

SFLG

SOUTH FLORIDA LEGAL GUIDE

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS



PUTTING KNOWLEDGE AND 'PEOPLE SKILLS' TO WORK

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS play an important role in advancing the interests of business, investment and financial clients. In South Florida, they help companies prepare successful bids for municipal, state and federal contracts, advise clients on meeting regulatory standards, and serve as advocates in legal disputes. They also draw on their knowledge to look into the future and help clients position themselves to meet the challenges of the next few years. Here are insights from five of South Florida's leading government relations professionals.



Al Maloof: A Consultant's Perspective

Al Maloof brings an insider's perspective on government to his role as business consultant and lobbyist. In the past 25 years, he has served on numerous official boards, committees and task forces, and was appointed chairman of the Miami-Dade Expressway Authority (MDX) Operations Committee and a member of the Florida Transportation Plan Steering Committee, which advised on developing the state's multimodal transportation plan.

"Governments focus on providing services to their communities and are not in the business of project development, design and operations," said Maloof, managing partner of GJB Consulting LLC, an affiliate of Genovese Joblove & Battista P.A., a Miami-based law firm. "However, they are large holders of real estate and are often willing to partner with the private sector in infrastructure projects."

Maloof, who is not a member of the Bar, assists law firms and their clients in identifying suitable land for construction, design-build and P3 development, as well as navigating the regulations, identifying financing mechanisms and designing a project. "We strive to provide a turnkey package for law firms so they can engage their clients effectively in this field," he said. "These developments require long-term agreements that need to be structured in a way that provides the client with a fair and reasonable return on investment while protecting the client's interests."

In the P3 sector, Maloof is seeing an increasing number of unsolicited project proposals from domestic and international companies that are being offered to local governments. “There are companies doing amazing things in construction, design, engineering and technology around the world,” said Maloof, who is a member of the American Public Transportation Association and the Design Build Institute of America. “For example, there are innovative advances in automated water and wastewater processing that expand capacity without significantly increasing labor costs. That creates opportunities for South Florida governments to keep up with population growth in an efficient manner.”

Infrastructure projects from water treatment plants to roadways, airports and seaports also support the region’s commercial activities, Maloof added. “If you don’t have adequate water and sewer capacity, for instance, you can’t get a building permit. That keeps a company from doing business here, creating new jobs and increasing property tax revenues,” he said.

Looking ahead, Maloof sees a critical need for multimodal mass transportation development in South Florida. “We anticipate seeing dozens of new projects in the next five years,” he said. “Now is the time to start planning for those opportunities.” In Miami-Dade County, those potential corridors include the east-west S.R. 836 expressway, and the U.S. 1 busway stretching south to Homestead.

Maloof said it’s always a good practice to engage professionals who focus on a certain field. “Advocates should stay within their areas of expertise and not try to be all things to all clients,” he said. “It’s not a good idea to take on a big assignment in an unfamiliar area, as that could result in a costly mistake for the client and compromise the integrity of your brand.”

Reflecting on the overall role of a government relations advocate, Maloof said, there are three keys to success. “Always be truthful, do your research and be respectful of the government staff,” he said. “Know the people at the agency, be prepared to answer their questions and be ready to follow up in a way that allows you to advance the cause of your client.”