

TAKING A SEAT AT THE TABLE

STATE BUDGET HANDBOOK FOR INDIAN COUNTRY



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INTRODUCTION

WHY THE STATE
BUDGET MATTERS

Through the state budget, we as Montanans identify, prioritize, and fund the public services we all rely on for our safety, prosperity, and stability. Our state budget can be used to promote future economic prosperity and health through investments that create opportunities for Montanans who are American Indian and all Montana residents, but this is only possible with substantial input and advocacy from Indian Country.

While the federal budget plays a significant role in relieving poverty, promoting health, and building economic opportunity, the state budget also has a substantial impact on the lives of American Indians living on and off reservations in Montana.

There are at least three ways the state budget impacts Indian Country:

01

› **FEDERAL AND STATE INVESTMENTS IN SERVICES THAT HELP ALL MONTANANS.** The federal and state budgets fund public services and infrastructure that are available to all residents of the state, including American Indians. These investments include schools, safe roads and highways, and clean drinking water.

02

› **DIRECT STATE INVESTMENTS IN INDIAN COUNTRY.** There are a number of programs the state of Montana has established to improve the lives of Montanans who are American Indian through direct funding to Tribal Nations, Tribal institutions, and reservation infrastructure. This includes funding to Tribal colleges, Native American tuition waivers, small business development, and Tribal language preservation, among others.

03

› **ALLOCATION OF FEDERAL INVESTMENTS BY THE STATE.** The federal government is increasingly turning over federal community services dollars to state governments in the form of block grants and pass-through appropriations. State-level policymakers are tasked with determining how best to distribute the funding, making decisions that can either help or hurt Montanans, including American Indians. Examples that fall under this category are Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) funds, disaster and emergency services, and federal transportation dollars. Portions of these federal dollars allocated to the state are then reinvested or passed through to Tribal Nations.

Just as the state budget impacts Indian Country, Indian Country impacts Montana. Each year, Tribal Nations infuse roughly \$1 billion into the state's economy.¹ This contribution makes Tribal Nations significant stakeholders in the future fiscal and economic health of Montana and further entitles them to a seat at the state budgeting table, where they can advocate for meaningful investments in their communities.

The state budgeting process allows for citizen input and is one of the few ways that citizens can directly influence state financial management decisions. The process is the same each biennium and provides two important entry points for citizen engagement. The first is during the period when the governor works with state agencies to construct the overall budget. The second is during the legislative session, when state policymakers work through budget details, section by section, recommending modifications, approving expenditures, and introducing new investment proposals based on the needs of their constituencies.

State legislatures can play a powerful role in defining the state's relationship with Tribal Nations. Thus, understanding and engaging in the legislative process is important in furthering Tribal interests. During the legislative session, Tribal leaders and citizens can voice support for or against new or existing policies that can have long-term implications for their communities. For example, the session is when Tribal leaders and legislators can work together to make permanent critical state-funded programs serving Indian Country, guaranteeing that these

EACH YEAR, TRIBAL
NATIONS INFUSE ROUGHLY
\$1 BILLION INTO THE
STATE'S ECONOMY.



important investments will continue despite the ever-changing face of the administration and Legislature.

To ensure the state is making wise investments in Indian Country, Tribal people must be involved in the state budgeting process. When Montanans who are American Indian voice their opinions in debates on how to invest state funds, legislators can better understand their needs. Because many lawmakers are unfamiliar with Indian Country, and the historical impacts that continue to affect communities, it is necessary to provide the perspective of how the state budget affects Montanans who are American Indian.

This Tribal-State Budget Handbook serves as an overview of how the state budgeting process works and how Montanans who are American Indian can get involved. **Section 1** summarizes the history of state and Tribal government relationships surrounding the state budget and explores why there is significant room for growth. **Section 2** provides a summary of Indian Country's economic contributions to the state. It also reviews how the state budget impacts Tribal Nations, including a list of critical services funded through state investment. **Section 3** provides a detailed timeline of the budgeting and legislative processes in Montana. This is followed by an overview of how a bill becomes law and how to track legislative activity online. **Section 4** outlines strategies for Tribal leaders and engaged citizens to influence the process.

THE TRIBAL-STATE FISCAL RELATIONSHIP

HISTORY OF TRIBAL-STATE BUDGET RELATIONSHIP

To fully appreciate the importance of Tribal involvement in the state budgeting process, it is important to understand the history of Tribal-State relations. Historically, as trustee, the federal government directly handled administration and oversight of Tribal funding, law enforcement, and education systems located on reservations. This left little need for interaction between states and Tribal Nations. When interaction did occur, conflict over land, natural resources, and law enforcement jurisdiction often characterized it.²

During the 1970s, American Indian leaders pushed for greater control over Tribal affairs, leading to the passage of the 1975 Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act (Public Law 93-638). By entering into so-called “638 contracts,” many Tribal Nations assumed administrative control of federal programs serving their reservations that the Bureau of Indian Affairs previously ran.³ It was not until the 1990s that the federal government adopted a widespread program of devolving federal resources and administrative responsibility of federal programs to Tribal Nations, states, and local governments.

These policies, often referred to as New Federalism reforms or “devolution,” intended to give local governments greater freedom in determining how best to meet the needs of their respective citizens.⁴ Eventually, devolution would give state and Tribal governments a reason to interact more frequently.

For Tribal Nations, devolution was largely evidenced in the passage of the Tribal Self-Governance Act of 1994 (Public Law 103-413), which took 638 contracting a step further, giving Tribal Nations the ability to compact management of one or more federal programs serving their reservations and the freedom to redesign the programs and reallocate funds for these efforts.⁵

States primarily saw devolution in the area of welfare reform. In 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act transferred financial resources and authority for federal income assistance programs to states.⁶ This transfer generally took the form of federal block grants to states for providing public services.

These reforms did not always acknowledge Tribal Nations as eligible governments to receive funding for or to administer certain programs (such as Medicaid and Children’s Health Insurance Programs, for example).⁷ However, Tribal Nations did gain the authority to administer some programs, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and the Low Income Heating Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). To do so, law required they contract with the state to assume program management. Thus began an intensified working relationship between Tribal Nations and states.



For both Tribal and state governments, devolution meant greater local independence in the administration of federal programs; however, it also resulted in decreases in overall federal aid for these programs.

Because of this, there is a great incentive for Tribal Nations and states to work collaboratively to coordinate administration of resources to maximize their benefit. There are an array of state and Tribal governmental activities, programs, and responsibilities that overlap, making it important to establish and maintain good Tribal-State working relationships. This can be a complex task, but a good starting point is for both sides to see themselves as potential partners in achieving some very significant mutual goals, which include addressing the basic needs of their shared citizens and strengthening their shared economies.

TRIBAL-STATE RELATIONS TODAY

Although contentious at times, the relationship between the state of Montana and Tribal Nations has improved significantly over the years. This is partly a result of the sustained efforts of Montanans who are American Indian engaging with and educating state government officials about Tribal communities, cultures, and history. It is also a result of the presence of American Indians in key positions in state government and in both chambers of the state Legislature.

As noted previously, legislatures play a powerful role in defining a state's relationship with Tribal Nations. Through the efforts of both American Indian and receptive non-Indian legislators and citizens, the Montana Legislature recognizes that Indian people are not only citizens of their respective Tribal Nations, they are also Montana citizens who contribute to the well-being of the state. What follows is a timeline of meaningful advancements in the Tribal-State relationship.*

1951 - Montana Legislature creates the Coordinator of Indian Affairs position in recognition of the need for American Indians to communicate with state government.⁸

1972 - Montana Constitution is revised in its entirety and includes the addition of Article 10, Section 1(2), which states that "the state recognizes the distinct and unique cultural heritage of the American Indians and is committed in its educational goals to the preservation of their cultural integrity."⁹

1981 - Montana Legislature enacts the State-Tribal Cooperative Agreements Act, authorizing public agencies to enter into cooperative agreements with Tribal governments.¹⁰ As of 2017, public agencies and Tribal Nations had entered into more than 550 agreements.¹¹

1989 - Montana Legislature establishes the Committee on Indian Affairs, now called the State-Tribal Relations Committee, as a permanent interim committee to act as a liaison with Tribal governments, encourage Tribal-State and local-Tribal cooperation, propose legislation, conduct interim studies and report its findings, and make recommendations to the Legislature.¹²

1993 - Montana Legislature amends the State-Tribal Cooperative Agreements Act to specifically allow for revenue-sharing agreements. In 2017, Tribal-State revenue-sharing agreements enabled Tribal Nations to collect almost \$11 million in shared tax revenue from the on-reservation sale of tobacco, alcohol, and gasoline.¹³

1995 - Montana Legislative Council's Committee on Indian Affairs, the predecessor to the State-Tribal Relations Committee, publishes "Tribal

*Note: The criteria for inclusion in this timeline are that the relationship development must (1) impact all the Tribal Nations in Montana; (2) be new (versus a continuation of support for a previous development); and (3) concern Tribal Nations and not individual Tribal citizens.

Nations in Montana: A Handbook for Legislators to educate legislators about Tribal culture, sovereignty, and government policies related to American Indians in Montana.” The handbook was among the first resources of its kind in the United States.¹⁴

1995 – Montana Legislature passes House Bill 544, sponsored by Representative Carley Tuss and codified as MCA 20-25-428, to appropriate \$1.4 million to reimburse Tribal colleges for providing educational services provided to resident non-Indian students. This funding is now known as the Tribal College Assistance Program.¹⁵

The five principles of **good collaborative governance** are

01

A commitment to cooperation and collaboration

02

Mutual respect and understanding

03

Regular and early communication

04

A process of accountability for addressing issues

05

Preservation of the Tribal Nations’ relationship with the state

Source: Montana Legislative Services, “Guiding Principles and documentation” (2015)

1997 – Montana Legislature passes Senate Bill 84, sponsored by Senator Greg Jergeson, to make permanent the funding formula for the Tribal College Assistance Program, though the funding distribution remains contingent upon a line-item appropriation.¹⁶

1999 - Montana Legislature passes House Bill 528, sponsored by Representative Carol Juneau and codified as MCA 20-1-501, to implement Article 10, Section 1(2), of the state Constitution, creating what is today known as Indian Education for All.¹⁷

1999 – Montana Legislature passes the Native American Economic Development Act, creating the State Tribal Economic Development (STED) Commission. The STED Commission is comprised of 11 representatives, including one from each of the eight Tribal governments in Montana, and is responsible for assisting, promoting, developing, and proposing recommendations for accelerating on-reservation economic development.¹⁸

2003 – Montana Legislature passes House Bill 608, sponsored by Representative Jonathan Windy Boy and codified as MCA 2-15-142, 143. HB 608 creates mechanisms for holding the state accountable to Tribal Nations by providing for Tribal consultation in the development of state agency policies that directly impact Tribal Nations, authorizing an annual training for state employees, providing for annual meetings between state and Tribal government officials, and requiring the state to produce an annual report on its work and investments in Indian Country. HB 608 also defined the principles to guide the Tribal-State relationship. The National Conference of State Legislatures and the National Congress of American Indians developed these principles.¹⁹

2005 – Through his first executive order, Governor Brian Schweitzer creates the Governor’s American Indian Nations (GAIN) Council to ensure that all activities conducted between Tribal Nations and the state are conducted in a government-to-government manner and that state agency activities with Tribal Nations include Tribal consultation.²⁰

2005 - Governor Brian Schweitzer’s administration creates the GAIN database to track the extent of the state’s involvement with Tribal governments.²¹

2005 – Governor Brian Schweitzer convenes the first-ever state-sponsored meeting of Tribal leaders, regional directors of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Service, and key members of his staff and state agencies to begin creating innovative solutions to some of the issues identified as priorities by Tribal Nations in Montana.²²

2005 – Montana Legislature approves Governor Brian Schweitzer’s executive budget request for \$3.2 million for fulfilling the state constitutional mandate articulated in Article 10, Section 1(2), today known as Indian Education for All.²³

2005 – Montana Legislature approves Governor Brian Schweitzer’s executive budget request of \$1 million for Indian Country economic development to support Tribal Nations in taking advantage of existing and

potential economic opportunities on their reservations. The program is now called the Indian Country Economic Development (ICED) program and remains contingent upon a line-item appropriation.²⁴

2006 – Governor Brian Schweitzer grants official state recognition to the Little Shell Tribe, a declaration that honored the 2003 landmark Montana Supreme Court ruling in *Koke v. Little Shell Tribe*.²⁵

2007 – Montana Legislature passes Senate Bill 173, sponsored by Senator Carol Juneau, to make permanent the State Tribal Economic Development (STED) Commission.²⁶

2009 – Montana Legislature passes House Bill 158, sponsored by Representative Shannon Augare, to allow Tribal governments the ability to access all economic development grants and loans available under the Big Sky Economic Development Trust Fund, originally created in 2005.²⁷

2009 – Montana Legislature passes House Bill 193, sponsored by Representative Shannon Augare, to change the title of the Coordinator of Indian Affairs to Director of Indian Affairs, making the position commensurate with other positions in the Governor’s cabinet.²⁸

2011 - Montana Legislature passes Senate Bill 412, sponsored by Senator Shannon Augare, to put in place a five-year property tax exemption for Tribally owned fee land with pending trust status.²⁹

2013 – Montana Legislature passes Senate Bill 342, sponsored by Senator Jonathan Windy Boy and codified as MCA 20-9-537, to provide \$2 million for the Montana Indian Language Preservation Pilot Program, to preserve and protect Tribal languages for current and future generations.³⁰

2014 – Governor Steve Bullock launches the Main Street Montana in Indian Country initiative to work with Tribal governments to increase educational and workforce development opportunities, develop reservation infrastructure, increase access to capital, and promote economic growth on reservations.³¹

2015 – Montana Legislature passes House Bill 559, sponsored by Representative George Kipp III, to appropriate an additional \$1.5 million to continue the accomplishments of the Montana Indian Language Program into the 2017 biennium.³²

2015 – Montana Legislature passes Senate Bill 307, sponsored by Senator Sharon Stewart-Peregoy, to require the state to recognize Tribal business entities organized under the laws of a federally recognized Tribal nation in Montana.³³



2015 - Governor Steve Bullock creates the Office of American Indian Health to work in close collaboration with Tribal Nations to address health disparities among the American Indian population in Montana and bring about health equity.³⁴

2017 - Montana Legislature passes Senate Bill 319, sponsored by Senator Jen Gross, to prevent a state agency or local government from prohibiting an individual from wearing traditional Tribal regalia or objects of cultural significance at certain public events, including graduation ceremonies.³⁵

2019 - Montana Legislature passes House Bill 21, sponsored by Representative Rae Peppers, to authorize the Department of Justice to assist with the investigation of all missing persons cases and to require the employment of a missing persons specialist within the department.³⁶

2019 - Montana Legislature passes House Bill 632, sponsored by Representative Jade Bahr, to require the Department of Commerce to publish an updated decennial report on the economic contributions and impacts to Montana of reservations.³⁷

2021 - Montana legislature passes HB 35, Sponsored by Rep. Sharon Stewart Peregoy, which establishes a missing person review commission that will review missing person cases that the attorney general chooses.³⁸

2023 - Montana legislature passes HB 317, sponsored by Rep. Jonathan Windy Boy, which provides enhanced protections for American Indian children and codifies the federal Indian Child Welfare Act principles into state law. HB 317 is to sunset in 2025, so reauthorization is needed to continue the act.³⁹

2023 - Montana legislature passes HB 163, sponsored by Rep. Tyson Running Wolf, which establishes a grant program to help fund training opportunities for community-based missing persons response teams.⁴⁰

Despite this progress toward meaningful collaboration, there is still room for improvement. The state can work harder to ensure that its elected officials and agency leaders are better educated about basic concepts, such as Tribal sovereignty and the history of Indian affairs. Additionally, the state can strive to better inform Tribal leaders about available state-funded programs and opportunities. However, Tribal leaders must also be proactive in seeking out information on existing programs and opportunities and actively work to educate the state about Tribal concerns. Tribal leaders must also understand how to use the methods available to them to advocate for the needs and rights of their communities.



Every reservation lies within at least one state legislative district. Each Tribal individual, including those living off-reservation, is also a Montana citizen and is therefore entitled to the same rights, responsibilities, services, and considerations as any other citizen in Montana. Participating in the state budgeting and legislative processes provides a unique opportunity to participate in both governments and is an act of exercising Tribal sovereignty and raising awareness that Tribal leaders are active and advocating on behalf of their constituents.



THE STATE BUDGET AND AMERICAN INDIANS IN MONTANA

Between 2003 and 2009, American Indian nations contributed \$6.6 billion in public sector dollars to Montana's economy. These findings are presented in the "Economic Contributions of Reservations to the State of Montana, 2003-2009."⁴¹

The Economic Contributions report updates a 2007 report that focused exclusively on fiscal year 2003. The 2007 monetary contributions report found that the eight Tribal Nations in Montana contributed more than \$1 billion to the state economy in fiscal year 2003 alone.⁴²

These reports demonstrate that rather than bearing a financial burden on the state, Tribal communities contribute significantly to the overall state economy. The reports also demonstrate that the Tribal Nations in Montana are substantial stakeholders in the state's economic health, not to mention contributors to Montana's cultural heritage and contemporary identity. As major contributors, they deserve a seat at the state-level decision-making table where they can work to advance the needs of their constituents by seeking meaningful reinvestments of dollars back into their communities.

STATE BUDGET IMPACTS ON AMERICAN INDIANS IN MONTANA

Virtually every area of the state budget impacts American Indian children, elders, families, and communities. The state budget is a concrete way for the government to prioritize services from child care assistance to public education and state parks to road repair. Although the state budgeting process may appear complicated, it is the same each biennium. Effective advocates engage early, understand who the decision-makers are, how decisions are made, and can clearly demonstrate how the budget impacts their communities.

THREE WAYS THE STATE BUDGET IMPACTS AMERICAN INDIANS:

- 01 › Investments in public infrastructure and programs (like our K-12 schools, higher education, and public highways) that impact American Indian children, families, and communities.
- 02 › Investments that provide Tribal Nations with opportunities for economic development and infrastructure projects in Indian Country.
- 03 › The state plays a role in allocating federal funds to Tribal Nations in Montana.

STATE INVESTMENTS IN ESSENTIAL PUBLIC PROGRAMS

Montana's state budget is a combination of revenue from taxes, fees, and federal funding. The state determines funding by estimating the cost to provide services, such as education or transportation. For example, the state funds K-12 schools that serve reservation communities. Montanans who are American Indian are eligible for all state public services. Federal funds support many of those services and are based on funding formulas that use population demographics, including from reservation communities.

DIRECT STATE INVESTMENTS IN INDIAN COUNTRY

The state of Montana also provides direct investments in Indian Country through programs funded by the state General Fund. Montana generates revenue in the General Fund from individual and corporate income taxes, property taxes, and natural resource extraction and development taxes. The state solely funds some programs and services in Indian Country, including the Tribal College Assistance Program (TCAP), Native Language Preservation, and an array of Indian Country Economic Development programs. The TCAP includes funding for High School Equivalency Tests (HiSET) and non-beneficiary students attending Tribal colleges.

Tribal Nations and entities are also often eligible to receive state investments for health service programs, workforce development, and infrastructure projects, such as building or maintaining reservation highways, bridges,

2023-2025 STATE-FUNDED TRIBAL PROGRAMS

Tribal College Assistance Program	+	Native Language Preservation	+	Indian Country Economic Development Program
\$2 MILLION		\$1.5 MILLION		\$1.87 MILLION

wastewater treatment, and irrigation projects.⁴³ However, many Tribal Nations are unaware that state funding is available for these kinds of efforts. Therefore, to take advantage, they must be proactive in seeking out information about available opportunities, as well as advocating for new or additional investments in their communities.

STATE'S ROLE IN DISTRIBUTING FEDERAL BLOCK GRANTS TO TRIBAL NATIONS

As a result of devolution, the federal government provides funding to states with the expectation that they will be passed through to local governments, including Tribal governments. This funding stream is typically delivered in the form of block grants.

The federal government intends for state and local governments to divide and disburse block grants to sub-recipients, such as counties, cities, nonprofits, or Tribal Nations. This method allows state and Tribal governments greater flexibility in meeting the needs of the people. Some of this federal funding comes with explicit requirements regarding how much should go to Tribal Nations. Other sources of funding will indicate a minimum that must go to Tribal Nations. It is occasionally up to the state to decide how to distribute the money.

Federal block grant funding is disbursed based on either a competitive application process (i.e., Schools of Promise) or a formula model (i.e., Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program). Some block grants require a minimum Tribal pass-through amount (i.e., Juvenile Justice). Other funds are only available to recipients that exclude Tribal Nations from being a direct grantee but will require Tribal Nations to apply for a portion of funding from a city or county.

WAYS FEDERAL BLOCK GRANTS REACH INDIAN COUNTRY:

- › Grant requires state to provide specific amount to Tribal Nations
- › Grant specifies a minimum (no maximum) to go to Tribal Nations; or
- › Tribal Nations are eligible to request to apply for grant funding, but there is no minimum amount guaranteed.

+	Tribal Computer Programming Scholarship Program	+	Office of Indian Affairs	+	MMIP Task Force & Community Training Grant	=	TOTAL
	\$96,000		\$514,909		\$271,162		\$6,284,893

Source: Legislative Fiscal Division



There is also funding that Tribal Nations can request that is above a minimum amount set by the federal government. For example, Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) funding requires states to share their total funding with Tribal Nations based on a set formula. However, the state funds Native American programs at a level higher than the JJDP Act requires.⁴⁴

Tribal Nations in Montana sometimes do not claim federal dollars. Oftentimes, this is because Tribal Nations are unaware that the funding is available. When this happens, the federal dollars are either sent back to the federal reserves or are redirected to other programs in the state.

Tribal Nations have the best opportunity to secure federal investments in Montana's communities when they actively engage in the state budgeting process. Early and regular communication with the state gives Tribal Nations the time they need to investigate available funding opportunities and to secure the investments needed by their communities.

When Montanans who are American Indian engage in the budgeting process, they improve recognition of Tribal interests in state fiscal policy debates. These leaders also inspire other American Indian leaders and allies to encourage responsible investments in schools, health care, critical safety net programs, and clean water.



UNDERSTANDING THE MONTANA BUDGETING AND LEGISLATIVE PROCESSES

To effectively participate in the state budgeting process, it is important to understand how the budget develops and ultimately becomes law through legislative approval.

The primary goal of the budgeting process is to assess the needs of Montanans and then to determine the amount of funding required to provide the services that Montana's communities rely on each day. Montana's budget pays for the public services that protect us, help ensure community health and well-being, and create economic security for families.

Our state budget is not simply a balance sheet full of dollar figures; it enables our communities to plan for our future quality of life.

WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DETERMINING THE MONTANA BUDGET?

The governor and state legislators work together to develop fair and fiscally responsible budgets, balancing revenue generation, or taxation, with community needs. In a snapshot, the process begins with state agencies submitting their proposed budgets to the governor, who may choose to modify or add to the proposal. The governor then presents the proposed budget to the Legislature for approval. In Montana, the overall budget is known as House Bill 2 (HB 2), but there are often other bills that also have budgetary impact, such as infrastructure funding and proposals related to the state employee pay plans.

The Legislature is responsible for appropriating state funding, developing state policies governing resource allocation and spending authority, and giving direction to state agencies to carry out programs and provide services.⁴⁵ After the Legislature passes a budget, the budget travels back to the governor's desk. From there, the governor may sign it (making it law), leave it unsigned (it still becomes law), offer amendments (called line-item veto, which a majority of the Legislature must approve), or reject it by vetoing. The timeline for this process is outlined in detail in the following section.

Montana’s citizen Legislature includes teachers, farmers, ranchers, business people, attorneys, retirees, stay-at-home parents, and more. The Legislature is a part-time governing body. Most elected leaders return home to their regular jobs after the session ends. Our elected leaders come from many walks of life; however, they might not be familiar with Tribal communities. When American Indians engage in the budgeting process, they help ensure that Tribal interests are taken into consideration. These efforts will help create and maintain investments that support economic opportunity and meaningful safety nets in Indian Country.

WHEN DOES THE MONTANA BUDGET PROCESS BEGIN?

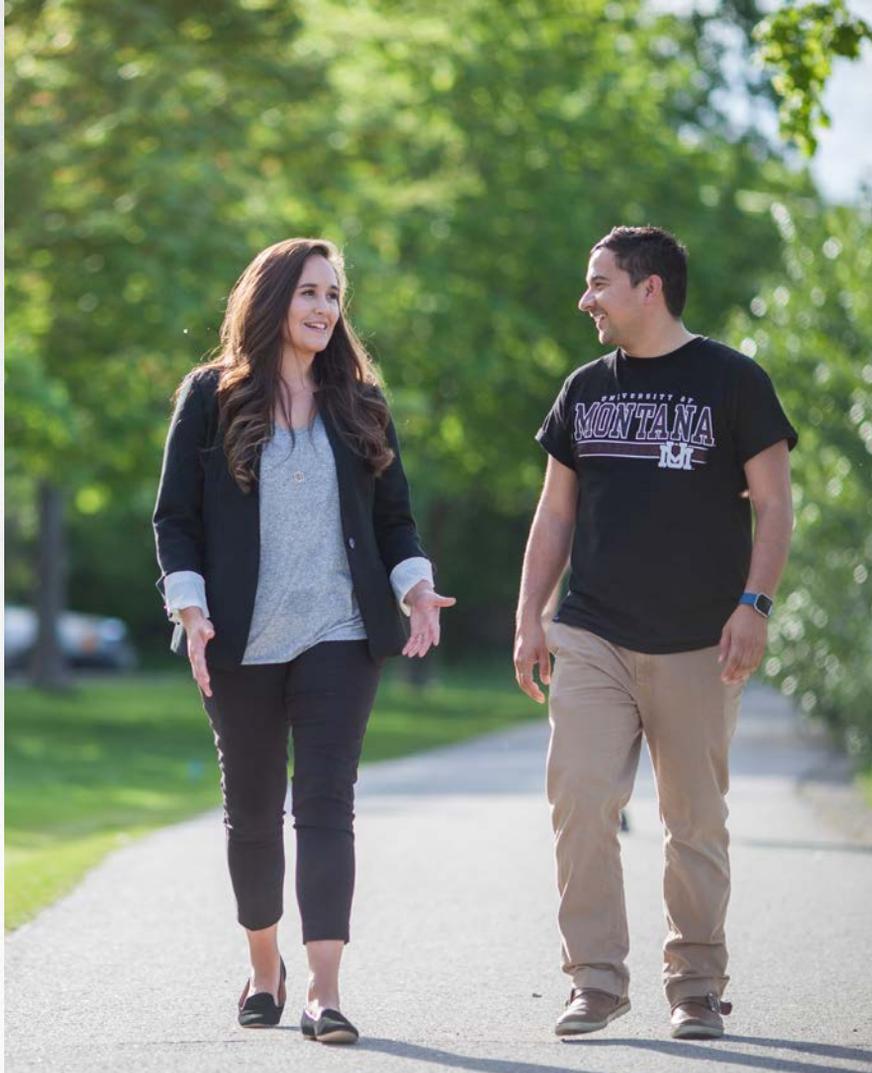
The budget process starts about a year before the legislative session begins. That means that it is important for Tribal Nations and citizens to engage early in the process and understand the timeline. The Montana Legislature convenes every other year (January – May, in odd-numbered years), making it one of the country’s “biennium” legislatures. This means that every odd year, the Legislature meets and decides a state budget for the following two years.

In the year prior to the session, or the start of the even-numbered year, the Governor’s Office of Budget and Program Planning (OBPP) releases the “Timetable” for the budget process. This document can be found at www.budget.mt.gov.⁴⁶

IS THE BUDGET PROCESS COMPLICATED?

The budget process is complex and for good reason. Expenditures for the 2025 biennium budget total more than \$14.5 billion, including \$4.3 billion in Montana’s General Fund, \$7.1 billion in federal funds, and around \$2.9 billion in state special revenue funds.⁴⁷ These numbers are only HB 2 expenditures and do not include statutory appropriations. Each step of the process is meant to provide the time and attention necessary for fair and reasonable outcomes for our state. This process also guarantees all Montanans their right to provide comment and input, as well as time to educate agency directors, the governor, and legislators on how the budget impacts the various demographics that make up our state.

It is important to know that even though it is a complicated process, it is not essential to understand every element of the budget to participate. See Section 4 of this Handbook for more information on how to participate in the process.

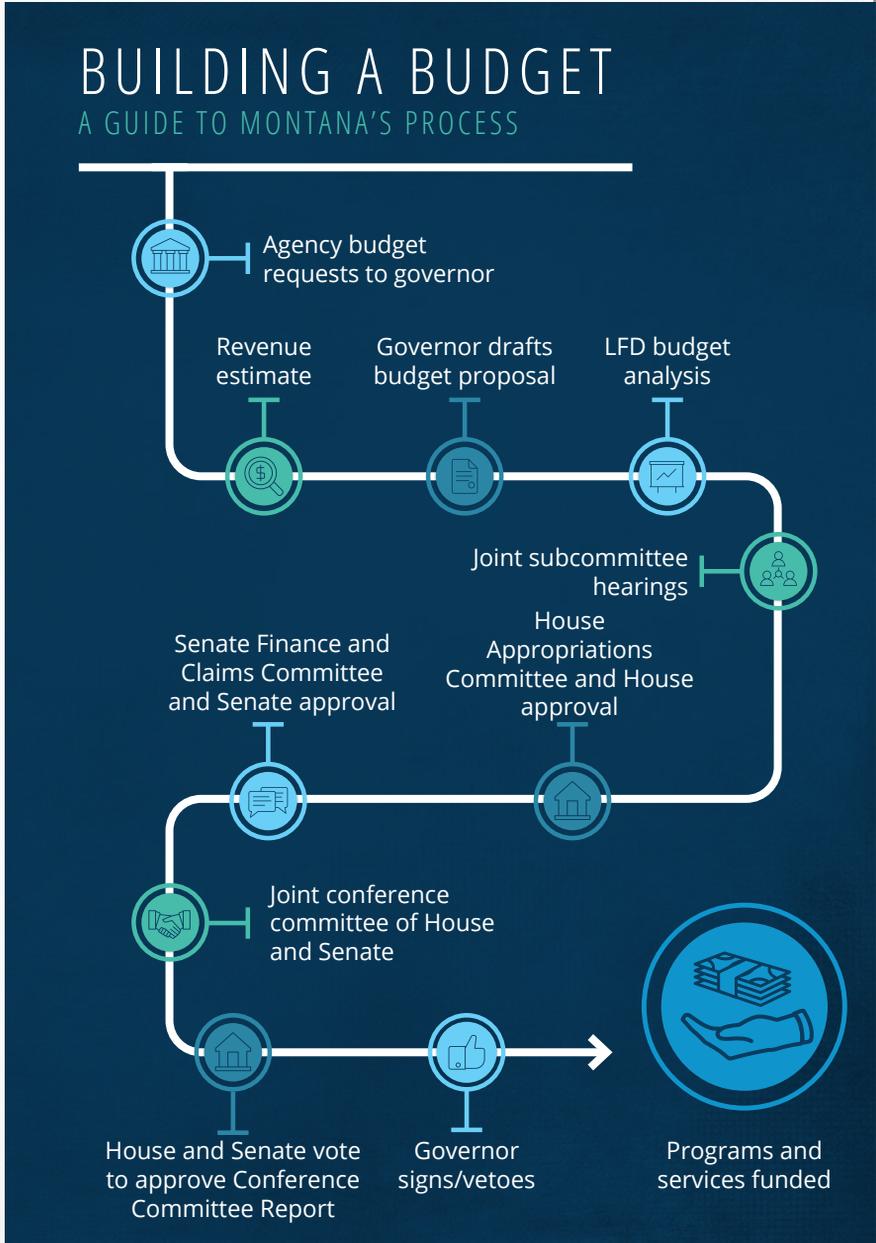


DOES PARTICIPATING IN THE BUDGET DEVELOPMENT REALLY MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Yes! Every Montanan has the right to share their thoughts, opinions, ideas, and concerns with legislators about any public issue considered, including how the state spends its funds. Tribal and American Indian participation—through discussions with the governor, agency staff, and legislators—has resulted in meaningful investments in areas that are priorities for Tribal Nations and communities. Without American Indian participation, policymakers may not understand the needs and circumstances of Indian Country or urban Indian communities.

THE MONTANA BUDGET PROCESS AND TIMELINE

The Montana Legislature meets in regular session for only 90 working days every odd-numbered year. Participation time is limited. To exercise our right to participate, the public must understand how and when to be most effective. Montanans should pay careful attention to the deadlines and expected dates of important meetings, hearings, and votes.⁴⁷





AGENCY BUDGET REQUESTS TO GOVERNOR JANUARY TO LATE AUGUST, EVEN-NUMBERED YEARS

Several months prior to the start of the legislative session, the various agencies that the Montana budget funds, such as the Department of Public Health and Human Services and Department of Commerce, submit their proposed budgets to the governor via the OBPP. In their budgets, each agency must indicate any proposed spending increases or decreases, in addition to any new program proposal that requires an appropriation. **This is the best time to contact the agency directors to suggest changes that they should make to their departmental budgets that will best meet the needs of Indian Country.** This might include requesting changes to the amount of funding available for programs that serve Montanans who are American Indian or requesting increases above the required minimum from federal funding. Because this process happens over the course of a few months and each administration is different, it is important to pay close attention to the official budget timeline mentioned earlier. This document is generally released in January of even-numbered years.



GOVERNOR DRAFTS BUDGET PROPOSAL NOVEMBER

Once agencies submit their budgets to OBPP, the governor and their staff review requests from agencies. OBPP then drafts a budget proposal and submits it to the Legislative Fiscal Division (LFD) by November 15th, before the start of the legislative session. At that point, the governor's proposed budget becomes available online to the public. The first version of the governor's proposed budget is only a draft; the final version is due by December 15th. The governor may offer changes until December 15th.

Montanans may propose changes to the governor's draft budget by contacting the governor's staff. The governor's staff includes policy advisors who are each assigned to certain issue areas.

On December 15th, the governor provides a final draft of the proposed budget to the LFD. At this time, the budget proposal officially becomes the first draft of HB 2, the major appropriations bill.

NOTE: In the case of a newly elected governor, the deadline for the final budget proposal is extended to January 7th to allow the governor-elect time to prepare a budget proposal.



LEGISLATIVE FISCAL DIVISION PRESENTS BUDGET ANALYSIS JANUARY

By the first day of the legislative session, the LFD provides a detailed analysis of the governor's budget proposal, including highlights of new spending priorities or cuts. This report, known as the Legislative Budget Analysis, provides a very specific, non-partisan examination of the governor's proposed budget. This analysis reviews agency submissions, as well as any important information that the Legislature should consider before determining an agency's budget. The Legislative Budget Analysis presents information for each of the agencies in three sections, which Montana law requires. Those sections are:

- › **BASE BUDGET:** The amount of funding the previous Legislature approved for the agency.
- › **PRESENT LAW ADJUSTMENT:** The amount of funding the agency needs, according to current law, to maintain the basic operations and services approved by the previous Legislature.
- › **NEW PROPOSALS:** Any funding changes requested in the governor's proposed budget that require approval by the current Legislature. This includes any new services that Montana law does not require, changes to the programs and services provided by an agency, requests to cancel a service that an agency provides, or changes to any source of funding that an agency receives.



JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE HEARINGS JANUARY - FEBRUARY, MUST COMPLETE BY 45TH LEGISLATIVE DAY

To provide adequate discussion of the various sections of the budget, the Legislature forms joint subcommittees to review every state agency budget. These subcommittees are comprised of members of the House Appropriations Committee and the Senate Finance and Claims Committee.

Subcommittees include: General Government; Health and Human Services; Natural Resources and Transportation; Judicial Branch, Law Enforcement, and Justice; Education; and Long-Range Planning.

These committees hear from agency personnel and committee staff and hold public meetings or hearings where any concerned citizen can provide recommendations for or against each of the budget items. These committees then make recommendations on how to revise the governor's budget to the House Appropriations Committee for the next round of review. Subcommittees must complete their work by the 45th day of the 90-day session.



HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE APPROVAL FEBRUARY – MARCH, FINISHES BY THE 64TH LEGISLATIVE DAY

The full House Appropriations Committee reviews the recommendations made by each of the subcommittees and pulls together a comprehensive appropriations bill. Agencies and the public offer additional input regarding the House Appropriations Committee's action. The full committee considers how much revenue there is to spend compared to the expenditures recommended by the subcommittees. The House Appropriations Committee finishes this stage of its work around the 64th day of the legislative session.



FULL HOUSE DEBATES HOUSE BILL 2 IN SECOND READING, FINAL ACTION IN THIRD READING MARCH, 65TH LEGISLATIVE DAY

After HB 2 passes the House Appropriations Committee, it heads to the House floor for second reading. This is the first opportunity for the entire House of Representatives to debate the state budget. The House members may propose amendments to the bill, which requires a majority vote. At the conclusion of the debate and amendment process, House members vote for or against the bill. If the bill receives a majority vote, it passes second reading, which often occurs on the 64th and 65th days of the session.

Members of the public may listen to the proceedings from the balcony of the House chambers and may lobby legislators in individual meetings, through phone and email contact, or as they move on or off the floor. Members of the public may not enter the House chambers or speak to the full House during these proceedings.

The next day, the full House votes again for or against House Bill 2 in its third reading. This reading is only a vote. Members may change their votes, but there is no further debate and discussion of the bill, nor can anyone offer additional amendments. Members of the public may try to contact their legislators between the second and third readings to thank them for a favorable vote or to encourage them to change their vote.

It is important to note that legislative bills containing appropriations must be transmitted from the House to the Senate by the 67th day of the legislative session. This is called the transmittal deadline. If an appropriations bill does not make this deadline, it is considered dead and will not be discussed further. Other types of bills have different deadlines for transmittal from one house to the other. Those may be bills containing revenue or general bills that have no or minimal financial impact on the state budget.





SENATE FINANCE AND CLAIMS COMMITTEE APPROVAL LATE MARCH, EARLY APRIL

The Senate Finance and Claims Committee reviews and debates HB 2 as passed by the full House. They also hold public hearings and may change the budget bill. When the committee concludes debate, a majority vote passes the bill out of Senate Finance and Claims Committee, with or without amendments. The committee reviews and debates HB 2 for about 10 days, from around day 66 until day 76.



FULL SENATE DEBATES HOUSE BILL 2 IN SECOND READING, FINAL ACTION IN THIRD READING

House Bill 2 heads to the Senate floor for debate and amendments by section, just like in the House. The Senate votes for or against HB 2 in the second reading after discussion. The next legislative day, the full Senate votes again for or against the bill in its third reading without debate. If the Senate passes the bill without any amendments, the bill passes the Legislature and heads to the governor's desk for approval. However, the Senate typically makes amendments to HB 2.

A. SENATE AMENDS

If the Senate makes any changes to HB 2 from the House version, HB 2 journeys back to the House. The House may accept the Senate's version of the bill by a majority vote. In that case, the bill has passed the Legislature and heads to the governor for approval.

B. HOUSE VOTES ON SENATE AMENDMENTS

If the House rejects the Senate amendments, the bill goes to a Joint Conference Committee. This committee is a joint body that includes members from the House and Senate. The committee works to iron out differences between the House and Senate versions of the bill.



HOUSE AND SENATE VOTE ON JOINT CONFERENCE COMMITTEE REPORT

Both chambers have already given ample consideration to HB 2 at this stage but must approve the version of the bill passed by the Joint Conference Committee by a majority vote. Again, each chamber votes in a second and third reading of the bill.

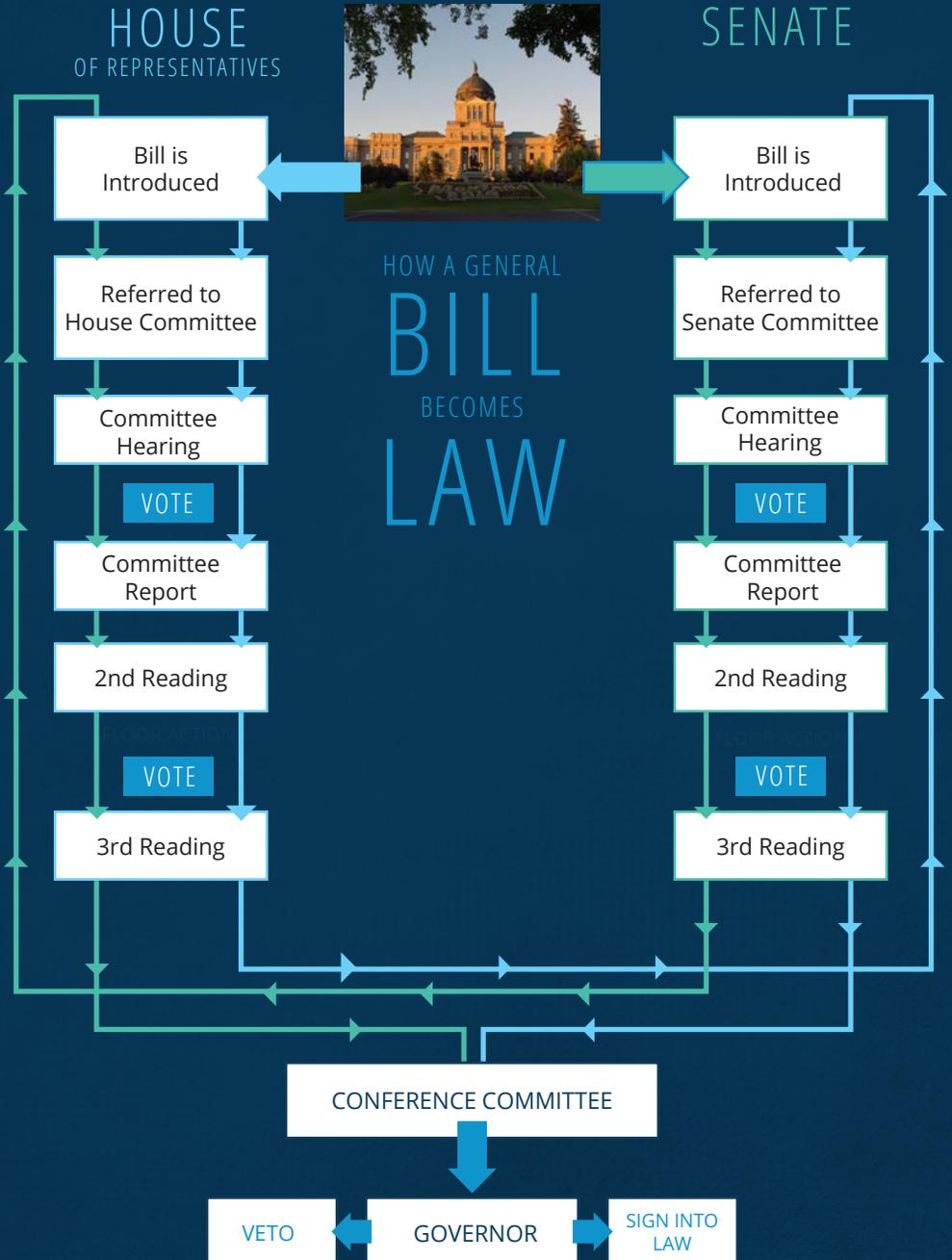


GOVERNOR APPROVAL

Finally, by the 90th day of the legislative session, the Legislature passes the state budget through House Bill 2 and sends it to the governor, who can sign it, reject it, remove specific line items, or propose amendments. The Legislature must vote on any proposed amendments.⁴⁸

HOW A GENERAL BILL BECOMES LAW

Non-budget bills follow a similar process. Below is a flowchart depicting how a bill becomes a law. Following this is a section detailing how to track legislative activity online. All information contained in the remainder of this section has been provided by the Montana Legislative Services Division.



TRACKING LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITY ONLINE

The Montana Legislative Branch has an online tracking system called **LAWS (Legislative Automated Workflow System)**, which allows the public to access information related to past and present legislative sessions. Even though the Legislature may not be in session, LAWS is still in use, processing bill draft requests prior to the general election. People can access the LAWS system at [http://laws.leg.mt.gov/legprd/LAW0200W\\$.Startup](http://laws.leg.mt.gov/legprd/LAW0200W$.Startup).

The quickest way to access past session information is by using the drop-down in the header area of LAWS. Simply choose the session you want to access. The chosen session will remain in effect, in the current browser window, until you change it.

Through the LAWS system, the public can see bill drafts, bill status information, bill text, including any amendments, as well as committee information, such as agendas, hearings, and recorded audio testimony.

Advanced search features help the public find specific bills or generate lists of bills and bill drafts based on specific criteria selected. This criterion can include one or more of the following: requester of a bill draft, primary sponsor of a bill, drafter of a bill, subject area, current status of a bill, and more.

One of the more popular features of LAWS is the “preference list” feature. This feature is useful for internet users who wish to track a specific list, or multiple lists, of legislation. The user can create an account, which is saved with a password of their choosing, allowing the user to access and/or modify the lists at any time. Once signed on to the account, the user can create bill lists. Users can then add bills and bill drafts to their lists. The user can then click on a single “Display Status” link to generate an online report listing the most current status of each bill in the list, along with the bill’s short title and primary sponsor or requester.

Preference list users also have the option of setting email notifications for them when bills maintained on their preference lists have scheduled hearings. Users can choose to receive email notifications for scheduled hearings for bills on their preference lists. Cancellation notices and date, time, and room changes are also sent. However, since LAWS is a real-time, up-to-the-minute system, users should continue to routinely check the bills on their lists to ensure their most current status.

For more information or questions concerning the LAWS system, contact the LAWS Webmaster at lawswebmaster@mt.gov.



LOCATING A BILL AFTER IT BECOMES LAW: A GUIDE TO SEARCHING THE MONTANA CODE ANNOTATED ONLINE FINDING THE MONTANA CODE ANNOTATED (MCA)

1. Go to <http://leg.mt.gov>;
2. Click "Laws & Bills" on the navigation bar at the top of the screen;
3. Select "Montana State Statutes (MCA)" from the drop-down, then click on "View the 2023 MCA."

The internet version of the MCA has two avenues for finding a section of law:

- › **BROWSING (Burrowing):** The Table of Contents is an arrangement of the law based on subject matter. The name of a Title, chapter, part, and section reflect its subject matter. Within the Table of Contents, click on the most appropriate Title (e.g., Title 7 is Local Government), then chapter, then part, and finally section. You can browse backward and forward through sections.
- › **SEARCHING:** The search engine allows you to filter results based on hits in the MCA, within bills, and on the legislative website as a whole. Each MCA section is a separate web page. This allows copying and pasting material from a section into a document.

The search engine will find pages matching your search criteria, but it does not bold or highlight a search term within a page. If you want to search within a page for a certain term, you must use the browser's "find" function (usually found under "Edit" or by using the Control+F keys).

In general, the more terms entered in the search field, the narrower the results.

HOW TO MAKE YOUR “READ ONLY” PREFERENCE LIST AVAILABLE TO OTHERS

- 01 › Learn to create a preference account at https://www.youtube.com/watch?list=PLua3im4_pMBhJKgrNszwLCfsu54zhmCP6&v=ZR6_JOWlQtU&feature=youtu.be
- 02 › Create a preference list (or lists) in your account, and add bills to your list. If you require instructions, go to https://leg.mt.gov/bills/demos/default.asp?p_. (If you already have a preference list, skip to step 3. This includes users from the 2011 session forward. If you had a preference account—username and password—in 2011, or since then, you most likely already have access to your account.)
- 03 › After logging into your account (and assuming you have at least one list) click the “Display Status” link for the list you wish to make available to others. You will find the “Display Status” link to the right of your list name(s) while on the Preference Account Maintenance page.
- 04 › Make sure your email software is running.
- 05 › From the resulting Bill Search Results page, click the “Email this page” link.
- 06 › An email message will launch containing a subject and a special link to the current page (the list you are currently viewing).
- 07 › Fill in the “To:” portion of the email with your recipient email address, then send. You can include a message in the email body, but be careful not to modify the URL displayed in the message.
- 08 › After receiving the email, the recipient can simply click the link, which will take them to the “Display Status” page for that list. While on the Display Status page, the recipient of your link can save the page as a favorite in their internet browser, if they so choose. They can then click the favorite anytime to see any changes to your list immediately.

NOTE: The link to each of the lists in your account is different. The “Email this page” link must be sent for each list you wish to share.



MORE ABOUT THE MCA

CODIFICATION. The MCA is a compilation of existing general and permanent law. Appropriation acts, resolutions, and laws that are temporary or special, such as repealing, validating, severability, or effective date clauses, are not codified.

ARRANGEMENT. The Montana Code Annotated is arranged topically. The user of the MCA will find titles that relate closely to one another logically and topically grouped in the code.

NUMBERING SYSTEM. The MCA uses a three-element numbering system. The number to the far left designates the Title number, the number between the hyphens designates the chapter number, and the number to the right designates the part and section number. Thus 1-2-304 indicates Title 1, chapter 2, part 3, section 4. Numbering is sequential, but the MCA leaves room for future expansion by skipping (or reserving) numbers within chapters and parts and between titles.

OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

Another great resource is the Montana Legislative Services Division (LSD). The LSD helps legislators, state agencies, and the general public navigate legislative information and reports and find information and resources on any topic of concern to the Montana Legislature. Find out more at <https://leg.mt.gov> or by calling 406-444-3064.



INDIAN COUNTRY'S VOICE AT THE CAPITOL

There are several ways American Indians can get their interests represented at the state Capitol. Two of the most effective ways include using state legislative representatives to address concerns on their behalf or voicing concerns directly by testifying and lobbying during the legislative session. The U.S. and Montana Constitutions guarantee the right of every citizen to speak on every public issue and to be heard by officials at every level of government. The key events in every bill's legislative life are the committee hearings. These hearings allow Montanans to communicate directly with legislators and provide an important opportunity for citizens to speak their mind before a committee takes action and before the bill is brought before the attention of each legislative house for debate and a final vote.

Although the establishment of most reservations in Montana predates the creation of the state, every single reservation lies within one or more state House or Senate districts. Therefore, each reservation resident—and in fact, every Montana citizen, Tribal and non-Tribal, on- and off-reservation—has one state house representative and one senator whose job is to represent them and advocate their needs during the legislative sessions, as well as during off-session years.

Tribal leaders and community members can meet with their district representatives and other legislators at any time to voice their needs and concerns. Remember, all testimonies become part of the permanent public record. Additionally, American Indians can request that their representatives or senators serve on committees that are of importance to Tribal communities, also asking to be kept informed of committee actions and bills that relate to their concerns. In general, elected officials welcome their constituents' input and opinions because this is one way they can become more knowledgeable about a particular topic to make an informed decision. Community members are sometimes the best experts, identifying both community needs and effective solutions. Thus, community member participation is vital.

During the legislative session, the public may speak for or against proposed legislation or may work directly with lawmakers to suggest bills. Only a legislator can sponsor legislation, but anyone can approach a legislator and suggest that they consider submitting a proposal to address a specific issue. In addition, legislators can call roundtable meetings and hearings on any topic. Indian Country can use these avenues for engaging with legislators to ensure their concerns are heard.



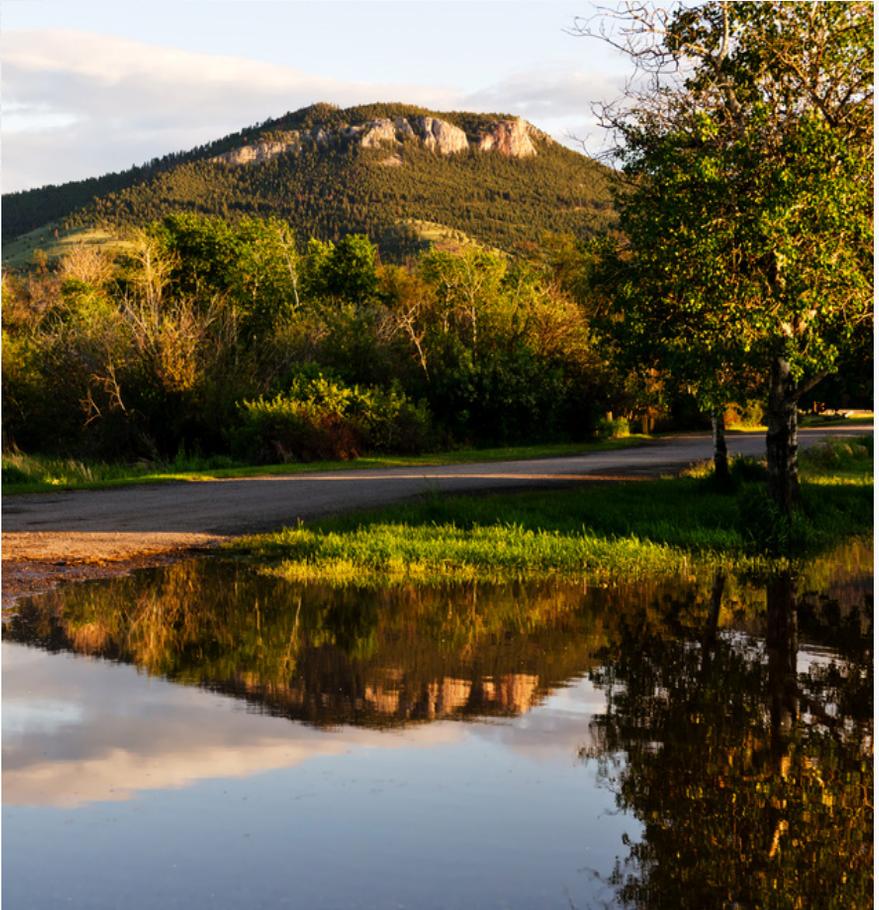
Voters elect legislators to represent their community's best interests. In Montana, state legislators are elected the first Tuesday of every November in even-numbered years. Montana State House Representatives serve 2-year terms. Senators serve 4-year terms.

Needless to say, establishing a personal relationship with your legislators makes way for more effective advocacy. A good way to begin cultivating a relationship is to meet with your legislators directly following their election to make an introduction or to talk about the upcoming legislative session. Montana's part-time legislators do not have in-district offices, but their contact information should be available on the Legislature's website (www.leg.mt.gov). The goal for early legislator meetings is to establish a basic relationship prior to the start of the hectic legislative session. Early conversations may include questions to help establish the lawmaker's motivations, legislative agenda, contact preference, and general demeanor towards issues of Tribal concern.

MEETING WITH LEGISLATORS WITH A SPECIFIC REQUEST

Ideally, advocates will meet with legislators for a specific reason after establishing a relationship. Either way, legislators generally respond to their constituents' requests to meet.

- **MAKE AN APPOINTMENT** in advance when possible. Write, email, or call the legislator to request a meeting. Do not get discouraged if you do not get an immediate response. Legislators can be very busy, so be courteously persistent.
- **CONNECT WITH ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS** ahead of time, if possible. In some instances, professional staff working on state policy may be available to provide valuable information and materials related to the legislative question at hand.
- **PREPARE AN AGENDA FOR THE MEETING.** Limit your agenda to two or three items, understanding that the meeting may be brief (15 minutes or less).
- **BRING INFORMATION** that may be useful for the legislator. This information may include relevant articles in the local newspaper, statistics about your community and its families, and fact sheets about legislation you are asking the legislator to support or oppose. Provide personal examples during your conversation whenever possible.



› **DURING THE MEETING:**

1. Identify yourself and introduce anyone else who is with you.
2. Inform the legislator that you are a registered voter in their district.
3. Explain why you requested the meeting and discuss the matters on your agenda.
4. Be honest.
5. Be prepared to answer questions; if you do not know the answer, say you will find out and report back to the legislator.
6. Ask for tips on how to reach other legislators.
7. Don't argue or name-call.
8. Thank the legislator for their time.

- › **FOLLOW UP.** Write a thank-you letter. Enclose any information promised or that provides additional support for your position.

STEPS TO EFFECTIVE LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

- › **FIND OUT WHO REPRESENTS YOU.** Go to *www.leg.mt.gov*, and look up your representative and senator.
- › **IDENTIFY A SPECIFIC PROBLEM** you want changed (e.g., more support for Indian-owned small businesses).
- › **IDENTIFY THE POLICY DECISION AND LEGISLATION AT HAND** (e.g., funding for Indian Country Economic Development).
- › **IDENTIFY WHAT TO ACCOMPLISH OR CHANGE** (e.g., maintain governor's proposed funding for the program or expand an existing program's budget, etc.).
- › **FIND WHERE THE LEGISLATION IS IN PROCESS** via LAWS on the Montana legislative website (e.g., the governor proposed adequate funding for the Indian Country Economic Development programs, and now the bill is under consideration by House Appropriations).
- › **UNDERSTAND WHICH LEGISLATORS ARE KEY DECISION-MAKERS** or leaders on the policy. Look beyond those who represent your district to find legislators who may have expressed interest in your issue or who serve on a committee relevant to your issue. Comprehensive lists of every committee and its members can be found at *https://leg.mt.gov/committees/*.
- › **UNDERSTAND THE ISSUE THROUGH PERSONAL RESEARCH** and conversations with a trusted organization.
- › **FIND OUT ABOUT THE WORK OF OTHER GROUPS** in your community or state that are working on this issue, and tap into their efforts. Tribal governments may employ a lobbyist and take a position on a particular bill. Advocacy organizations, such as Western Native Voice, seek to represent American Indian interests.
- › **DETERMINE A COURSE OF ACTION TO PURSUE.** Advocates can write a letter or email, call legislators, meet local legislators in Helena, or testify at public hearings.

TACTICS TO INFLUENCE LEGISLATION

1. WRITE A LETTER/SEND AN EMAIL

Letters and emails from constituents have a significant impact on legislators. They may be effective with the sponsor of a bill, certain members of a committee, or your own legislator. When writing, keep in mind the following tips:

- › **BE CONCISE.** Keep your letter or email short and to the point. Use bullets and bold typeface to emphasize main points.
- › **MAKE IT PERSONAL.** Your own experience is the best evidence. Explain how the issue affects you, your family, or Tribal community. Personalized letters or emails are always more effective than form letters or petitions.
- › **DESCRIBE WHAT YOU WANT THE LEGISLATOR TO DO.** For example, ask them to support, co-sponsor, or oppose a particular bill or increase funding for a program.
- › **INCLUDE YOUR NAME, ADDRESS, A LITTLE ABOUT YOURSELF** (e.g., your role in your community), and your Tribal affiliation.

2. TESTIFY AT A HEARING

Anyone may testify during a public hearing in legislative committee. Committee hearings allow constituents to address concerns about proposed legislation before the committee takes action and, importantly, before the bill makes its way to the full House and Senate for debate and final vote. Montanans may testify in person or submit written testimony. In 2019, 12 elected legislators served in the Indian Caucus.

- › **FIND OUT WHEN THE HEARING IS SCHEDULED.** Keep track of the dates, times, and locations of the committee meetings and hearings that pertain to your community. Hearing dates can pop up quickly, and meeting rooms can change at the last minute, so make sure to check frequently for details. Information on committee hearings and other events for the current legislative session can be found on the legislative website (<https://leg.mt.gov/>).
- › **ARRIVE EARLY TO THE HEARING.** Participants should sign in and be courteous and quiet when entering or leaving a hearing room. You may enter or leave at any time, even if the door is closed and the hearing is already in progress. Turn off cell phones before entering, and do not bring in food or beverages, except for water. If a Zoom option is available for the committee, the public is asked to request access to the meeting at least 24hrs in advance. An email request must be sent to the committee's Research Analyst who will then send out a Zoom link for you to attend.

- **PREPARE BEFORE ATTENDING THE HEARING.** Read the most recent version of the bill before testifying. Take note of key talking points, and practice in front of others. Be concise and speak clearly. State your most important arguments first, in case you run out of time. In the case that you are asked by the committee to keep your testimony short, it may be best to have a two-minute version of your testimony prepared. It is also a good idea to have a printed copy of your statement which you can give the committee in the case time restraints prevent everyone from testifying. It is always best to assume that your time will be very limited.



- **DRESS APPROPRIATELY.** Most legislators wear business clothing. Dress well by personal standards.
- **SIGN IN.** Every hearing includes an entryway table with a sign-in sheet. Speakers identify themselves as proponents (those for the bill), opponents (those against) or informational witnesses (generally used by other government personnel).
- **USE PROPER LEGISLATIVE HEARING PROTOCOL.** Effective public testimony is short, generally less than two minutes long. At the beginning of testimony, open with “Chair, my name is ____, spelled _____. I am from ____ and represent (myself or an organization). I am speaking to (support or oppose) (Senate or House) bill number _____.” It is also important to remember that there is a set order for testimony. Those in support go first, after which the chair of the committee allows opponents to speak.
- **SUBMIT A COPY OF WRITTEN TESTIMONY.** Come to the hearing with a short written summary of your position and provide a copy to the committee secretary for the official record. Advocates may also provide copies to individual legislators. Include your contact information on any written materials.
- **BE PREPARED TO ANSWER QUESTIONS FROM LEGISLATORS.** Although you cannot direct questions to them during hearings, in some instances, legislators will call testifiers and witnesses to the podium to answer questions about testimony. Again, when answering questions, first address the chairperson of the committee. Then, address the legislator asking the question. For example, a response might sound like, “Chair,

Representative Smith, thank you for the question. I am in support of _____ because....”

3. ORGANIZE A “CALL-IN” TO LEGISLATORS

Organizing an event to encourage constituents to call their legislators is an effective way to change a legislator’s position on proposed legislation. In Montana, calls to legislators made during the legislative session are made to a general hotline at the Legislative Information Desk (406-444-4800). These calls become part of the official public record. A staffer will deliver summaries of each call to legislators. An influx of calls to a legislator during the same period of time help bring a particular issue to the attention of the elected official. When organizing a call-in:

- › **START BY BUILDING A VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT LIST** from personal phone and email contact lists. Look for potential volunteers from among friends, families, and colleagues who may care about the issue.
- › **TRY TO DESIGNATE A SINGLE LOCATION FOR THE CALL-IN.** Being together in one space helps generate excitement and gives callers confidence as part of a group motivated by a common cause. Sometimes, local businesses or nonprofit organizations will provide their space for call-in events. If you cannot secure a formal space, simply host a call-in party with friends using cell phones.
- › **GIVE EACH CALLER A PIECE OF PAPER CONTAINING:**
 1. The name and telephone number of the legislator(s), or the Legislative Information Desk (406-444-4800).
 2. A short, clear script for the caller. To emphasize your point, it is important that callers deliver a similar message to legislators.
- › **IF POSSIBLE, WORK WITH OTHER ADVOCATE GROUPS** to coordinate multiple sites to conduct call-ins on the same day to maximize impact.

4. WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF A LOCAL NEWSPAPER

Legislators stay abreast of community public opinion via their local newspapers, and in particular, the opinion page. Submit a brief (250 words or less) letter to the editor expressing your support or opposition to a particular bill. Be sure to include personal experiences and an appeal to other community members to join in support or opposition.

5. BECOME ACTIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media can be an effective way both to encourage others to get engaged and to reach your legislator. Here are some ways to use the most popular social media channels:



FACEBOOK

- › Advertise important events like committee hearings or call-ins on your personal Facebook page. You can also create “events” and invite people to attend them.
- › Share news articles about issues that matter to you.
- › Like and follow legislators’ pages, including representatives, committee members, and others.
- › Like, share, and comment on articles or posts from organizations engaged in your issues.
- › Use Facebook Live to engage with your friends through videos of events, interviews with legislators, comments from individuals who testified, and more, etc. You can also attend Facebook Live events hosted by others and share the recordings.
- › Create groups on Facebook. This can help build grassroots support, connect with other people around the state, and coordinate messages.

X

- › Follow legislators’ Twitter accounts. This includes not only your representative but also other engaged legislators, committee members, caucuses, and others with affiliated accounts.
- › Follow the accounts of advocacy organizations who are engaged in issues that matter to you. Like, retweet, or comment on their posts.
- › Organize Twitter campaigns. Like a call-in, encourage constituents to tweet at the legislator. Send an email to interested constituents with suggested tweets. For example, “@MyLegislator: Vote for more school funding” or “@MyLegislator: Thank you for voting yes and supporting X.”
- › Use hashtags so people can easily find tweets on the topic. People active in the political process often use #MTPOL (Montana politics) or #MTLEG (Montana Legislature) at the end of their tweets.
- › Tweet links to news stories related to your issues.
- › Engage with reporters by following them and tweeting @(reporter name). Reporters are always looking for good stories, so build these relationships to tell your story and share good news and/or concerns with your community.

INSTAGRAM

- › Follow policymakers, reporters, and other advocates engaged in your issue(s) on Instagram.
- › Like, share, and comment on posts from organizations and other advocates engaged in your issue(s).
- › Share memes, photos, and video about issues that matter to you. You can even reshare content from Facebook and Twitter.
- › Engage your followers by asking them to call/email their legislators, attend hearings, or take other actions.

When using social media, it is important to act as if you are talking directly to a legislator. Use polite, clear language, and avoid inflammatory statements. This will help make your voice heard.

Perhaps just as important as engaging and getting excited about political issues is remembering that effecting lasting change takes time. Although you may have some quick, hard-fought wins, most policy changes require a long-term commitment to moving forward an issue one legislator, one session, one step at a time. The road to winning often consists of several small victories along the way.

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