

State Advocacy Toolkit: Student Advocacy Manual

Engaging the students who benefit from state student aid programs can be an extremely effective tool when advocating for robust funding. If you want to include students in your advocacy efforts, you should look for students who are engaged in the campus community and are invested in maintaining state aid programs. You may consider reaching out to the student government association, student groups that work with education issues, or Federal Work-Study students in your office. NASFAA has developed a [student advocacy manual](#) that financial aid administrators can share with students to support their advocacy efforts.

The manual includes:

- Advocacy tips
- Instructions on how to find/contact their state representatives
- Letter/email templates
- Sample script for phone call
- Instructions for how to leverage social media and create a social media campaign

Advocacy Tips

Five secrets to effective advocacy

- Keep it local
- Keep it personal
- Keep their position in mind
- Keep it factual
- Keep informed

Do's and Don'ts

- Do
 - Arrive on time
 - Clearly state who you are representing
 - Show gratitude for something specific
 - Share your information, but also listen
 - Be concise
 - Ask for support on something specific
 - Focus on students
- Don't
 - Offer suggestions on cutting other programs to pay for student aid
 - Engage in a political discussion
 - Answer a question you do not know the answer to

Below are steps on how to effectively find, contact, and interact with your state legislators

Step 1: Finding Your Lawmaker

1. Go to [OpenStates.org](https://openstates.org)
2. Enter your zip code and find out who your local lawmakers are

Step 2: Identifying an Issue

1. Go to your state legislative website by searching “[Your State] House of Representatives” or [Your State] Senate” and review current House/Senate bills to be voted on.

Step 3: Understanding Your Lawmaker's Position

1. Go to [Votesmart.com](https://votesmart.com)
2. Review your lawmaker's record on the issue

Step 4: Call/Write/Email Your State Senator(s) and State Representative

1. Before you call and/or write, watch the [VlogBros' video](#) on how to make your letter/call count.
2. General quick tips:
 - a. Stick to the core message of issue
 - b. Provide a clear and concise ask/request
 - i. Tip: Include your ask right up front
 - ii. Tip: Allow time for questions
 - c. Talk about yourself and how the issue affects you personally
 - i. Have “fast facts” and data about your school and student population

- d. Thank them for taking the time to meet with you
- 3. Quick tips for meeting in person:
 - a. Dress and conduct yourself like you would on a job interview
 - b. Provide the lawmaker/staffer with a “one-pager” that highlights the importance of the issue and the request the group is making
 - c. Be familiar with the advocacy materials
 - d. Bring a camera and post on social media
- 4. Quick tips for writing:
 - a. Emails/letters should not exceed more than one page
 - b. Emails/letters should be personal, concise, and have a clear ask
- 5. Quick tips for phone calls:
 - a. Phone calls should only last 15-20 minutes, allowing time for questions

Step 5: Social Media

- 1. If the meeting is in-person, request to take a picture with the lawmaker or staffer you met with.
 - a. After receiving permission, post the picture on social media and tag the lawmaker to show that you are taking action.
- 2. If you are calling or writing a letter, use social media to tag the representative and make a post about the issue you are advocating for.
- 3. Encourage others within your constituency to like/comment/share the picture to ensure that it has traction.

Step 6: After the Meeting

- 1. Follow up the meeting with a “thank you” note or email, expressing your appreciation to the legislator/staff member for their time. In this note, be sure to re-state your request.
- 2. Follow up with additional information as needed. For example, if the legislator/staff member asked a question during the meeting that you did not know the answer to, be sure to follow up with the answer to their question.
- 3. Make a plan for continued communication. Now that you’ve made a connection, make it a goal to reach out to the member or staffer to keep in touch and offer assistance.

How to Write a Letter or Email

Essential Tips for Writing to Your Representative:

1. Direct
 - a. State your subject clearly in the email subject line or first sentence of the letter. Stick to just one issue in the letter.
2. Informative
 - a. Identify yourself as a constituent. State your views, support them with your expert knowledge, and, when appropriate, cite the bill number of relevant legislation (e.g., H.R. 1234 or S.3456).
3. Inquiring
 - a. Ask for the policymaker's point of view and how they plan to vote on relevant legislation. Expect an answer to a letter, though it may be a form response. Replies to email vary by office; not all reply.
4. Factual & Courteous
 - a. Rely on the facts, but personalize the issue. Explain how the issue affects your life. Avoid personal attacks, threats of political influence, or demands.
5. Constructive
 - a. Be positive about your issue and offer recommendations about how you want the member to address concerns.
6. Specific
 - a. Always explain the hometown relevance of the issue. Use "I" statements and cite specific times and examples.
7. Helpful
 - a. Offer to provide additional information if needed, and provide your contact information.
8. Appreciative
 - a. Remember to thank members for their attention. Follow the issue and thank them later if they vote your way.
9. Concise
 - a. Keep your letter to one page, or your email to 500 words or less.

Sample Email Template

Subject: Support of [State Grant Program]

Dear Representative/Senator [Last Name],

As a constituent, I urge you to support and fully fund the [state grant program]. This program is important because it serves a critical role in opening doors to educational opportunities for students in [state].

Here are some specific facts to help illustrate my point:

1. Fact 1
2. Fact 2

Your support for [state grant program] is important because your constituents have benefited from the funding. [Insert your story and why this matters to you. How will this program continue to benefit you and the constituents? If you have the number of students or dollars that was awarded in the previous award year provide that as well.] I encourage you to fully fund the [state grant program]. Given the pandemic's impact on the earnings and financial stability of students and families, including myself, the [state grant program] is more important than ever in ensuring students have the resources needed to continue to attend institutions of higher education.

I would like to request a written response on this issue and my contact information is attached to this message. Thank you for your service and consideration.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Your Title (if applicable)

Your Address

Your city, state, zip

Your Phone Number

Your Email Address

Sample Phone Conversation Template

Phone calls to an elected official

1. State your name and address and identify yourself as the legislator's constituent and a student at [XX] college/university.
 - a. You will often be speaking with a secretary or aide.
2. Briefly make known your position, as they keep track of the issues that people call about to report to the legislator.
3. Have your thoughts organized in advance, which will help you to keep the call brief and to the point.
4. Share how the issue affects you personally.
5. Thank them for their support.

Conduct a Successful Social Media Campaign

Once the directed audience has been identified, utilizing a social media campaign can create a substantial impact.

Follow these steps:

1. Look for existing, well-used hashtags that you can adopt for your campaign.
 - a. #education, #edchat, #pellgrant, #financialaid
2. Acronyms used in print or in conversation are VERY different from acronyms used in social media.
 - a. Where ESP may mean Education Support Professionals, in the social media world of hashtags this is actually a popular, subject-specific education hashtag meaning English for Specific Purposes.
3. Social media is full of creative hashtags. An original hashtag just may not be so original after all.
 - a. Quick tips for hashtags
 - i. Always do a search on Twitter for any hashtags you "create."
 - ii. Make sure the new hashtag isn't already being used for another purpose.
 - iii. Hashtags should be short and to the point.
 - iv. Hashtags should be memorable, catchy, and specific to the campaign (Ex. #NEAreads).
4. Create a coalition of students to disseminate the hashtag campaign.
 - a. Having a set schedule with predetermined tweets can create a bigger movement.
 - b. Tagging the state official can draw attention to the matter.