

# LEGISLATIVE TOOLKIT

*A Guide for School Leaders*



NEW YORK CITY  
**CHARTER SCHOOL**  
CENTER

It's about great public schools.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....	1
A Calendar for Community and Legislative Engagement.....	2
Strategy: Why and How Do We Engage Elected Officials?.....	4
Building a Strategy for Elected Official Outreach.....	5
Strategy: Why and How Do We Engage Community Boards (CBs) and Community Education Councils (CECs)?.....	6
A Story of Successful Community Involvement.....	8
City, State, and Federal Political Engagement: Why They Matter to Your School.....	9
<b>TOOLS TO USE</b>	
Funding Requests: City and State.....	11
Sample State Funding Request.....	14
Sample Letter to Elected Official.....	15
Sample Press Release.....	16
Good to Great: Online Advocacy and Organizing.....	17
<b>APPENDIX</b>	
Government Flow Chart.....	19
How a Bill Becomes a Law in New York State Chart.....	20
Citywide Organization Chart.....	21-22
Glossary of Legislative Terms.....	23

# Introduction

*“The purpose of life is to contribute in some way to making things better.”*

—ROBERT F. KENNEDY

No public school should have to operate in a hostile political environment. The New York City Charter School Center is not only committed to fostering a favorable public policy environment for charter schools, but we are also committed to supporting your efforts to build positive relationships with leaders in your communities.

This Legislative Toolkit is designed to serve as an easy-to-use guide for engaging with policy and decision-makers. It is intended to aid your planning for the upcoming school year as well as provide supportive materials to inform and enhance your community engagement activities.

## ABOUT US

The Charter Center was founded to support the development of a high quality charter school sector in New York City. One of the ways in which we do this is by ensuring that public policies and politics engender the continued growth, autonomy and quality of the charter sector.

The Charter Center’s Policy and Advocacy team does this by:

- Building positive, ongoing relationships with elected officials and their staff.
- Monitoring and working to influence education policy at both the city and state levels.
- Conducting public awareness campaigns, including citywide paid and earned media outreach.

- Proactively leading the charter discussion by conducting quality research, producing reports and fact sheets and participating in local and national policy discussions.
- Introducing and lobbying for legislation that supports charter schools’ ability to succeed.
- Assisting school leaders and staff to develop and implement political and community engagement projects.

## CONTACT

As always, the Charter Center’s Policy and Advocacy team is here to support your work. Please reach out with any questions or requests:

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# A Calendar for Community and Legislative Engagement:

MONTH	HIGHLIGHTS AND ACTIVITIES
<b>September</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In city election years, NYC primaries take place early-to-mid month.</li> <li>• The City Council participatory budgeting neighborhood assemblies are meeting to identify community needs and select delegates, followed by project expos <i>(see page 11)</i>.</li> <li>+ Write a back-to-school introduction letter <i>(see the Outline on page 7)</i> to your legislators, Community Board (CB) and Community Education Council (CEC), and invite them to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ribbon-cutting ceremony for new schools</li> <li>- <b>“Back-to-School” celebrations</b></li> <li>- “All-parents” orientation meeting</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>October</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The City Council participatory budgeting neighborhood assemblies are meeting to identify community needs and select delegates, followed by project expos <i>(see page 11)</i>.</li> <li>+ Invite your legislators, CB and CEC to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Charter School Board meeting</li> <li>- Halloween event/activity</li> <li>- Sporting events/other school or student competitions</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>November</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In general election years, election day is first Tuesday of the month</li> <li>• The City Council’s participatory budgeting delegate meetings are taking place to develop proposals <i>(see page 11)</i>.</li> <li>+ Congratulate your new or re-elected representative! A simple letter addressed from you as the school leader on school stationery will do.</li> <li>+ Invite him/her, along with your other legislators, CB and CEC to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Attend/Make a presentation to civics classes or student government meetings</li> <li>- Thanksgiving show</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>December</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The City Council’s participatory budgeting delegate meetings are taking place to develop proposals <i>(see page 11)</i>.</li> <li>+ Invite your legislators, CB and CEC to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Winter concert/festival</b></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>January</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State legislative session begins.</li> <li>• The City Council’s participatory budgeting delegate meetings are taking place to develop proposals <i>(see page 11)</i>.</li> <li>• Early January: Applications are due for State Assembly and Senate discretionary funding requests <i>(see page 12)</i>.</li> <li>+ Schedule a meeting with your Councilmember.</li> <li>+ Invite your legislators, CB and CEC to:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Judge an academic fair or other event/competition</li> <li>- Attend/Speak at Martin Luther King, Jr. Day celebrations</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

**MONTH**

**HIGHLIGHTS AND ACTIVITIES**

**February**

- Governor submits the State Executive Budget.
- The City Council’s participatory budgeting delegate meetings are taking place to develop proposals *(see page 11)*.
- Late February: Capital funding requests for non-profits to Borough Presidents and joint Borough Presidents/City Council requests are due *(see page 11)*.
- + **Join your colleagues for the Annual Charter School Advocacy Day in Albany on the first Tuesday of the month!**
- + Invite your legislators, CB and CEC to:
  - Attend school’s parent association meetings
  - Observe your enrollment lottery
  - Attend a Valentine’s Day event/activity
  - Participate in new parent education fair

**March**

- Mayor introduces preliminary City budget.
- Communities vote on the City Council’s participatory budgets *(see page 11)*.
- + Invite your legislators, CB and CEC to:
  - School Open House

**April**

- Early April: Capital funding requests for non-profits to the City Council are due *(see page 11)*.
- State legislature votes on the Governor’s Executive Budget.
- + Invite your legislators, CB and CEC to:
  - Read to students during the National Reading Week

**May**

- City Council holds Executive Budget hearings.
- + Invite your legislators, CB and CEC to:
  - Celebration event for National Charter Schools Week
  - Release of your ELA and Math test score results

**June**

- City Council approves the final City budget.
- + Invite your legislators, CB and CEC to:
  - **End-of-the-year ceremonies / celebrations / graduations**

**THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL YEAR**

- + Attend CB and CEC meetings.
- + Prepare CB and CEC presentations.
- + Send exceptional student artwork to your City Councilmember. Elected officials love putting student art on their walls, and it will keep you on the radar!

# Strategy: Why and how do we engage elected officials?

*“If you don’t interpret to others your calling and your reason for doing what you’re doing, do you think it will just stay uninterpreted? No. Other people will interpret it for you. You don’t have any choice if you want to be a leader. You have to claim authorship of your story and learn to tell it to others so they can understand the values that move you to act, because it might move them to act as well.”*

–MARSHALL GANZ, Developer of Barack Obama’s 2008 Presidential Campaign organizing model

There’s a simple bit of wisdom in politics – tell your own story relentlessly, or else someone else will do it for you. As charter school leaders working in a contentious political climate, if you’re not engaging the elected leaders in your community, the story that they hear about your school and other charter schools may be far from the truth, and sometimes disastrously so.

Elected officials, even those without legislative jurisdiction over charter school policy, wield enormous influence in the community, and you have the power to shape their views.

Politics is a relationship business. The better your community and elected leaders know your school – the principal, teachers, parents, and students – the more supportive they will be. **The strongest way you can build that relationship is by sharing positive experiences based upon your school community as well as integrating your school with the neighborhood.**

Political engagement is an inexact science, but strategic planning can still maximize your effectiveness. A good plan will have goals and benchmarks of success in place, but won’t turn you away from opportunities to engage even if there is no obvious or immediate benefit. The events are tactics in pursuit of that strategy.

Here are some key questions to consider when planning your outreach:

- Who are the “targets” of your outreach, and why? Are they the ones who actually affect your school’s ability to succeed? What are their passions and self-interests, and who do they already partner with?
- What other organizations are influential in your community, and how could their work overlap with your school’s?
- Which school events would officials enjoy attending, and could you provide them with a chance to speak?
- What are the two to four key messages you want to repeat to local elected officials?

## Building a Strategy for Elected Official Outreach

### GOALS

What do you want to accomplish by the end of the year?  
How will you know you're making progress?

### PUBLIC OFFICIALS

Which public officials most affect your school?  
Think Community Boards, CECs, City Councilmembers, Assemblymembers and Senators, and Congresspeople.  
What do they care about?  
What do you have to offer them?

### ALLIES

Who do you already partner with?  
Who is influential in your community that you could meet and invite to events?  
Which officials are already friendly?

### TACTICS AND TIMING

What does the school calendar look like, and how does that compare with your elected officials' calendars?  
What events will they most enjoy?  
How can they celebrate successes with you?  
What events allow for meaningful interaction?  
How can you involve media?  
How will you communicate your needs and demands?

# Strategy: Why and How do we Engage Community Boards (CBs) and Community Education Councils (CECs)?

Politicians are interested in the big picture, and the most effective way to communicate with them is through unscripted, in-person conversation. **Community Boards and Community Education Councils, on the other hand, are interested in the details that affect their communities.** You know your school best, and as you approach your CB and CEC with your school's details, you are improving your relationship with the decision-makers in your neighborhood.

## COMMUNITY EDUCATION COUNCILS

**What:** Community Education Councils ("CECs") are deliberative bodies that help to shape educational policies and priorities in their districts. Their real power lies in zoning decisions of district lines. There are 32 CECs in New York City.

**Who:** CEC members are parent volunteers who provide hands-on leadership and support for their community's public schools. Each CEC represents a Community School District that includes public elementary, intermediate, and junior high schools. Each CEC has 11 voting members including nine parents of students in public elementary, intermediate and/or junior high schools in the district. There are two additional voting members who are appointed by the borough presidents and must be residents of or own or operate a business in the district. A non-voting high school senior residing in the district and who is an elected student leader will be appointed by the community superintendent. Since 2005, parent selections and borough president appointments take place every two years.

**How:** Parents of public school children can apply to be in their district's CEC. Legally, charter school parents are not allowed to join CECs (because by law a charter school is considered its own school district). In the past, the New York City Charter School Center sponsored legislation to change this.

**Full list of contacts:** [www.schools.nyc.gov](http://www.schools.nyc.gov)

## COMMUNITY BOARDS

**What:** Every neighborhood in NYC is represented by a Community Board. These Boards serve as a link between your community and the government, looking out for what's best for your neighborhood and advocating for your community's needs. It is an important body of community leaders with whom to build a relationship. Every CB has a District Manager who hires staff, runs the office, and creates procedures to ensure smooth execution of city services. Each CB also has an education committee; the Chair of this committee will serve as your first point of contact.



## Here is an easy way to plan your outreach to your CB and CEC:

1. Prepare a one-page factsheet with basic details of your school (*see Outline below*). If you have never written a letter of introduction to your CB or CEC, now is the time to do so! Introduce yourself as the school leader, include the factsheet, and attach your school's calendar. Invite your CB and CEC to any school functions open to the public. If your school produces a regular newsletter, make sure that your CB and CEC receive it!
2. If you have never attended a CB or CEC meeting, attend one as an observer first, and meet some people while you're there.
3. Contact and request time on the CB's and CEC's agenda for an annual presentation (*see Appendix for CB contacts in your borough and neighborhood*). The presentation need not be more than an expansion on your school's fact sheet, so you can use the outline below for both.

### School Fact Sheet for CB and CEC Outreach: AN OUTLINE

- School name and brief school leader bio/ introduction
- Founding year
- Current enrollment grades and planned grade buildout
- Facility status
- If colocated, list of colocated schools
- Test scores (if not written down, be prepared to discuss them)
- School's calendar
- School's schedule (highlight it if it is different from the district's), including first and last days, and school day hours
- Any unique features of your school (e.g. rooftop garden, unique curriculum, volunteer days, etc.)
- Contact information for school leader and parent leader, if applicable

# A Story of Successful Community Involvement

When Nick Tishuk founded Renaissance Charter High School for Innovation in 2010, he had a tight window between the time his school was sited in East Harlem and opening day. Needing to gain community support in a neighborhood wary of charter schools, Nick and his team used a combination of community organizing techniques to win over the community.

Before approaching some of the more opposed members of the community, Nick put in a lot of face time with community organizations and tenant associations, eventually winning over their support. When it came time to meet with more skeptical groups, showing the school's wide base of support proved critical.

Nick then engaged Community Board 11, long considered suspicious of charter schools. Nick and his team attended their first meeting of the board that winter, which stretched for nearly three hours, answering questions, listening to the concerns of parents and other residents and helping them understand how Innovation would work. Nick also solicited their suggestions. Days later, Nick returned and spent another three hours with the board. At the end of that meeting Innovation won their endorsement, the first time the board had taken such a step.

**“Most of the time charter schools don’t even come to talk to the community board,” said Matthew Washington, president of Community Board 11. “The general sense was that Innovation was different.”**

# City, State, and Federal Political Engagement: Why they Matter to Your School

## CITY

**The Mayor** controls the NYC Department of Education, the Department of Buildings, as well as all other City agencies. He/She appoints Panel on Education Policy (PEP) members and the Chancellor, among others.

**The Public Advocate** has the power to introduce legislation, make appointments, act as a watchdog over all city agencies, and has a platform to organize community members.

**The City Comptroller** is the chief financial officer of NYC. The Comptroller audits city agencies, but has no authority over charter schools.

**The Borough President** has an official role in the City's land use decisions. Duties include the appointment of Community Board members as well as two voting members of the Community Education Councils.

**The City Council** has the power to conduct oversight hearings, but lacks legislative or budget authority over the Department of Education. Individual members do have discretionary expense money that they provide in the form of grants to local organizations, including public schools (charters are eligible). In addition,

Council members are able to mobilize local support for or against issues that affect their communities, and have district offices that provide services to their constituents.

## STATE

State elected officials have the most power over charter schools. The **Governor** has significant budgetary and law-making influence, and members of the **Senate** and **Assembly** are constantly crafting laws that can affect school funding and policies. The legislature can raise or lower the cap on charters, adjust funding formulas, and even affect the composition and powers of Community Education Councils. The **State Comptroller** is the State's chief fiscal officer, and has audited charter schools in the past. The **Attorney General** oversees enforcement of state law and can, and has, launched investigations into individual charter operators.

## FEDERAL

Federal elected officials, like **Congresspeople**, **Senators**, and **the President**, have the ability to draft and modify federal laws like No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top that influence state policies, grants, and other types of funding such as Title I.

### How to Engage Elected Officials

#### Develop Good Materials

Prepare simple, direct materials that touch on your main points, provide a rationale for your position and include information on how you can be contacted.

#### Know Who You're Talking To

Be sure you do your homework on the person's background, his/her public policy interests and the area he/she represents, as it can help you relate your issue in meaningful ways.

#### Make It Local

Whenever possible, play up local angles in your issue. The more the issue resonates in a legislator's district, the more likely he/she is to care.

#### Utilize Staff

In most offices, staff are an essential part of the policymaking process. *Don't be insulted if you meet with staff rather than the elected official*, as gaining their support is an important part of the process.

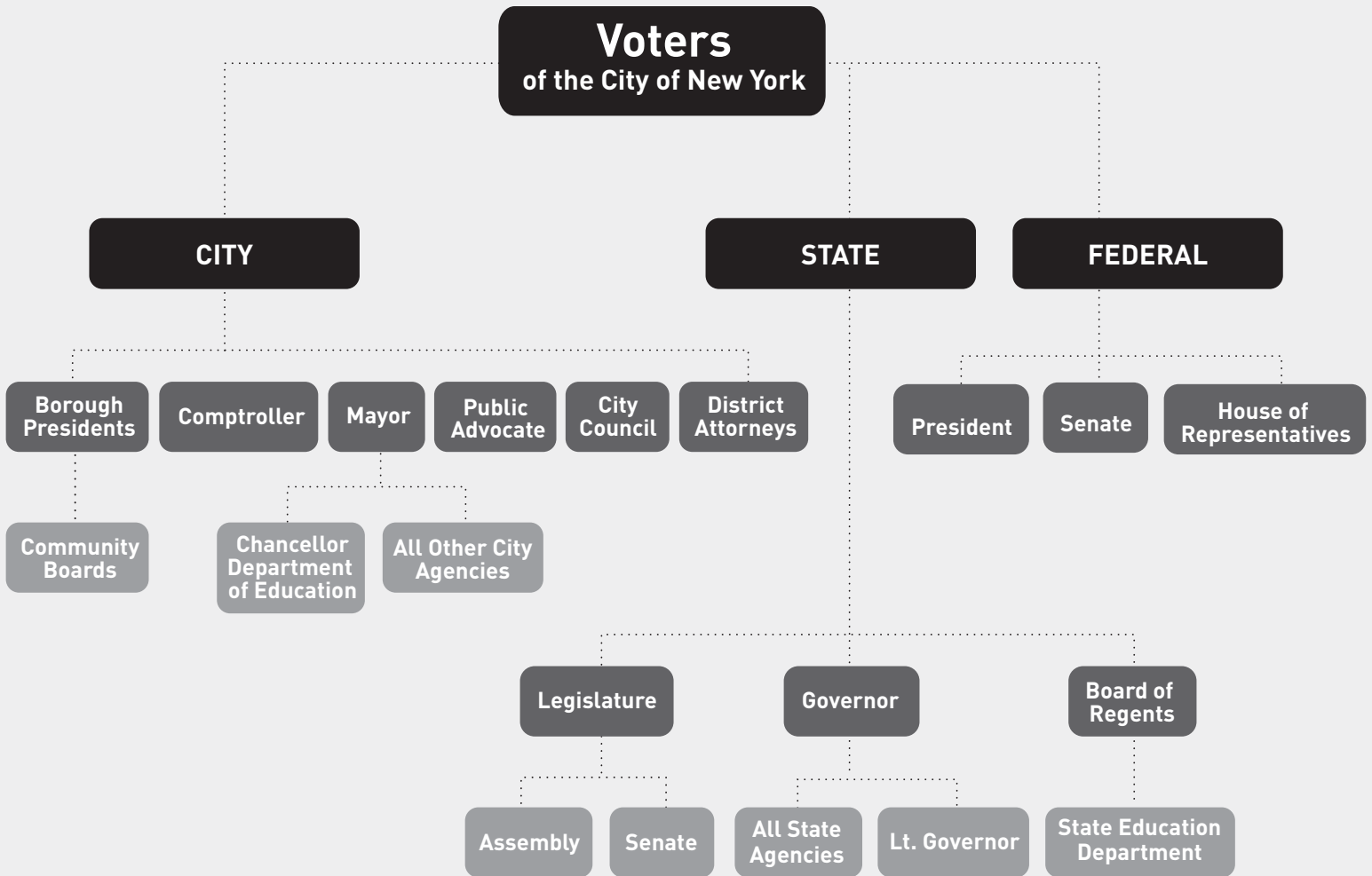
#### Follow-up

Use any meeting with policymakers or their staff as an excuse to communicate with them again!

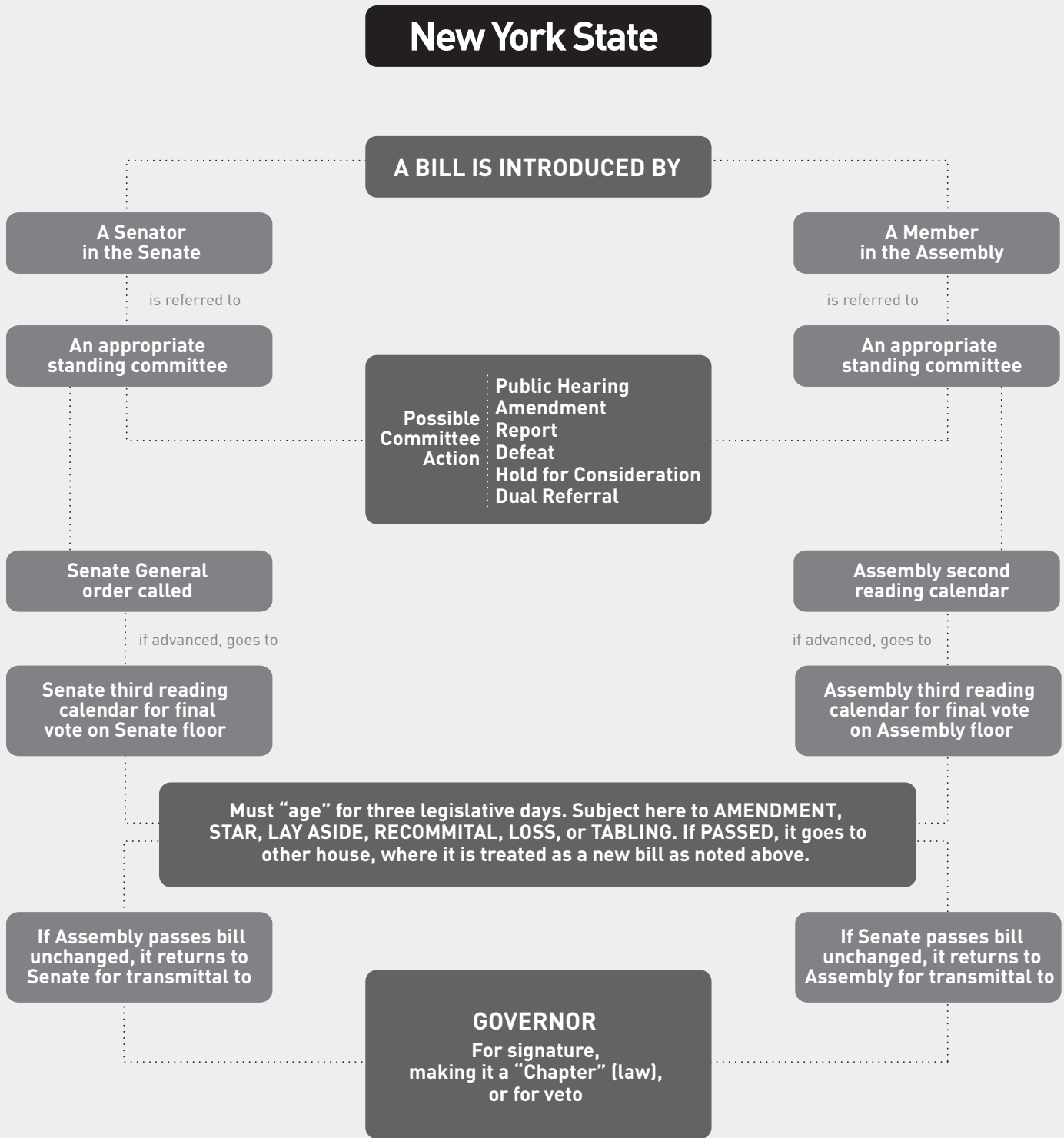
**REMEMBER: IF YOU'RE MEETING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS, TAKE PICTURES AND SHARE THEM (EMAIL, FACEBOOK, ETC.)!**

# Appendix

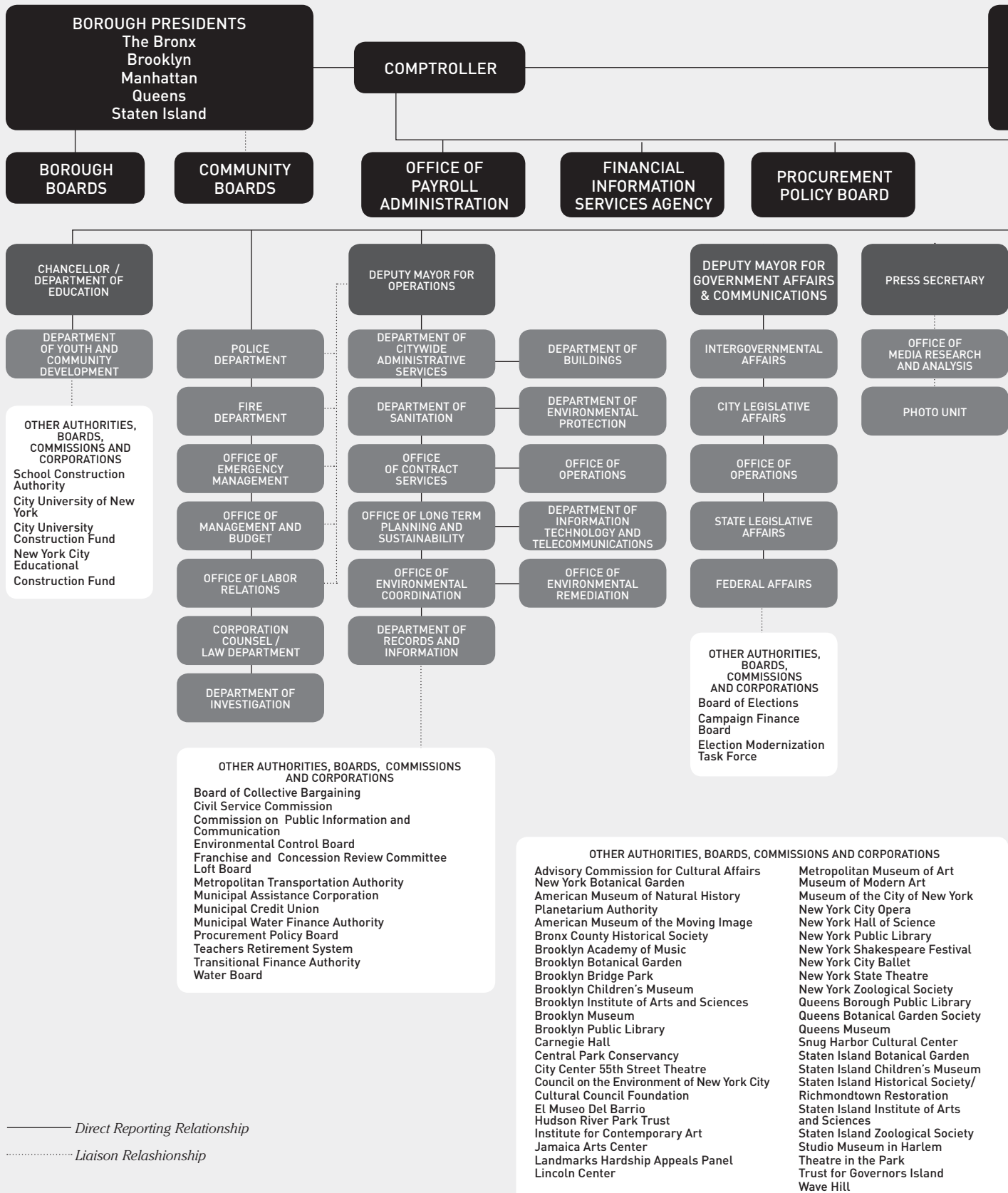
# Government Flow Chart



# How a Bill Becomes a Law



# Citywide Organization Chart | THE VOTERS OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK:



# BOROUGHES OF THE BRONX, BROOKLYN, MANHATTAN, QUEENS AND STATEN ISLAND

**MAYOR**

**PUBLIC ADVOCATE**

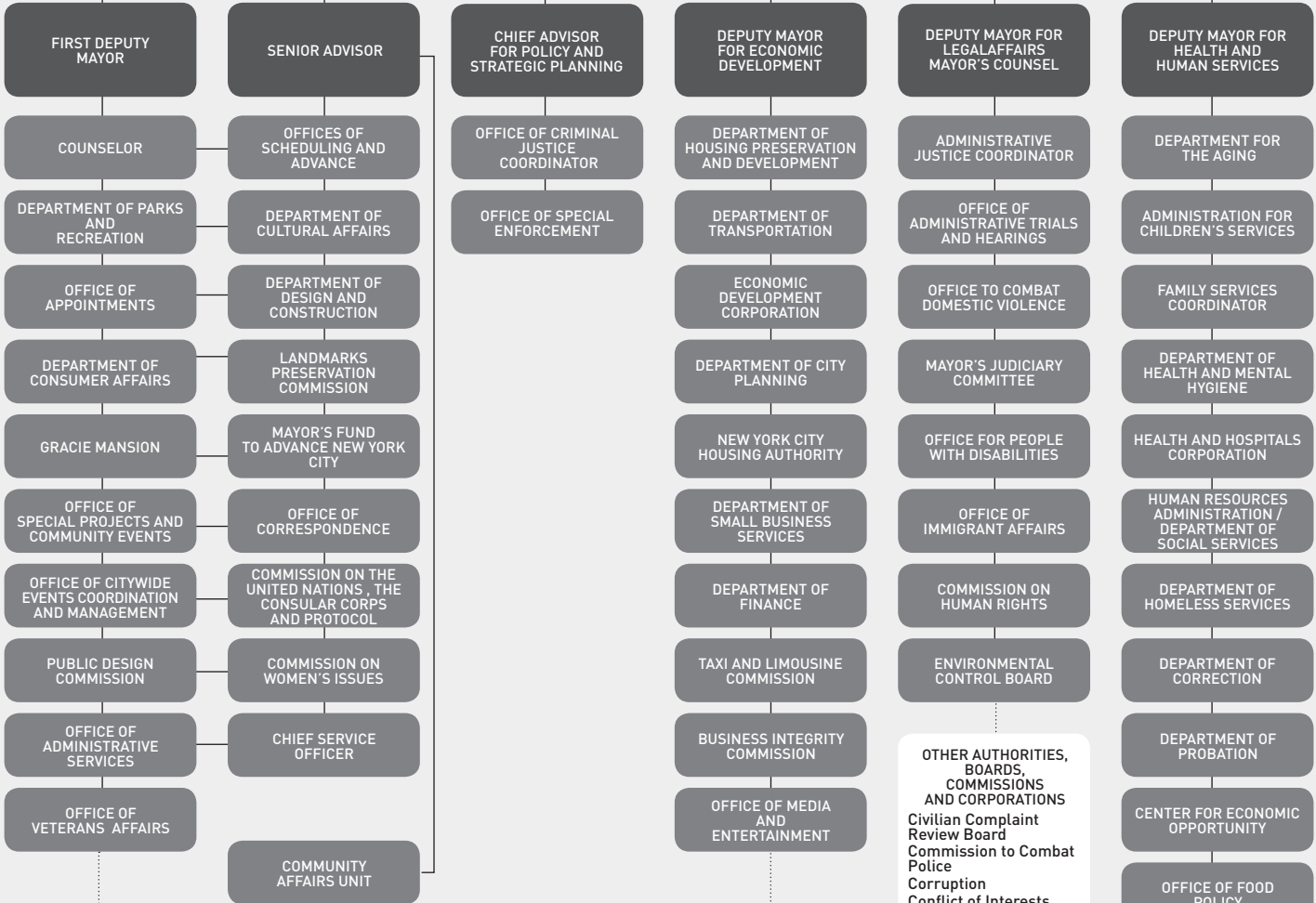
**THE COUNCIL: 51 COUNCIL MEMBERS**  
 The Bronx 8 members  
 Brooklyn 16 members  
 Manhattan 10 members  
 Queens 14 members  
 Staten Island 3 members

**ALL DISTRICT ATTORNEYS**

**OFFICE OF SPECIAL NARCOTICS**

**CITY CLERK  
 CLERK OF THE COUNCIL**

**INDEPENDENT BUDGET OFFICE**



**OTHER AUTHORITIES, BOARDS, COMMISSIONS AND CORPORATIONS**

- Banking Commission
- Biomedical Research and Development Task Force
- Board of Education Retirement System
- Board of Standards and Appeals
- Brooklyn Navy Yard Development Corporation
- City Planning Commission
- City Sports Commission
- Commercial Incentive Boundary Area Commission
- Deferred Compensation Board
- Empire State Development Corporation
- Fire Department Pension Fund Board of Trustees
- Governors Island Preservation and Education Corporation
- Housing Development Corporation
- Industrial and Commercial Incentive Board
- Industrial Development Agency
- In Rem Foreclosure Release Board
- Lower Manhattan Development Corporation
- New York City Employees' Retirement System
- New York City Empowerment Zone NYC & Company
- Police Pension Fund Board of Trustees
- NYS Public Service Commission
- NYS Department of Economic Development
- Pennsylvania Station Redevelopment Corporation
- Port Authority of NY/NJ
- Power Authority of the State of NY
- Private Industry Council
- Rent Guidelines Board
- Sports Development Corporation
- Tax Appeals Tribunal
- Tax Commission
- United Nations Development Corporation

- OTHER AUTHORITIES, BOARDS, COMMISSIONS AND CORPORATIONS**
- Civilian Complaint Review Board
  - Commission to Combat Police Corruption
  - Conflict of Interests Board
  - Equal Employment Practices Commission

**OTHER AUTHORITIES, BOARDS, COMMISSIONS AND CORPORATIONS**

- Board of Correction
- Board of Health
- Center for Animal Care and Control
- Commission for Economic Opportunity
- HIV and Human Services Planning Council
- Office of the Chief Medical Examiner
- Primary Care Development Corporation



# Glossary of Legislative Terms

<b>Aging</b>	A three day period, upon introduction, that bills must wait prior to being acted on by the Assembly or Senate
<b>Bill Draft</b>	A proposal that has been drafted but not yet introduced
<b>Caucuses</b>	A group of members organized to work together around a shared ethnic, gender or regional trait
<b>Conference</b>	Meeting of the members of one political party in either house
<b>Chapter</b>	A bill that has been signed into law by the Governor
<b>Departmental Bill</b>	Legislation drafted by and introduced at the request of a state agency
<b>FOIL</b>	Acronym for the “Freedom of Information Law” that allows members of the public to access public records and documents. To learn more, visit <a href="http://www.dos.state.ny.us/coog/">http://www.dos.state.ny.us/coog/</a>
<b>Home Rule Bills</b>	Legislation requiring authorization by local governments prior to enactment
<b>Lobby Day</b>	A specific day when a group travels to Albany to meet with elected officials to discuss issues of concern
<b>Lobbyist</b>	A person who is paid to advocate on behalf of a specific cause or group
<b>Majority</b>	The political party that has a controlling majority in a house
<b>Marginal</b>	A legislator who won election or re-election by a small number of votes or whose district enrollment favors the opposite party and is therefore considered vulnerable to electoral defeat
<b>Member Item</b>	A budget appropriation secured by a legislator for the benefit of his/her constituents
<b>Message of Necessity</b>	A notice issued by the governor authorizing an immediate vote on legislation without the required three day “aging” period
<b>PACs</b>	Political Action Committees that donate money to support candidates
<b>Program Bill</b>	Legislation proposed by the governor, the Attorney General, or state agencies for consideration by the legislature
<b>Ranking Member</b>	A minority party legislator who acts as the leader of his fellow minority members on a committee
<b>Second Floor</b>	The governor’s office (Executive Chamber)
<b>Session Day</b>	A day when legislators are in Albany to conduct business
<b>Sponsor</b>	A legislator who has introduced a specific piece of legislation
<b>Starring a Bill</b>	An action that prevents a bill on the floor of the Assembly or Senate from being voted on
<b>Third reading</b>	Calendar status of a bill that has been “aged” (three days) and can be voted on
<b>Veto Override</b>	A vote of two-thirds of the Assembly or Senate to approve a bill that has been vetoed by the governor





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