

Assessing the Landscape for Legislative Action in Your State

Successful advocacy is about relationships built up over time. View it as a process that continues until you have achieved your goals. While you may already be taking some of the steps listed here, below are a number of questions to ask before committing your organization to action.

1. Issue / Initiative Assessment

Take stock of the "big picture" of your issue(s) by reflecting on the following questions and action steps.

- How important is the issue to you and the learners for whom you advocate? Is it of low importance or a "fall on your sword" issue?
- What is the time frame for action?
- Has there been previous legislative activity on the issue?
- What is the current political or public climate concerning the issue?
 - has there been news coverage?
 - has the governor, state superintendent of education, or other key education leader spoken on the issue?
- What other issues will impact the fate of the initiative?
 - is there a state commission report or state supreme court decision that affects decisions related to your issue?
- Does your organization have a coordinated, clear message(s) on the issue?
- How can the issue, and your message, be packaged for public and media consumption?
 - can you tie the issue to concerns about student achievement? economic health? teacher retention?

2. Supporter / Opponent Assessment

Who will you be working with in support of your issue? Are there groups that do not support What you propose? Consider the assets, and the obstacles:

- Do you have a sponsor for your initiative in the legislature who will act as the point person?
- Where do state-level officials stand on the issue? (governor, chief state school officer?)
- Who can best carry the message? (It may not be your organization, but rather another group, or a coalition of groups that will be the strongest spokespersons.)
- Where do other key education and parent organizations stand on the issue?
 - if any groups oppose your issue, are you well-versed with their position?
- What is the position of key business leaders or other "influentials"?
- Have other elected or appointed officials (e.g., mayors, superintendents of large school districts, school board leaders) around the state taken a position?
- Have any news outlets taken position on their editorial pages, or covered the issue in a series of articles?

3. "Intelligence" Gathering

It is imperative that you have information about the legislative process itself, who the key legislators are, as well as information that supports your issue and rebuts any arguments against you.

- Are you clear about the legislative process that will be followed on your issue? (in some states there are budget battles in off years that follow a different process than in typical committee-generated work)
- Which committees in the legislature handle your issue?
- Who are they key committee members and leaders in the state legislature?
- What are the critical dates throughout the legislative session? (hearing dates, committee votes, budget deadlines)

- Do you have other information about key decision makers? (e.g., previous votes or statements, children in g/t class, spouse who is a teacher)
- Are there position statements or resolutions supporting your issue from other organizations and groups? (You may want to review NAGC's [Position Statements](#) and the NAGC [Pre-K-12 Gifted Program Standards](#))
- Do you have research evidence and data and program information from your state (and the nation) to support your issue?
- Do you know what the key obstacles will be and have you discussed them with key legislators to get advice on how to overcome them?

4. Association Resource Assessment

It's time to take stock of what support your association can produce to bring the issue into the spotlight. Consider the following:

- Who will be the key spokesperson for the organization?
- What percentage of your membership realistically can be expected to participate in this effort?
- How much money can you allocate to develop materials to take to the legislature, for member and press mailings? Do you have a lobbyist or legislative consultant who will help coordinate the effort?
- Can you identify influential supporters in key legislators' districts?
- Who will be the liaison with the key legislator(s)?
- Have you identified leaders in your group who can coordinate key areas? (media contact, getting information to members and the public, contacts with other groups, and visits with legislators)

5. Action Steps

Now that you have determined what the organization wants to do, and is able to do, make a plan to utilize those resources. This may require that you triage among multiple issues having different levels of importance or different likelihood of success. Depending on the timeline, some strategies include:

- Develop packets of information for key decision makers on your issue, making sure to continually update them with the latest research and information.
- Testify at a public hearing
- Submit letters-to-the-editor and op-ed pieces to key newspapers across the state to get public support (visit the [working with media](#) section)
- Provide information (and persons to interview) to education reporters in your state
- Hold a press conference with the legislator who introduced your legislation
- Invite key legislators & other officials to visit a gifted education program, to attend your state gifted education conference, or to attend a key meeting of influential supporters so that they can hear and see what your issue is all about.
- Send email alerts to organization members to keep them informed and to generate grassroots support
- Establish a state legislative listserv to share information quickly and to field questions
- Coordinate letters and visits from your members and supporters to the legislature
- Gather the responses to letters / impressions from meetings to share with organization members and key legislators and policymakers.
- Meet regularly with key leaders in the legislature to keep up with any changes in dates, key supporters, and important legislative language