2022
Advocacy Toolkit

Introduction

There are elected lawmakers in US congress, the White House, state capitols and city halls that are making decisions that affect undergraduate research. The following is a collection of materials, resources and advice to help you tell the story of your undergraduate research to leaders and stakeholders in your community.

Why Adocacy?

Government and public policy can seem far away from the world of undergraduate research, especially the specific research happening at individual schools. However, higher education policy and funding is continually changing and influencing universities. Did you know that that federal government invested over $152 billion in colleges and universities in fiscal year 2021? Those funds affected over 3,000 schools, about 15 million undergraduates and a little over 2.5 million graduate students. As constituents and stakeholders in those policies, representatives and their staffs need to hear from you.

Advocacy is a way to engage with those lawmakers effectively and with maximum impact, so that your voice is heard and reflected in the policies that affect you the most. Policymakers need to know why undergraduate research is important to their constituents and our society. You are the best resource to tell them!

Advocacy and Non-Profit Rules

n. ad·vo·ca·cy
1. The act of pleading or arguing in favor of something, such as a cause, idea, or policy; active support.

Many organizations shy away from activities they presume to be lobbying but which in fact fall outside of the definition of lobbying, which is narrowly defined by the IRS. Generally speaking, lobbying is the expression of a view or a call to action on specific legislation. Lobbying does not include, for instance, nonpartisan analysis of legislation, the expression of a position on issues (as opposed to legislation) of public concern, or action taken in "self-defense" of the organization.

The right of citizens to petition their government is basic to our democratic way of life, and non-profit organizations are one of the most effective vehicles for making use of citizen participation in shaping public policy. Legislation passed by Congress in 1976 makes it possible for charities to advocate for their causes, communities and individuals they serve. The federal government clearly supports this activity.

Overall, there are three key aspects to remember: Advocacy is organized action in support of an idea or cause, advocacy is constituents educating elected officials on important issues, and advocacy is establishing ongoing and trusting relationships.

What Is the Difference between Advocacy and Lobbying?

As previously mentioned, advocacy is organized action in support of a cause, educating elected officials and their staff as well as creating ongoing relationships and communication. Lobbying, on the other hand, is action in response to a specific piece of legislation. Many people find the differences between advocacy and lobbying to be narrow or unclear. Below are some general rules of thumb to consider about lobbying:

• Lobbying is narrowly defined by the U.S. Internal Revenu Service (IRS) as "expression of a view or a call to action on specific legislation."
• Nonprofits are prohibited from lobbying via IRS regulations but may engage in advocacy.
• Does not include nonpartisan analysis of legislation, the expression of a position on issues (as opposed to legislation) of public concern, or action taken in "self-defense" of the organization.

It is rare that CUR advocates find themselves in a gray area between advocacy and lobbying.

Government: How to Get in Touch

Federal Government Contact Information

To learn who your represents you in the House of Representatives and the two Senators who represent you in the US Senate, visit https://www.govtrack.us/congress/members and enter your address. If you do not have access to the internet, call the Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121.

State Government Contact Information

To learn who your Governor is, visit https://www.usa.gov/state-governor/ and choose your state. To learn more about your State Legislature, visit https://www.congress.gov/state-legislature-websites and choose your state.

Local Government Contact Information

Visit https://www.usmayors.org/mayors/ to learn more about your mayor by name, city, or population size. To learn more about the head of the executive branch of government in your county, visit http://explorer.naco.org/ and enter city/zip code, county, or state. To learn more about other local government officials, visit https://www.usa.gov/local-governments and choose your state.

The Federal Government and UR

There are many federal programs and policies that affect colleges and universities, the students who go there and the practice of undergraduate research. Investments in the National Science Foundation's Research Experiences for Undergraduates program is an example. So is the McNair Scholars and other TRIO programs run by the Department of Education. Funding for programs at the National Endowments for the Arts and Humanities also supports undergraduate research. The US Congress is charged by the Constitution with making decisions about how to spend public money. In practice, these spending decisions are made via two processes. One is the debate and enactment of authorizing legislation. The other is the development and enactment of appropriations bills via the federal budget process.

"Authorization" is done by Congress via legislation that "can establish, continue, or modify an agency, program, or activity for a fixed or indefinite period of time." "Appropriations" are done by Congress via legislation that authorizes agencies to make payments from the federal Treasury (i.e. it allows them to spend the money that had previously been authorized). Appropriations bills are ordinarily passed each year, but in recent years it has been common for Congress to fund the government "on autopilot" via continuing resolutions that simply allow agencies to continue spending the same amount of money they were spending under the previous funding bill, or via large "omnibus" bills that combine many spending bills into one measure. The following two charts provide a representation of how each of these processes is supposed to work—but rarely does.

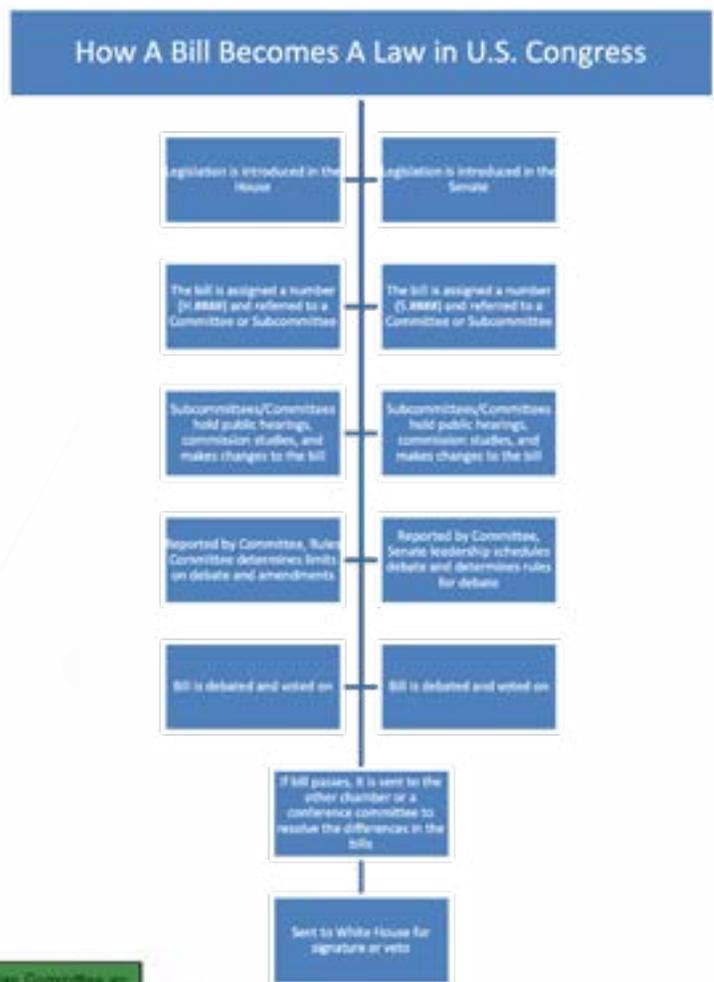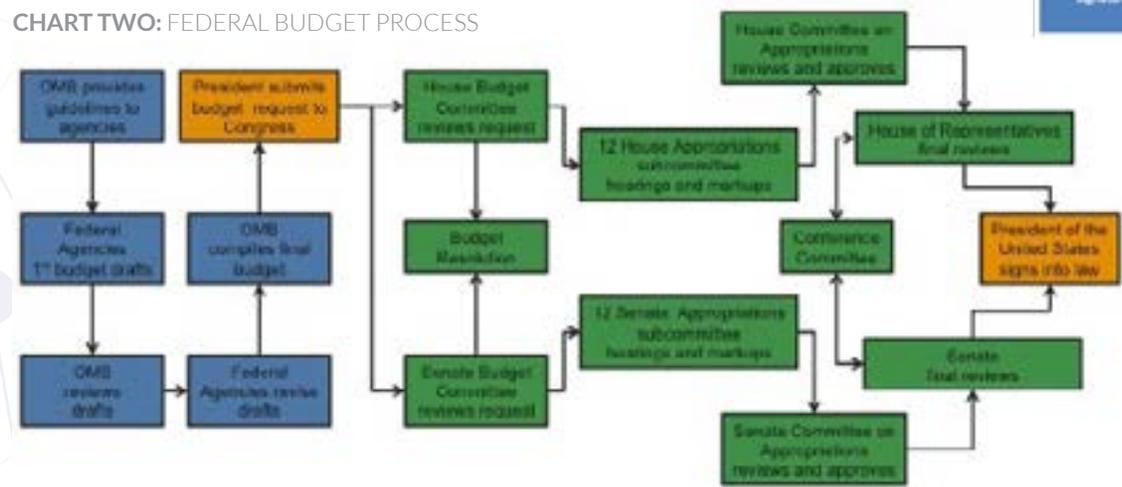**CHART ONE:** BILL BECOMES A LAW

CHART TWO: FEDERAL BUDGET PROCESS

Meeting Your Legislator

The most effective way to communicate with your legislator is to schedule a meeting to talk face-to-face (or virtually, for the time being). While these personal visits are the most effective advocating tool, they also require the greatest amount of planning and time. Here are a few guidelines to help you plan a successful visit.

How to schedule a meeting
Once you identify your three federal representatives, look at their website for guidance on scheduling a meeting. Most offices have a webform for requesting a meeting, or you can call the office and ask to speak with the scheduler. Let the scheduler know you are a constituent. Ask for a meeting on a specific day. If you have the flexibility to accommodate the member's schedule, say so. Of course, Members of Congress are busy. If he or she is unavailable, the scheduler will quite ask if you want to meet with a staff member, and will identify one based on your issue. Call at least a week in advance.

Before the meeting
Prepare effectively by identifying and practicing your story and explaining why the legislator should care about undergraduate research, your work and what is happening on campus at your institution. Learn any position your legislator might have on postsecondary education and/or university research. Check out any statements on their website. Follow your legislators on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, and other social media to get the most up-to-date information about policy stances. (Most members have links to their social media accounts on their websites.)

Write down your priorities
Prepare a written letter (or email) that you can send to the staffer recapping what you mentioned in your visit. The exercise will help you get your thoughts organized. Be sure to address why any proposed legislation is important to you, how it will affect you, your colleagues and peers, your students, your school, and your profession. When you send the email after the meeting, it will provide the legislator or staff with a written record of your visit, and establish you as a resource going forward. In 2021, you may want to discuss how important the federal funds sent to postsecondary institutions to address the effects of the pandemic were and talk about how they were used on your campus. You may want to discuss how the pandemic interrupted undergraduate and other research on campus and that those interruptions will need to be addressed if the work is being supported by federal funds. Further, you may want to talk about how certain federal student aid programs (student loans, Pell Grants, Federal Work Study, TRIO programs) are important to you and others on campus. You may also want to share what is happening in undergraduate research on your campus. What discoveries are being made, corporate partners that might be supportive in the community, and your aspirations. Institutions of higher education are crucial economic engines and your elected representatives will be very interested in what is happening on campus.

During the meeting
Explain how current issues and/or proposed legislation will directly affect you. Share your prepared priorities. In 2021, if the meeting is over the phone, acknowledge that it is difficult to read body language or other cues, and encourage the staff or representative to ask questions as you talk. Share statistics from your school or personal stories from students. Highlight successes and challenges. Explain how a cut in funding will affect your undergraduate research program, or how a new proposed program will help meet current unmet needs. Ask them if they are working on anything you should know about.

Always be on time and dress professionally. Remember you only have 10-30 minutes to meet with each legislator. Even if you disagree with your legislator's position or politics, be polite. Don't talk about elections—past or future. A staffer may ask you tough questions. That is his or her job. If you do not know the answer, tell them that you will look into the question and get back to them.

Ending the meeting
Ask for a commitment. Your goal is to enlist your legislator's support, so be as specific as possible. Ask the staffer direct questions such as "Will your boss support ongoing support for undergraduate research in federal research investments?" or "Does your boss support adequate investment in federal TRIO programs?" or "What is your boss's position on addressing climate change?" to elicit direct answers.

After the meeting

You should always follow up by thanking the legislator or staffer for his/her time in a follow up email and reiterating the points you discussed in the meeting. (The letter you prepared when you wrote down your priorities is perfect for this.) Always offer to provide staffers and legislators with additional information on your work and school. You can also invite them to your campus to see research in action, for student presentations or to watch student presentations virtually.

Even if the meeting is virtual, you can tweet and post about your discussion. In a tweet or Instagram post, tag your representative, thank them for meeting with you, and add a picture of the meeting—even if it's a computer screen. Also include any event or organizational hashtags. "Just had a great virtual meeting with the staff of @SenFeinstein about the importance of supporting undergraduate research at @csnorthridge. Thanks!"

Social Media Engagement

Having a social media presence is an important part of advocacy—not only for your representatives, but for your entire school and community. Following your federal representatives before any meetings will help you get to know what they care about.

If your school doesn't already have them, it might consider creating social media accounts specifically for undergraduate research. Dedicated research accounts allow for more detailed content, direct communication with your audience, and an online community around undergraduate research. Below is platform-specific guidance and general tips for better online engagement, which can lead to better engagement with your representatives.

Platform-Specific
Twitter is perfect for short updates and highlighting achievements in undergraduate research. Tweet frequently—at least once per week—to build follower engagement and validity. The account doesn't have as much of an impact if the most recent update is

from several months ago. Although photos aren't required in a tweet, posts that include pictures or graphics tend to attract more attention.

Instagram can be utilized for longer posts, research spotlights, and student profiles. For example, choose one project per month (frequency can change depending on volume of undergraduate research) and dedicate an entire post to explaining the research and its impact to your audience. Since Instagram allows for paragraphs-long captions, the post can include quotes from the students, summaries of the research, and any notable highlights. As with any social media platform, ensure that the photo is interesting and high quality for best results.

Facebook can be a catch-all; share shorter updates, student profiles, Instagram posts directly onto the page, etc. Facebook Events is a great tool to invite students, members of the community, and faculty to student research presentations—on campus or virtually.

General tips
Apply for verification. Verified accounts have a blue or gray check-mark on the page, so that users know it is a legitimate university website. Each platform has different requirements to receive verification, but the application can be found in the account settings. It should only take 10 minutes.

Consider video content. Research can make interesting and informative videos, and while making those videos is more of an investment, it can yield impressive social media engagement. Short videos (1-3 minutes) can be posted to all of the above platforms, but YouTube and TikTok are ideal platforms for maximum engagement on video content.

Utilize the students. This one is critical. No one can better engage members of a college campus than the students themselves, especially when it comes to social media. Most importantly, student perspectives are valuable to representatives and will help your social media impact reach further.

10 Tips for Conducting a Successful Meeting

1. Always schedule an appointment in advance.
Time is valuable in legislative offices. Contact the office at least one week in advance to arrange a meeting. It is best to email your meeting request and to follow-up with a phone call, if there is no response. Due to the busy schedule of legislators, meetings are often assigned to staff.

2. Prepare thoroughly for your meeting.
Do your homework before meeting with your legislator's office. Visit their website to find out about their policy interests and voting records. Particularly, find out how they have voted in the past on your issues, be aware of their party leadership's stance on the issues, and know committee assignments, if applicable.

3. Be clear at the start of the meeting.
Everyone should introduce themselves with their name, position, and university so that the staff will know exactly who is on the call. Then get a sense of time allotted by asking staff how much time they have to spend with you.

4. Encourage engagement virtually.
Acknowledge the virtual nature of the call precludes reading body language, and encourage staff to interrupt or ask questions throughout the meeting.

5. Have a "message" and stick to it.
Successful legislative meetings are always narrow in scope. Stick to a few main talking points of support for your issue and make a specific request for action.

6. Bring it home.
Always connect your issue to your school or community. Legislators value your thoughts as a constituent. They rely on local stories and sources for the work they do.

7. Make a specific request.
The purpose of your meeting is to gain support. Legislators expect you to make requests. It is important to make the request specific and direct.

8. Build a relationship with staff.
Staff are very influential in getting requests honored by elected officials. You should make every effort to establish strong relationships with staff and encourage them to use you as a resource in your area of expertise.

9. Follow-up.
Confirm the email address for all staff on the call, and then send thank you emails after your meeting to express your appreciation and to reinforce any commitments made during the meeting. Remember to honor any commitments you made in the meeting, such as providing more information. You want to be a reliable source.

10. Stick to the facts.
Keep the discussion on policy, not politics. Remember you want legislators, regardless of their political affiliation, to support your position.

Writing (Emailing) Your Legislator

Sometimes writing a legislator or office is the fastest way to convey your perspective – particularly when policy is moving quickly. This is also a great way to contact your state legislators. If you don't have an individual's email address, an email address or comment portal can usually be found on your lawmaker's website.

Identify yourself as a constituent

The most important thing to do is establish yourself as a constituent. Put your name or email and complete home address on the letter. Legislators will only feel obligated to respond to constituent correspondence, so it's important to establish a district connection. You can use the subject line in an email to clearly indicate this, e.g. "Constituent Meeting Request" or "Question from University of Rochester professor."

Use proper forms of address

Remember to address your lawmaker appropriately. Be sure to get their title correct such as Senator, Representative, Mayor, or Chairman (or Chairwoman), etc.

Be brief and simple

Your letter should be one page. Make your request in the first paragraph. Do not feel the need to explain the issue or legislation in your letter.

State and repeat your position

Make your position or request clear in the opening and closing of your letter. Be specific, such as asking for support or opposition to a bill or issue.

Personalize your message

A personal letter is much more effective than a form letter. Your message will have an impact. Connecting your issue to your personal situation will set your email above the rest in the inbox. Tell a story. If a sample letter is provided, incorporate your own words and personal perspective into the text.

Always proofread before sending

This is essential to making a credible argument.

Make your message timely

Do not procrastinate. Be aware of the legislative process and time your letter accordingly.

Talking Points

Introduce undergraduate research

Even though undergraduate research is a familiar concept in education and research policy circles, see if your audience is familiar. The most effective way to do this is to talk about what undergraduate research means on your campus specifically. Provide examples. What research is currently happening at your school? How does it enrich and advance your school? How does it contribute to the research enterprise?

Why does undergraduate research matter to society?

How you begin any piece of communication shapes how everything that follows will be interpreted. This is why you always want to begin your communications with an explicit statement about why undergraduate research matters. Focusing on either "shared prosperity" or "future preparation" can work well. You can even use them both!

• Shared prosperity. Investing in undergraduate research increases graduation and retention rates in academic programs, increases enrollment in graduate education, and provides effective career preparation, which improves the systems that power our economy and advances our society.

• Future preparation. Given our complex and changing world, we will need citizens who are critical thinkers and problem-solvers to meet our modern challenges. Undergraduate research develops critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, and promotes an innovation-oriented culture.

What does undergraduate research entail?

The public and most lawmakers often don't have a clear understanding of the crucial role student mentors and faculty play in developing and sustaining high-quality research. Use explanatory metaphors to help communicate why educators matter to those who are not involved in the process firsthand.

Devote attention to communicating solutions

Draw attention to investing in practices that can have tangible benefits for undergraduate research, like investing in scholarships and intellectual leadership, prioritizing equity and inclusion, and creating continuous evaluation and assessment that balances advancement with fiscal responsibility and sustainability. Use resources like anecdotal undergraduate research stories and the Council of Undergraduate Research's Year in Review to demonstrate success in implementing these practices.