

As Midterms Approach, It's Time to Prepare for the NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE SUMMIT

**A month-by-month calendar
to get ready to advocate
in Washington, D.C.**

By Carrie Warick-Smith

EACH YEAR, COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS AND STUDENTS gather in Washington, D.C., to learn the latest in federal higher education policy, to share the goals and challenges of their campuses and, yes, to meet with elected officials.

The Community College National Legislative Summit — or NLS — aligns with the start of the 118th Congress, marking a key opportunity to connect with newly elected senators and representatives or renew relationships with those who move into leadership positions. With the election just around the corner, now is the time to prepare for your college's trip to Washington.



Visiting Washington at the beginning of a new Congress allows you to form relationships with newly elected officials. With possible changes in party control in each chamber, as well as retirements triggering many changes in committee leadership, it's also crucial to continue or renew relationships with elected officials who move into leadership roles. Bringing your institution's leadership — trustees, the college CEO, and students — to visit Washington is the best way to inform your elected officials about the benefits and needs of your campus, to discuss the federal role in community colleges, and to encourage support for the sector and the learners it supports.

The benefit of the National Legislative Summit for your college increases greatly if your team works together in advance to prepare. Below is a guide to help you get ready.

October: Pick Your Team

Decide who will represent your college in Washington. This group should include a combination of trustees, the president, senior government relations staff, and students (such as your student trustee, student government leader, or students who participate in federally funded programs such as Pell Grants). Advocacy of this nature is most effectively performed by a team such as this — and bringing one or more students who have compelling stories can be a 'secret weapon' in making your voice heard by elected officials and their staffs.

November: Check the Election Results

With the midterm elections taking place on November 8, it's important to determine which, if any, members of your Congressional delegation have changed. Community college leaders should plan to meet with both of their state's senators and all the representatives whose districts overlap with the college's service district. These meetings will ensure that your institution and its students remain top of mind when the Congressional session begins.

December: Learn About Your College and Your Community

Meeting with your elected officials is an opportunity to share about your college and to ask how the federal government can support it. Learn about your institution's mission, key programs offered, and facts about the student population. Information to share also includes the communities served and their demographics, the number and size of your campuses and student populations, businesses served by your institution, and economic impact.

December is also an important time to reach out to your community and ask questions such as:

- What are the needs of the community?
- How is your community changing?
- How is the college responding to these changes?

The answers yielded by these questions will give you compelling information to present during your meeting and as you follow up.

Early January: Schedule Your Meetings

To schedule meetings, use the letter template from the ACCT toolkit at nls.acct.org and customize it for each of your requests. Review your final delegation, including which committee assignments they have and if they are the chair or ranking member. Those colleges in states with active associations should also reach out to the associations for meeting coordination.

Mid-January: Meeting Preparation

It's important to decide not only what information to share about your college, as gathered in December, but also which issue areas or requests your college would like to focus on. ACCT will provide in-depth backgrounders on key issues as well as the "Green Sheet" that summarizes priority concerns.

Your college team should also consider what your "asks" of your elected official will be. These can include introducing legislation on a key priority, support of or opposition to a specific bill, advocacy for federally funded programs that support your school and students, a campus speaking engagement or visit/tour, or funding through Congressionally Directed Spending (Senate) or Community Project Funding (House), formerly known as earmarks.

Late January: Know Your Legislators and Federal Funds

It's important to decide which materials to take to each of your meetings. ACCT provides a helpful template called the Federal Funds Worksheet through which you can share all dollars received, such as Pell Grant dollars and federal grant funding. Sharing the impact of these programs on your colleges demonstrates to members and their staffs the importance of the federal investment in education and training programs.

Additionally, you should get to know your legislators. Do some research into their backgrounds; doing so helps you make a connection and communicate in a way that gets your point across most effectively.

Early February: Plan Your Meeting Agenda

Before the meeting, choose one person to be the spokesperson. Use the meeting worksheet to determine who will speak about each topic and who will take notes.

Mid-February: Follow Up

The follow-up email is an important opportunity to continue building your relationship after visits during the NLS. It allows you not only to say thank you for their time, but also to share materials electronically, put any specific questions in writing, and provide any information asked for in the meeting that you didn't have immediately on hand. Also be sure to follow up with ACCT by emailing publicpolicy@acct.org with a summary of your meeting and expected outcomes or next steps.

Contact us at if you need any further guidance on planning your visit. A little planning will go a long way in forging new relationships, nurturing established ones, and yielding the most effective possible outcomes. We look forward to seeing you in February.



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