



Building and Training Your Institutional Advocacy Muscle

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Our Vision

Through the Association of Community College Trustees, community college governing boards are ***THE LEADING ADVOCATES*** of the nation's community college system.



What is “Advocacy”



Webster: the act or process of supporting a cause or proposal



Cambridge: public support for an idea, plan, or way of doing something

What is “Advocacy”

ChatGPT ▾

what is "advocacy"

Advocacy means publicly supporting or speaking up for a person, cause, idea, or policy.

For example:

- A person might advocate for better public transportation.
- A lawyer advocates for their client.
- A nonprofit might advocate for environmental protection.

In simple terms: **advocacy** = speaking or acting in support of something you believe should happen.

Claude

what is "advocacy"

Advocacy is the act of publicly supporting, recommending, or arguing for a particular cause, policy, group of people, or idea, with the goal of influencing opinion, decisions, or action.

A few key aspects:

- **Purpose:** Advocacy aims to bring about change — this could be a change in law, policy, public opinion, or how a person or group is treated.
- **Who does it:** Individuals, organizations, lawyers, activists, nonprofits, or even companies can engage in advocacy.

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What is “Lobbying”

→ **lobby** 2 of 2 [verb](#)

lobbied; lobbying

intransitive verb

: to conduct activities aimed at influencing public officials and especially members of a legislative body on legislation

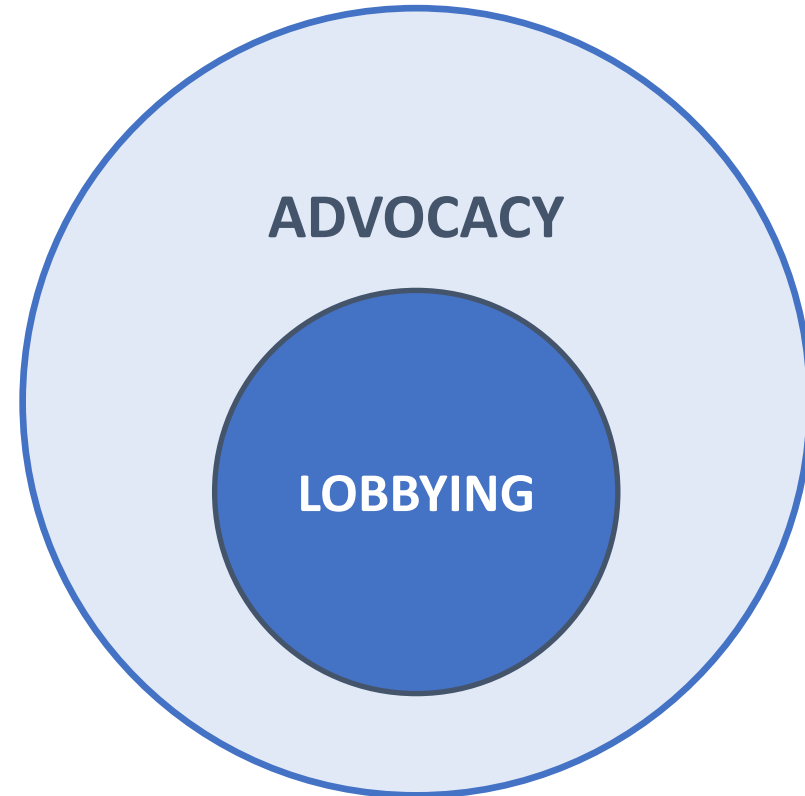
transitive verb

1 : to promote (something, such as a project) or secure the passage of (legislation) by influencing public officials

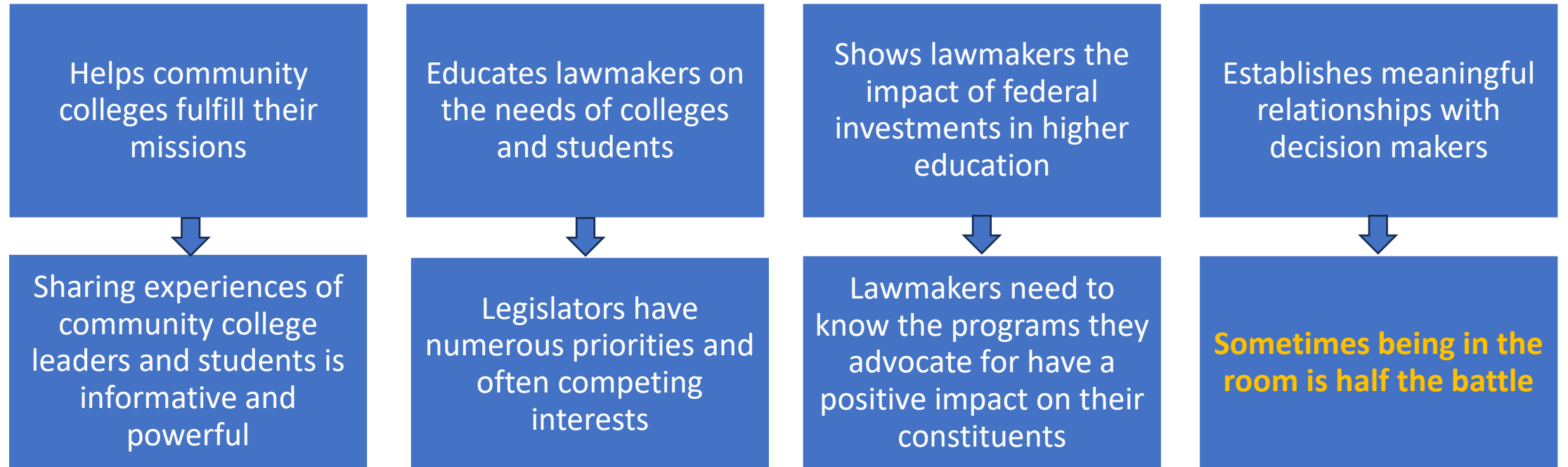
| *lobby* a bill through Congress

2 : to attempt to influence or sway (someone, such as a public official) toward a desired action

| *lobbying* senators for tax reform



Why is advocacy important?



Advocacy Actions

Direct Actions intended to influence lawmakers' positions

- Letter-writing/Emails
- Phone Calls
- Direct meetings with policymakers and/or their staff
- Virtual or in-person gatherings with policymakers and/or their staff
- Social media campaigns that tag policymakers

Indirect Actions intended to influence lawmakers' positions

- Broad social media campaigns that do not mention policymakers by name
- Letters to the editor or earned media coverage of issue (story placement, being quoted in a story)

Examples in Action: Community College Visits



Representative April McClain Delaney (center) at Hagerstown Community College's Bowman Workforce Training Center



Senator Jon Husted (left), Acting Secretary of Labor Keith Sonderling (right), and Dr. Dione D. Somerville, Owens Community College President (center)



Senator Jeff Merkley takes the stage at a town hall held at Central Oregon Community College



Senator Dick Durbin (Center) at Joliet Junior College



Senator Catherine Cortez Masto (left) tours Truckee Meadows Community College

Department of Education Approves the First Workforce Pell Program

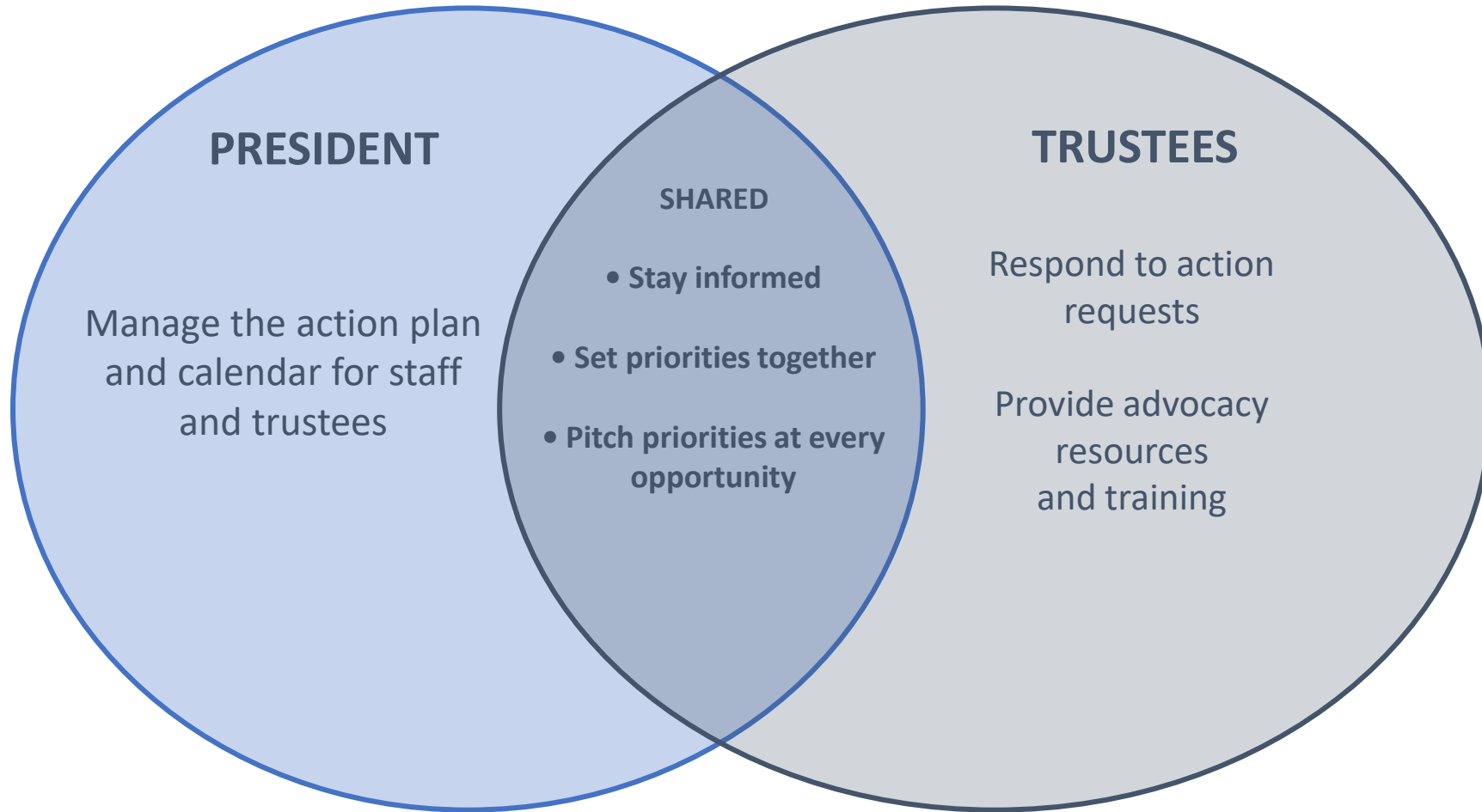
- On August 4, 2026 the Department of Education approved the nation's first Workforce Pell Grant program at **Iowa Central Community College**.
- Eligible students can now apply federal Pell Grant dollars toward their education in Iowa Central's Emergency Medical Technician program.
- ACCT looks forward to the new Workforce Pell programs that will begin across the country. **Please reach out to the ACCT team at publicpolicy@acct.org with news of your college's Workforce Pell program(s) going live.**



Front row, left to right: Iowa Central Community College's President Jesse Ulrich, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, Secretary of Education Linda McMahon, and Acting Secretary of Labor Keith Sonderling.



Getting Started: President and Board



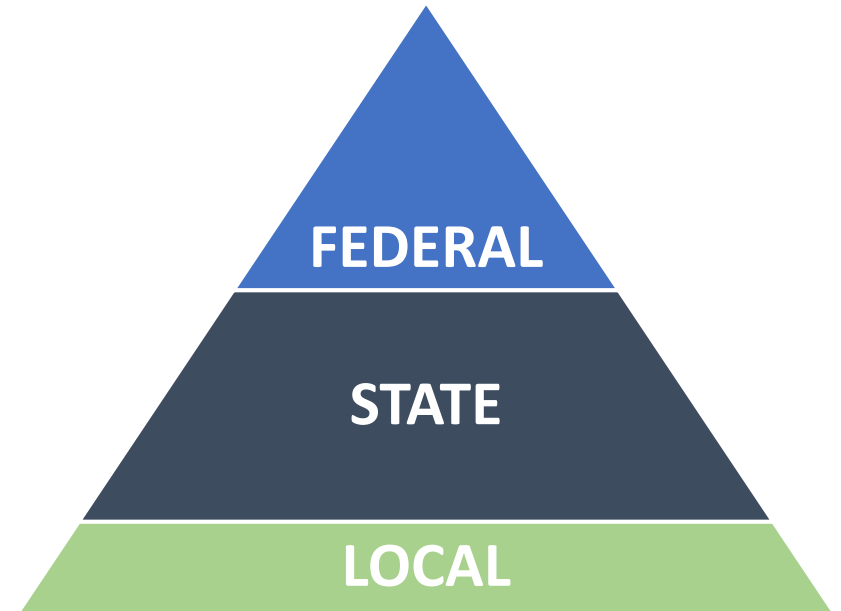
Staying Informed

- ACCT's Latest Action in Washington:
 - Update email (weekly)
 - Alert emails (urgent, as needed_
 - Live! – webinar on First Friday of the month
 - Live and In Person! – workshops at ACCT Leadership Congress and NLS
- Create a News Diet:
 - What is helpful and in digestible format?
 - Do I get ACCT and CCATT emails?
 - What local sources may cover higher ed or state legislature?
 - Is there a one stop shop newsletter or podcast?



What do we advocate about?

- **Valuable resources**
 - Majority of community college funding comes from state and local budgets.
 - Federal student aid and workforce programs remain significant sources of institutional operating revenue (outside of tuition).
 - Economic pressures on states drives an even greater need for federal support
 - “Earmarks” have returned.
- **Legislative language**
- **Regulations, guidelines, reports, and commissions** (<https://acct.org/node/685>)



Picking Priorities

Questions to ask for federal:

- Which federal programs are financially most important?
- Which federal programs have biggest impact/best results?
- What do we need that federal funding could support?
- What story do we want to tell?

Consult Joint Community College Legislative Agenda

- Produced biannually for each session of Congress
- Updated annually “Green Sheet” for NLS



Building a Plan

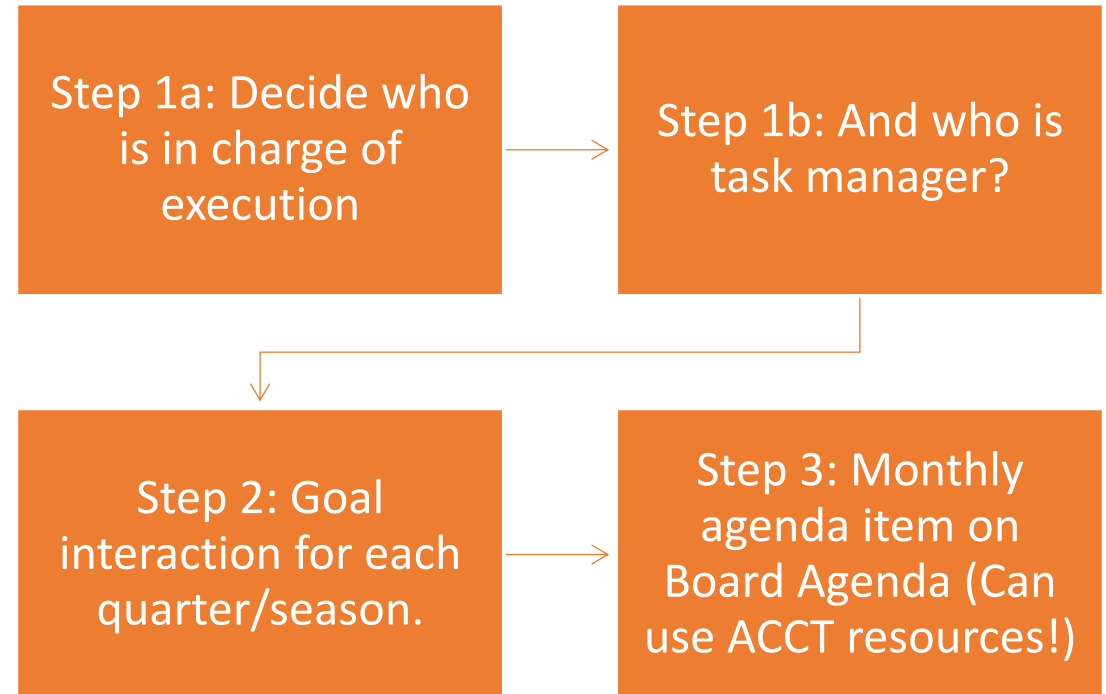
Suggested Calendar:

*Winter: NLS – bring students!

*Spring: Virtual meeting/appropriations requests

*Late Summer: Campus visit or district meeting

*Fall: Virtual meeting, back to school update, or planning earmark request



Elements of effective advocacy

- Create a clear, consistent message.
- Connect with your Senators and Representatives in their DC and district offices.
- Learn the basics of the legislative process.
- Know key issues facing institutions and students.
- Support and encourage the president's role as an influential advocate.
- Leverage students as direct beneficiaries of federal programs.
- Attend the ACCT National Legislative Summit.
- Invite legislators to visit the campus; offer resources (such as event space) to create partnership.
- Build relationships with policymakers and staff.

Build Muscle – Need to Repeat, Need to Practice



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- Advocacy Resources -

Advocacy Resources

To stay up to date on the most recent updates in the federal government and learn about new grant competition sign up for our weekly Latest Action in Washington ([LAW](#)) Updates.

For the latest publications on community college research, a deep dive on federal activities, and short pieces on community college trends, visit [ACCT Now](#).

For prior webinars on demand and other additional resources, please visit [ACCT Connect](#).

For information on our call to actions (action campaigns), on how to contact your legislators, and to view legislation ACCT is supporting, please visit [ACCT's Action Center](#).

Interested in having your board or college leadership team receive a live, virtual federal policy update? Contact the Public Policy team at PublicPolicy@acct.org



- Upcoming Events-

DRIVING CHANGE

WHERE **VISION** MEETS **COMPASSION**

ACCT ²⁰²⁶
LEADERSHIP
CONGRESS

acct.org

Click [HERE](https://acct.org/events/2026Congress) to Register:

<https://acct.org/events/2026Congress>

LEADING WITH CARE

October 21–24 ★ Chicago, IL

#ACCT2026

- Questions and Discussion -