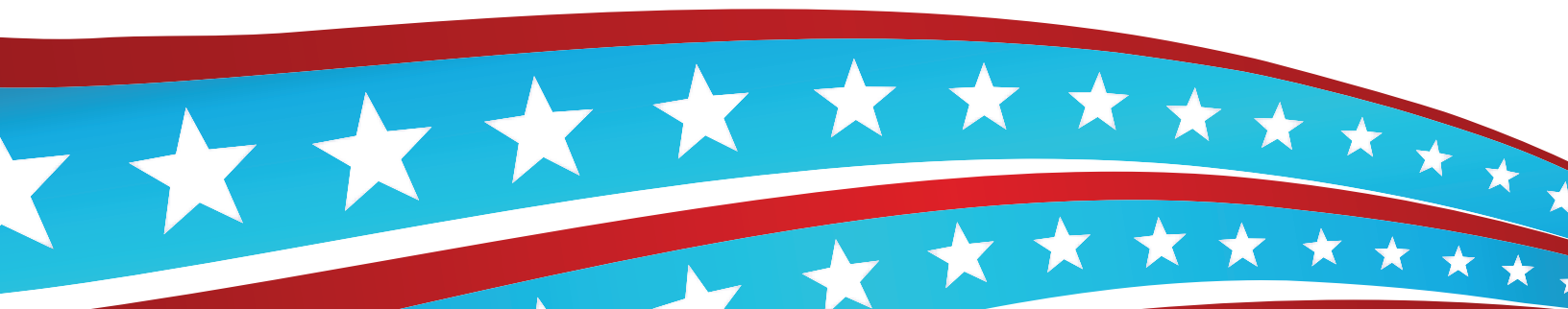


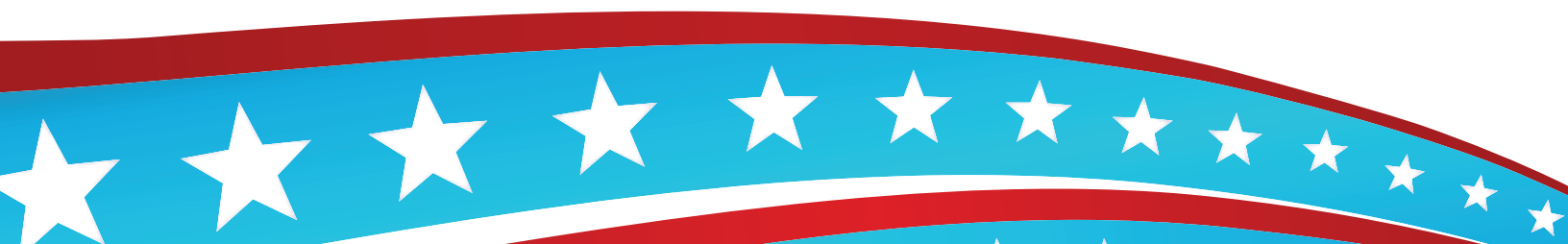


# ADVOCACY TOOLKIT



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## Introduction

Effective advocacy by community college leaders depends on active engagement and participation at the local, state, and national levels. AACCC's government relations efforts in Washington, DC, are substantive and exhaustive in support of the sector and its collective weight. But, ultimately, all politics is local, and community college advocacy messages need to be transmitted at that level—from the college CEO to the legislator. The community college voice needs to be loud and persistent.

Cultivating good relationships with members of Congress helps to ensure that these legislators recognize the importance of community colleges and champion measures that will benefit them and their students. This brief guide is intended to serve as a primer for those new to advocacy at the federal level as well as a checklist for those experienced advocates.

Many community college CEOs have had little to no advocacy experience before they became the institution's leader. Some are less comfortable than others in serving as an advocate for their college, at least initially. But advocacy is an essential part of the toolkit of the successful CEO, and can ultimately yield enormous benefits for a college.

In addition, the CEO should be transparent with his or her trustees about whether or not they should make political contributions, and, if they do, on what terms. Some do "play the political contributions game," but many do not. There are arguments to be made on both sides. In any case, an explicitly articulated approach is necessary.

As with other aspects of their work, community college leaders need to make sure that their political activities align with their trustees' expectations. In most cases, the CEO is largely at liberty to represent the institution, but this is not a universal condition.

The materials that follow break down the various facets of a successful institutional advocacy program. Much of these descriptions are grounded in common sense. It's also important to remember that other CEO colleagues and state officials can help a new CEO learn the advocacy ropes.

## Meetings on Capitol Hill

Federal legislators crave knowledge about how federal actions impact their constituents. They recognize that they cannot begin to appreciate the concrete significance of proposed or implemented federal policies without hearing from those who are touched by them; the national government is just too big and complicated. This means that, even outside of advancing their institution's interests, community college leaders have an essential responsibility to communicate to policymakers about their actions.

AACC recommends that community college leaders periodically travel to Washington, DC, to share with legislators information about the impact of federal student aid, job training, institutional aid, and other programs, and to talk about proposed legislation concerning their institutions. This is, of course, in addition to attending such events as the National Legislative Summit hosted by AACC and ACCT. College leaders should also make it a common practice to meet with legislators or their staff in their district offices. And nothing is as effective as arranging for a campus visit, as described below.

In all of this work, developing a trusting relationship is essential. If a community college leader can be routinely relied upon to provide useful and relevant information to a legislators or their staff, they are an invaluable resource, irrespective of anything else. If they provide misleading or untimely information, their stock is quickly diminished. Others will be there to fill the void.

### Tips for Successful Congressional Meetings

#### Before You Go

- **Arrange meetings with your congressional delegation and/or staff members.** Email or call any staff members with whom you have a relationship to schedule a meeting. If you do not have such a contact, call the congressional office's main number and ask which staff person handles higher education issues and obtain that person's contact information. AACC staff can help you make these arrangements.
- **Gather pertinent information about the impact of federal programs on your students and college.** Determine which federal student financial aid and institutional aid programs provide funding to your students and college. Effective communications combine data and personal stories. For example, you should be able to inform your legislator about how many students receive Pell Grants and the total Pell Grant disbursements your college made in a recent year. You should be able to talk about the amount of Perkins Act funds you have received. And, the same for any other sources of federal grants, such as TAACCCT. Supplementing facts with stories of how federal programs and policies affect particular students, your college, and community also is important.
- **Familiarize yourself with your legislator.** This includes knowing his or her personal background, policy concerns and priorities, committee roles, and general political leanings. Knowing these things will help you craft your message and, more importantly, allow you to forge the relationship on which your "ask" will often hinge.

#### While in Washington, DC

- **Be on time, flexible, and friendly, but brief. Meetings with staff can be as productive as seeing the legislator personally.** Congressional offices are friendly places and are open to meeting with visitors from the state or district they represent. However, flexibility is important because when Congress is in session legislators'

schedules get rearranged at a moment's notice. And while you are undoubtedly important to the office, don't overstay your welcome. It is entirely appropriate to ask a scheduler how much time you have. Finally, don't be offended in any way if a staff member meets with you instead of the member. Staff have a large influence in most offices and ultimately the member is dependent on them for information and, often, counsel.

- **Be specific and concise.** Plan to focus on a limited number of topics during the meeting—a complete “laundry list” of priorities is self-defeating. Share a success story if it's relevant and appropriate. Needless to say, always stick to the facts. It is far preferable to say “I'll get back to you with that information” than guessing and being wrong.
- **Keep leave-behinds to a minimum, but always bring something.** Keep any printed material succinct. A one- or two-page fact sheet that summarizes your talking points is more likely to be read than a longer document. Staffers will often ask for electronic copies rather than paper. Always make sure to note any additional material that the member or staffer has asked you to provide.
- **Ask about your member's priorities.** As with any good relationship, it is important to have give and take. Ask your legislator or staff member what the member's priorities are; doing so presents an excellent opportunity to find out more about his or her interests and agenda. This discussion also may yield opportunities to work together on additional issues outside of your particular concerns.
- **Ask for support.** Your representative, senator, or their staff should be able to give you an indication of the legislator's level of support for specific community college priorities. It is appropriate for you to ask their position, but don't be surprised if you get a vaguer answer than you would like. This is often because the member does not know your particular concerns, no matter how thoroughly he or she has been briefed beforehand by staff.
- **Collect business cards.** Ask for business cards of any staff members you talk with for easy reference when following up on the visit, including writing thank-you letters. Remember to leave behind your business card and college information (especially a one-sheet overview of your college) when you are visiting a legislator's office.

#### After You Return Home

- **Follow up by sending an email thanking them for meeting.** Include any information that you promised to provide during the meeting.
- **Cultivate your relationship.** Periodically send information your legislator and staff might find useful. Communications should not only include requests, but also should thank legislators for federal actions that have helped your institution. The value of a simple “thank you” cannot be overstated. Members work hard to get to where they are, have many demands placed on them, and should be recognized often for their efforts.

Also, make it a standard practice to invite the member and his/her staff to your college for a visit and have the media cover the event. This type of exposure is generally positive for legislators and something that most other constituents cannot provide. In some respects, this platform is a more than ample substitute for campaign contributions, which many CEOs do not make. Recognize that the goal is to develop a long-term relationship.

## Letters to Congress

When members of Congress are deliberating about policy issues, correspondence from constituents often plays a significant role. Letters and emails from the public can influence a policymaker's decision, especially if the letters are timely and provide relevant input. Community college letterhead is politically potent, given a college's place in the community.

However, also keep in mind that mailed letters must go through a lengthy security process. Therefore, it is advisable to transmit correspondence via email whenever possible, though this can be followed up by written correspondence. Telephone calls may be the best option when a vote is imminent on an issue, and if you can't get through to a member or his/her staff, an email message can be used.

### Tips for Effective Written Correspondence

- **Use the correct title, address, and salutation for the member of Congress.** To find the contact information, visit the [www.House.gov](http://www.House.gov) or [www.Senate.gov](http://www.Senate.gov) website to look up your legislator's office contact information or visit AACC's advocacy site, which has links to the congressional offices. AACC government relations staff also can help you with this. Sample letters are included in the Advocacy Resources section of this guide.
- **Be brief and to the point.** Refer to AACC's advocacy website or government relations staff for talking points or sample letters on priority issues. Include information and data from your college if these reinforce your position on an issue. Generally, letters should focus on only one or two issues.
- **Summarize the topic in the subject line.** When you transmit your letter via email, this will ensure that the information is identified as relevant and relayed to and read by appropriate staff.
- **Include your contact information in the letter.** Let your legislator know that you are available for follow-up questions or discussions.

### Tips for Telephone Calls to Congress

- **Prepare talking points.** Check with AACC's government relations staff if you would like additional information prior to calling. Talking points should indicate your position on the topic, how it will impact your students/college, and the action wanted from the congressional office (i.e., support or oppose).
- **Find the relevant telephone number.** Numbers can be located easily online or via the House or Senate website (see above) or via the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at 202-224-3121.
- **Identify yourself as a constituent when you call.** Ask to speak with the staff person who handles higher education or workforce issues. Senate staff tend to be more specialized than their House counterparts. Be brief and make sure that you don't do all the talking. When a vote is imminent, there often will not be time to discuss the issue and the staff will only want to know if you are for or against the bill in question.
- **Always thank the staff for his/her time and consideration of your views.** This is important even if the legislator is not receptive to your position on that particular issue. Again, the importance of saying "thank you" cannot be overstated.

- **Ask if there is something that you can do to support the staff and the legislator.** Very often members of the staff can benefit from your personal involvement. Appearing at hearings capitalizes on your expertise and provides knowledge and understanding about particular policy issues in support of community colleges. You may volunteer to conduct research or prepare a brief that substantiates proposed legislation. Always supply as much material as you can to support your position. And, extend your advocacy beyond your institution to the state and national level.

## Hosting a Campus Visit

Members of Congress keep very busy schedules and their presence is constantly being requested. But they are usually eager to visit their local community college(s) if they can. If you plan ahead and arrange for a campus tour or event, you can showcase certain programs and/or partnerships of interest to your legislator and engage him or her in a discussion about your college's importance to the community. This is a great way to engage administrators, students, faculty, trustees, and others in building ties with your legislators.

### Tips for Planning and Hosting Successful Campus Visits

- **Determine what your goals are for the visit.** Do you want to showcase a specific workforce development program? Do you want to focus on a new initiative or a topic of special interest to your congressional delegation, such as STEM education, cybersecurity, or allied health? Has a TRIO-funded program been exceptionally effective in addressing the needs of special student populations? These are some of the questions you should be asking.

You may well want to ask the legislator to speak at commencement or another special event. This guarantees the press coverage that members desire.

- **Develop a draft agenda.** Consider what programs, classes, facilities, and personnel will be featured in the tour or event. Be conscious of time constraints. Will classes be in session? Will students be on campus to demonstrate how the equipment works or to showcase their acquired skills?
- **Timing is important.** You should be aware of when the member is likely to be in their district or state. The legislative calendar for each chamber is available on the respective House and Senate websites. Congress has scheduled district work periods throughout the year when they are often home for several days and many return to their districts nearly every weekend. Invitations may be extended with alternative dates to maximize the chances of getting a favorable response.
- **Invite your legislator.** Draft a brief letter or email inviting your legislator at least three to four weeks prior to the event. Describe the event, who will be present, and explain why you would like the member to visit your campus to participate in this event. A sample invitation is included in the Advocacy Resources section of this document.
- **Send the invitation to the appropriate staffers.** Generally, invitations go to the scheduler in the member's Washington, DC, office. You can identify this individual and his/her email address by calling the congressional office. If you have established contacts in the office, such as with the education staff, send the invitation to the scheduler but copy the staffer. Over time, you may also develop a close relationship with the district office, and learn of their ability and interest in facilitating visits.
- **Follow up.** After sending the invitation, if you don't receive a response, call or email the scheduler or other staff contacts in the office.

- **Planning for the meeting/event.** Be prepared to provide a brief overview of your college's mission, programs, economic impact on the community, and student demographics. A one- or two-page fact sheet about the college and a campus map are helpful. Again, it's important to identify what federal programs may have helped support specific programs or initiatives on campus. Determine who will be presenting or speaking at the event.
- **Consider inviting local press.** In your invitation to the legislator, offer to coordinate with his or her press office if he or she would like to promote the event. If quoting the member, check with his or her press staff to secure approval. Take many photos and disseminate every way you know how.
- **Formally welcome your representative or senator.** Provide the VIP treatment to your elected officials and staff. Arrange for the legislator to cut the ribbon, break ground on a new facility, hand out the diploma, or participate actively in another capacity at the event. This ensures good photo opportunities and engagement.
- **Do not criticize other elected or public officials during these meetings.**
- **Send a thank-you note.** Remember to thank not only the member but the participating congressional staff.

## Media Outreach

News coverage greatly influences policy decisions. Working with your local reporters to secure coverage of campus events is one way to increase your college's visibility, and hopefully tilt outcomes positively. Meeting with the editors of your local newspaper about a pressing issue is another approach.

### Tips for Working with the Media

- **Establish media relationships in advance.** Getting to know the local media professionals and inviting them to your college will help build relationships so that will enable you to be seen as a reliable source of information on relevant topics.
- **Determine what your goals are.** Do you want to showcase a specific campus program or college initiative? Is it newsworthy or something that could be part of a longer feature piece? Who is your targeted audience?
- **Recognize the differences between news and opinion.** Editorials and op-eds are one way to gain support for a specific initiative, whether local or national. Local media outlets are hungry for these opinion pieces. In this context, timing is important—you want to key into developments that the broader public may be aware of, or will find relevant to the current environment.
- **Coordinate with the college's press office to develop a media kit.** Consider developing a series of one-pagers on key programs and college initiatives. Develop a fact sheet with demographics about the college's student population. Compile lists of media contacts, key campus officials, board members, and business leaders in the community that can be resources for getting the message out.
- **Be proactive.** Develop a media advisory that can be sent out in advance of an event. This media advisory should provide the necessary information about the event as well as background information about why it's taking place.
- **Engage the community.** Depending on the event, include students, parents, business partners, and others in the community to participate.



## Using Social Media

At this time, social media is a necessity and an important part of a college's advocacy strategy. Members of Congress and their staff receive and send brief messages about key issues daily using Twitter or other social media. Successful advocacy campaigns for reinstatement of the year-round Pell Grants in 2016 and 17 deftly utilized tweets and re-tweets to gain momentum.

### Tips for Using Social Media for Advocacy

- **Be positive.** Refrain from posting personal attacks or negative comments.
- **Stick to the facts.** Even on Twitter, maintaining credibility is essential.
- **Focus on the issue's impact.** Share a short personal story that is relevant.
- **Consider working with your communications office to develop a hashtag for the specific topic or event.**
- **Utilize a blog and/or other social media.**
- **Develop a short video about a project, event, or program.**
- **Find your legislators' official social media contacts.** Some are available on their office websites. Others may be found by searching the social media platforms.

## Working with Federal Agencies

Community college leaders will focus most of their advocacy efforts on Congress, but developing good relationships with senior officials in the federal agencies can be immensely beneficial to a college. Policies, regulations, grant applications, and technical assistance as well as reporting requirements and audits are managed by various federal agency personnel, and at times their influence can be decisive.

AACC works with community college presidents, financial aid administrators, business officers, grants administrators, and other senior campus personnel on issues that range from individual inquiries to issues that impact large numbers of colleges and students. Some community college leaders familiar with the rulemaking process may wish to comment on proposed regulations; others may want to become involved with the negotiated rulemaking panels convened by the U.S. Department of Education.

## Advocacy Resources

### Sample letter on an issue (email to staff that handles the issue):

October 1, 2XXX  
The Honorable [first name] [last name]  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator [last name]:

As president of [name of college] in [city], [state], I am writing to express strong support for the Dream Act of 2017, S. 1615. The president's decision to rescind the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program last month has created tremendous confusion and anxiety on campus. Now is the time to enact the Dream Act, or similar legislation, to help thousands of DACA recipients across the country pursue and achieve a higher education.

To qualify for DACA status, individuals had to arrive in the United States before age 16, reside continuously here since 2012, be enrolled in or have completed high school, not have been convicted of a crime, and passed a rigorous exam. The United States is the only country they know and they are Americans, just like their classmates, in every way except their immigration status.

Our country benefits greatly from these bright and talented young people who are working, serving in the U.S. military, or currently enrolled in college. They contribute to our economy, paying taxes, buying cars and consumer goods, and working to build their communities. And, while they contribute to our economy, they are ineligible for federal student aid or other federal benefits.

I urge you to support the Dream Act to ensure that DACA-covered students can continue to concentrate on their studies without fear of deportation or other disruptions.

Sincerely,  
President  
[Name of college]

**Sample letter requesting a Hill meeting (email to scheduler as attachment):**

October 1, 2XXX

The Honorable [first name] [last name]  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator [last name]:

As president of [name of college] in [city], [state], I am interested in meeting with you to discuss our top federal priorities, including funding for the Federal Pell Grant program this year and the status of the DACA initiative. Two of our board members will be joining me in Washington, DC, for a conference November 1-3 and we would like to schedule a short meeting with you in conjunction with this meeting.

We look forward to seeing you and hope you will have some availability in your schedule to meet with us.

Sincerely,  
President  
[Name of college]

**Sample Invitation for Campus Visit (email to scheduler as attachment):**

October 1, 2XXX

The Honorable [first name] [last name]  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative [last name]:

On behalf of [name of college], I am pleased to invite you to visit our community college campus to tour our cybersecurity training facility next month. Each year, this program graduates more than 50 students, and we have been very successful in placing them in jobs in this high-demand field. We would like to showcase this program because we believe it would be of particular interest to you and relevant to your work on the Homeland Security Committee.

The campus tour should take no more than an hour. We would like to schedule the tour at a time when students will be in the lab and when faculty will be available to answer questions. Depending on your schedule, we would also like to include a brief meeting with local business leaders who have been hiring our graduates with cybersecurity credentials.

We have some flexibility regarding the date, but are wondering if you have any availability during the week beginning November 6 or the one beginning November 13. If neither of these weeks is convenient for you, please ask your staff to call us at [area code] [telephone number] to determine if there is a better date that would work for all parties.

We look forward to hosting a tour for you on campus. If you are interested in promoting the visit, we are happy to coordinate the tour with your press office.

Sincerely,  
President  
[Name of college]

**Sample worksheet<sup>1</sup> compiling funding information:**

**Impact of Federal Education Dollars on Your Campus**

When completed, this form will demonstrate how federal student aid funds and other federal funds are currently at work on your campus. Members of Congress, state legislators, local government officials, and members of the press find this information valuable as they analyze the impact of the many policy changes currently being considered by Congress. Contact your college's student financial aid or business office to assist you in completing this form.

Even if you are unable to complete all the categories listed on this form, members of Congress and their staffs will find any information you are able to provide them useful when considering the impact of program funding on their districts.

**Name of college:** \_\_\_\_\_

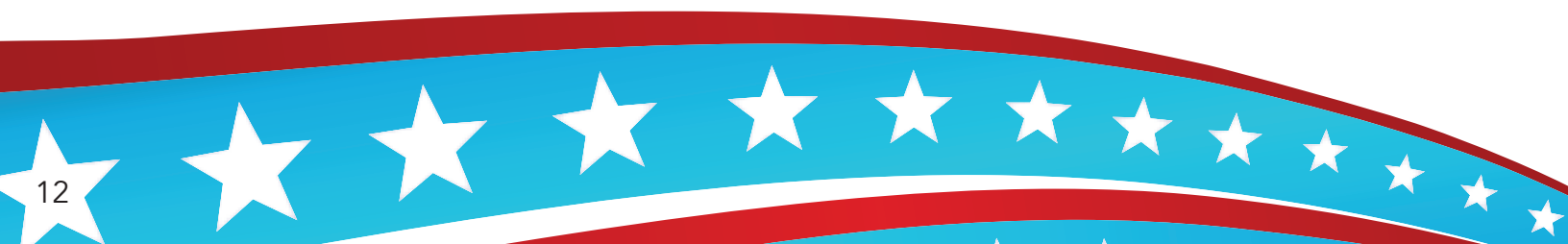
**Federal Pell Grant Summary**

Award Year	Number of recipients	Average grant	Total grant dollars disbursed
2016-2017	\$	\$	\$
2015-2016	\$	\$	\$
2014-2015	\$	\$	\$

**Other Federal Programs – Use Most Recent Year for Which Data Is Available**




1. No. of Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (SEOG) recipients
2. Total Federal SEOG funds awarded
3. No. of students participating in Federal Work-Study program
4. Total Federal Work-Study program funds awarded
5. No. of Federal Direct loan recipients
6. Average loan amount per recipient
7. Total Federal Direct loan funds disbursed (subsidized and unsubsidized)
8. Total TRIO funds
9. Total Perkins Career and Technical Education Act funds
10. Total Title III-A (Strengthening Institutions) Grants funds
11. Total Minority-Serving Institutions and HBCU Grants funds
12. Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funds
13. Other federal education grant funding
14. Information about other federal program funding, such as the National Science Foundation's Advanced Technological Education (ATE) program.

<sup>1</sup> This worksheet provided by the Association of Community College Trustees (ACCT).





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-  Join the conversation on LinkedIn.

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