

Karl Aro's Tips on Legislative Service/Tough Budget Choices

- As a legislative service director, your budget must “share the pain” along with state agencies and others, yet all your work will be a priority to someone.
- Legislative services are highly connected to personnel (for Karl's agency it is 84% of the cost). It's hard to cut without cutting positions.
- Maryland used furloughs to make cuts and smoothed the effect by paying employees so the furlough was applied over the course of the year. That way, the effect of furloughs didn't hit employees all at once.
- Travel was restricted to “essential travel” only. Some training continued by bringing trainers to the agency.
- Karl used the encumbrance procedure to create a reserve for unexpected costs
- In tough times, legislatures can reduce the number of task forces to save money. Often, an issue can be handled by the appropriate standing committee, which will have to address the issue eventually.
- Cross train staff so that your agency can withstand a vacancy that occurs. In tough times, you probably won't fill the vacancy soon.
- In tough times, you have to think ahead to keep your staff happy. Consider options like allowing employees to telecommute for some of their time. Communicate with staff about cuts and what it will mean for them---you have to stay ahead of the curve of the rumor mill.
- The director must be the face of optimism in an agency. Your staff looks to you for direction and guidance.