



VPA LEGISLATIVE PROTOCOLS

[11/07]

Legislative Responsibilities:

Legislative Liaison (LL) – elected every two years under bylaws

- Represent VPA's legislative interests
- Coordinate VPA's legislative work through the Executive and Legislative Committees, VPA Listserv
- Register as the VPA legislative liaison with the Secretary of State's office (lobbyists), if required
- Track/report VPA legislative expenditures under adopted budgets
- Chair Legislative Committee
- Track legislation, identify bills of interest to planning community
- Provide regular legislative updates to membership
- Serve as VPA's primary legislative contact for scheduling, responding to legislative and administrative requests
- Represent VPA on the NNECAPA Executive Committee as the Vermont Legislative Representative

Legislative Committee (LC) – ad hoc committee open to all members

- Draft position papers, briefs for VPA-sponsored legislation (e.g., white papers, studies, draft legislation)
- Annually identify annual legislative priorities, poll membership
- Draft written testimony on bills of interest for Executive Committee consideration
- Testify before legislative committees upon request

Executive Committee (EC) – elected to represent VPA

- Adopt, periodically update VPA legislative protocols
- Identify planning issues to be addressed through VPA-proposed legislation – e.g., as included in VPA's strategic plan, as identified at annual meetings, or as requested by members
- Appoint Legislative Committee (every two years)
- Recommend, review and endorse VPA position papers, briefs submitted by the Legislative Committee
- Annually review and endorse legislative priorities submitted by Legislative Committee prior to session
- Review/endorse testimony, bill language drafted by the Legislative Committee as needed during the session

Legislative Process:

- Elect VPA's Legislative Liaison (VPA, 2-yr term)
- Establish VPA's legislative budget, reimbursement policy, per federal and state requirements (EC)
- Appoint Legislative Committee for 2-year period, prior to initial session (EC)
- Identify planning legislation, position papers, policy briefs to be developed by Legislative Committee (EC)
- Draft position papers, briefs for consideration by members, EC (LL, LC)
- Adopt, distribute VPA position papers, briefs (EC)
- Identify annual legislative priorities, with input from membership, for review/endorsement by EC prior to legislative session (LL, LC)
- Endorse annual legislative priorities (EC)
- Establish legislative contacts – Legislative Council, committees (LL, LC)
- Make it known that VPA is available to testify on topics included in VPA's legislative priority list
- Maintain key alliances with related organizations (VLCT, VAPDA, SGV, etc.) (EC, LL, LC,)
- Track/ report on legislation of interest to membership through VPA Listserv (LL)
- Review legislative priorities following crossover deadline (LL, LC, EC)
- Prepare written/oral testimony on legislation, with input from VPA members where feasible (LL, LC)
- Endorse, in a timely manner (e.g., majority vote via e-mail), written/oral testimony prior to submission or presentation to legislature (EC)
- Testify before committee (LL, LC and EC members)

Because of the need for timely responses during the legislative session, it's very important that:

- Legislation of interest is closely tracked – consider funding “eyes and ears” at the state house to track legislation through committees and floor votes as annual budget and nonprofit status permits.
- Legislative priorities are assigned to one or more legislative committee members who agree to do the necessary background research (including membership polls where appropriate) and drafting, and who will serve as the lead contact/rep for particular bills or legislative priorities.
- Draft testimony be reviewed by committees in a timely manner (e.g., within 24 hours of receipt) – in a very few cases it may be necessary to bypass legislative committee review and go directly to the executive committee for endorsement.

Testimony Guidelines:

- Testimony generally should be presented only upon request of a legislator or legislative committee, per our 501(c)(3) status.
- Present VPA position, as endorsed by Executive Committee, not that of a particular individual, community or organization – we're there to represent planners and good planning principles. Testimony should reflect and conform to any VPA-adopted position papers or policy briefs.
- Submit written testimony or summaries of oral testimony on VPA letterhead.
- Identify bill/draft number.
- Identify VPA legislative contact(s).
- When testifying, briefly describe VPA organization, personal qualifications, interest in topic.
- Keep written testimony/summaries brief, to the point – try to limit to one page, front and back and highlight/bullet key points.
- Provide interesting examples where appropriate – especially in response to specific questions – without focusing only on one particular community or region.
- Attach additional information, proposed bill language as appropriate.
- Get copy of testimony request form from Legislative Council, submit with expenses to Executive Committee for reimbursement.

APA Legislative Training Notes (Stephanie Vance, Advocacy Associates/ APA Lobbyist)

Myths	Realities
Good information rules	Good messages rule
Planning decisions are based on logic	Planning decisions are emotionally charged
Elected officials want to do what's best for everyone	Elected officials represent their constituency

To be effective, testimony must be engaging – it should:

- be constituent and coalition based –
 - strength in numbers
 - represent broad base that includes constituency organizations
- be grounded in expertise –
 - know what your talking about
 - focus on useful information
 - avoid or define professional jargon
 - self edit (most relevant v. merely interesting)
- provide information that committee members want and need, including information that is –
 - relevant (on topic, timely, and of interest)
 - specific (avoid generalizations and lengthy explanations)
 - personal (include compelling stories, examples)
 - interactive (don't just “educate” – ask questions, request feedback, get committee members personally involved, find out what they need)