



ADVOCACY

Advocacy Clearinghouse and Toolkit

Advocating for public policies that support adult literacy

Sponsored by the National Coalition for Literacy

Key Elements for Effective Advocacy Resulting in a 75% Increase in State Funding for Adult Education in New Hampshire

New Hampshire has a long history of advocacy in the adult education community throughout the state, so the campaign described below is only the most recent and most successful of those efforts.

We Start Early

This campaign began the day after the election last November with letters of congratulations to the Governor and all members of the state legislature on their election/reelection. It is difficult to find a start and end date for this work since it is pretty much constant, but our starting date is always every two years the day after the election.

Students Must Be Involved

80% of the contacts in any successful advocacy campaign at the state level will come from students. They are the best and most successful advocates for their programs and needs. In the past campaign we had the active involvement of approximately 4,000 of the 7,000 students enrolled in the past year.

A Core Group of People Must Coordinate the Campaign

In New Hampshire this task is carried out by the NH Literacy Task Force which is made up of the directors of the largest adult education programs in the state.

Targeting

While contacts are made with every legislator (we have 400 in the NH House and 24 in the NH Senate) special efforts were made to insure that all members of key committees and subcommittees are strong supporters of adult education. In the recent campaign, the 8 members of the NH House Finance Sub-Committee dealing with adult education and the 5 members of the similar sub-committee in the Senate, became the highest priorities for the work of adult educators, students and allies in the communities from those districts. The party leaders in both houses and the memberships of the two Education Committees also went onto the targeted list for contacts. In order to make the targeting work, local adult education programs must be aligned with the targeted legislators.

Timing

It is very important that the advocacy system understands how a budget/legislation moves through the process. In New Hampshire, the Governor submits his or her budget to the legislature on the first Monday in February; it goes to the Finance Sub-committee in the House, then to the full Finance Committee, then to the full House. In about mid April the Senate begins active consideration of the budget, roughly following the same process as the House. In late June, the House and Senate agree on the budget which is then sent to the Governor for his/her approval or veto.



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Rule of Six

All directors of local adult education programs make at least six contacts with each state legislator during the course of the year. These typically are: letters of congratulations on the election, inviting the legislator to visit the program, an end of the year report on the program accomplishments, inviting the legislator to the end of the year graduation, a list of the graduates from the program, a request to support the funding increase requested by the field, etc.

Threshold Number

It is important for advocates to know the "threshold number" of contacts that each legislator should receive to make them aware of the importance of adult education or any issue. In states like New Hampshire, that number is 8, but even in larger states the number rarely goes above 50 and more often or not it is in the 20-25 range. The way to find out this number is to ask those legislators that are friendly to adult education.

Identify Allies in the Community Who Will Help Carry the Message

It takes some time and effort to identify those allies in the community who will be willing to support the campaign's request for additional funding. In New Hampshire and other states the list is long and varied: businesses that have been involved with adult education programs over the years, social service agencies, chambers of commerce, hospitals, law firms, utilities, higher education institutions, banks, and others.

Focus on the Governor

It is much easier to get the legislature to support an increase in funding if at least some of it is included in the Governor's budget that is submitted to the legislature. This means that an early part of the campaign must focus on the Governor.

Identify the Champions in the Legislature

The champions for adult education in both houses of the legislature are the best messengers to convince their fellow members to support the request for additional funding.

Key Elements of the Recent Campaign

The Use of Postcards

8,000 thank you postcards were sent to the Governor and legislature during the campaign (2,000 to the Governor in the two weeks before he sent his budget to the legislature and 6,000 to the members of the House and Senate as the budget was going through the legislative process.)



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Individual Letters to the Governor and Legislature

Approximately 3,000 letters went from individual students to the Governor and legislators explaining why they enrolled in adult education, what they planned on doing when they graduated, and thanking the policy maker for his/her support for adult education.

Active Participation of Every Local Program Director in the State

All program directors wrote their own letters, contacted legislators by email and telephone, and actively supported the role of their staff in the advocacy process.

Celebrate the victories; learn from both victories and the defeats, and sign on for the long haul.

Art Ellison, NH Literacy Task Force