

Assessing the Landscape for Legislative Action in New Mexico

Successful advocacy is about relationships built up over time. View it as a process that continues until you have achieved your goals. While you may already be taking some of the steps listed here, below are a number of questions to ask as you plan your course of action.

1. Issue / Initiative Assessment

Take stock of the “big picture” of your issue.

- determine how important the issue is to you. Is it of low importance or a “fall on your sword” issue?
- what is the time frame for action?
- has there been previous legislative activity on the issue?
- what is the current political or public climate on issue?
 - has there been news coverage?
 - has the governor, state superintendent of education, or other key education leader spoken on the issue?
- what other issues will impact the fate of the initiative?
 - is there a state commission report or other high profile report that could have an impact?
- does your organization have a clear message(s) on the issue?
- how can the issue, and your message, be packaged for public and media consumption?
 - can you tie the issue to concerns about student achievement? global economy? state's economic health? teacher retention? STEM?

2. Supporter / Opponent Assessment

Who will you be working with in support of your issue? Are there groups that do not support what you propose? Consider the assets, and the obstacles:

- do you have a sponsor for your initiative in the legislature who will act as the point person?
- where do state-level officials stand on the issue? (governor, chief state school officer?)
- who is best to carry the message? It may not be your organization, but rather another group, or a coalition of groups to be the standard-bearer.
- what is the position of key education /parent /other organizations on the issue?
 - if any groups oppose your issue, are you well-versed with their position?
- what is the position of key business leaders or other “influentials”?
- have other elected or appointed officials around the state taken a position? (mayors, superintendents of large school districts?)
- have any news outlets taken position on their editorial pages, or covered the issue in a series of articles?

3. “Intelligence” Gathering

It is critical to have information about the legislative process itself, who the key legislators are, as well as information that supports your issue and rebuts any arguments against you.

- are you clear about the legislative process that will be followed on your issue?
- which committees in the legislature handle your issue(s)?

- who are they key committee members, leaders in the legislature?
- what are the critical dates in the legislative session that you'll be working with (hearing dates, committee votes)
- do you have other information about key decision makers (e.g., their previous votes or statements? children in g/t class, spouse who is a teacher?)
- are there position statements or resolutions supporting your issue from other organizations and groups?
- do you have research evidence and data and program information from your state (and the nation) to support your issue?
- can you collect the names of families willing to share their experiences related to your issue with the media and with legislators?
- do you know what the key obstacles will be and have you discussed them with key legislators to get advice on how to overcome them?

4. Resource Assessment

It's time to take stock of what support you and your local and state associations can produce to support the issue.

- who will be the key spokesperson?
- what percentage of your membership realistically can be expected to participate in this effort?
- how much can you spend to develop materials to take to the legislature and for use with the press?
- do you have a lobbyist / legislative chair who will coordinate the effort?
- can you identify influential supporters in key legislators' districts?
- who will be the liaison with the key legislator(s)?
- have you identified leaders in your group who can coordinate key areas? (media contact, getting information to members and the public, updating your website, contacts with other groups, and visits with legislators)

5. Resource Deployment

Now that you have determined what the organizations are able to do, make a plan to utilize those resources. This may require that you triage among multiple issues having different levels of importance or different likelihood of success. Depending on the timeline, some strategies include:

- developing short fact sheets on each issue, including contact information for whomever will respond to questions
- developing packets of information for key decision makers on your issue and for reporters.
- developing a short powerpoint presentation that can be used by advocates in local meetings
- utilizing your website; post fact sheets, links to the state legislature, timeline for action, state g/t law and regulations, a powerpoint presentation and other sample materials, and an email address or other contact information for those who need more information
- testifying at a public hearing
- submitting letters-to-the-editor and op-ed pieces to key newspapers across the state
- providing information (and persons to interview) to education reporters in your state
- holding a press conference with the legislator who introduced your legislation
- inviting key legislators & other officials to, visit a gifted education program, attend your conference, attend a key meeting of influential supporters, etc. to hear and see what your issue is all about
- sending email alerts to members to keep them informed and to generate grassroots support
- coordinating letters and visits from your members and supporters to the legislature
- gathering the responses to letters / impressions from meetings to share with key legislators
- meeting regularly with key leaders in the legislature to keep up with any changes in key dates, key supporters, and key legislative language

6. Follow up

- who ensures that the promised visits, letters, calls are actually being made
- who is responsible to follow up with thank you notes (2nd opportunities)
- who is collecting new intelligence so that resources can be re-deployed efficiently
- who is responsible to feed information to the legislative sponsor