

Legislative Engagement Guide for Advocacy in Liberia (LEGAL)

Fostering Legislative Openness, Effectiveness and Responsiveness

2024

THE LEADERS OF THE LIBERIAN LEGISLATURE



Hon. Cllr. Jonathan Fonati Koffa

Speaker

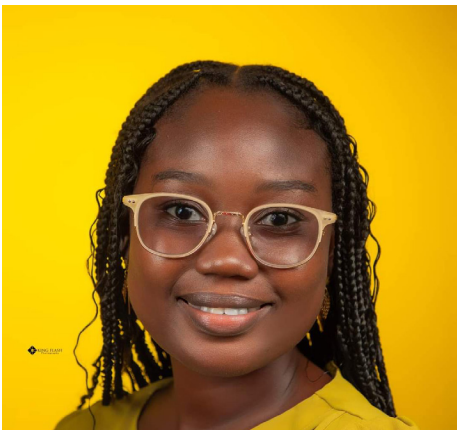
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FORWARD

The development of this Legislative Engagement Guide for Advocacy in Liberia (LEGAL) is inspired by Naymote Partners for Democratic Development decade-long advocacy to promote democratic accountability and transparency in Liberia's governance processes as well as increasing legislators' responsiveness to the needs and aspirations of the people who elected them. The guide is keen on practical experiences, best practices and strategies that have proven to be successful and effective during legislative advocacies and civic engagements.

The primary objective of this guide is to promote the culture of legislative openness and responsiveness in Liberia. Additionally, the guide endeavors to promote transparency in public policy formulation and ensure engagement of civil society organizations and citizens in the legislative process in Liberia.

This guide is a practical tool that can be used to engage the Liberian Legislature as the fulcrum of Liberia's democracy because of its constitutional responsibilities to enact laws, represent citizens' interests and oversee executive policy implementation and performance. It is also intended to improve young people's skills to engage in constructive legislative advocacy and monitoring from an informed perspective, being knowledgeable of its structures and functions as well as strategies to get the legislature working in the interest of the people.

This handbook provides an in-depth analysis of legislative advocacy highlighting the steps and tools to be used when advocating for the passage of a bill/legislation or to influence a legislative action. Moreover, this guide also comes in handy when engaging lawmakers to deliver on their campaign promises after being elected which they rarely do, especially in African nations of which Liberia is no exception.

It is my ardent hope that development partners, as well as ordinary Liberian citizens, especially the youth, women and other marginalized groups, will use the information contained herein and advocate for a people-centred governance process in Liberia by fostering legislative openness, transparency, accessibility, accountability and responsiveness.

Eddie D. Jarwolo
Executive Director

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To the thousands of Liberians who, since the formation of Naymote in 2001, have sought to be educated, empowered and engaged in democratic processes, a profound gratitude and thanks!

Most importantly, we wish to thank the hardworking employees and support staff of Naymote Partners for Democratic Development and our innovative team leader, Eddie D. Jarwolo, who provides unending inspiration.

INTRODUCTION

Liberia has a bicameral Legislature. It comprises a Senate, the upper house, and the House of Representatives, considered the lower house. The House of Representatives and Senate make up the Liberian Legislature. For the House of Representatives, the number of seats is fixed by law at 73, with each county being apportioned a number of seats based on its population. There are 30 seats at the Liberian Senate, with each county having two senators. The Legislative branch undertakes three cardinal functions: lawmaking, oversight and representation.

Lawmakers or legislators are the eyes and ears of their constituents (their citizens); they debate and adopt legislation to benefit all Liberians, and exercise oversight over the executive branch of government. In taking the oath of office, legislators commit themselves to uphold and defend the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Liberia and to conduct their responsibilities faithfully.



PART I

**CHAMBER POLITICS AND
LEGISLATIVE DEBATE OR
ARGUMENT AND SOME
LEGISLATIVE JARGONS**

WHAT IS A CHAMBER?

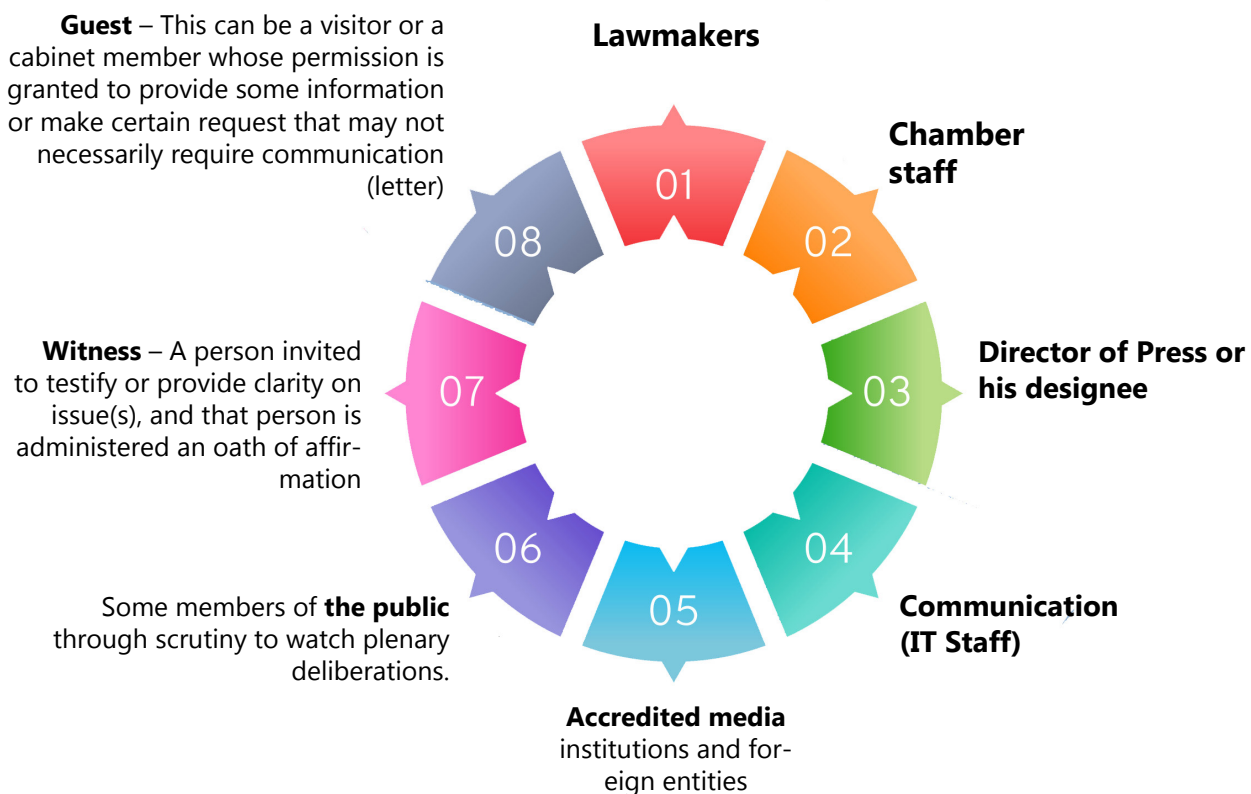
- Chamber of the Legislature is a place or room where all of the legislators or lawmakers assemble to discuss issues of national concern. The assembly of the lawmakers is called Plenary.
- Legislature around the world, especially bicameral Legislature has three chambers – The House of Representatives Chamber, Senate Chamber and Joint Chamber.
- Example of bicameral legislature: Liberia, US Congress, British Parliament, the Indian Parliament, etc.
- Example of unicameral legislature: Hungary, Sweden, ECOWAS Parliament, Pan African Parliament;
- The House's chamber is reserved for only members of the House of Representatives while the Senate's Chamber is reserved for only senators and the Joint Chamber is where the two Houses meet on occasion.

WHAT MAKES THE CHAMBER OF THE LEGISLATURE IMPORTANT AND “SACRED”?

- Article 42 of the Constitution protects each lawmaker on statement made in the chamber.
- It is a legislative pulpit; the Legislative Chamber protects lawmakers from arrest or any form of intimidation.
- All laws are enacted in the chamber.
- Major decisions for smooth running of the country are made in the chamber.
- The debate in the chamber is very time-bound.
- The manner in which one uses the chamber can gain him/her respect or lose respect.

NOTE: All lawmakers are required to act as diplomats in chambers; in that, they are required to refine statements made. With respect to language, the official language for deliberation in any of the legislative chamber is English.

WHO ARE ENTITLED TO GOING IN THE CHAMBER



PLENARY

- The Speaker presides over plenary sitting of the House, while the President Pro Tempore does for the Senate. The gavel of the Speaker or Pro tempore is the authority given him or her by colleagues (the lawmakers). The gavel symbolizes quietude (calmness; quietness) and perfects decorum (etiquette; good manner).
- Plenary is the assembly of lawmakers. It is the highest decision-making body for either the House of Representatives or Senate. Plenary is not a committee but acts on motion, tried and carried; it can resolve to a Committee of the Whole to act on critical national issue. It is very rare for plenary to resolve into Committee of the Whole.
- Plenary works through committees.
- When plenary meets, in the case of the House, the deliberations are presided over by the Speaker or Deputy Speaker. In the case of the Senate, the President of the Senate who is the Vice President of the Republic of Liberia or the President Pro Tempore presides; or any ranking member on either side.
- No one is allowed to speak until you are recognized by the presiding officer.

PLENARY MEETING DAYS

- The official meeting days for plenary are Tuesdays and Thursdays. Any other day outside of the official days of sitting is called Special Sitting.
- The legislature has four (4) different sittings during a session. They include:
 - **Regular Sitting** – (Tuesday and Thursday)
 - **Secret Sitting** – The public leaves the chamber and only lawmakers and those who supposed to be there are seated.
 - **Executive Sitting** – The Chief Executive (President) visits the legislature and hold meeting with the lawmakers. (It is important for the Chief Executive to visit the lawmakers).
 - **Extraordinary Sitting** – When the legislature closes and the President calls the lawmakers back from their break.

LEGISLATIVE DEBATE

A debate is a presentation by an individual(s) in support of a subject. It is a process that has two different sides – those who are supporting the subject matter under discussion who most times referred to as the PROs and those who are against the subject matter under discussion that are referred to as CONS.

- In legislative debate, the PROs and the CONS, in a persuasive manner, are putting forth their points for which the opposite side should join them.
- To make the debate more substantive and not lengthy, there are no repetitions allowed by the Presiding Officer who guides the exchanges.
- Every supporter of either side of the debate puts forward points to convince his/her colleagues to join him/her.
- No repetition allowed. Repetition in legislative debate prolongs issues under discussion, and makes the debate to lose substance; and to avoid that, each speaker at times is allotted time.

INFORMATION

- A lawmaker may call for "information". When such call is made, the caller can only speak by the mandate of the Presiding Officer or by the presiding officer recognition. Other than that, he/she will not provide the information.
- It is the Presiding Officer who determines whether the information provided is useful for the debate or not. If the information is useful for the purpose of the debate or discussion at hand, the Presiding Officer announces: "the information is sustained or information sustained".
- When the information is sustained, the person who was in speech continues with his/her presentation

unless he/she (presenter) decides otherwise.

- If the information is not useful for the debate, the Presiding Officer announces: "the Information is denied or information denied".
- Whether information is accepted or denied, it does not stop the person who was in speech from speaking. What it does is to keep the person on track of the deliberation. Information is to add intellectual ingredients to the debate. It provides clarity for a need to support the idea.

ORDER

- A colleague may call for or announce "Order!"
- "Order" is announced when a member who is in speech is observed to divert from the entire debate or issue under discussion and brings in other matter not related to the discussion.
- When the presiding officer accepts for the order to be heard, the person who was in speech yields to the 'Order' and listens to the 'Order.'
- Should the Presiding sustains the 'Order', it means the person who was in speech automatically sits and loses his/her time to speak.
- On the other hand, if the 'Order' is denied, he/she proceeds with his presentation.

OBSERVATION

- An observation is almost like "information" but it gives notice of certain procedural lapse or error.
- It ensures that issues are not repeated or certain procedure needs to be followed.

MOTION

- A motion, in a debate, is a proposed decision proffered by a lawmaker during a debate that states what should be done by plenary.
- It is the last point of any debate in every plenary's discussion and sitting.
- The motion is always clear and to the point. It is not ambiguous.
- It is finalization or determinant for the decision between the pros and cons, which requires a vote to be taken.
- All lawmakers are eligible to make a motion but only a person recognized by the Presiding Officer can make a motion.
- To determine whether a motion is accepted or not it has to be tried or tested.
- The manner in which the motion is tried can be determined by the presiding officer; unless out of certain controversy a member can call for either a roll call vote or head count or raising of hand.

SECOND THE MOTION

- A person who seconds a motion is as important as the person that makes a motion.
- No motion is considered as long as there is no second.
- The person who seconds a motion confirms the motion that is made. Legislatively, the person who seconds a motion is as significant as the person that makes a motion even though outsiders see the person who seconds a motion as not being important.
- When one seconds a motion, it means he/she agrees to the motion or supports the motion.
- At such, anybody who seconds a motion cannot have any reason to be unready when a motion is being tried.

UNREADINESS

- This aspect in legislative debate gives room for lawmaker to amend (add, subtract or change) from a motion that has been made.
- To do that, he/she must be recognized by the Presiding Officer before stating said unreadiness.
- The unreadiness is not stated for the members or the presiding officer. Rather, it is the sole prerogative of

the movant (person who makes a motion) to accept or reject the amendment.

- Unreadiness is stated in this form: "I will be ready to vote if you (Mr./Madam Movant or Hon. X accepts my amendment." Another way is to say: "To the Movant, I will be ready to vote if you accept this amendment...."
- No amendment is simple as long as it will alter/change something in a motion.
- To state unreadiness, it is not to debate the issue. Unreadiness is to the point for which you are not ready to vote.
- In order to keep the debate in its essence and not prolong it, the Presiding Officer guides the process of unreadiness. If not, one who was not recognized to speak during a debate can use the period of unreadiness to debate the issue.

MOTION FOR RECONSIDERATION

- This is the only way that a lawmaker registers his/her disagreement to an issue that is finalized through a motion. As long as this aspect is defeated it means that lawmaker desire has been defeated and he/she has to concede to the defeat as a result of majority decision.
- Using the media to register disagreement contravenes legislative work and is punishable by the august body.
- There are two kinds of legislators who can file a motion for reconsideration – those who voted against and those who abstained.

CONTEMPT CHARGE

- Nobody can be under contempt while they have not been given due process. Contempt is synonymous to due process.
- For legislative due process is an appearance of a witness along with his/her lawyer (which is not mandatory). Said lawyer does not have testifying right before the legislators, but sits in the chamber, and after an Oath of Affirmation, testifies by giving reasons for his/her action.
- Therefore, a contempt charge by statute is punishable by a sentence, which can be a fine or jail.

COMMITTEE OPERATIONS

- Committees are the engine of the legislature.
- Committee are the first to deal with issues of oversight, lawmaking and sometimes representation.
- Committee reports to plenary with a recommendation.

SUB-COMMITTEE OR AD-HOC COMMITTEE

- In the legislature, all committees are comprised of members who are drawn up on the basis of expertise and experience, so all committees in the legislature are special on the basis of specialty.
- A sub-committee or Ad-hoc committee can be set up to deal with a specific issue on the basis of some demand, either quick resolution, technicality in the process, etc.

PETITION

- It is the Sergeant-At-Arms who has the mandate to go to receive a petition from petitioners and turn it over to the Chief Clerk's office.



PART II

KNOW YOUR LEGISLATURE

What are the key functions of members of the Legislature?

There are 30 senators elected, two from each of Liberia's 15 political sub-divisions (Counties), with a nine-year term, and a midterm election every six years. The 73 representatives are elected from the various electoral districts for a term of six years. According to Articles 29 and 34 of the Liberian Constitution, 'the legislative power of the Republic shall be vested in the Legislature of Liberia' with three cardinal functions: lawmaking, representation, and oversight.

1. LAWMAKING: they make laws that address the concerns of the citizens of Liberia through the submission of bills from the Executive, individual members or group of members of the legislature or petitions from citizens.

2. REPRESENTATION: the representative function requires that lawmakers attend sessions regularly and participate in deliberations and decision-making; during deliberations, they speak on issues affecting the lives of their constituents. Each lawmaker is required by their rules to speak on every issue on the agenda once or they may choose to cede their right to speak, to another lawmaker.

3. OVERSIGHT: Effective legislative oversight of the executive branch is key to the integrity of democratic systems and, by extension, to the open government agenda. Oversight is the essential function through which legislators determine whether current laws and appropriations are achieving intended results. In performing this function, legislators often have questions about how policies are being implemented, how programs are being managed, how money is being spent and what results are being achieved.

As shared from the Legislative Modernization Plan (2008-2013), the Liberian Constitution speaks to the lawmaking, representation and oversight role and responsibilities of Members of the Legislature:

Lawmaking:

- Article-29: Affirmation of the power and format to make law.
- Article-32: Schedule of lawmaking session.
- Article-33: Quorum for transaction of business.
- Article-34: Clarifying the types of laws expected to be made.
- Article-35: When does an act of the Legislature become a law and the power to override Presidential veto.
- Article-38: Internal laws to regulate the conduct of lawmakers.
- Article-39: The power to cause a national census to be taken.
- Article-40: Schedule of adjournment of session.
- Article-41: The language used in law-making.
- Article-43: The power to impeach and remove the President, the Vice President and Judges of the Courts.

Representation:

- Article-30: Who can become a lawmaker?
- Article-31: Oath of office for lawmakers.
- Article-37: Filling of vacancies in the Legislature.
- Article-44: Contempt of the Legislature and obstruction of its work.
- Article-45: Term of office of Senators.
- Article-46: Staggered term of office for Senators to ensure continuity.
- Article-47: Election of officers of the Senate. Article-48: Term of office of Representatives.
- Article-49: Election of officers of the House.

Oversight:

- Article 34: Imposition of taxes, public accountability and allocation of resources.

- Article-43: Power to impeach and remove the President and members of the judiciary.
Article-53: Joint Session for induction of the President and Vice President.
Article-54: Confirmation of executive appointees, including judges and the military.
Article-58: The President reports to the Legislature.
Article-60: The Legislature determines the salaries of the President.

How a bill becomes a law?

A bill is a draft law presented to the Plenary for discussion and passage. In order to become a law, a bill must be passed by a majority vote in both chambers and signed by the President. By legislative practice and in accordance with the legislative rules, a bill must undergo three readings by plenary of the House of Representative or the Senate.

However, the Plenary of the House of Representative can also decide that the first reading of the bill shall constitute the first, second and third depending on the political interest of the body, (Plenary). A bill must also be subjected to public hearing to engender public participation and input to make sure that there is greater citizen's views and inputs incorporated in the bill. In case of a presidential veto the Legislature can override consistent with Article 35 of the 1986 Constitution. The following steps constitute processes leading to a bill becoming a law:

1. A bill is introduced to the Plenary through or by a lawmaker;
2. The Plenary then sends the bill to the relevant committee(s) for review;
3. The committee(s) makes a report to the Plenary;
4. The Plenary votes on committees' reports;
5. A bill passed from the originating House is then sent for concurrence to the other House;
6. After concurrence, the bill is sent back to the originating house;
7. There are occasions where the other house makes additional input to the bill;
8. In such cases, there will be a conference committee, to make sure there is harmonization;
9. The bill (ACT) is then forwarded to the President for approval;
10. Upon approval, the ACT is then sent to the Foreign Ministry to be printed into a handbill.

How many votes are needed to pass a bill into law?

A simple majority, comprising 50 percent plus one vote of members in session is required for the passage of a bill. In the case of a bill of impeachment, and state of emergencies, a two-thirds majority of members present in the House of Representatives in session is needed to have it passed and a two-thirds is required by the Senate for removal.

What happens when a bill is introduced?

When a bill is introduced, it is recorded and numbered. When the session is convened, the plenary conducts the first reading of the bill and forwards it to the appropriate committee.

How does a bill differ from a resolution?

A bill differs from a resolution in that a bill is a draft of a proposed law presented to the Plenary for discussion, while a resolution reflects the general opinion of the Plenary.

What are the various types of legislations?

There are four types of legislations: bills, joint resolutions, concurrent resolutions, and simple resolutions.

How is either House structured in terms of committees?

The House of Representatives is structured into four committees:

1. Statutory Committee
2. Standing Committee
3. Ad-hoc Committee
4. Committee of the Whole (Plenary)

How are the Standing Rules of either House evolved?

Article 38 of the Liberian Constitution provides for the Legislature to adopt its own rules of procedure. It states: "Each House shall adopt its own rules of procedures, enforce order, and with the concurrence of two-thirds of the entire membership, may expel a member for cause..."

What are the various legislative committees in the House of Representatives?

Legislative committees are established by the Legislature to help in the running of the body. There are Statutory, Standing, and Special (ad-hoc) committees. A sitting or assembly of the Legislature in quorum is referred to as a Plenary or Committee of the Whole, the highest decision-making body of the House and Senate.

What are committee hearing processes?

The committee hearing processes are as follows:

Upon receipt of a bill from the Plenary, the Committee Chair instructs his/her Secretary (Chief-of-Office-Staff) to draw up the agenda for the public hearing, which includes a list of witnesses to be invited for the hearing, the time and venue.

The time and venue of the hearings are communicated to the Press and Public Affairs Department for announcement to the public.

1. (Expert) Witnesses are invited for the hearing;
2. The Committee's Chair, Co-chair and members, as well as members of the public attend the hearing; and
3. The hearing is held at times using media coverage.

What is the Relevance and Functions of Committees?

Committees are organized to decentralize the functions of the Legislature for the purpose of ensuring efficiency and effectiveness. A great deal of the Legislature's work is accomplished through committees. Each legislator serves on several different committees.

What is a Conference Committee?

A Conference Committee consists of selected members of both Houses of the Legislature to reach a settlement on a proposed legislation, or disagreement arising between both Houses on a given matter.

What is Legislative Session?

A legislative session is the time the Legislature assembles within a legislative term for the purpose of executing its constitutional mandate as provided for under Article 32(a) of the Constitution.

What is a Special Session?

A special session is a period when the legislature convenes outside of the normal legislative session in order to complete unfinished tasks for the year or may convene in 'closed door' to address special topics, or emergencies such as natural disasters or security matters.

Procedure for Speaking in Session

As required by parliamentary procedures and applied by our legislature, a lawmaker has to be recognized by the presiding officer and may be allotted a specific time in which to speak.

How Does the Legislature Track Its Voting Records?

The legislature currently tracks its voting records manually through the Office of the Stenographer. However, modern practice dictates the use of an electronic voting machine and overtime institutionalized into an electronic voting system. This system is effective given that it guarantees a transparent, secured, accurate and faster vote count, but currently lacking. The legislature currently subscribes to the “Yea” and “Nae” voting system.

What are the functions of the office of the Chief Clerk of the House?

The Chief Clerk is the chief administrative officer of the House of Representatives. He or she serves all 73 members of the House of Representatives. Primary duties include numbering and printing of all legislations introduced, and recording all votes taken on the floor or in session. He/she is assisted by a Deputy Chief Clerk.

What are the functions of the Secretary of the Liberian Senate?

The Secretary of the Senate is the chief scribe or copyist, head of administration, and custodian of properties of the Senate.

What are the functions of the Legislative Information Service (LIS)?

Firstly, the LIS was established by a joint resolution of the Legislature through the Joint Legislative Modernization Committee (JLMC). The LIS serves as the knowledge-based information center of the Legislature. It comprises three departments and a division, namely:

1. Research Department: personnel of the Research department in the LIS conduct extensive research for members, staff and the public;
2. Library Department: library staffers at the LIS provide (automated) library related services to lawmakers and the public;
3. Archives Department: staffers of the Archives manage the repository of the legislature and provide archival services using legislative instruments;
4. Quality Control Services (QCS) Division: staffers are trained and disciplined to proofread and edit voluminous documents and ensure every document that leaves the LIS meets (universal) best practices standards.

By extension, the Legislative Information Service:

- Ensures that legislators, staff, committees and members of the public have access to a variety of up-to-date and accurate sources of information about legislative developments on, possibly, any topic;
- Provides reliable legislative research and analysis; and
- Assists members with reliable and authoritative information for informed decision-making and improved public policy formulation.

Functions of the Legislative Budget Office (LBO)

The Legislative Budget Office (LBO) is a bicameral, non-partisan, professional & technical arm of the Liberian Legislature in budgeting, financial and monetary matters.

The mission of the LBO is to provide technical staff support necessary to enable the Joint Legislative Budget Committee and the Legislature to adopt a balanced state budget. The department also provides data processing support necessary for a proper functioning budget committee and the Legislature. The bicameral

legislative support office consists of three functional units, namely:

1. Revenue Unit: Conducts research and provides analysis on tax policy, tax measures, revenue estimates and forecasts.
 2. Expenditure Unit: Conducts analysis of government appropriations as against spending and evaluates budget performance by Line Ministries and Agencies.
 3. Macro-Economic Analysis Unit: Conducts macro-economic surveys and fiscal impact analysis of legislations.
- LBO also has an Information Technology Department.

How do citizens petition their lawmakers to pass a bill or resolution?

In reference to Article 17 of the Constitution, a bill may emanate from a legislator, the executive or private citizens. A group of citizens who desire of presenting a bill to the legislators can do so through petitioning. The bill is presented in the form of a petition to the Claims and Petition Committee of either House. When presented, the bill must be sponsored by a legislator.

How does Legislative Committee work/function?

Legislative committee works by providing oversight responsibilities on tasks assigned to it by either the Constitution or legislative rules and reports to the plenary of the House or Senate. Oversight can include requesting officials of government or concerned individuals to provide testimonies on a given matter. For instance, the Committee on Health provides oversight on all health-related matters and may request stakeholders of the health sector to appear before it and provide testimony when necessary.

What are the functions/workings of Lawmakers during constituency break?

Lawmakers usually use their constituency break to visit and interact with their constituents through town hall meetings, tours to inspect ongoing projects, jointly plan developmental programs and provide annual working reports to their constituents.

How do lawmakers provide oversight for community/district projects?

Lawmakers provide oversight by engaging and bringing together stakeholders from their constituencies to identify projects for implementation. They are required to conduct town hall meetings, seek funding for projects and programs in their constituencies, and review and respond to concerns of the people they represent. They also monitor the implementation of projects and programs within their districts and counties.

Impeachment Power of the Legislature

Article 43 of the Liberian Constitution:

The power to prepare a bill of impeachment is vested solely in the House of Representatives, and the power to try all impeachments is vested solely in the Senate. When the President, Vice President or an Associate Justice is to be tried, the Chief Justice shall preside; when the Chief Justice or a judge of a subordinate court of record is to be tried, the President of the Senate shall preside. No person shall be impeached but by the concurrence of two-thirds of the total membership of the Senate. Judgements in such cases shall not extend beyond removal from office and disqualification to hold public office in the Republic; but the party may be tried at law for the same offense. The Legislature shall prescribe the procedure for impeachment proceedings which shall be in conformity with the requirements of due process of law.



PART III

ADVOCACY TOOL AND STEPS

What is Legislative Advocacy?

Legislative advocacy refers to efforts by citizens to influence the introduction, enactment, amendment or modification of legislation. The most common means of legislative advocacy is direct lobbying, which entails contacting a legislator, sharing one's views on an issue, and asking him or her to vote a specific way on a bill. For instance, the introduction of both the Local Government and Land Rights acts saw a group of CSOs working with lawmakers to ensure the passage.

Legislator one-on-one Engagement

The most effective way to articulate your views to your elected official and to affect the outcome of legislation is, by far, to sit down and speak with your lawmaker(s) face-to-face. While these personal visits are extremely productive, they also require the most amount of planning to ensure success.

There is no more effective way to communicate with your legislator than by a face-to-face personal visit. Address your concerns first to lawmakers who represent you, being mindful that you will likely deal first with his/her legislative staff, who often play a key role in this process and have major input regarding the lawmaker's decision.

When planning a personal visit, you may choose to refer to the guidelines that follow:

- Schedule an appointment. Elected officials have extremely hectic schedules. Call their district offices in advance to schedule an appointment.
- Explain how the proposed legislation will directly affect you. Use specific examples to show your lawmaker how the bill (or proposed measure) will strengthen your rights or benefits; cite these examples to support this position.
- If your lawmaker is unavailable, meet with his/her staff. Your representative may not always be available for a meeting. In such case, try to schedule an appointment with the staff member responsible for the related issues. Legislative staff will bring your concerns to your legislator's attention, and often have great influence on legislator's voting decisions, as well as, expertise on related issues. Following this meeting, send a letter to the staff member you met with as well as the legislator.
- Be courteous! Nothing is more harmful to a visit with a lawmaker than a constituent who is rude, vulgar, or threatening. Be polite at all costs, even if you disagree with the position of your legislator.
- Dress appropriately. The proper attire will convey the seriousness of your visit; business suit or traditional attire will be recommended for such a visit.
- Bring documentation and materials to share with your lawmaker and his staff. These supporting materials will strengthen your point and serve as valuable reference materials after your meeting has concluded. Example of supporting materials could include photos, newspapers' stories, minutes from community meetings, letter of support from other groups, video recording, etc.
- Send a letter in follow-up to your visit. Regardless of how your meeting goes, send a letter to your legislator thanking him/her for the time, and repeating the points you discussed. This gesture will go a long way, and possibly set the pace for future meetings or engagements.

WRITING EFFECTIVE LETTERS

Writing a letter is the most common method of communicating with lawmakers. As a voting constituent, a letter is an easy method for you to let lawmakers know your views on specific issues, encourage them to vote your way, and let them know you will watch how they vote on particular issues and keep those votes in mind on election day. Personally written letters give you an opportunity to present your position to your lawmakers without interruption.

E-MAIL

E-mail is becoming an increasingly popular way to communicate to lawmakers. While not all lawmakers can receive e-mail messages, most do, and more elected officials now utilize e-mail. Follow the tips for writing an effective letter when putting together an email, but note that this format is usually less formal and allows

you to slightly abbreviate your message. A major advantage of e-mail versus a personally written letter is the speed at which your message will be received.

Using the Media:

The media can be very influential in setting the (government) agenda by drawing attention to your issue and raising public awareness. Media, by its nature, reaches audiences that may be difficult or impossible for you to reach on your own. Public officials who are unresponsive may find it necessary to respond to public pressure created by media coverage.

EFFECTIVE TELEPHONE CALLS

As a bill moves through the legislative processes, often times, there isn't enough time to write to your legislators in time for them to receive the correspondence, prior to a key vote. When you need to get in touch with your lawmakers immediately to let them know of your position on issues, and if you do not have access to e-mail, your telephone calls become the most effective means for you to communicate your views. There are several tips to use when placing your calls:

Identify yourself as a constituent. As someone who lives and votes in the district or county of the lawmaker you are contacting, your phone calls carry the most weight. Calls to lawmakers outside your district or county can be helpful as well. However, be sure to always contact your own lawmakers on issues of concern to your community/electoral district first.

- State your point quickly and clearly. Be sure to limit your telephone conversation to one issue concerning the district. Be specific on issues you want your lawmaker to address that will develop your district. Your phone call should last for at most 5 minutes.
- Always be polite and respectful to your lawmaker. Never threaten or use abusive language.

ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN – STEP BY STEP

STEP ONE: Define policy issue: Where is change needed?

Ask yourself: what do I want to change within my community? What are the important issues facing my constituency? What do my fellow constituents think is the most important issue? It is generally advisable to focus your work on a selected number of issues that are realistically manageable. Advocates who attempt to fix everything at once run the risk of fixing nothing. Identify the issue that will have the greatest impact and bring about the most significant change to your community.

STEP TWO: Define your objective: What is the change needed?

Your objectives are the changes in legislation that you hope to achieve through your advocacy. These objectives are based on what the community thinks will bring about the most change. Legislative advocacy is a fluid process and you should be willing to be flexible in your approach and in determining your objectives.

STEP THREE: Define your message: Why is change needed?

- Create a message that is simple, easily understandable as possible. While different members of your group may have different concerns or priorities, your message should be coherent and general.
- The message should not be too technical.
- Don't create too many messages. You may need to refine your message according to your audience's self-interest but the basic principle underlying the message should be the same.
- The message must always be truthful.

STEP FOUR: Develop your strategy: How will change happen?

Your strategy is the critical component of your advocacy campaign. A strategy is a well-thought-out plan of action with concrete steps and activities. Development of a strategy requires a thorough analysis of the issue, the political context, and the general environment. Legislative advocacy often has an inside strategy that focuses on directly influencing decision-makers and an outside strategy that focuses on creating public awareness, mobilizing those outside the Legislature and those who can influence decision-makers.

Research and Analysis:

Information is power. Time spent gathering information on the legislative process in the beginning can help you avoid simple mistakes and save you time in the long run. The more you understand the formal rules and procedures of the decision-making process, the more power you will have to influence it.

Information on your issue is important to understanding the process. The initial step in any campaign is informing decision-makers about why your issue is important. The more compelling details you can provide, the more likely you are to raise interest in your issue. You should also undertake an inventory of what resources and advantages you have that will help the campaign.

Influencing Legislators or Other Policymakers:

One of the most important moments in any advocacy campaign is the short time you have to interact one-on-one with a policymaker. To make the best use of this time, prepare well in advance and prepare for the worst-case scenario.

- Determine what information you want to highlight in your meeting, the purpose of the meeting and what outcomes you hope to achieve.
- Before the meeting, send an advance position paper or information to help present your issue. Keep the information to a manageable length. Send documentation a few days before the meeting so the individual has time to read it, but do not assume that it has been read. Bring extra copies to the meeting.
- If possible, know the position of the policy makers before the meeting. It can be helpful to role play with each other activists in preparation for the meeting, and to anticipate questions or concerns that the representative may have.
- Develop a concise and understandable message to be delivered at the meeting. It should not take you longer than three minutes to deliver your message and it should include your specific desired action for the legislator to take. Practice delivering your message.
- If more than one person attends the meeting, make very short introductions and explain the role of each individual in the meeting.
- Listen to what the policy maker is saying and, if possible, address any concerns or questions in your position.
- If you do not have the information requested or needed, offer to send it. Make sure you send the information you have offered.
- Be aware that the meeting is not the only opportunity to influence a decision-maker.
- Follow up on all meetings with a letter of thanks that outlines any understandings or commitments that were agreed upon at the meeting and repeat your message.
- Keep in touch with supportive individuals.



PART IV

**KNOW YOUR
LAWMAKERS (ELECTED
OFFICIALS, ASSIGNED
COMMITTEES &
CONTACTS)**

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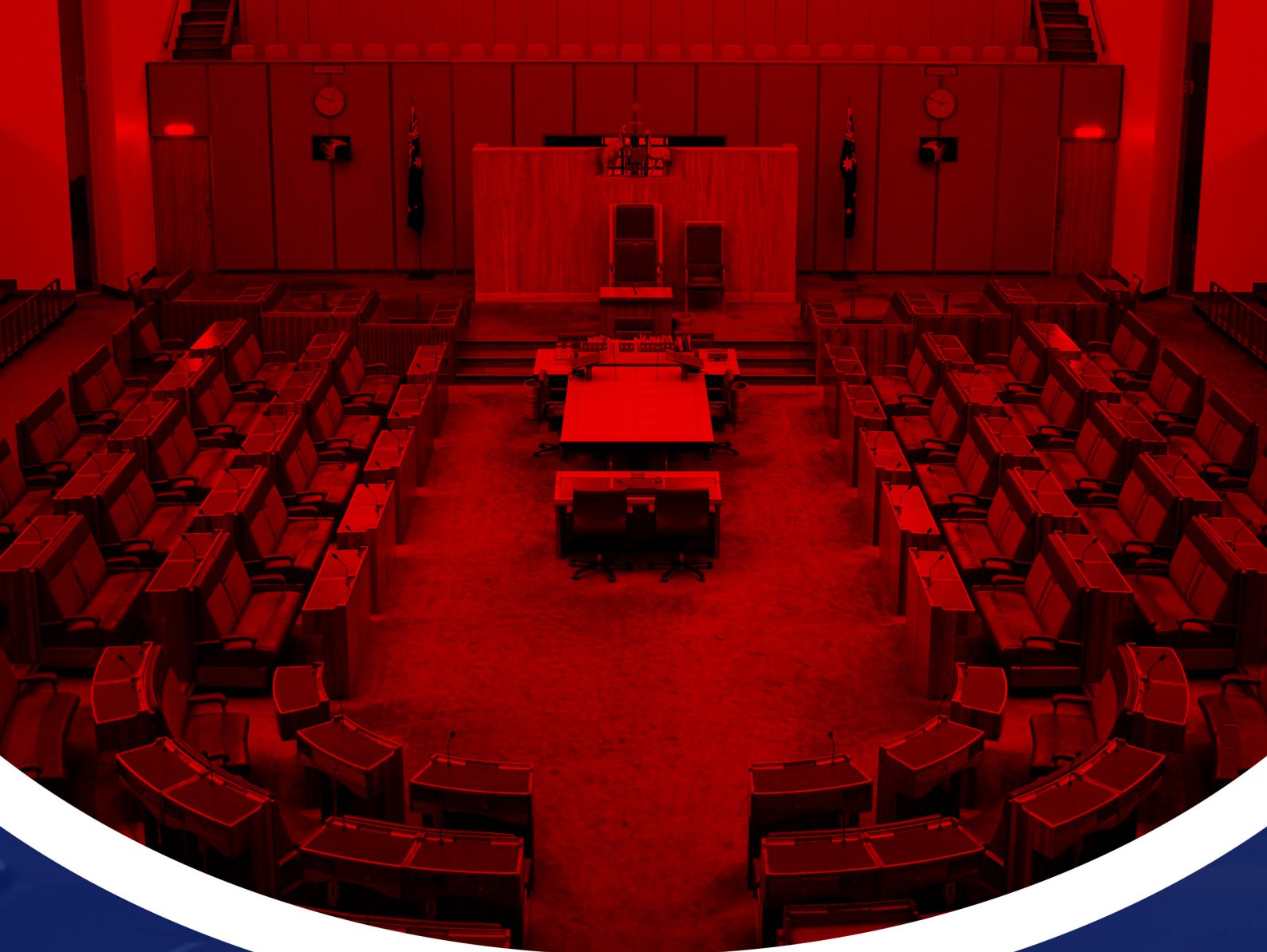
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