National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators

Getting Started: State Advocacy

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Agenda

• The Basics: What is Advocacy?
• First Steps: Develop Core Advocacy Principles
• Take Action: The State Advocacy Toolkit
Advocacy 101: What is advocacy?

**advocacy**
the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal; the act or process of advocating something

**advocate**
a person who argues for or supports a cause or policy
Why does advocacy matter?

During this time of heightened partisanship, it’s more important than ever to make sure your voice is heard in policy debates — especially on issues that could affect you on a daily basis.

Members of the legislature and their staff are most interested in the day-to-day concerns of their constituents in their states and districts.

Your voice matters!
Advocacy Basics

- Advocacy is not always lobbying, lobbying is always advocacy
- You don’t need to be in Washington, D.C. or your state capital to be an effective advocate
- Advocacy can and should be proactive and reactive
- Effective advocacy uses data, research, and stories
First Steps: Develop Core Advocacy Principles
Advocacy Principles

• Defines key issues of importance

• Serves as a framework for advocacy

• Helps to prioritize engagement on issues
Develop “Core Advocacy Principles”

• Questions to consider?
  • What is the mission of your organization
  • What is important to your association?
  • What do you believe in?
  • What major issues keep coming up at the state level?

• Tips:
  • Narrow your focus—too many principles dilutes what is truly important (4-5 is optimal)
  • Don’t get so specific that you box yourself in, but be broad enough that one principle could capture multiple issues
NASFAA Core Advocacy Principles

• Increasing access to higher education, including early awareness and outreach
• Simplifying student aid systems
• Encouraging college persistence & completion
• Promoting college savings and financial education
• Minimizing student indebtedness and emphasizing grant and work aid
• Supporting the primacy of need-based aid
Citing budgetary concerns due to COVID-19, your legislature is considering modifying the state grant so that it would only cover, at maximum, 75 percent of tuition.
Exercise: Develop Advocacy Plan/Materials

1. Does this issue fall within the scope of your advocacy principles? If so, which one(s)?

2. After you have evaluated the issue, let’s review the State Advocacy Toolkit to determine what resources and materials can support your advocacy efforts.
Take Action: The State Advocacy Toolkit
State Advocacy Toolkit Components

- **User Guide**
  - The User Guide includes advocacy tips, instructions on how to contact your state representatives, and more!

- **Letter and Email Templates**
  - Letter and Email templates that can be customized with your information before sending to your state lawmakers.

- **Talking Points**
  - The talking points outline and give examples of the importance of state financial aid programs.

- **Student Advocacy Manual**
  - The Student Advocacy Manual provides resources for students to support their advocacy efforts.

- **State Legislation Activity Form**
  - The State Legislation Activity Form is for you to share any proposed, pending or recently passed legislation that could impact the financial aid community in your state, or to simply update us on percolating issues.

- **ECS State Education Policy Tracker**
  - A resource to track postsecondary education bills that have been introduced at the state level. The tool allows users to search legislation by state, issue area, or bill status.
State Advocacy Toolkit: User Guide

The User Guide features detailed steps on how to find your local lawmaker, how to develop your message, and tips for effective advocacy.
Find Your
Representative

- Go to OpenStates.org

- Enter your Zip Code
  - You will find out who your local lawmakers are

- If your primary residence is in a different district than the district your institution is located in, you might consider reaching out to representatives from both districts.
Tips for Effective Advocacy

1. Keep it local
2. Keep it personal
3. Keep their position in mind
4. Keep it factual
5. Keep informed
## Tips for Effective Advocacy

### Do...
- 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
- Have some "fast facts" and data about your school and student population

### Do Not...
- Suggest cutting other programs to pay for student aid increases
- Engage in political discussion
- Answer a question for which you do not know the answer
Develop Your Message

- Letter/Email Templates
- Talking Points
- School-Specific Data
Maintain the Relationship

Follow Up with a thank you

Answer Questions

Report back to your state

Continue to check in with contacts
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State Advocacy: Letter and Email Templates

• This letter and email template can be modified to fit your institution/association and topic matter.

• The template letter focuses on funding and can be customized with your information before sending to your lawmakers.

Subject: Support of [State Grant Program]
Dear Lawmaker [Last Name]:

On behalf of the [State/Regional Association or Institution], we thank you for your continued support of [state] students’ pursuit of a postsecondary education. [State/Regional Association] is an organization of professional financial aid administrators committed to instituting and promoting activities that provide financial aid and support to students and their families.

We write to urge you to fully fund the [state grant/loan program], as it has served a critical role in opening the doors to educational opportunities for students in [state]. These programs support [total number of postsecondary students] students at [total number of institutions] diverse institutions of higher education within our [state], including [total number of] Federal Pell Grant recipients. During the [last aid year], the [State Grant Program] provided [$_ million] to [total number] of low-income students.

As financial aid professionals in [state], we call on you to continue to make higher education accessible and affordable. Given the range of students who benefit from the [state grant programs], it is vital that these programs receive robust and continued funding to support students in an evolving higher education landscape. We understand there are many competing priorities for the state, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, but higher education is an investment with proven, long-term returns for both individual students and our state’s economy. The pandemic’s impact on the earnings and financial stability of students and families, particularly those who are low-income, makes the [state grant program name] more important than ever in ensuring students have the resources needed to enroll this fall.

Our organization would be delighted to answer any questions you may have or discuss this issue further. We look forward to working with you on [state grant program] funding and other postsecondary issues as the fiscal [year] budget moves forward. Thank you for all that you do for [state] students.

Sincerely,

[Your name and contact information]
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NASFAA has developed a set of **talking points** that outline the importance of state financial aid programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Talking Points</th>
<th>Impact on College Enrollment and Attainment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus on the critical role that state aid programs play in promoting student access</td>
<td>Highlight research demonstrating the effectiveness of specific state aid programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and success, placing particular emphasis on the importance of these programs amid the</td>
<td>in improving higher education access and attainment for in-state students</td>
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<td>COVID-19 pandemic</td>
<td></td>
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Engage Students in your Advocacy Efforts

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.

Engaging the students who benefit from state student aid programs can be an extremely effective tool when advocating for robust funding. Gather student testimonials with permission to share.

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.

Download Student Advocacy Manual (PDF)
Student Advocacy Manual Includes

- Advocacy Tips
- Sample Script for phone call
- How to find/contact state representatives
- Leveraging Social Media
- Letter/email templates
- Creating a social media campaign

This resource can be shared with students to support state student aid advocacy efforts.

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State Legislation Activity Form

As NASFAA becomes more engaged in state policy and advocacy, we want to hear from you!

The State Legislation Activity form is for you to share any proposed, pending or recently passed legislation that could impact the financial aid community in your state, or to simply update us on percolating issues.
State Legislation Activity Form

• You are our eyes and ears as we work to have a greater influence in student aid policy across the country.

• This information will help us better track proposals and trends in state student aid policy.

• [State Legislation Activity Form]
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NASFAA Advocacy Resources

The State Advocacy Toolkit also includes several existing NASFAA Resources that are helpful to advocacy efforts:

• NASFAA Advocacy Resources
• NASFAA Advocacy Web Page
• NASFAA Core Advocacy Principles
• NASFAA COVID-19 Web Center
• What Financial Aid Administrators Do