Fairfax County Government
Government Relations

Strategic Plan Update

Strategic Plan

The Government Relations staff have traditionally focused their efforts specifically on lobbying, a subset of government relations with the most direct, targeted form of policy engagement. While this has served the County in the past, the changing federal and state dynamics requires a switch to a government relations strategy, which goes beyond lobbying by focusing on long-term relationship building, effective communication and navigating the regulatory environment.

Engagement on long-term priorities such as K-12 funding, protecting land use authority, and transportation and transit funding requires continually strategic engagement. This switch will allow the Government Relations team to engage year round guided by the legislative program as opposed to focusing the majority of efforts on General Assembly.

A **Government Relations** approach will allow Fairfax County to lead policy discussions and delivery solutions versus reacting and fixing problems.

This work has already begun. Key efforts so far have been shifting the legislative program schedule forward and scheduling the Delegation Work session prior to adopting to foster better communications and partnerships. Internally, Government Relations, OPA, and OCA have reviewed and reformed working relationships to ensure alignment between offices and smooth communication. Government Relations has also kicked-off a two-year process reviewing the current Legislative Review Team structure and how it aligns to a more year-round engagement model.

State Strategy:

In order to shift to a higher level of engagement, Government Relations is seeking an outside consultant to supplement the team's work. Given the size of the Fairfax Delegation, relationship building with other members of the General Assembly can be a challenge and the county would benefit from a consultant's existing relationships outside of Northern Virginia. Additionally, a consultant based in Richmond relieves pressure on staff's travel schedule as the consultant can cover meetings when staff are unable to make the trip and/or when last-minute meetings are scheduled.

Federal Strategy:

Federal strategy needs to be more strategic and focused on increasing funding for key county priorities. For counties, the biggest impact can be made through funding support as many of the issues dealt with at the federal level are better dealt with through NACo and national organizations with existing relationships than individual localities. The county would benefit from a consultant with a specific background in federal funding engagement through grants, "earmarks" and appropriations, with additional support available as requested on major reauthorizations (which take place every several years versus annually). For example, federal expertise has been beneficial regarding current activity on Surface Transportation Reauthorization, which funds many of the projects the county receive transportation and transit funding through. Additionally, Government Relations will continue working to strengthen relationships with NACo staff in order to strategically engage on policy when Fairfax County has a specific role to play that is different than general counties' concerns.

Proposal Change:

Legislative Program

Program will be further refined and consolidated:

- Fairfax At-A-Glance: a visual portrayal of Fairfax County pulled for 2025 Demographic Report and other data sources (2 pages).
- 2026 Board Priorities and Initiatives: include budget and legislative initiatives as well as timely overarching priorities (2 pages).
- Budget Priorities and Position Statements: Board specific positions in to provide additional guidance to lobbyists on their priorities, allowing them to work quicker on bills of concern or interest to the County. This section will be organized by and aligned with the Strategic Plan and informed by the OneFairfax policy. (10-15 pages).
- Federal funding priorities (1-2 page)

The team will also develop leave-behind advocacy documents on the Board Priorities and Initiatives as well as individual one-pagers on specific priorities. The Government Relations team will work with OPA and other county staff skilled in design to ensure that the quality of the writing matches appealing design elements.

Key Activities Timelines

January – March – *Session Operations*
• Weekly Board report on bills affecting the county, including a bill report and priority updates (see below).
• Legislative Committee meets on the call of the Legislative Chair.
• Legislative Committee meets after adjournment to review major session outcomes.

April – *Reconvene and Final Updates*
• Government Relations engages before Reconvene on outstanding issues.
• Update Board and leadership on outcomes, including the Reconvene Memo and Update.

May – *Program Kickoff and Session Close-Out*
• Finalize General Assembly close-out, including final report and legislative impact analysis with Legislative Review Team.
• Launch Program Development: send “Call for Proposals” to departments and BACs.
• Government Relations hosts kickoff training on the legislative process and proposal development.

June – *Issue Review and Early Engagement*
• Review previous session bills to identify outstanding issues, work groups, and studies.
• Legislative Committee reviews new mandates, authority changes, and budget impacts.
• Begin Government Relations meetings with the Board before summer recess.

July – *Program Design and Priority Engagement*
• Continue engagement with Board offices, leadership, and regional partners.
• Develop design for this year’s program aligned to the Countywide Strategic Plan.
• Host events/meetings on Board priorities (such as housing) with local governments, elected officials, VACO/VML, advocacy organizations, and state partners.

August – *Draft Program and Early Outreach*
• Government Relations, with Chairman/Legislative Chair offices, drafts program for first Legislative Committee.
• Begin outreach to strategic partners and General Assembly members to identify alignment and potential patrons.
• Continue hosting priority-focused events and meetings.

September – *Committee Review and Coalition Building*
• Legislative Committee discusses proposed initiatives and program draft.
• Develop agenda for October Delegation Meeting.
• Continue patron identification and coalition development around priorities.

October – *Delegation Engagement and Public Input*
• Hold Delegation Work Session on key county priorities and partnerships.
• Public Hearing on Legislative Program for community feedback.
• Continue patron identification and coalition building.

November – *Finalization and Language Development*
• Work with patrons to draft legislative language and budget amendment proposals.
• Continue hosting priority-focused events and meetings.
• Board adopts Legislative Program.

December – *Session Preparation*
• Legislative Committee briefing on the upcoming General Assembly session.
• Governor's Budget analysis

Legislative Committee Schedule:

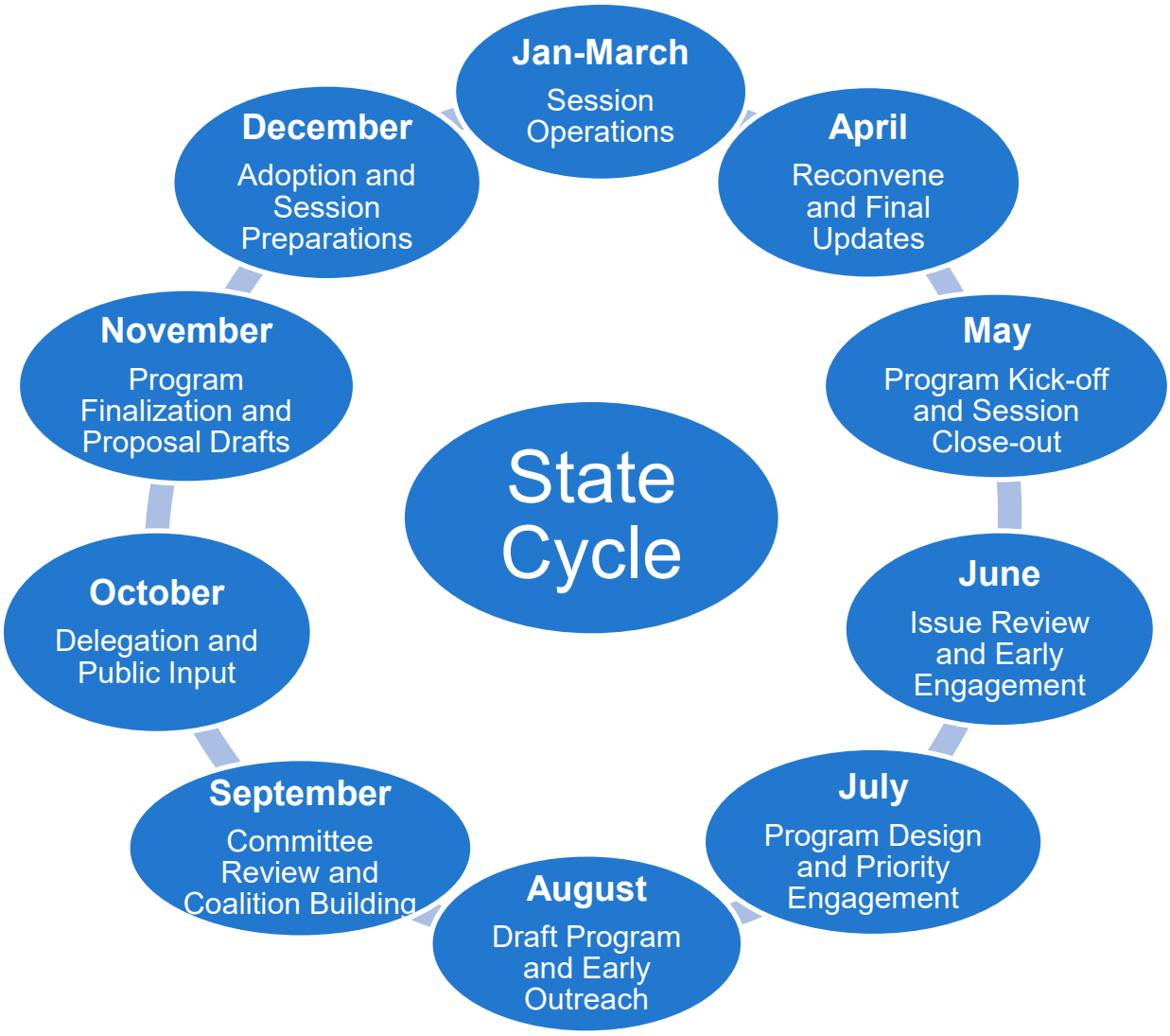
September

December

March

June

*upon call of Legislative Chair


State Cycle
Jan-March
Session Operations
April
Reconvene and Final Updates
May
Program Kick-off and Session Close-out
June
Issue Review and Early Engagement
July
Program Design and Priority Engagement
August
Draft Program and Early Outreach
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Committee Review and Coalition Building
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Delegation and Public Input
November
Program Finalization and Proposal Drafts
December
Adoption and Session Preparations

Example of Weekly Report

Happy Friday! We are a week away from scheduled adjournment and final actions are picking up. In the next week, the General Assembly will take final action on the remaining bills, including around 50 bills currently in conference committees, as well as the biennium budget. In order to adjourn on time, the budget will need to be released by Thursday night.

For a full list of bills the County is monitoring, please see attached report.

Update on Initiatives:

- Muffler Bill (HB 55): It has been a dramatic week for this bill. On Tuesday, if failed to pass on the Senate floor 18-22. After being revived and passed by for the day, staff have continued to work with the patron to try and get votes. As we were getting ready to accept defeat this morning, we got a call that there may be positive movement so it was passed by again today and we are hopeful there is good news to share with you Monday.
- Park Authority (HB 250): It has officially passed both bodies. It is now waiting to be signed and sent to the Governor for consideration.
- UPPPF (SB 285): The study was officially reported by the House Rules Committee and will be voted on next week.

Update on Priorities:

- Budget/Transit Funding: As has historically happened, each body rejected each other's budget proposals and appointed Conferees. Delegate Krizek was appointed so we have communicated our priorities to him and will continue to advocate on our priorities.
- Housing Red Light Bills: An updated housing strategy list is attached. Only 3 of the red light bills are still in play.
    - Due to local government coalition, the multifamily by right bills died this week. HB 816 was defeated on the Senate floor and SB 454 was rereferred to committee which has had its final meeting already (a nice way to kill something without taking a vote).
    - The two Faith in Housing bills (HB 1279/SB 388) are in conference and we are continuing to advocate our amendments on that pair.
    - For the parking requirements bill (HB 888), we worked with the patron and were able to get some amendments on it to make it more like our current program. They were offered on the floor today and will get final vote on Monday.
- Speed Cameras: As of this morning, all of the speed camera bills have been consolidated to six – HB 684, HB 1220, SB 59, SB 84, SB 219, and SB 436. We will have to confirm the language in each of the bills, but the sovereign immunity waiver-like language seems to exist only in the House versions of HB 1220 and SB 219. It appears that this issue is going to be decided in Conference.