

Lawmaking & Governing

★ EXPLAINED ★

Roadmap to State Budget Process General

Every state will engage in a legislative session this year. This is the time when the governor and state level representatives and senators propose and vote on legislation and the state budget. You can find the dates for your state's legislative session in this [tracker](#).



A very similar process happens at the local level between mayors and the city council. So if you are seeking investments at the local level, read on!

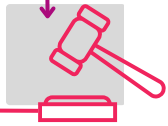
Start

State of the State

The legislative season typically kicks off with the governor's **state of the state address, a speech the governor uses to outline priorities for the year.** You might find your governor's included in this [compilation](#), but if not, these speeches are generally posted on a governor's website. You should be able to find them with a Google search of your governor's name and "state of the state 2023".

Budget Proposal

The governor and the rest of the executive branch team (that is, all the agencies that run programs, along with the governor's budget office) develop a proposed budget reflecting the priorities laid out in the state of the state address, which is then sent to the legislature for consideration. Depending on how often your state holds a legislative session, this could be an annual (one year) budget, or a biennial (2 year) budget. Biennial budgets are sometimes revisited in the off year through special sessions or amendments.



Budget Hearings

The legislature—both in the house and the senate—will generally hold two rounds of hearings on the budget.

One / The first round typically includes oversight hearings to assess agencies' performance over the last year.

Two / "The second round is focused on the budget for the next fiscal year.. (In some places, these rounds might be collapsed into just one set of hearings). These hearings are conducted by committees based on the different issue areas that are part of their jurisdiction (basically, their responsibility). Child care is commonly part of the jurisdiction of a committee on health and human services or child and family services. You can find a list of the committees, including the members of the committee and their hearing schedule, on the legislature's website.



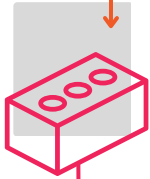
Committee Outreach

The membership of the committee is important, and you'll want to set up meetings with members to build relationships with them, learn about their priorities, and figure out who your champions and allies might be. These allies, and especially their staff, can help keep you informed about the schedule and any bills moving forward on child care issues. And you can offer them insights and background on child care, and questions that they should raise with officials and their colleagues during hearings and budget negotiations.

Ultimately, one of your goals should be to move into a "co-governance" relationship with your legislative allies –that is, they co-strategize with you about how together you will advance your policy goals with inside and outside action.



While it is good to talk directly with members, don't underestimate the value of having good relationships with their staff. These relationships are critically important, especially for situations that require a rapid response or frank analysis of the jockeying happening in the legislature.



Basebuilding

Understanding who is on the committee should also help guide your basebuilding, because legislators are always more responsive to their constituents. It's a good idea to map out who represents your members as part of your power analysis. This is also helpful because, in addition to the committees directly overseeing child care, there are committees (often called "Budget," "Finance," or "Appropriations") that wield power over the budgeting process. You will want to map and cultivate allies on these committees, too.



(A long term goal can be getting your child care champions elevated to a leadership position on one of these broader committees).



Public Testimony

Budget hearings are open to the public to testify. They are a good opportunity to:



Public Narrative Worksheet

1) Share your story about why public support for child care is essential and which investments you want to see reflected in the budget; and

2) Have lots of people show up to demonstrate how popular child care is to voters, and that you are all paying attention.



(In ways that easily identify them as child care supporters – think dressing in the same color, tshirts, buttons, posters)

The hearings are a rare window into the budget process that is usually not very transparent.

Lots of negotiations happen behind closed doors, between the governor and key legislators, and securing money in the budget takes persistence. Reaching out to committees before the budget hearings take place, following up on your testimony and staying in touch with legislators and the governor's office through phone calls and meetings, along with outside actions, are all necessary to get action on your demands.

Public Accountability



In most cases, the legislature and the governor negotiate a budget agreement that the legislature passes and the governor signs.

In 44 states, the governor has some “line item veto” authority, meaning s/he can veto individual items in the budget (you can check if your state is one of these here).

Actions to increase the visibility of your demands during these negotiations can be helpful to support your allies and pressure your opponents.



Once the Budget is Final

Once the budget is final, it’s time for some analysis. First, congratulations on working through this long process that isn’t always easy to understand or penetrate!

Did you get what you asked for? Some of it? None of it? Regardless of the outcome, public accountability is key. Figure out who was on your side – you’ll want to thank your supporters. You’ll also want to continue to push your opponents.

From this point on, your work should focus on two goals:

One / Making sure any investments you won are secure and implemented well. Politicians can change their minds and move funding in the next budget process, change priorities due to emergencies, or more. So, part of our work is keeping our elected officials accountable for the money they committed to spending, especially regarding child care, which is so often overlooked.

Two / Track the amount committed to the agencies and programs administering the funds. Follow up with the agencies to ensure they are implementing programs as designed and spending money that was allocated equitably. You will have an opportunity to champion this process or hold them accountable for the commitments made.



Building relationships for the next round.

Whether you got everything you wanted at this moment or were shut out of the budget, get ready to move forward. Campaigns take time and power. Figure out who was with you and who you need to hold accountable. Work with your legislative allies to cultivate them all as champions and strategize together about the next steps you'll take to advance your demands.

End