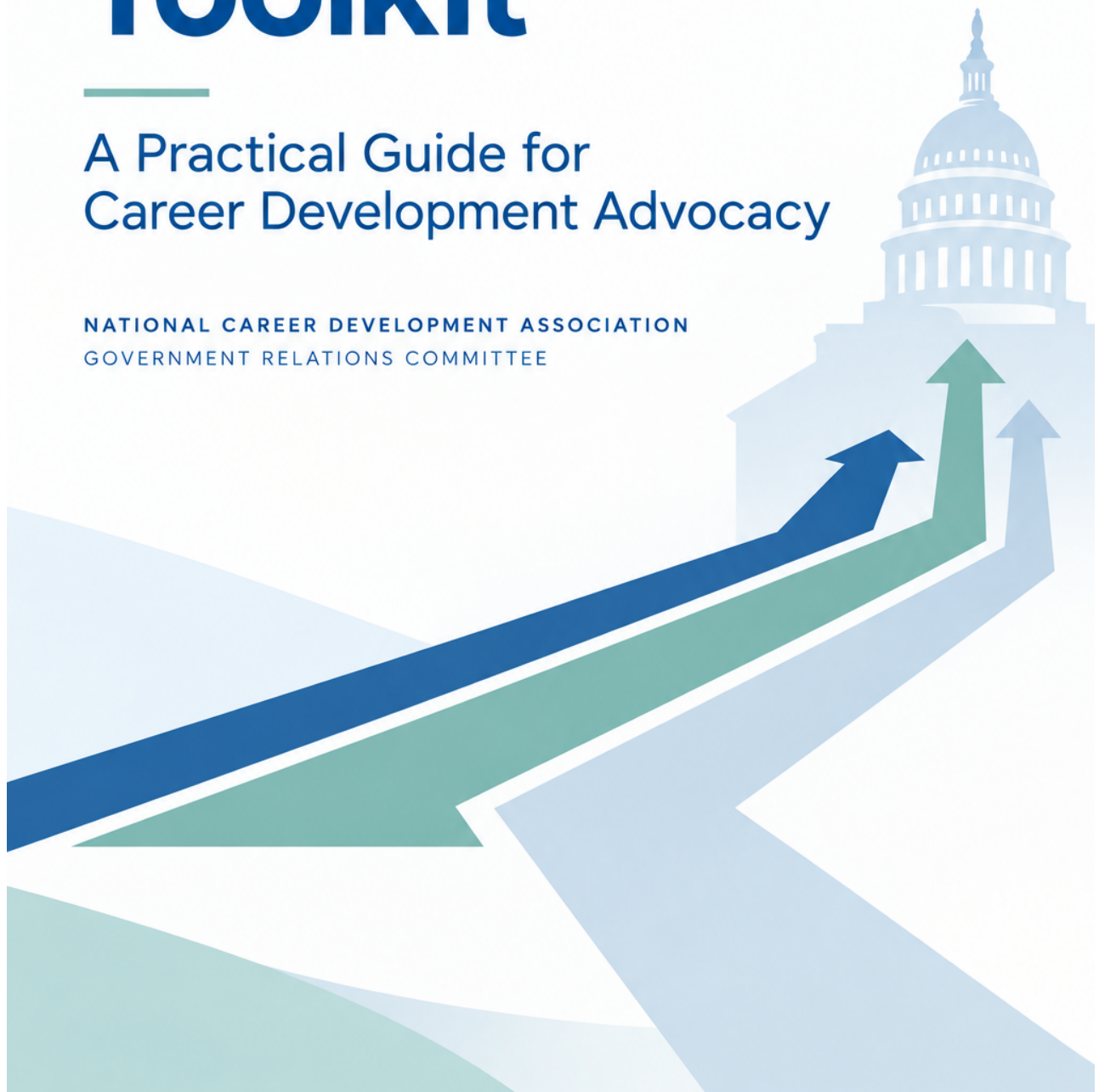


Advocacy Toolkit

A Practical Guide for
Career Development Advocacy

NATIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS COMMITTEE



NCD A Advocacy Toolkit

A Practical Guide for Career Development Advocacy

**National Career Development Association
Government Relations Committee**

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Acknowledgments	4
Introduction	5
Background	5
Purpose of the Toolkit	5
Intended Audience	5
How to Use the Toolkit	6
How the Toolkit Was Developed	6
Disclaimer	6
Glossary of Advocacy & Policy Terms	8
Chapter 1: NCDA Government Relations Committee	13
NCDA's philosophy on public policy and government relations	13
Advocating For Work-Related Legislation	17
Member-Accessible Tracking for Federal and State Legislation & Regulations	18
NCDA Coalition Building	18
NCDA Advocacy Focused Podcast Episodes	18
State Career Development Association Advocacy Support	19
Chapter 2: Getting Started with Advocacy	21
Advocacy in Career Development	21
Advocacy at the State and Local Levels	23
Advocacy at the Federal Level	23
Start With An Issue, Not An Activity	25
Career Development Community of Practice & Shared Resources	27
Chapter 3: Choosing & Researching An Advocacy Issue	29
Understanding Career Development Policy	29
Researching Legislation, Policy & Identifying Decision-Makers	29
Policy Issue Worksheet	30
Understanding the Legislative Landscape Worksheet	32
Know Your Decision-Makers Worksheet	33
Advocacy Planning Worksheet	34
Elected Official Research Worksheet	35
Stakeholder Mapping & Beginning Coalition Research Worksheet	38
Connecting Your Issue to the Broader Policy Ecosystem	41
Policy Research Resources	42
Chapter 4: Engaging & Communicating with Policymakers	43
Finding Your Representatives	43
Types of Legislator Engagement	50
Chapter 5: Proclamations & Citations	53
How, When, and Why Your State CDA Should Request a Proclamation	53
Sample Proclamation Text	56
Chapter 6: State CDA Capacity Building Evaluation	58
Self Assessment: Where does your chapter fit?	59

Chapter 7: Additional Advocacy Resources	61
Chapter 8: History of the NCDA Government Relations Committee	63
Why the GRC Exists	63
Building the Foundation and Expanding Committee Workstreams	64
Evolution and Expansion	64
Looking Forward	66
Appendix: State CDA Resource Repository	67
What Can You Submit?	67
Ohio Career Development Association (OCDA)	68

Acknowledgments

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Author

Sarah JanTausch

Contributors

Diana Bailey

Elle O'Flaherty

Newton Kimberly

Kaleigh Mahon

Shelby Moscottyre

Steven Thomas

Christine Yancey

Contributing State Divisions of NCDA

Ohio Career Development Association

Introduction

Background

The NCDA Government Relations Committee intends for this toolkit to be a living resource. Advocacy practices, legislative processes, policy priorities, and available resources can change over time. Suggestions, corrections, examples, and additional resources may be submitted to governmentrelations@ncda.org for consideration in future revisions.

Purpose of the Toolkit

Career development professionals work every day to help individuals and communities navigate education, employment, career transitions, and changing workforce conditions. Many of the factors that shape those experiences are influenced by public policy at the federal, state, and local levels. This toolkit is designed to help career development professionals understand how they can participate in advocacy efforts that support the profession, the people we serve, and effective career development systems. This resource provides foundational information, practical guidance, planning tools, templates, and examples to help career development professionals move from interest in an issue to informed and organized advocacy.

Meaningful advocacy for the profession and those we serve does not necessarily require a background in government, lobbying, or public policy. It can take many forms, including educating policymakers about career development, sharing professional expertise, participating in meetings with elected officials, responding to proposed policies, sharing your story, building relationships with policymakers and community partners, and helping others understand the connection between policy and career development. The purpose of this toolkit is to make those activities more approachable and actionable.

Intended Audience

This toolkit is intended for individual career development professionals and the organizations that support them (i.e. Career Development Associations) who are interested in participating in advocacy at the state, local, or federal level. Readers of this toolkit may have very different levels of experience with advocacy. Some may be participating in advocacy for the first time, while others may already have relationships with policymakers or experience engaging in state or federal policy discussions. This toolkit is designed to provide a common foundation while allowing readers to adapt the information to their own professional roles, organizations, states, and communities.

This toolkit is for career development professionals who:

- Want to better understand how public policy affects career development
- Have identified a policy issue that affects their clients, students, communities, organizations, or profession
- Want to learn how to communicate with policymakers
- Are interested in participating in state or federal advocacy
- Want to participate in an advocacy day but do not know where to begin
- Want to build advocacy capacity within their state career development association
- Have advocacy experience and want additional tools or examples
- Want to connect their professional expertise to public policy discussions

You do not need a title in government relations, public policy, advocacy, or legislative affairs to participate.

How to Use the Toolkit

You do not need to read this toolkit from beginning to end before taking action. The goal is not to follow a single formula. Effective advocacy is responsive to the issue, audience, policy environment, and community involved. We recommend that you dive into the topics that relate to your interests or needs first and come back again and again as needed. If you find an area where you would like to see a resource or you have created one, we welcome feedback and submissions to our member repository. To inquire about the development of a new resource or submit an example for the repository, please email governmentrelations@ncda.org.

How the Toolkit Was Developed

This toolkit was developed by the National Career Development Association Government Relations Committee with contributions from career development professionals, state career development associations, subject matter experts, and other contributors. The toolkit incorporates practical advocacy guidance, professional knowledge, and examples from the career development community. State career development associations have also contributed resources and examples that can help professionals see how advocacy can be adapted to different state contexts.

Disclaimer

The NCDA Advocacy Toolkit is an educational resource intended to support career development professionals in understanding and participating in advocacy. While this toolkit has been written from the perspective of individuals within the United States, we

believe that the resources and tools included within can be adapted or revised to support individuals within other member countries.

Nothing contained within can be construed as legal advice, lobbying advice, or a substitute for consultation with qualified legal or government relations professionals when specific questions arise.

Advocacy and lobbying are not synonymous. Advocacy is a broad term that can include educating the public, raising awareness, sharing professional expertise, communicating with policymakers, and supporting or opposing policy approaches. Lobbying is a narrower legal and regulatory concept with specific definitions and requirements that vary depending on the jurisdiction and circumstances.

Users are responsible for understanding or seeking out answers to the following:

- Applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations
- Requirements governing advocacy and lobbying in their jurisdiction
- Their organization's policies and procedures
- Relevant professional and ethical standards
- NCDA policies and the NCDA Code of Ethics, where applicable

When in doubt about whether a planned activity constitutes lobbying or whether specific requirements apply, consult the appropriate organizational, legal, or government relations resource.

Career development professionals should understand and follow all applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, as well as the policies and requirements of their employers, organizations, professional associations, and other entities with which they are affiliated.

Advocacy and lobbying are related but distinct activities. The rules governing lobbying, including registration, reporting, and permissible activities, vary by jurisdiction and organizational status. Professionals should seek appropriate legal or organizational guidance when they are unsure whether a planned activity constitutes lobbying or when specific legal requirements may apply. Nothing in this toolkit supersedes NCDA policies, the NCDA Code of Ethics, applicable laws, or the policies of a reader's organization.

Glossary of Advocacy & Policy Terms

This glossary provides working definitions for terms commonly used in public policy, government relations, and advocacy. Definitions are intended to support career development professionals who are engaging in advocacy at the local, state, or federal level. Some terms, particularly lobbying, grassroots lobbying, and political campaign activity, have specific legal or tax meanings that may vary depending on the organization, jurisdiction, and activity. **The definitions in this glossary are provided for educational purposes and should not be treated as legal advice.**

Advocacy is the process of supporting, advancing, or influencing an issue, policy, practice, or cause. Advocacy can include activities such as educating policymakers, communicating with the public, building coalitions, sharing professional expertise, providing testimony, and participating in public policy discussions. Advocacy is broader than lobbying and may include activities that do not involve legislation or direct efforts to influence specific legislation.

An **advocate** is an individual or organization that communicates support for, opposition to, or interest in a particular issue, policy, practice, or cause. Career development professionals can advocate as individuals, as members of professional associations, or as representatives of organizations, subject to applicable laws and organizational policies.

An **advocacy goal** is the specific change an advocacy effort seeks to achieve. A strong goal identifies what should change, who has the authority or influence to make the change, and, when appropriate, a timeframe for action.

An **advocacy strategy** is the overall approach used to achieve an advocacy goal. It may include researching an issue, gathering supportive information including stories or evidence, identifying decision-makers, building relationships, developing messages, engaging partners, communicating with policymakers, and determining appropriate actions and measures of progress.

A **bill** is a proposal for a new law or a change to an existing law. At the federal level, bills may be introduced in either the U.S. House of Representatives or the U.S. Senate. A bill must generally pass both chambers in the same form before it can be presented to the President. State legislatures use their own procedures and terminology.

Bipartisan describes participation or support involving two major political parties. A bipartisan approach may involve working with policymakers from different parties around a shared issue or area of concern.

A **coalition** is a group of individuals or organizations that work together toward a shared policy or advocacy objective. Coalition members may have different missions or perspectives while sharing a common interest in a particular issue.

A **constituent** is a person represented by an elected official. For example, a resident of a legislative district is generally a constituent of the legislator representing that district. Constituency can also be used more broadly to describe the members or communities served by an organization or professional association. In advocacy, constituents may include individuals or groups who are directly affected by a policy or issue and whose experiences, perspectives, and interests can help inform policymakers and decision-makers.

A **decision-maker** is an individual or body with formal authority to make, approve, implement, fund, or change a policy or program. Depending on the issue, decision-makers may include legislators, elected officials, agency leaders, boards, commissions, or other government bodies.

The **executive branch** is the part of government responsible for implementing and administering laws and carrying out government programs. At the federal level, it includes the President and federal executive departments and agencies. State and local governments have their own executive structures.

Grassroots lobbying generally refers, under federal tax rules applicable to certain tax-exempt organizations, efforts to influence legislation by attempting to affect the opinions of the general public or a segment of the public and encouraging action related to that legislation.

Government relations is the work of developing and maintaining relationships with government officials, agencies, policymakers, and other public-sector stakeholders. Government relations may include policy monitoring, relationship building, education, advocacy, coalition work, and legislative or regulatory engagement.

A **government official** is a person who holds a position within a government body or agency. Depending on the context, the term may include elected officials, appointed officials, agency leaders, legislative staff, and government employees.

A **government agency** is an administrative body established by the government to carry out specific responsibilities, programs, or functions. Agencies may develop and administer programs, enforce laws and regulations, collect data, provide services, or advise policymakers.

A **hearing** is a formal proceeding in which a legislative body, committee, agency, or other governmental entity receives information, testimony, comments, or evidence about an issue. Hearings may be used to examine proposed legislation, government programs, regulations, or other matters.

An **issue** is a matter of public concern that may be affected by government policy, legislation, regulation, funding, or administrative decisions. An advocacy issue should be sufficiently specific to allow advocates to identify the relevant decision-makers, stakeholders, and desired outcome.

A **key message** is a concise statement that communicates the central point an advocate wants a policymaker or other audience to understand. Effective key messages generally connect the issue to its impact, provide relevant evidence or professional expertise, and make a clear request or recommendation when appropriate.

Legislation refers to laws or proposed laws considered by a legislative body. In federal tax rules concerning lobbying, legislation includes actions by Congress, state legislatures, local councils, and similar governing bodies, including acts, bills, resolutions, and certain ballot initiatives and referenda.

A **legislative body** is a governmental body with authority to consider and enact legislation. Examples include the U.S. Congress, state legislatures, county commissions, city councils, and other bodies with legislative authority.

A **legislative session** is the period during which a legislative body formally conducts its business. The length, schedule, procedures, and terminology for legislative sessions vary by state and by legislative body.

A **legislator** is an elected member of a legislative body. At the federal level, this includes members of the U.S. House of Representatives and U.S. Senate. At the state level, legislators are members of the state legislature.

Lobbying has both an everyday meaning and specific legal definitions. Under federal tax rules, for certain tax-exempt organizations, lobbying generally involves attempting to influence legislation. This can include communicating with legislators about legislation or encouraging the public to contact legislators regarding legislation. Organizations and individuals should consult the rules applicable to their organization and jurisdiction before determining whether a particular activity constitutes lobbying. Please consult with your organization's attorney before attempting to lobby any government official.

A **lobbyist** is an individual who engages in lobbying activities as defined by applicable law and, when required, registers with the appropriate government entity and complies

with applicable disclosure, reporting, and ethics requirements. Federal law establishes specific definitions and registration requirements for certain lobbyists and lobbying activities, while state and local governments may define lobbying differently and impose additional registration, reporting, or other requirements. Not all advocacy activities constitute lobbying, and whether an activity is considered lobbying depends on the specific activity, jurisdiction, and applicable law. Organizations often have lobbyists on staff, hire them as external consultants, and/or work with them seasonally or as needed for a specific goal. Please consult your organization's attorney before engaging in any lobbying activities.

Nonpartisan means not supporting or opposing a political party or candidate based on party affiliation. Nonpartisan advocacy can address legislation, public policy, programs, funding, or other government actions without endorsing or opposing candidates for elected office. The NCDA is a nonpartisan organization.

A **policymaker** is a person or body involved in developing, adopting, implementing, administering, or influencing public policy. Policymakers may include legislators, elected officials, agency leaders, appointed officials, boards, commissions, and other government decision-makers.

Policy is a course of action, principle, or set of decisions adopted by a government, organization, or other institution to address an issue or achieve an objective. Public policy may be established through legislation, regulations, executive actions, administrative decisions, funding decisions, or other governmental processes.

A **policy agenda** is a set of issues or policy priorities that an organization, government, coalition, or advocacy effort identifies as important for attention or action. An agenda helps communicate where an organization intends to focus its policy and advocacy efforts.

A **policy platform** is a formal statement of an organization's positions or priorities on public policy issues. A platform may provide guidance to members or representatives when engaging in advocacy and government relations. For an organization like NCDA, this may not align with one political party specifically, but rather looks at the policies themselves and their objectives related to relevant areas to the organization

Political campaign activity is activity intended to support or oppose a candidate for elective public office during a general, special, or primary election. For organizations subject to federal tax restrictions, political campaign intervention is distinct from lobbying and is subject to separate rules. Political campaign activity is regulated at the federal, state, and local levels. In many cases, it is not permitted for certain types of organizations to conduct political campaign activity. Before you engage in any political

campaign activity, consult with your organization, any applicable unions, attorney, and all applicable local, state, and federal laws. In some cases, certain funding sources for positions prohibit individuals from certain activities.

Public comment is information, feedback, or opinion submitted to a government body as part of a formal or informal opportunity for public input. Public comment may be requested during legislative, regulatory, administrative, or other governmental processes. Additionally, an organization or individual may submit public comments to communicate their stance on the record as NCDA regularly does on behalf of its members.

Public policy refers to decisions, actions, priorities, and approaches adopted by the government to address public issues. Public policy can take many forms, including legislation, regulations, administrative decisions, funding priorities, and government programs.

A **regulation** (often referred to as administrative code) is a rule or requirement issued by a government agency under authority granted by law. Regulations generally provide more detailed requirements for implementing or administering laws. The process for developing and adopting regulations varies by jurisdiction. As an example, a public university would be required to follow state law as well as applicable state level administrative code.

A **stakeholder** is an individual, organization, community, or other group that is affected by, has an interest in, or may influence an issue or policy decision. Stakeholders may include career development professionals, students, workers, employers, educational institutions, government agencies, policymakers, professional associations, and community organizations.

Testimony is information or a statement provided to a legislative body, government agency, committee, or other public body as part of a formal proceeding. Testimony may be delivered orally or submitted in writing, depending on the process.

A **working group** is a group of individuals brought together to examine an issue, develop recommendations, complete a defined task, or support a broader initiative. Working groups may operate within government, professional associations, coalitions, or other organizations.

Chapter 1: NCDA Government Relations Committee

The National Career Development Association (NCDA) Government Relations Committee (GRC) supports the association's efforts to strengthen the voice of career development in public policy and government relations. The GRC works to increase awareness of issues affecting the career development profession, support advocacy capacity among NCDA members and state career development associations, and provide opportunities for members to engage with policymakers and other decision-makers. Through resources, education, policy engagement, and collaboration with state CDAs, the GRC works to help career development professionals better understand advocacy and participate in it effectively.

NCDA's philosophy on public policy and government relations

Published 8/28/2012

Most citizens will seek and hold a job at some point in their lives. Many of these will actively pursue lifelong career aspirations and goals. The federal, state, and local legislative processes provide direction, policies, funding, programs, and services to support the employability and employment of citizens.

As a result NCDA will:

- Provide leadership and advocacy by becoming directly involved in the legislative process providing information, guidance, recommendations, and support for legislators, legislation, funding, programs, and services related to employability, employment, and career planning and development at the federal, state, and local levels.
- Hire a lobbyist to stay abreast of all legislative actions and legislation related to employability, employment, and career planning and development at the federal and state levels and to assist the NCDA Board by:
 - serving as a liaison between the Board and legislators
 - educating legislators on the NCDA platform and relevant career development practices, processes, issues, and trends
 - drafting legislative proposals, policies, recommendations, and amendments
 - promoting and positioning NCDA as the “go to” organization for career development related information, guidance, and support
 - keeping the Board and members informed of pending legislation, progress, and implications
 - soliciting political support and votes for favorable legislation
 - leveraging federal and state funds to promote the NCDA platform

Annually review and revise the legislative agenda to address all facets of employability, employment, and lifelong career planning and development. The legislative agenda will be written in short, concise statements for ease of understanding and for use by all career development professionals, practitioners, constituents, stakeholders, and legislators.

NCDA Federal Advocacy Policy Areas

Published during fiscal year 2023-2024

NOTE: Policy Areas are not in order of priority. Priority of these areas will be ever-evolving to mirror prominent issues within the legislature.

1. Employment Opportunities and Job Market Adaptability
 - Focus 1: Advocating for federal policies that foster a dynamic and inclusive job market, ensuring opportunities for all skill levels and backgrounds.
 - Focus 2: Pushing for legislation that supports job transition programs, particularly for workers in declining industries or those impacted by automation and digital transformation.
 - Focus 3: Collaboration with federal agencies to develop and promote initiatives that match job seekers with opportunities based on current and forecasted labor market trends.
2. Student Career Services
 - Focus 1: Educate policymakers and advocate for the continuum of career services from early education through the end of life, with particular emphasis on meaning and purpose derived from work.
 - Focus 2: Advocating for and supporting funding for high-quality career services in K-12 settings.
 - Focus 3: Advocating for and supporting funding for high-quality career services in higher education institutions at the undergraduate, graduate, and professional (e.g. law and medical school) levels.
 - Focus 4: Advocating for and supporting funding for high-quality career services in vocational programs, community programs, and additional services for minors and adults.
3. Professional Accreditation and Certification Standards
 - Focus: Lobbying for federal standards and support for the accreditation and certification of career development professionals to ensure quality and uniformity across the field, with particular emphasis on NCDA's professional and ethical standards, including credentials approved by the NCDA Credentialing Commission.
4. Access to Professional Development

- Focus: Advocacy for federal grants or subsidies aimed at promoting ongoing professional development among practitioners and educators in the career development field.
- 5. Workforce Development and Education
 - Focus: Collaboration with federal agencies, including the Department of Education and the Department of Labor, to integrate career development into national education policies and workforce development programs.
- 6. Equal Opportunity and Inclusion
 - Focus: Promoting legislation that ensures all individuals, especially those from underrepresented and marginalized groups, have equitable access to career development resources and opportunities.
 - Focus: Advocating for legislation to protect workers from discrimination, especially those from underrepresented and marginalized groups.
- 7. Special Populations
 - Focus: Advocating for legislation and programs that support special populations, including military veterans, individuals with disabilities, reentering formerly incarcerated individuals, immigrants, and other groups with barriers to workforce participation.
- 8. Mental Health and Career Development
 - Focus: Pushing for policies that integrate career development as part of broader mental health and well-being initiatives at the federal level.
- 9. Funding for Research and Innovation
 - Focus: Advocating for federal funding to facilitate research in career development trends, technologies, and best practices.
- 10. Small Business Development
 - Focus: Support funding and programs supporting small businesses, including tax structures to support small businesses and their owners.
- 11. Data Privacy and Ethical Compliance
 - Focus: Advocacy for ethical standards and data protection laws relevant to the gathering and storage of client information in the career development sector.

Policy Statements & Federal Advocacy

August 2026 NCDA Urges Human-Centered Modernization of Federal Career Information Systems

The National Career Development Association (NCDA) called on federal policymakers to modernize the nation's career information systems, including O*NET and CareerOneStop, while preserving transparency, accessibility, and public trust. In comments submitted to the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training

Administration, NCDA identified eight priorities for modernizing these public resources, which support career exploration, career counseling, workforce planning, talent development, and education and training decisions nationwide. Read the [NCDA Press Release](#) and the [letter from NCDA to the U.S. Department of Labor](#).

June 2026 - NCDA Joins Workforce Development Organizations in Federal Funding Advocacy

NCDA, along with representatives from workforce development boards, state and local governments, community and technical colleges, adult educators, labor and labor-management partnerships, community-based organizations, workers, and businesses, submitted a letter urging Congress to prioritize a response to economic changes affecting workers and learners. The letter calls for protecting and increasing Fiscal Year 2027 funding for workforce development, education, and training programs, including investments in WIOA programs, adult education, apprenticeship, Career and Technical Education, and other workforce programs. The letter also highlights the importance of wraparound supports, such as career navigation, transportation, and childcare, that help workers and learners participate in education and training. Read the [NCDA National Skills Coalition Support Letter](#).

May 2026 - NCDA Supports Congressional Review Act Resolution on Federal Student Loan Rules

The NCDA Board voted to support the Congressional Review Act (CRA) resolution introduced by Senator Jeff Merkley and Representative Suzanne Bonamici to overturn recent federal student loan rule changes. View the [Government Relations Committee Briefing Memo to the NCDA Board](#) and the [letter to Senator Merkley and Representative Bonamici](#).

February 2026 - Federal Student Loan Limits and Counseling Programs

The NCDA Government Relations Committee (GRC) monitored recent actions by the U.S. Department of Education related to proposed reductions in federal student loan limits. NCDA submitted its own [public comment](#) expressing concern about the potential impact of the proposed limits on the counseling workforce, access to education, and the long-term ability to meet growing mental health and career development needs nationwide.

April 2025 - NCDA Signs Letter Urging the U.S. Department of Education to Support Mental Health Services

The National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC), along with NCDA, urged the U.S. Department of Education to reconsider the proposed elimination of essential programs that support mental health services in schools. View the joint [letter sent to the U.S. Department of Education](#).

January 2025 - NCDA Statement on Federal DEI Executive Orders

NCDA issued a statement regarding recent presidential orders revoking diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives for federal workplaces and contractors, including the rescission of Executive Order 11246 of September 24, 1965, which established equal employment opportunity in federal employment and contracting. [Read the full NCDA Press Release](#).

October 2023 - NCDA Supports Federal Action on Paid Internships

The National Career Development Association (NCDA), the largest organization serving career practitioners and educators globally, affirmed its alignment with the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) in support of the [#UnpaidisUnfair campaign](#), which calls for federal action to ensure internships are paid. NCDA highlighted the connection between paid internships, career development, and equitable access to career opportunities and reaffirmed its commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, belonging, and advocacy (DEIBA). The NCDA Government Relations Committee committed to bringing attention to and tracking the Federal Intern Protection Act. NCDA also reaffirmed its broader commitment to advocacy for equity in the profession and for the students and clients served by career development professionals. View the [NACE Position Statement](#).

Advocating For Work-Related Legislation

NCDA Government Relations Committee former Co-Chair Elle O'Flaherty provides a valuable article on [Advocating for Work-Related Legislation](#), published in NCDA's Career Developments Magazine (Fall 2023). The article provides career development professionals with guidance for understanding and engaging in the legislative process when a proposed law or policy directly affects their work, clients, students, or communities. It offers a useful starting point for professionals who may have subject-matter expertise and firsthand experience but are newer to legislative advocacy. The article can be used alongside the tools in this toolkit to help readers connect their professional knowledge and experiences to broader policy discussions and identify appropriate opportunities to engage with policymakers.

Member-Accessible Tracking for Federal and State Legislation & Regulations

The Government Relations Committee monitors federal and state legislative and regulatory activity that may impact NCDA, NCDA members, and the communities served by career development. Through policy analysis, advocacy, and engagement with policymakers and stakeholders, the committee works to advance our legislative priorities and represent our organization's interests. Legislative monitoring is a key part of this effort, allowing the committee to identify emerging issues, evaluate potential impacts, and recommend advocacy when appropriate. Members can access the dynamic report after logging into NCDA's website. This dynamic report summarizes legislation and regulations at the state and federal levels currently being monitored, highlights recent activity, and identifies bills that may require continued attention or engagement.

NCDA Coalition Building

Coalition building involves developing relationships with organizations, professionals, community groups, and other stakeholders who share an interest in an issue or may be affected by a policy decision. For NCDA and state career development associations, coalitions can broaden the range of expertise, experiences, and voices involved in an advocacy effort while helping partners identify areas of shared interest and common goals. Building these relationships over time can strengthen advocacy efforts and create opportunities for continued collaboration.

NCDA maintains a partnership with the American Counseling Association (ACA) Government Affairs and Public Policy (GAPP) team. This includes sharing resources and information related to federal and state public policy, government affairs, and advocacy for the counseling profession. Additionally, in March 2025, NCDA partnered with Counselors United for Legislative Engagement (CULE) in order to work together on the needs of the profession. The NCDA GRC continues to build relevant relationships with partners that have shared interests and missions. This is not an exhaustive list.

NCDA Advocacy Focused Podcast Episodes

The [NCDA Career Practitioner Conversations podcast](#) includes episodes that connect to advocacy, public policy, workforce issues, coalition building, and the broader systems in which career development professionals work.

[SHRM's Education-to-Employment \(E2\) Initiative with Emily M. Dickens](#) This episode explores government affairs, public policy, employer engagement, and the role

professional associations can play in addressing education-to-employment issues. It is particularly relevant to understanding how career development organizations can engage with broader workforce and policy conversations.

[NCDA's International Student Services Committee 2026 Mini-Conference](#) This episode is particularly relevant to advocacy and coalition building. The discussion includes advocacy, community building, changing policy environments, cross-campus support networks, and collective action.

[DEI Symposium Series - 2025 State of the Union: Providing Career Services in Ever-Changing Times](#) This episode examines how changes in the social and political environment affect career development practice and the communities career professionals serve. It provides useful context for considering how career development professionals can respond to broader societal and policy changes.

[Beyond Green Jobs: Applying Sustainability and Climate Justice Issues to Career Development Practice](#) This conversation provides an example of connecting career development to broader societal issues and emerging policy conversations. It is useful for professionals looking to connect a larger public issue with career development.

[The U.N. Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\) and Career Development with Dr. Candy Ho](#) This episode provides background on connecting career development to broader societal goals and explores ways career practitioners can integrate the SDGs into their work. The episode also references advocacy for a UN International Day of Careers and Livelihood.

[Current Challenges in Career Counselor Education: Addressing Accreditation, Social Justice, and Mental Health](#) This conversation provides broader context about systems and policy issues affecting career counselor education and the career development profession, including discussion of advocacy, professional identity, and collaboration.

State Career Development Association Advocacy Support

The GRC supports State Career Development Associations in developing and strengthening their advocacy efforts. The GRC provides opportunities for state advocates to connect, share resources and approaches, build advocacy knowledge and skills, and stay informed about relevant federal policy developments. State CDA representatives can also connect with the GRC's network of state contacts to share information and learn from advocacy efforts taking place across the country.

Chapter 2: Getting Started with Advocacy

You have probably heard someone say, “Politicians won’t listen to an average citizen.” Or perhaps something along the lines of, “Politicians just like to sit around and argue with each other - they’re completely ineffective.” Maybe you’ve even said these things yourself. After all, it’s accepted conventional wisdom that politicians are corrupt and the government is broken.

In truth, the most common phrase you hear in any elected official’s office is “how does this connect to my constituents?” In other words, elected officials DO listen to people in their communities and the conflicts within and among these communities account for much of the debate and acrimony demonstrated in a legislative organization.

This toolkit will begin to give you the resources, regardless of your starting point, to begin engaging in advocacy and speaking to your elected officials.

Advocacy in Career Development

Advocacy is the process of influencing an issue, cause, policy, or decision. These policies can be the basis for laws, regulations, and guidance that policymakers and politicians in local, state, and federal government put in place that can impact career development professionals, our clients, and our workplaces. In the context of career development, advocacy can involve bringing the knowledge and experience of career development professionals into conversations about policies that affect:

- Access to career development services
- Education and training
- Workforce development
- Postsecondary transitions
- Employment and economic opportunity
- Career information and guidance
- Workforce participation
- Career-related public programs
- The career development profession

Advocacy can occur at many levels. A career development professional might educate a local decision-maker about a community workforce issue, participate in a meeting with a state legislator, provide professional expertise to a policymaker, respond to a federal policy proposal, participate in a professional association's advocacy effort, or help the public better understand an issue. Advocacy is therefore broader than contacting

legislators. At its core, effective advocacy is about bringing informed perspectives and experiences into decisions that affect people, communities, and professions.

Public policy shapes many of the conditions in which career development takes place. Funding decisions can affect whether career services are available. Education and workforce policies can influence access to programs and services. Changes to regulations can affect institutions and organizations that employ career development professionals. Public investments can determine which populations receive support and which services are available.

Career development professionals see the effects of these decisions firsthand. They work directly with people navigating education, employment, career transitions, layoffs, training, and changing labor markets. They often see barriers and opportunities that may not be visible in policy discussions. That professional experience is valuable. Advocacy provides a way to bring that experience into conversations about public policy.

Effective advocacy does not require career development professionals to provide input on every policy issue. It does require professionals to recognize when their expertise and the experiences of the people they serve can contribute meaningfully to a policy discussion.

Who Can Advocate?

Advocacy is not limited to people who work in government relations. Career development professionals in many different roles can contribute to advocacy. Your day-to-day work may give you firsthand knowledge, data, or professional insight that can help policymakers better understand how an issue affects people and communities.

A career counselor may share observations about barriers facing clients. A university career services professional may explain how a policy affects students as they transition from education into employment. A workforce development professional may provide information about how a proposed change could affect job seekers, workers, or employers. A private practitioner may offer a perspective based on working with career changers or other populations. A researcher may contribute data or evidence that helps clarify the scope or impact of an issue. A state CDA member may participate in a legislative meeting or advocacy day and share their perspective as a representative of the career development profession.

These contributions may look different, but each can help policymakers understand the connection between public policy and career development practice. The specific role

you play will depend on your expertise, your organization, the issue, and the rules governing your participation.

Advocacy at the State and Local Levels

State and local governments make decisions that can have a direct impact on career development systems and the people who use them. State legislatures may establish or change laws related to education, workforce development, professional licensing, funding, economic development, or public programs.

State agencies may implement those laws through regulations, programs, funding decisions, guidance, and administrative processes. Local governments and community organizations may also influence workforce and education priorities. For career development professionals, state-level advocacy can therefore be particularly important.

State CDAs can provide a professional voice within these conversations by helping policymakers understand the role career development plays in education, workforce participation, career mobility, and economic opportunity.

Advocacy at the Federal Level

Federal policy can influence career development through legislation, funding, regulations, administrative actions, and national programs. Many state-level workforce programs receive federal funding, and therefore federal policies and decisions can directly impact state policies. Federal advocacy may involve communicating with members of Congress or federal agencies and their staff, responding to federal policy developments, participating in national advocacy efforts, submitting comments when appropriate, or working through professional associations and coalitions.

The same basic principles still apply:

- 1. Understand the issue.**

Take time to understand the problem you are trying to address, including its scope, impact, and the perspectives of those affected. Be clear about what you are asking for and why it matters.

- 2. Understand the policy landscape.**

Learn how the issue is currently addressed through laws, regulations, policies, funding, or existing programs. Understanding what is already in place helps you identify opportunities for change and avoid duplicating existing efforts.

3. **Identify the appropriate decision-makers.**

Determine who has the authority to influence or make the decision you are seeking. This may include elected officials, government agencies, boards, administrators, or other stakeholders as well as the committees they serve on. Identify their stance or prior statements on the issue.

4. **Communicate clearly.**

Keep your message clear, succinct, and focused. Explain the issue, your position or requested action, and why it matters without assuming that your audience has the same professional knowledge you do.

5. **Connect the issue to real people and professional experience.**

Personal experiences, client stories, and professional observations can help illustrate how a policy affects people in practice. When sharing stories, protect confidentiality and obtain appropriate permission when needed.

6. **Follow applicable rules and organizational policies.**

Advocacy activities may be subject to legal requirements, organizational policies, ethics rules, or restrictions related to lobbying and political activity. Know the rules that apply to your role and organization before engaging.

7. **Build relationships over time.**

Effective advocacy is rarely a one-time interaction. Developing respectful, ongoing relationships with policymakers, staff, partners, and other stakeholders can create opportunities for dialogue and collaboration when future issues arise.

Advocacy vs. Lobbying

CAUTION! Nonprofit organizations are prohibited from lobbying and, therefore, NCDA and all state CDAs are prohibited from lobbying.

Advocacy and lobbying are often used interchangeably in everyday conversation, but they are not the same thing. Advocacy is a broad term that encompasses activities intended to support, educate about, raise awareness of, or influence an issue, cause, policy, or decision. Lobbying is a legal concept. Federal and state laws may define lobbying differently and may establish requirements related to registration, reporting, permissible activities, and organizational participation.

This distinction matters because not every advocacy activity is lobbying, but some advocacy activities may meet the legal definition of lobbying. For example, educating policymakers about the importance of career development may be an advocacy activity.

A communication that specifically asks a legislator to support or oppose a particular piece of legislation may constitute lobbying depending on the circumstances and applicable law. The appropriate classification depends on the specific activity, the jurisdiction, the organization involved, and other factors. **When in doubt, seek legal guidance. Career development professionals should not assume that an activity is or is not lobbying based solely on how the activity feels or how another organization describes it.**

Stepping into Your Role as a Career Development Advocate

Advocacy can feel unfamiliar to career development professionals who have spent most of their careers focused on direct service, education, counseling, workforce programming, research, or organizational leadership. You do not need to become a government relations professional to participate in advocacy. You already possess many of the skills that effective advocacy requires: understanding the experiences of the people you serve, communicating clearly, building relationships, identifying problems, explaining complex issues, collaborating with others, and helping people make informed decisions. This toolkit is intended to help you apply those skills in a policy context. It provides a practical introduction to advocacy and offers tools for identifying issues, understanding the policy environment, developing an advocacy strategy, communicating with policymakers, organizing advocacy activities, and evaluating your efforts. The emphasis throughout this toolkit is on informed, ethical, nonpartisan advocacy grounded in the knowledge and experience of career development professionals.

Start With An Issue, Not An Activity

Start with an issue, not an activity. One of the easiest ways to make advocacy less effective is to begin with an activity rather than an issue. For example, "We should have a legislative advocacy day" is an activity. "Students in our state have limited access to career development services before making postsecondary decisions" is an issue. Start by thinking about the issues you encounter in your professional work. The second statement gives you something to investigate, understand, communicate, and potentially address through policy. Before deciding that you need to schedule meetings, write letters, organize an advocacy day, or contact legislators, identify the issue you are trying to address.

What barriers repeatedly affect the people you serve?

What policies make it easier or harder for people to access career development services, education, training, employment, or economic opportunity?

What changes in legislation, regulation, funding, or public programs could affect your clients, students, communities, or profession?

These questions can provide the starting point for advocacy. A strong advocacy effort begins with a clear understanding of the problem.

Know Your Audience, Rules, and Regulations

Different audiences need different information. A legislator may need a concise explanation of an issue and why it matters to constituents. A legislative staff member may need additional background or data. A community partner may need to understand how the issue connects to their work. A policymaker who already knows the issue may be ready for a more specific conversation about potential solutions. Effective advocacy is not simply about having the right information. It is about communicating that information in a way that is useful to the person receiving it.

Advocacy takes place within different legal and political environments. Legislative processes, lobbying definitions, reporting requirements, public comment procedures, ethics rules, and other requirements vary across states and between state and federal government. Before engaging in advocacy, become familiar with the rules that apply to you and your organization. If you are participating through a state career development association, understand your association's policies and procedures as well as any applicable state requirements. If you are participating as an employee or representative of another organization, understand that organization's policies before communicating on its behalf.

Professional advocacy should reflect the responsibilities and policies of the organizations we represent. Before taking a position publicly or communicating on behalf of NCDA or a state career development association, understand the appropriate authorization and decision-making processes. Individual professionals may have their own perspectives on policy issues. Representing an organization's position is different from expressing a personal professional opinion. Be clear about which perspective you are representing.

Use the Tools and Templates in This Toolkit

You do not have to build an advocacy effort from scratch. The toolkit includes worksheets, checklists, templates, examples, and resources designed to help you move from an initial issue to an organized advocacy strategy. Use the materials as starting points rather than rigid requirements.

Adapt them to:

- Your issue
- Your state
- Your organization
- Your audience
- Your available time and resources
- Your level of advocacy experience

Career Development Community of Practice & Shared Resources

State career development associations are not starting from a blank slate. Across the country, career development professionals are already engaging policymakers, organizing advocacy activities, educating the public, building relationships, and communicating about issues affecting the profession and the people they serve. One of the most valuable resources available to a state CDA may be another state CDA that has already faced a similar challenge.

Consider reaching out to other state CDAs to learn:

- What advocacy activities have they tried?
- What worked well?
- What did they change the next time?
- How did they organize participants?
- How did they identify policymakers?
- What resources or templates did they develop?
- How did they communicate their issue?
- What partnerships helped strengthen their efforts?

Learning from another state does not mean copying its approach. It means starting with experience rather than starting from zero.

Adapt Resources to Your State's Context

A template created in one state may need significant changes before it is appropriate for another. State legislative structures, terminology, election cycles, committee systems, lobbying requirements, public policy priorities, and relationships between government agencies and career development organizations can vary considerably. Use examples from other states as models, then adapt them to your own policy environment.

Share What Works With the NCDA Community

Advocacy knowledge becomes more valuable when it is shared. If your state CDA develops a useful template, creates an effective advocacy-day model, identifies a

helpful resource, or learns something from an advocacy effort that could benefit others, consider sharing it with NCDA. The goal of this toolkit is not to create one "right" way to advocate. It is to build a stronger body of shared knowledge so career development professionals can learn from one another and approach advocacy with greater confidence. To submit examples of advocacy or resources for inclusion in this toolkit, please email governmentrelations@ncda.org.

Chapter 3: Choosing & Researching An Advocacy Issue

Effective advocacy begins with a clear understanding of the issue you want to address. For career development professionals, this means looking beyond individual programs or professional concerns and considering how laws, regulations, funding decisions, administrative policies, and other government actions affect career development, the people we serve, and the systems in which we work. Before deciding what to advocate for, take time to understand the policy landscape, identify issues that matter to your state or community, and determine where career development intersects with those issues. A strong advocacy issue should be specific enough to understand and communicate clearly, while also connected to a broader need or opportunity.

Understanding Career Development Policy

Career development is affected by policy at the federal, state, and local levels. Education and workforce policies, funding decisions, licensing requirements, economic development initiatives, employment policies, and other government actions can shape the services available to individuals and communities. Understanding the policy environment does not require becoming an expert in every area of government. It means developing enough familiarity with the systems that affect career development to recognize relevant policy issues, ask informed questions, and identify opportunities for engagement.

Researching Legislation, Policy & Identifying Decision-Makers

Once you have identified a potential issue, research it before deciding what action to take. Start with primary sources whenever possible, including legislation, regulations, government websites, agency documents, budget documents, and official data. Through research, you should be able to identify the following:

- What the current policy says and proposed changes to that policy
- Who is affected
- Which government body has authority over the issue
- Where the issue is in the policy or legislative process
- State legislators
- Legislative committees
- Governors and their offices
- State agencies and agency leaders
- Local elected officials
- Federal legislators
- Congressional committees
- School or higher education leaders

- Other government decision-makers

There may also be people who do not have direct authority but can influence the conversation, including professional associations, community organizations, employers, researchers, constituents, and other stakeholders. Before contacting a policymaker, determine what role that person or organization plays in the issue and what action they can realistically take. This will help you make a more specific and appropriate advocacy request.

Worksheets & Tools to Identify an Advocacy Issue & Build an Advocacy Strategy

The following worksheets and tools will help you or your state CDA identify an issue important to you, map out who to contact, and begin to build your advocacy strategy.

- Policy Issue Worksheet
- Understanding the Legislative Landscape Worksheet
- Know Your Decision-Makers Worksheet
- Advocacy Planning Worksheet
- Connecting Your Issue to the Broader Policy Ecosystem
- Policy Research Resources
- Elected Official Research Worksheet
- Stakeholder Mapping & Beginning Coalition Research

Policy Issue Worksheet

Use this worksheet to clearly define a policy issue before developing an advocacy strategy. You do not need to have every answer before getting started. The purpose is to organize what you know, identify gaps in your understanding, and determine what additional information you need.

1. Which policy issue are you interested in addressing?
2. In one or two sentences, what is happening?
3. Why does this issue matter to career development?
4. Who is affected by this issue?
5. What is the specific problem or barrier?
6. What happens if the issue is not addressed?
7. What evidence supports your understanding of the issue?

Understanding the Legislative Landscape Worksheet

1. Is there an existing law, regulation, program, funding decision, or policy connected to this issue?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure

If yes, what is it?

2. Is there proposed legislation, a proposed regulation, or another policy change related to the issue?

☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Not sure

If yes, what is it?

3. What would the proposed or existing policy do?

4. What is unclear or do you need to learn more about?

5. What would you like to see happen? Be specific if there are data points or specific outcomes.

6. What policy change would help address the issue?

7. What would success look like?

Know Your Decision-Makers Worksheet

1. Is this a federal, state, or local issue? Does this issue connect to multiple jurisdictions?
2. Who has the authority to make or influence the decision?
Consider legislators, legislative committees, governors, state agencies, local officials, boards, or other decision-makers.
3. Who else may influence the decision?
Consider professional associations, community organizations, employers, educators, advocacy organizations, constituents, or other stakeholders. If this is a federal issue, we recommend reaching out to governmentrelations@ncda.org.
4. Whose experiences should be represented in this conversation?
5. What perspectives or expertise can career development professionals contribute?
6. Are there people or organizations already working on this issue?

Advocacy Planning Worksheet

1. What data, research, or other evidence can help explain the issue?
2. Does your message need to adapt or change based on the audience?
3. What real-world experiences illustrate the issue?
4. What is the most important thing you want a policymaker to understand?

5. Check Your Understanding Before moving forward, consider:

- ☐ I can clearly explain the policy issue.
- ☐ I understand who is affected.
- ☐ I understand the relevant policy, legislation, regulation, or program.
- ☐ I know who has authority to make or influence the decision.
- ☐ I have identified credible evidence or information supporting the issue.
- ☐ I can explain why the issue matters to career development.
- ☐ I have identified information I still need to learn.

6. Your Issue in Brief Complete the following statement:

The issue:

Why it matters:

The policy change or action we would like to see:

The people or communities affected:

The decision-maker or decision-makers:

Our strongest evidence or example:

Elected Official Research Worksheet

Before contacting or meeting with an elected official, take a few minutes to learn about their role, responsibilities, constituency, and areas of interest. This information can help you prepare for a more informed and relevant conversation.

1. Identify the elected official and write down their name and office/position.
2. Are they in the federal, state, or local government?
3. Which district or constituency do they represent?
4. What is their political party? If they are in a nonpartisan role, note that.
5. When did their term start, end, and how many terms have they served?
6. Website & Social Media:
7. Contact Information:
8. What responsibilities does this office have that relate to your issue?
9. What committees, boards, or other bodies does the official serve on?
10. Does the official have a role in decisions related to your issue?
 - ☐ Direct decision-maker
 - ☐ Committee member
 - ☐ Potential influencer
 - ☐ Constituent representative
 - ☐ Other:

Elected Official Research Worksheet Continued:

11. Are there any important details or demographics about their constituency or district worth noting?
12. What communities, industries, educational institutions, employers, or workforce organizations are located in the district?
13. Are there local workforce, education, or career development issues that may be particularly relevant to this constituency?
14. What local data or examples could help demonstrate why your issue matters to their constituents?
15. Are you or one of your stakeholders one of their constituents?
16. What policy areas does the official appear to focus on?
17. Have they introduced, sponsored, supported, or spoken about legislation related to your issue?
18. Have they participated in hearings, events, or public discussions related to the issue?

Elected Official Research Worksheet Continued:

19. What questions or concerns might this official have about your issue?

20. Do you or your organization have an existing connection to this official or their staff?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ Not sure

If yes, describe the connection:

21. Does anyone in your professional network or community have an existing relationship with the official or their staff?

22. Are there constituents, employers, educators, community organizations, or other stakeholders who may be able to provide relevant perspectives?

Stakeholder Mapping & Beginning Coalition Research Worksheet

Understanding who is affected by an issue, who has expertise or influence, who may share your goals, and who may have different perspectives can help you build stronger relationships and identify opportunities for collaboration. Use this worksheet to map the people and organizations connected to your issue. This could be the beginning of your first coalition.

1. Which policy issue are you working on?
2. What policy change or outcome are you seeking?
3. Identify Your Stakeholders. Consider who is directly or indirectly affected by the issue.

Consider:

- Career development professionals
- Students or clients
- Employers
- Educators and educational institutions
- Workforce development organizations
- Community organizations
- Professional associations
- Government agencies
- Elected officials and their staff
- Researchers or subject-matter experts
- Funders
- Labor organizations
- Other affected communities or groups

Stakeholder #1:

How are they connected to the issue?

What perspectives or expertise do they bring?

Stakeholder Mapping & Beginning Coalition Research Continued:

Stakeholder #2:

How are they connected to the issue?

What perspectives or expertise do they bring?

Stakeholder #3:

How are they connected to the issue?

What perspectives or expertise do they bring?

4. Who already supports or may support your position? An ally may be an individual or organization that shares an interest in addressing your policy issue or achieving your advocacy goal.
5. Who has publicly discussed or worked on this issue?
6. Who has a relationship with the decision-maker or policymakers involved?
7. Who could contribute expertise or information?
8. Who could help reach affected communities or constituents?
9. Who could provide data, research, or professional expertise?

10. Who could help organize an event, meeting, or advocacy activity?
11. Who may already have relationships with relevant policymakers?
12. Strong advocacy does not require everyone to have the same perspective. Who may have concerns or a different perspective on this issue? Are there areas of shared interest or common ground?
13. For each key stakeholder, consider your current relationship. Is it strong, developing, or new?
14. Choose 1-3 people or organizations you would like to connect with based on the analysis above.

Who?

Why?

What do you want to learn or accomplish through the connection?

Who will make the initial contact and when?

What is your very next step?

15. Relationship Outreach Checklist

- ☐ I understand why this person or organization is connected to the issue
- ☐ I can clearly explain why I am reaching out
- ☐ I understand what I am asking for
- ☐ I have considered what I can offer or contribute to the relationship
- ☐ I am approaching the relationship with curiosity rather than assuming they will support my position
- ☐ I have identified an appropriate first step

Connecting Your Issue to the Broader Policy Ecosystem

Policy issues rarely exist in isolation. Career development is connected to a broader ecosystem that includes education, workforce systems, employers, community organizations, funding sources, government agencies, and the people and communities career professionals serve. When considering an advocacy issue, take time to identify how the issue connects to these different systems and who else may be affected, interested, or able to influence change. Mapping these connections can help you better understand the issue, identify potential partners and stakeholders, recognize different perspectives, and determine where advocacy efforts may have the greatest opportunity for impact.

Career Pathway Ecosystem Diagram



Career Development Ecosystem. Adapted from U.S. Department of Energy (2024), Educating Zero Energy Professionals (EZEP), Figure 2, “Focus areas of EZEP in the Career Pathway Ecosystem”.

Policy Research Resources

The following resources can help career development professionals research policy issues, understand legislation and government programs, identify relevant data, and find evidence to support informed advocacy. When possible, consult multiple sources and consider the methodology, date, population, and purpose of the research before using it in advocacy communications.

Start with the primary source whenever possible. If you are advocating about a specific bill, regulation, funding program, or government action, review the actual legislation, regulation, government document, or official data in addition to summaries or commentary about it. Secondary research can help explain an issue, but the primary source provides the most direct information about what a policy actually says or does.

Federal Policy and Legislative Research

- [Congressional Research Service \(CRS\)](#)
- [Government Accountability Office \(GAO\)](#)
- [Congressional Budget Office \(CBO\)](#)
- [Congress.gov](#)

State Policy Research

- [National Conference of State Legislatures \(NCSL\)](#)
- State legislative research offices and policy agencies: Many states have legislative research offices, fiscal offices, or nonpartisan policy agencies that provide reports, bill analyses, fiscal notes, and other information for policymakers. Check your state legislature's website to identify the appropriate resource for your state.

Workforce, Education, and Career Development Research

- [Bureau of Labor Statistics \(BLS\)](#)
- [National Association for Colleges and Employers \(NACE\)](#)
- [U.S. Department of Education Institute of Education Sciences \(IES\)](#)
- [U.S. Department of Labor](#)

Public Opinion and Demographic Research

- [Pew Research Center](#)
- [U.S. Census Bureau](#)

Chapter 4: Engaging & Communicating with Policymakers

These resources provide practical tools for career development professionals preparing to engage with legislators, policymakers, and their staff. They are designed to support informed, respectful, and relationship-focused advocacy at the federal, state, and local levels. Caution: before proceeding, know your local rules and laws around engaging and lobbying elected officials. In some cases it is prohibited. Consult a qualified attorney.

- Finding Your Representatives
- Legislator Meeting Preparation
- Meeting Request Templates
- Meeting Agendas
- Communication Templates for Letters and Emails
- Follow-Up Templates
- Post-Meeting Internal Team Debrief
- Types of Legislator Engagement

Finding Your Representatives

In most cases, you are represented by local, state, and federal representatives. It is important to know your representatives at each level of government. For the purpose of this toolkit, we will focus on the legislative branch at the federal level (Congress) and state level (state legislatures).

U.S. Congress

At the federal level, you are represented by two chambers:

- The U.S. Senate: Each state has two U.S. Senators who represent the entire state. Senators serve six-year terms. To find your representatives in the U.S. Senate, visit <https://www.senate.gov/senators/senators-contact.htm>.
- The U.S. House of Representatives: Each state is divided into congressional districts, and one Representative is elected from each. Representatives serve two-year terms, so they are frequently thinking about the concerns of their constituents. To find your representative in the U.S. House of Representatives, visit: <https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>.

State Legislature

Each state has its own legislature, typically made up of two chambers: a House (or Assembly) and a Senate. Members are elected from districts within your state and are responsible for passing state laws, setting the state budget, and overseeing state

agencies. Many decisions affecting daily life are made at the state level, including education, health care, transportation, and public safety. Your state legislators are often the most accessible and impactful point of contact for advocates. To find your representatives, please visit your local state's legislative branch websites.

Legislator Meeting Preparation & Templates

Meeting with a legislator or their staff is one of the most effective ways to move an issue forward. A little preparation goes a long way. Before you reach out, take time to confirm who represents you and research them. You'll want to know which committees they serve on, their public positions, past votes, and sponsored bills that relate to your issue. In addition to the background research, you will need to go in with a specific ask. This could be a bill you'd like them to sponsor, co-sponsor, or vote on or another action within their scope. Each person in the meeting you bring with you should have a role and be prepared to speak on their portion during the meeting. Often these meetings are brief and getting to the point as soon as you can is valuable for the legislator and their staff. In many cases you will be meeting with the legislator's staff such as a legislative assistant or legislative director, which is common and valuable. Staff often advise legislators on issue areas and are more likely to have time for in-depth conversations.

Meeting Request Templates & Examples

Email: Initial Meeting Request

Subject: Meeting Request from [Constituent/Organization Name] re: [Issue/Bill Number]

Dear [Senator/Representative/Title] [Last Name],

My name is [Name], and I am a constituent from [City/Town] and [role, e.g., a volunteer with / member of / advocate for] [Organization]. I am writing to request a meeting with you or a member of your staff to discuss [issue or bill] and how it affects our community.

[One or two sentences on why this matters locally, e.g., "In [District], [number] residents are affected by..."]

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you at your convenience, either at your [district/capitol/Washington, D.C.] office or by phone or video. We are available on [dates/times] and are happy to work around your schedule.

Thank you for your service and for considering this request. You can reach me at [phone] or [email].

Sincerely,

Phone Script: Scheduling Line

"Hello, my name is [Name], and I'm a constituent from [City/ZIP]. I'd like to request a meeting with [Legislator] or the staff member who handles [issue area] to discuss [issue/bill]. Who would be the best person to speak with about scheduling?"

Email: Request for a Group or Coalition Meeting

Subject: Constituent Coalition Meeting Request: [Issue]

Dear [Title] [Last Name],

On behalf of [Organization/Coalition], I am writing to request a meeting with you to discuss [issue]. Our group includes [number] constituents representing [e.g., families, health providers, educators, small business owners] from across your district.

We would like to share our experiences and discuss [specific ask, e.g., "your support for HB ###"]. Would you or a member of your staff be available for a 30-minute meeting during [timeframe]?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
[Name, Title, Contact Info]

Meeting Agenda Template

Standard 30-Minute Meeting Agenda:

Legislator Meeting: [Issue/Bill Number]

Date: [Date]

Time: [Time]

Location: [Office/Virtual Link]

Attendees: [Names and roles]

1. Welcome and Introductions (3 minutes)
Lead: [Team lead]
 - Thank the legislator or staff member for their time
 - Introduce each team member and where they live in the district
2. Who We Are and Why We're Here (5 minutes)
Lead: [Team lead]
 - Briefly describe [Organization] and its work in the community
 - Explain the issue and why it matters locally
3. Personal Story and Local Impact (7 minutes)
Lead: [Constituent/Storyteller]
 - Share a brief, personal account of how the issue affects real people in the district
4. Data and Policy Context (5 minutes)
Lead: [Subject expert]
 - Present two or three key facts or statistics
 - Explain how the proposed policy addresses the problem
5. The Ask (5 minutes)
Lead: [Team lead]
 - State one specific request (for example, "Will you vote yes on [Bill Number]?")
 - Ask where the legislator currently stands
6. Discussion, Questions, and Next Steps (5 minutes)
Lead: Everyone
 - Listen to the legislator's response and concerns
 - Confirm any commitments and agree on follow-up
 - Offer the leave-behind materials and thank them again

Short 15-Minute Meeting Agenda:

Legislator Meeting: [Issue/Bill Number]

Date: [Date]

Time: [Time]

Location: [Office/Virtual Link]

Attendees: [Names and roles]

1. Introductions and Thanks (2 minutes)
Lead: [Team lead]
2. Personal Story (4 minutes)
Lead: [Constituent/Storyteller]
 - One brief story showing local impact

3. Key Facts and the Ask (4 minutes)

Lead: [Team lead or subject expert]

- Share one or two key facts
- State your single, specific request

4. Discussion and Questions (5 minutes)

Lead: Everyone

- Listen, answer questions, and confirm next steps

Pre-Meeting Team Huddle Checklist

- ☐ Assign roles: lead, storyteller, subject expert, note-taker
- ☐ Agree on the single ask and rehearse how you'll phrase it
- ☐ Prepare a one-page leave-behind with key facts and your contact info
- ☐ Anticipate likely questions or objections
- ☐ Arrive ten minutes early

Communication Templates for Letters and Emails

Letter or Email Supporting a Bill:

Dear [Title] [Last Name],

As your constituent in [City/Town], I am writing to urge you to support [Bill Name/Number].

[Two to three sentences on why this matters to you personally or professionally.]

[One sentence with a key fact or statistic, ideally local.]

I respectfully ask that you vote yes on [Bill Number] and encourage your colleagues to do the same. Please let me know if I can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

[Name, Address, Phone/Email]

Letter or Email Opposing a Bill:

Dear [Title] [Last Name],

I am writing as a constituent to express my concerns about [Bill Name/Number] and to ask that you oppose this legislation.

[Explain the specific concern and how it would affect you, your community, or the people you serve.]

[Offer an alternative or an amendment if you have one.]

Thank you for considering my perspective. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this further.

Sincerely,
[Name, Address, Phone/Email]

Phone Call Script:

"Hello, my name is [Name], and I'm a constituent from [City/ZIP]. I'm calling to ask [Legislator] to [support/oppose] [Bill Name/Number]. [One sentence on why.]
Thank you for taking my message."

Social Media Message:

Thank you, [@Handle], for your leadership on [issue]. Constituents in [community] are counting on [action/bill]. Please [support/vote yes on] [Bill Number].
#[YourHashtag]

Thank-You Note (After a Vote or Action):

Dear [Title] [Last Name],

Thank you for your [vote/support/leadership] on [Bill/Issue]. Your action will make a real difference for [population or community]. We appreciate your commitment to [value/priority] and look forward to continuing to work with you.

Sincerely,
[Name, Organization]

Follow-Up Templates

Send a follow-up within 24 to 48 hours via email and send a hand written card to arrive in the mail later. It reinforces your message and keeps the relationship moving.

Thank-You and Recap Email

Subject: Thank You: [Issue] Meeting on [Date]

Dear [Title] [Last Name] / [Staff Name],

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us on [date]. We appreciate your openness in discussing [issue].

To recap, we asked that you [restate ask]. [If applicable: You mentioned that you would [commitment or next step].]

As promised, I've attached [resource, e.g., fact sheet, data, story] for your reference. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you need further information.

We look forward to staying in touch.

Sincerely,
[Name, Title, Contact Info]

Follow-Up When You Owe an Answer:

Dear [Name],

Thank you again for meeting with us. During our conversation, you asked about [question]. Here is what we found: [answer or resource]. Please let us know if you would like more detail.

Best regards,
[Name]

Follow-Up After No Response to Your Ask:

Dear [Name],

I'm following up on our meeting on [date] regarding [issue/bill]. We're hopeful that [Legislator] will consider [ask], especially as [timely reason, e.g., "the committee hearing is scheduled for [date]"]. Could you share where the office currently stands or if there is additional information that would be helpful?

Thank you for your time.

[Name]

Communication Tips:

- Keep messages to one page or about 200 words
- Focus on one issue and one ask
- Personal stories are more persuasive than form language
- Stay respectful, even when you disagree

- Always include your address so the office can verify you're a constituent

Post-Meeting Internal Team Debrief

After each meeting, gather your team to record what happened while it is fresh. Note the date and location, who attended from your team and from the legislator's office, and the issue and specific ask you presented. Then capture the legislator's response or stated position, along with any concerns or questions they raised. Be sure to document any commitments made by either side, the next steps and who is responsible for each, and the date by which you plan to follow up.

Types of Legislator Engagement

Example 1: The District Meeting

Constituents:

- K-12 school counselor,
- higher ed career coach, and
- workforce development professional

A high school counselor, a community college career coach, and a local workforce board program manager met with their state representative in the district office to discuss higher education funding. Each person spent two minutes describing how the issue shows up in their daily work: the counselor shared how caseloads limit time for career exploration, the career coach described students arriving on campus with no clear plan, and the workforce professional explained the gap between graduates' skills and local employer needs. They closed by asking the representative to co-sponsor a relevant bill. The office later introduced an amendment reflecting their concerns.

This strategy worked because voices from across the education-to-career pipeline came together to share impactful, brief personal stories, and one clear ask.

Example 2: The Site Visit

Constituents:

- Higher ed career services team

A university career services office invited its state senator to visit during the campus career fair. The senator met career coaches, employer partners, and students, watched a mock interview session, and saw firsthand how students connect classroom learning

to employment. She later mentioned the visit during a higher education committee hearing.

This strategy worked because seeing career services in action makes the work concrete, and the visit created a relationship that extends beyond a single bill.

Example 3: The Coordinated Call-In Day

Constituents:

- Coalition of K-12 counselors,
- career coaches, and
- private practice counselors

A statewide career development coalition asked members to call their legislators on the same day ahead of a committee vote on [Bill Number]. School counselors, college career coaches, and private practice career counselors all used a shared one-sentence script: "I'm a career professional in your district, and I'm asking you to support this bill so more residents have access to career guidance." Offices reported a noticeable volume of calls on the bill.

This strategy worked because of timing, coordination, and a simple, consistent message from professionals across settings.

Example 4: The Testimony

Constituent:

- Private practice career counselor

A private practice career counselor submitted written testimony and delivered a three-minute statement at a public hearing. She shared how her adult clients, including mid-career changers and workers displaced by layoffs, struggle to find affordable career guidance, and she offered one suggested change: adding career counseling to the list of services eligible for the funding stream.

This strategy worked because personal testimony on the public record gives legislators a quotable, real-world perspective, and a specific suggested change gives them something to act on.

Example 5: The Long-Term Relationship

Constituents:

- State career development association members

After a successful vote, association members sent a thank-you note, shared updates for the next two years on how the new funding affected students and clients, and invited the legislator to speak at the association's annual conference. When a related workforce issue arose later, the office reached out to them first for input.

This strategy worked because advocacy is a long game, these advocates stayed in touch, and being a trusted resource pays off over time.

Chapter 5: Proclamations & Citations

How, When, and Why Your State CDA Should Request a Proclamation

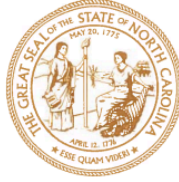
National Career Development Month, observed each November, is a natural opening for your CDA to raise the profile of the profession. A gubernatorial or legislative proclamation formally recognizes the value of career development in your state and signals that policymakers see career guidance as central to education, workforce readiness, and economic opportunity. It also gives your members a tangible reason to contact officials, generates local media and social media attention, and creates a foundation for deeper relationships. Many advocates find that a low-stakes, positive request like a proclamation is an ideal first step with an office before moving on to a legislative ask.

Timing matters, because proclamation requests are often processed weeks in advance and offices receive many of them. At least 3-6 months before you plan to request a proclamation, research the process in your state by calling your elected officials. Some states require a couple of weeks while others request several months notice. Most states will be able to submit requests in late summer or early fall. Build in extra time for drafting, internal approvals, and any follow-up the office may need. If November is already close, submit anyway and ask whether a later date or a proclamation timed to a related event is possible.

Start by finding out who issues proclamations in your state, which is typically the governor's office or your legislature. Visit the office's website to locate the proclamation request form and any guidelines. Prepare a short draft of the proclamation text that explains what career development is, why it matters to your state's students, workers, and employers, and why November is the right time to recognize it. Include the name of your association, a contact person, and any local data or examples that show the need for career services. Submit your request through the official process, and follow up politely by phone or email if you have not heard back within a week or two.

Once granted, use the proclamation to build momentum. Thank the office publicly, share the document on your website and social media, and invite the official or their staff to a career development event during November. Consider presenting the proclamation at a member meeting or career fair, and use the occasion to introduce your association's policy priorities. Each of these steps turns a single ceremonial document into the start of an ongoing relationship with policymakers.

Example Proclamation from North Carolina and New Mexico



State of North Carolina

ROY COOPER
GOVERNOR

NORTH CAROLINA CAREER DEVELOPMENT MONTH

AND

NORTH CAROLINA CAREER DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR DAY

2018

BY THE GOVERNOR OF THE STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA

A PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, Career Development Coordinators in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs in North Carolina's public schools are committed to helping students explore their potential in personal social development, educational achievement and lifelong learning, and career management within the National Career Development Guidelines Framework; and

WHEREAS, Career Development Coordinators provide the supporting materials to ensure our schools meet the national standards and competencies established by the National Career Development Association; and

WHEREAS, Career Development Coordinators support the mission of North Carolina's CTE programs by providing community resources and services that help students succeed in life, college and/or careers, citizen readiness, and as productive members of society; and

WHEREAS, Career Development Coordinators empower students to make informed decisions regarding their post-high school plans, which may include immediate employment in a civilian or military occupation, or further education at a vocational program, community college, or university; and

WHEREAS, Career Development Coordinators support the work of Career and Technical Student Organizations, extending student learning based on instructional competencies; career development education can contribute to increased attendance, raise achievement, and improve graduation rates; and

WHEREAS, Career Development Coordinators assist students in understanding the 16 Career Clusters in the National Career Clusters Framework, which is made up of 79 Career Pathways to success in college, career, and citizen readiness; through career development education, CTE students gain the critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, leadership, and interpersonal skills necessary to thrive in the modern business world and contribute to the vitality of our state and nation;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, ROY COOPER, Governor of the State of North Carolina, do hereby proclaim November, 2018, as "NORTH CAROLINA CAREER DEVELOPMENT MONTH" and November 14, 2018, as "NORTH CAROLINA CAREER DEVELOPMENT COORDINATOR DAY" in North Carolina, and commend observance to all citizens.





Roy Cooper
Governor

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Great Seal of the State of North Carolina at the Capitol in Raleigh this twenty-sixth day of October in the year of our Lord two thousand and eighteen and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and forty-second.



STATE OF NEW MEXICO EXECUTIVE OFFICE SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO

Proclamation

WHEREAS, national career development month highlights the importance of nurturing professional growth by prioritizing lifelong career development and personal empowerment; and

WHEREAS, all students should be encouraged to think broadly about their interests and abilities to facilitate career choices that foster long-term professional growth and fulfillment; and

WHEREAS, working adults can also benefit from career exploration, increasing subject matter knowledge, and broadening their skills and knowledge; and

WHEREAS, investing in career development contributes to economic growth and workforce readiness, empowering communities and businesses to thrive in a dynamic and competitive global marketplace; and

WHEREAS, the National Career Development Association, New Mexico Career Development Association, and other organizations are dedicated to empowering New Mexico residents to discover their ideal career choices.

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Michelle Lujan Grisham, Governor of New Mexico, do hereby proclaim November 2024, as:

"National Career Development Month"

throughout the state of New Mexico.

Attest:

Maggie Toulouse Oliver
Maggie Toulouse Oliver
Secretary of State

Done at the Executive Office this
31st day of October 2024.

Witness my hand and the Great Seal
of the State of New Mexico.



Michelle Lujan Grisham
Michelle Lujan Grisham
Governor

Template Proclamation or Citation Request

In some cases, a request can be submitted via email, but most government websites have a form on their website you can fill out with this request. Use the sample proclamation text below to personalize the proclamation to your state, issues, and career development association to assist the legislator in completing the request.

Request Template

Subject: Proclamation Request: National Career Development Month, November [Year]

Dear The Honorable _____,

On behalf of the [State] Career Development Association, I am writing to request a proclamation recognizing November [Year] as National Career Development Month in [State].

[State CDA] represents [number] career development professionals across the state, including school counselors, college and university career coaches, workforce development specialists, and private practice career counselors. Every day, our members help [students, job seekers, and workers] explore options, build skills, and move toward meaningful work. Recognizing National Career Development Month would highlight the importance of career guidance for [State]'s students, workforce, and employers.

For your convenience, I have attached a draft proclamation for your consideration, along with [the required request form, if applicable]. [Optional: In [State], [local statistic or example showing the need or impact of career services].] We would also welcome the opportunity to present the proclamation at [event, e.g., our annual conference, a career fair, or a member meeting] and invite you or a member of your staff to attend.

Please let me know if you need additional information or a different format. The best way to reach me is [phone/email]. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to [State]'s residents.

Sample Proclamation Text

PROCLAMATION

National Career Development Month
November [Year]

WHEREAS, career development is a lifelong process through which individuals explore, plan, and manage their learning and work, and it is essential to the well-being and economic security of the people of [State]; and

WHEREAS, access to quality career guidance helps students make informed decisions about education and training, helps workers navigate career transitions, and helps employers find the skilled talent they need; and

WHEREAS, career development professionals in [State], including school counselors, college and university career coaches, workforce development specialists, and career counselors in private practice, serve [students, job seekers, and workers] in every region of the state; and

WHEREAS, effective career development strengthens [State]'s economy by connecting education to employment, supporting career pathways, and helping individuals adapt to a changing labor market; and

WHEREAS, the [State Career Development Association], an affiliate of the National Career Development Association, promotes excellence in career development through professional support, training, and advocacy; and

WHEREAS, November is recognized nationally as National Career Development Month, providing an opportunity to celebrate the work of career professionals and to encourage all residents to take advantage of career development resources;

NOW, THEREFORE, I, [Name], [Governor/Title] of the State of [State], do hereby proclaim November [Year] as

NATIONAL CAREER DEVELOPMENT MONTH

in the State of [State], and I encourage all residents to recognize the value of career development and the dedicated professionals who support the people of our state.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Great Seal of the State of [State] to be affixed this [day] day of [Month], [Year].

[Signature Line]

Chapter 6: State CDA Capacity Building Evaluation

During the early part of 2026, the GRC sought to identify how to support state CDAs across the country with their advocacy efforts. By first interviewing and assessing a small group of representative state CDAs, data was collected and informed the creation of the following levels and framework. These levels are used only to support CDAs in identifying the next few steps they can take to grow their advocacy efforts and effectiveness. NCDA views advocacy as an ongoing process and values each contribution at every level. You do not have to be an expert to start and we encourage anyone along the continuum to get involved.

To make this toolkit useful for every State CDA, the NCDA Government Relations Committee (GRC) first needed to understand where each division stands. Chapters differ widely in volunteer capacity, board priorities, legislative environments, relationships, and advocacy experience. Asking every chapter to follow the same path would overwhelm newer chapters and underserve experienced ones.

The levels grew from a needs assessment sent to State CDAs. Respondents described their committee structures, government relations leadership, advocacy experience, member confidence, policy interests, barriers to participation, and the kinds of national support they wanted. The GRC reviewed the responses for recurring patterns in three areas: leadership infrastructure, advocacy experience, and capacity for sustained engagement.

Eleven divisions responded, each representing a different states. These findings are an initial snapshot, not a complete picture of every State CDA, and we will keep gathering feedback and refining the framework.

- **Structure:** Seven divisions had no formal government relations, advocacy, or public policy committee. Two were developing one, and two had established committees.
- **Shared priorities:** Workforce development policy and career pathways or apprenticeships were each selected by 10 of 11 respondents. K-12 career development and funding for career development programs were each selected by seven.
- **Barriers:** Time was the most common barrier, selected by nine divisions. Leadership capacity, knowledge, and lack of clear direction or priorities were each selected by six.

Self Assessment: Where does your chapter fit?

Use this assessment tool to identify where you are and plan your next steps. Answer quickly. No scoring is required. Choose the statement in each section that best describes your chapter today.

A. Structure and Leadership

- We have no formal government relations committee or designated lead. → *Explorer*
- We have a committee or designee, but roles and processes are still developing. → *Builder*
- We have a committee with clear roles, goals, and continuity. → *Advanced*

B. Advocacy Activity (Past 12 Months)

- We have had no direct contact with policymakers. → *Explorer*
- We have done occasional outreach, meetings, or coalition work. → *Builder*
- We have ongoing relationships or policy wins. → *Advanced*

C. Confidence with Advocacy Tasks

How comfortable is your team with hearings, testimony, or policy statements?

- We are not comfortable or are unsure where to start. → *Explorer*
- We have some comfort and would benefit from coaching and templates. → *Builder*
- We are comfortable and experienced. → *Advanced*

D. Capacity and Time

- We have limited time and need low-lift options. → *Explorer*
- We have a small team with defined tasks. → *Builder*
- We have dedicated leadership capacity. → *Advanced*

Your level: The category that appears most often is your starting point. If your answers are split, choose the level that best matches your current capacity, and feel free to use resources from the others.

Your level reflects your chapter's current infrastructure and experience, not the importance of its contribution. An Explorer chapter's first conversation with a policymaker can be just as meaningful as an Advanced chapter's coalition-building or mentoring. Every level strengthens NCDA's national advocacy. State divisions share local insights, flag emerging issues, build relationships, and document policy impact,

and the national GRC uses that information to strengthen NCDA's credibility and reach. In turn, national templates, training, and peer learning help your chapter turn interest into action.

The three levels

- **Explorer:** Your chapter is interested in advocacy but does not yet have a government relations representative or has recently appointed one and needs a manageable starting point.
- **Builder:** Your chapter has a government relations person but is still developing advocacy experience, infrastructure, a committee, and/or confidence.
- **Advanced:** Your chapter has at least two years of advocacy experience and is ready to expand capacity, visibility, partnerships, and policy leadership.

Once your chapter has a government relations designee, we encourage that person to attend the monthly national GRC meetings.

These levels are a starting point, not a ranking, requirement, or performance rating. You can draw from more than one level, adapt the tools and pace to your needs, and move between levels as your circumstances change.

Chapter 7: Additional Advocacy Resources

Federal Resources

Federal government resources can help advocates understand proposed legislation, federal regulations, agency actions, congressional activity, and other developments that may affect career development and workforce issues. Useful starting points include Congress.gov, GovInfo, the Federal Register, and Regulations.gov. GovInfo provides access to official federal legislative, regulatory, and government publications, while the Federal Register provides the official daily publication of federal rules, proposed rules, notices, and presidential documents. Some of the most commonly referenced federal agencies for advocacy in career development include the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Labor, and the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs. To contact your representatives in Congress visit www.senate.gov for the U.S. Senate and www.house.gov for the U.S. House of Representatives.

State Resources

State government resources can help advocates understand state legislation, legislative calendars, committees, policymakers, state agencies, and existing or proposed state policies. Start with your state legislature and relevant state agencies, and consider resources such as the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) for comparative information about state legislation and policy across the country. NCSL provides information on legislatures in all 50 states, territories, and commonwealths, including legislative calendars, policy research, and examples of state actions.

Understanding Your State's Legislative Calendar

Every state legislature has its own calendar, schedule, and process for introducing, considering, and acting on legislation. Understanding your state's legislative calendar can help advocates identify when legislators are in session, when bills are introduced, when committees meet, when public testimony may occur, and when key votes are likely to take place. Start by visiting your state legislature's official website and looking for its legislative calendar, session schedule, committee calendar, and deadlines for introducing or advancing legislation. As you become familiar with the calendar, pay particular attention to session start and end dates, bill filing deadlines, committee hearings, crossover or chamber deadlines, and final voting periods. These dates can help you determine when to research an issue, contact legislators, provide testimony, organize advocates, or participate in a legislative advocacy day.

Nonpartisan Advocacy Organizations

Nonpartisan advocacy organizations can provide practical guidance on engaging policymakers, communicating about public policy, understanding advocacy rules, and building community support. Organizations such as the National Council of Nonprofits

and Nonprofit VOTE offer resources on nonprofit advocacy, public policy engagement, and staying within applicable legal and organizational requirements.

Policy Research Resources

Policy research resources can help advocates understand an issue, examine available evidence, identify relevant data, and develop informed messages for policymakers and other stakeholders. Resources may include government research offices, academic research centers, policy institutes, and other organizations that publish research, reports, data, and policy analysis. The Congressional Research Service (CRS), for example, provides Congress with research and analysis across a broad range of public policy areas.

American Counseling Association Advocacy Resources

The American Counseling Association (ACA) provides a collection of resources to help counselors and professional organizations participate in legislative and public policy advocacy. Resources include Advocacy 101 guidance, federal and state legislative advocacy training, legislative priorities and position statements, workforce development resources, policy updates, advocacy tools, and a government affairs and public policy glossary. The collection also includes resources for tracking legislation, communicating with legislators, understanding current federal policies, and strengthening advocacy at the state and national levels. These resources may be useful for career development professionals and State Career Development Associations looking to learn from related professional advocacy efforts or strengthen their own advocacy practices. Explore ACA Advocacy Resources at www.counseling.org/government-affairs/resources.

Additional Links for Organizations within the Workforce-Career Landscape:

[American Counseling Association](#) (ACA)

[American School Counselors Association](#) (ASCA)

[Association for Career and Technical Education](#) (ACTE)

[National Association of State Directors of Career and Technical Education](#) (NASDCTE)

[National Association of Workforce Development Professionals](#) (NAWDP)

[National Skills Coalition](#)

[Society of Human Resource Management](#) (SHRM)

Chapter 8: History of the NCDA Government Relations Committee

This is a partial history. Annual reports and budgets posted on the NCDA website provide additional detail.

Why the GRC Exists

Career development does not happen in isolation from the policies, programs, and systems that shape people's access to education, training, employment, and economic opportunity. Decisions made by legislators and government agencies can directly affect the individuals and communities career development professionals serve. As a result, understanding and engaging in public policy is an important part of advancing the career development profession and advocating for the people it serves.

NCDA's (GRC) provides a structure for career development professionals to engage in this work. The GRC monitors relevant legislative and policy developments, identifies issues that may affect the profession and the people career development professionals serve, supports advocacy and civic engagement, and provides opportunities for NCDA members to develop their advocacy skills. The committee also helps connect the experiences and expertise of career development professionals to policymakers and other decision-makers.

The GRC's work reflects a broader understanding of advocacy: effective government relations is not limited to responding to legislation. It includes building relationships, understanding how policy decisions are made, communicating the experiences of the profession and the individuals it serves, and participating consistently in the public policy process. The history of NCDA's GRC illustrates how these efforts have developed over time and offers lessons for career development professionals seeking to build or strengthen advocacy efforts in their own states and communities.

The Early Years

The GRC grew out of a decision by the NCDA Board to take a more direct approach to advancing NCDA's priorities and the interests of its members through lobbying. Niel Carey, Rebecca Dedmond, and Dr. Pat Schwallie-Giddes began exploring nonprofit-rate lobbying firms in Washington, DC. Their connection to George Washington University's Career Services Department helped shape the search. After interviewing several options, they selected Lobbyit, led by President Paul Kanitra.

In the first few years of the contract, Lobbyit assigned a staff member who worked with the committee monthly on several initiatives. That person attended the GRC's monthly meetings, presented at national conferences, and helped prepare proclamations and legislative briefs supporting NCDA's mission and membership. Together, NCDA and Lobbyit held several Hill Days, though none during the COVID-19 pandemic. The contract concluded after several years as the committee's needs and leadership evolved.

The earliest co-chairs were Niel Carey and Rebecca Dedmond, followed by Diana Bailey and Mike Marlowe, and then Diana and Steven Myers. Diana chaired alone for several years until more volunteers could be secured. Natalie Kauffman, a longtime committee member, has been instrumental in expanding participation and representation for all states.

Building the Foundation and Expanding Committee Workstreams

Over time, the committee grew from a small group into a broader, more representative body. Diana Bailey led committee recruitment at NCDA conferences, which expanded participation from a few state representatives to many more. Elle O'flaherty and Shelby Moscotte and others were brought into GRC leadership roles during this period and were pivotal to the committee's growth. Several Board of Directors liaisons have supported the committee, including Niel Carey, Lisa Severy, Charles Lehman, and Marty Apodaca.

In the years that followed, the committee created a policy platform and expanded into workstreams covering every area of its work. It built coalitions, including with SHRM, and trained advocates across the United States. It also adopted NCDA's first legislative tracking tool, laying the groundwork for a robust legislative monitoring strategy, and another Hill Day in Washington, DC.

The GRC moved to a committee leadership structure with two co-chairs each holding two-year terms and alternating start years for ongoing leadership development and succession planning. As the committee began to evolve, Shelby's term ended Sarah JanTausch was brought on to succeed Shelby in this new leadership framework.

Evolution and Expansion

During the 2025-2026 fiscal year, the Board asked the committee to shift its advocacy priorities after analysis of the greater landscape, NCDA's advocacy priorities, and looking at member needs. Sarah brought on Steven Thomas after Elle's term ended to support the GRC's shifting focus. Strategic planning for the year was conducted and the federal landscape was analyzed to realign advocacy activities, and built the committee's

capacity and training to support the new direction. The new direction focused on continuing to monitor and advocate at the federal level while shifting and expanding resources for building the capacity for advocacy within all of NCDA's state divisions and across the global membership.

The committee hosted NCDA's first global advocacy summit with registrants from across the United States and around the world. Award-winning lobbyist and advocacy trainer Luke Crumley trained NCDA members and the public, and a state CDA panel provided resource sharing and peer leadership opportunities.

The committee created, launched, and implemented a new state advocacy grant programs to support state CDAs in building capacity and hosting engagement events with legislators and policymakers at the local and state levels. It organized independent reviewers, selected awardees, and announced fund distributions.

Legislative tracking was completed by the prior vendor through the end of its contract, then manually by the committee from January until budget approval in the spring. Once the budget was approved, the committee issued a request for proposals and secured a new vendor in May 2026. The new tool allowed for a dynamic report of all tracked legislation and regulations at the federal and state levels to be viewed through the member login. This change allows members to instantly access important information and learn what NCDA is monitoring minute-by-minute.

The committee has worked to start and expand coalitions with SHRM, the National Skills Coalition, and the American Counseling Association, CLUE, and plans further coalition building with national organizations that share NCDA's mission.

While the organization shifted to a state focus, federal advocacy continued and the following public statements, issues letters, and campaigns ensured NCDA had a voice in important issues surrounding career development:

- Signed on to the National Skills Coalition letter supporting career and technical education and related topics
- Joined a coalition of workforce boards, state and local governments, community and technical colleges, adult educators, labor partners, community-based organizations, workers, and businesses in a June 2026 letter urging a response to economic changes affecting workers and learners
- Wrote and submitted public comment on the federal proposed RISE (Reimagining and Improving Student Education) rules
- Led a letter-writing campaign for NCDA members in six or more states supporting continued advocacy on the RISE regulations in partnership with a Senator Merkley's staff

- Submitted public comment on the O*NET rules

Looking Forward

The GRC's work continues to provide an important structure for NCDA's engagement in public policy and advocacy. Future leaders have the opportunity to build on the relationships, knowledge, processes, and advocacy practices developed by those who came before them while also responding to emerging issues and opportunities. Maintaining this advocacy infrastructure helps ensure that government relations remains a sustained part of NCDA's work rather than an effort that begins and ends with individual initiatives or legislative sessions. By documenting institutional knowledge, developing new advocates, strengthening relationships, and continuing to refine its approach, each generation of GRC leaders can build on the foundation established by previous leaders and help carry the work forward.

Appendix: State CDA Resource Repository

The NCDA Government Relations Committee is building a State CDA Advocacy Resource Repository as part of the NCDA Advocacy Toolkit. These resources will be updated on an as needed basis. We are interested in practical materials that can help other career development professionals understand what advocacy can look like and adapt approaches to their own state or organization. The goal of the repository is to help career development professionals learn from one another and make advocacy more accessible.

What Can You Submit?

We welcome resources, examples, and tools related to career development advocacy, including, but not limited to:

- Advocacy Day models, agendas, or planning materials
- Legislator meeting resources or preparation guides
- Advocacy training materials
- Policy platforms or policy development resources
- Advocacy talking points or communication materials
- Legislator outreach templates
- Advocacy planning tools or worksheets
- State-specific advocacy resources
- Examples of successful advocacy activities
- Resources for engaging members in advocacy
- Policymaker engagement strategies
- Other resources that may be useful to career development advocates

Submission Instructions: Email governmentrelations@ncda.org and include your name, state or state CDA, a description of the resource, and any relevant context or recommendations for others using it. Submission does not guarantee publication or inclusion in the repository. Please note that submissions will be reviewed and posted if aligned with NCDA's advocacy goals.

Organization of the repository: Submitted and approved resources will be organized in the following pages by state.

Ohio Career Development Association (OCDA)

Advocacy Hub: The OCDA maintains an advocacy webpage on their website (<https://www.ocdaonline.org/Advocacy>) for members and the public.

Policy Platform: The OCDA published their [policy platform](#) in May 2026.

Pulse on Ohio Column: The OCDA GRC publishes a monthly column in the CDA's newsletter. All issues are posted on the [website](#) for reading.

Trainings: The OCDA GRC has created several trainings for their members that can be replicated or brought to other states. Contact the OCDA to schedule a training:

- Legislative Tracking Training
- Advancing Career Readiness Through Policy: OCDA Government Relations Committee Progress & Policy Updates
- Advocating for Career Development During Revolutionary Times
- The Work-Life Balancing Act: Navigating Government Regulations from the Career Counselor/Coach's Standpoint to Support our Clients
- Creating Spaces for Advocacy with State Career Development Associations

Committee Recruitment Poster:



The poster is a vertical rectangle with a light blue background. At the top, a dark blue banner contains the text "JOIN THE OCDA GOVERNMENT RELATIONS COMMITTEE!" in large, bold, white capital letters. Below this, in smaller white text, is "advocate for career practitioners and those we serve". The main body of the poster is divided into two vertical sections. The left section has a green background and features a white megaphone icon with red sound waves. Below the megaphone is the OCDA logo, which consists of a blue square with a white outline of the state of Ohio and the text "OCDA" and "OHIO CAREER DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION" below it. The right section has a light blue background and contains an orange rounded rectangle with white text. The text inside the orange box lists four bullet points: "Learn and engage in advocacy efforts", "Stay up to date on legislation", "Be a leader in creating a voice for the field of career development", and "Ensure policies support you and those you serve". Below the orange box, in blue text, is the statement "We want to hear from you, and no experience is required to join the OCDA GRC!". At the bottom of the poster, in black text, is the "Interested?" section, which says "Contact OCDA GRC Co-Chairs, Sarah JanTausch (sarah@valuesbasedcareers.com) and Newton Kimberly (nskimberly@owu.edu)".

JOIN THE OCDA GOVERNMENT RELATIONS COMMITTEE!
advocate for career practitioners and those we serve

Learn and engage in advocacy efforts

Stay up to date on legislation

Be a leader in creating a voice for the field of career development

Ensure policies support you and those you serve

We want to hear from you, and no experience is required to join the OCDA GRC!

Interested? Contact OCDA GRC Co-Chairs, Sarah JanTausch (sarah@valuesbasedcareers.com) and Newton Kimberly (nskimberly@owu.edu)

Ohio Career Development Association (OCDA): Continued

Legislative Advocacy Day

The OCDA hosts an annual legislative day each year for members to meet with legislators in the Ohio Statehouse. The team uses Luma, a free platform, for event registration and promotes their event in the member newsletter and at their conference. In a prior year they used the following leave behind for legislators:



**OHIO CAREER
DEVELOPMENT
ASSOCIATION**



**OHIO'S LEADING VOICE FOR
CAREER DEVELOPMENT
PROFESSIONALS SERVING
OHIOANS ACROSS THE CAREER
CONTINUUM FROM
K-12 THROUGH ENCORE CAREER**

Mission

The mission of the OCDA is to promote the career development of all people over the lifespan and to establish, improve, and maintain the standards of professional career guidance, counseling, and career services within Ohio. The OCDA strives to present opportunities for professional development and professional networking within the career development community and strives to provide the building and maintenance of a diverse network of resources and support for its members.

History

The Ohio Career Development Association (OCDA) was founded in 1975 is a strong state division of the National Career Development Association (NCDA), which was founded in 1913. NCDA is a division of the American Counseling Association (ACA).

Our Focus

- 1. Preparing for a career**

Ohio's youth need career awareness, exploration, and discovery as early as K-12 to be ready for jobs of the future.
- 2. Early Career**

Whether a young person goes into college, career, military, or an apprenticeship, the foundational career years will impact lifetime earnings, their family, and their local community.
- 3. Mid Career**

Due to the many shifts in work, shifts toward a knowledge economy, and rapid advancement of technology these professionals are seeking to up-skill and grow their careers.
- 3. Late Career**

Careers often last into the later years of one's life whether that is by choice or necessity. Rewarding work in this phase is a necessity and growing opportunity to align with Ohio's workforce and employer needs.

Our members include:

- K-12 school counselors
- Higher education career services staff
- Private practice business owners
- Workforce development agencies
- Employers and industry representatives
- Graduate students
- Counselor educators
- Researchers
- Government

For inquiries or general information about OCDA, please visit ocdaonline.org.

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 Ohio Career Development Association

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