

**APHL  
Lab Director Transitions  
Online Toolkit**

**[Headline]**

**Tips for Communicating with the SHO and Legislature**

*Keep their needs top of mind when dealing with these important groups in your state*

Although communication with legislatures and agencies is becoming more and more controlled, the lab director still must have some degree of political acumen. You may be tapped as a resource or become involved in policy discussions and decisions. As soon as possible, find out if there are any immediate needs or issues for the state. While you'll want to re-examine overall functioning, it's hard to get anywhere if immediate needs aren't addressed.

For a deeper look at these relationships, check [\*A Practical Guide to Public Health Laboratories for State Health Officials\*](#).

**Interacting with the state health official:**

- Engage in a dialogue to find out how the laboratory is meeting the needs of the state. What's being done out of habit, and what might be better done another way?
- A SHO looks at a lab director and sees a data source—this is your highest value. If you can anticipate these data needs, you will probably be able to count on help from the SHO in return.
- Manage expectations on what is and isn't possible, particularly in emergency situations. A SHO is going to need to understand why certain data can't be available immediately, for instance.
- Help the SHO to understand why specialized workers and equipment are needed. A lab review or analysis of staff and equipment can help you make the case.
- Know and remember your legal responsibilities—and don't be concerned about pushing your message where these are concerned.

**Interacting with the legislature:**

- Get a copy of your state's annual legislative guidebook, if there is one. Familiarize yourself with the various committees, including advisory committees, and individual legislators who have authority over public health and laboratory programs.
- Find out if you are allowed to attend legislative sessions uninvited.
- Learn the behavioral protocols that must be followed during legislative sessions.
- Establish a relationship with the legislative liaison for health-related issues in the governor's or similar office.
- Consider hosting lab workshops on issues such as influenza or newborn screening to educate government officials about public health laboratory business and its implications for public health.
- Especially in divisive times, re-emphasize that the laboratory is a non-partisan, science-based resource for legislators.

- Get to know the advisory committees that may intersect with the lab's mission, such as a genetics advisory committee. Are the committees strictly advisory, or do they set policy? You may be asked to serve or to make recommendations on who should serve.
- You may need to be available at all times during the legislative session, so have a backup plan in place to keep the lab's business running if you're otherwise occupied.

**To remember with both groups:**

- Check with your communication department to see if the state would like to collaborate on promotional and educational programs out of the lab—a lab open house or similar. They can share in the goodwill produced and help maximize getting the message out.
- Make sure the SHO and legislature understand how your lab works with federal programs and agencies. Do they know your lab's work for the FBI or CDC programs may mean shifting state priorities?
- Think about preparing a weekly e-newsletter or similar with the accomplishments and interesting briefs out of the lab. This will keep the lab on the state radar.
- Everyone likes a bit of good news and fast, meaningful data. Work with your communications person to streamline your messages so SHOs and legislative officials don't dread a science lecture.