

5 KEY ELEMENTS OF A SUCCESSFUL ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN

While certain factors you can't control will impact your appropriations advocacy campaign (e.g., a state budget shortfall), understanding the factors within your control can set you up for success.

- 1. Root your ask in reality.** Consider the state's budget realities when determining the amount of an appropriations request. Be prepared to demonstrate clearly both "why now" and the impact of the funding. Calibrating your ask to the context and making it clear that it resolves an urgent and timely need will keep you on lawmakers' radars.
 - In budget shortfall years, be prepared to defend current funding for your program against cuts – or, in a best-case scenario, request a reasonable increase backed up with data on the immediate need and impact. During a challenging year, an ambitious funding request will come across as unrealistic and laughable.
 - When there is an influx of funding or revenue causing a budget surplus, advocates shouldn't shy away from leveraging that to ask for the high-bar amount your program needs. But even when there is a budget surplus, be prepared to justify why you need the funding now and what the impact will be.
- 2. Deploy a lobbyist.** Long-standing, trusted relationships with lawmakers who have influence over the budget and appropriations are crucial to a strong campaign. Whether you use an in-house or a contract lobbyist, these relationships provide access that can be difficult to achieve without connections. Lobbyists also bring knowledge and expertise to the processes.
- 3. Tell a good story.** The story you tell and how you tell it matters. Successful campaigns rely on good stories, backed by data and anecdotes (ideally from constituents), told by compelling messengers. Successful campaigns also recognize the power of translating their messages into someone else's political language. Depending on the circumstances in your state, speaking more pragmatically than idealistically can help you reach and influence a broader audience of lawmakers. "Education justice" may be your end goal, but "workforce development" could help you get the bipartisan support you need to secure the funding.
- 4. Maintain coalition alignment.** Coalitions build power to influence lawmakers by leveraging diverse perspectives, strengths, and experiences. A coordinated, collective ask from a coalition representing a larger constituency can be extremely impactful. Building and maintaining communication and transparency within your coalition is crucial to ensure alignment on your strategy and funding request. When different organizations in the same issue make misaligned requests, it undermines the coalition's power. It can even jeopardize the ability to secure the highest possible funding level.
- 5. Make it local.** They say "all politics is local." The greatest and perhaps the only form of accountability lawmakers care about is their constituents' votes. Connecting your funding request to its benefit for their constituents, specifically, and leveraging constituents as messengers whenever possible will only benefit your effort.