, addresses, and cell numbers.
- Master schedule by district.
- Master schedule by time.

Day of event:

- Be sure everyone knows where to check in and pick up their schedule for the day.
- Be prepared for last minute changes. No matter how well organizers prepare, there will be changes. If possible, have a tablet or laptop available to make last minute changes to the schedule.
- Organizers should have a whiteboard or large pad available to write information that everyone will need. For example, if the committee hearing has a room change or you need to advocates to meet somewhere at a certain time.
- Organizers should monitor registration to ensure that at least one advocate from each group is in attendance.
- Organizers should also work to mitigate the no-shows. This can be done by making registrants fully aware that appointments are being made on their behalf and keeping them in the loop with consistent communication.

7. Reporting

After the event, organizers should collect the feedback forms. Bill sponsor(s), lobbyists, and legislative leaders should be made aware of comments made by legislators. If legislators request more information, then the advocates should let the appropriate person know to follow up.

Organizers should catalog which legislators were supportive, neutral, or opposed to the bill and the reason. They should also note which legislators had meetings and which did not.

If possible, provide thank you cards with the IIDA logo or the logo of the organization that coordinated the capitol day. Have advocates complete the cards as they finish their meetings with legislators. Be sure organizers know who the card is intended for. A handwritten note is a great way to make a positive impression on a legislator.

Send photos and recaps to Abby Rathbun, arathbun@iida.org, to share via social media.

Source: Advocacy Handbook: A Practitioner's Guide to Achieving Policy Goals through Organization Networks, Stephanie D. Vance, 2009, Columbia Books, Bethesda, MD