

ADVOCACY

In Your Back Pocket

North Iowa Area Community College creates a wallet-size toolkit to help trustees and other supporters speak up for the college



Effective advocacy means being ready anytime, anyplace. You never know when you are going to run into an elected official, business leader, or even just an interested member of your community who might be willing to pick up the phone and let decision-makers know how important your college is to your community. When you encounter such a person, you need to have your facts within reach — something North Iowa Area Community College (NIACC) takes seriously.

Last year, the NIACC governing, foundation, and alumni boards set a goal of developing tools to improve advocacy, and ended up with a solution that caught our eye: a wallet-sized advocacy toolkit that is literally at the fingertips of NIACC's trustees and other advocates. *Trustee Quarterly* asked NIACC Director of Marketing, Community Relations, and Governmental Affairs Sethanne DeGabriele to describe how and why the college developed this unique tool.

How did NIACC come up with the idea for a pocket-sized advocacy toolkit?

Annually, the NIACC Board of Trustees, Foundation Board, and Alumni Board come together for a joint meeting. The need identified by these boards was to find tools to help individuals become better advocates for NIACC. The boards identified what “tools” — specific and targeted information — they need for their toolkit. Our charge then was to provide this information in a format that would be at our board members' fingertips as they talked with our community and legislators. One of our staff members had seen similar pocket-sized cardholders being used in a different way, and we thought it would be an easy-to-use and convenient tool for our advocates.

What information is included, and why was that specific information chosen?

We included important phone numbers, Web sites, tuition comparison information, quick facts, and student testimonials. The information was determined through a rating process that our various boards participated in.

Why did you decide to print the college facts and testimonials on small plastic cards rather than as a booklet?

The size was chosen so it could easily be carried in a pocket or purse for quick reference. We utilized plastic cards for the information so they would fit in the pocket holders and because the cards are more durable. We also wanted something that we could easily update without reprinting the entire toolkit. We were able to crate the plastic cards by using a student ID card machine already housed on our campus.

How have NIACC representatives used the kit?

The kit's primary purpose is for use with legislators when advocating for NIACC, but due to its format, it can also be used with media and community members when talking about the college.

Is it a tool primarily for NIACC trustees, or does anyone else use it?

We've given the kits to our administrative team. We also use them for a statewide student legislative seminar, during which our students visited with legislators, and for our “VIP luncheons” with key business partners, donors, and community leaders.

How often do you update or plan to update the information?

We plan to update the information as needed and simply provide updated cards to our ongoing users to add to their toolkits.

Given all the responsibilities of the college, how much of a priority is advocacy?

Advocacy at the state and federal levels is extremely important to NIACC. We are beginning to delve even further into these arenas as we see the impact of our efforts.