



Advocacy Toolkit

for

National Writing Project Sites

2019



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What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is organized activism in support of an idea or cause. As an advocate for the professional development of teachers to help their students become successful writers and learners, you can help ensure that the sites of the National Writing Project continue to flourish.

Advocacy consists of constituents contacting their elected officials about issues that are important to them and establishing relationships with these legislators. Public policy decisions are influenced by many factors, including a legislator's relationships with his/her constituents. By establishing relationships and champions, you encourage public officials to make a commitment to you and to the sites of the National Writing Project.

People often ask how advocacy is different from lobbying. Lobbying is an effort to influence the thinking of legislators or other public officials for or against a specific cause or a specific piece of proposed legislation. Advocacy is the promotion of a cause, idea, or policy. In other words, your active support of writing and of the Writing Project is considered advocacy.

The right of citizens to petition their government is basic to our democratic way of life.



Establishing Relationships with Lawmakers

If you have not met your lawmaker, you should designate your first meeting as a get-acquainted occasion. Some opportunities include:

- **Town Hall Meetings**
Attend a town hall meeting held by your lawmaker and introduce yourself as a local constituent and teacher.
- **Civic Activities**
Public or programmatic events in which you are involved—such as a teacher inservice, the Summer Institute, an open house, or an award ceremony—are great ways to get acquainted with your lawmaker and/or your lawmaker’s district staff by inviting them to attend.
- **State and Local Affiliates**
You may have opportunities to meet your lawmakers through state and local associations.
- **Program Tours**
Hosting a site visit allows lawmakers to see firsthand the work you are accomplishing.
- **Meet-and-Greet Receptions**
Hosting a meet-and-greet reception is a good way for groups of constituents to meet and chat with lawmakers one-on-one.
- **Congressional Visits**
Contact your lawmaker’s Washington, D.C., or district office to schedule a personal meeting. Visiting with your elected official in his or her home office is an excellent, yet often overlooked, opportunity to establish a relationship. If a lawmaker is unavailable, you should schedule a meeting in his or her home office with district staff or in the Washington, D.C. office with staff.



Helpful Hints for Congressional Visits

Meeting in person with lawmakers is the most effective means of advocacy. Here are some tips to help you prepare:

1. Always schedule an appointment in advance.

Time is valuable in legislative offices. Contact the office in advance to arrange a meeting—do not drop by and expect to meet with someone. It is best to email your meeting request and to follow up with a phone call and fax. Due to legislators' busy schedules, meetings are often reassigned to staff.

2. Prepare thoroughly for your meeting.

Do your homework before meeting with your legislators. Visit their websites 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.

3. Be on time.

4. Have a “message” and stick to it.

Successful legislative meetings are always narrow in scope. Stick to a few main points of support for your issue and make a specific request for action.

5. Bring it home.

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

6. Make a specific request.

The purpose of your meeting is to gain support for your issue. Legislators expect you to make requests. It is important to make the request specific and direct, preferably tied to current legislative activity.

7. Build relationships with staff.

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

8. Identify yourself as a constituent.

Legislators are elected to represent constituents. Although often short on time, elected officials and their staff want to hear from and be educated by you, a constituent. Feel comfortable in sharing your local stories, analysis, and suggestions in follow up to your discussion if time is short during the meeting.



9. Follow up.

Send thank-you letters and emails after your meeting to express your appreciation and to reinforce any commitments made during the meeting. Remember to honor any requests you made in the meeting such as providing more information. You want to remain a reliable source. Also, make sure you contact the NWP national staff. Inform them of any outcomes of your visit—this will help in formulating the overall legislative strategy for the organization.

10. Do not characterize your issue in partisan terms. Stick to the facts.

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

11. Be kind, but not overly comfortable.

Do not let the comfortable nature of the meeting stop you from making your request.

Modified from the American Planning Association and NSTA websites.



How to Communicate Effectively with Lawmakers

While standard letters and faxes are still used on Capitol Hill, email has become a much more readily used form of communication. This is due in part to the extensive screening process that standard mail must undergo. For that reason, it is best to email, fax or call. This section includes helpful hints for communicating via email, letters, faxes, and phone.

Tips for Writing to Your Legislators About NWP

Always put your name and address at the top of your message.

(Unless there is a web form that provides for it elsewhere.)

It is extremely important to show that you live or work in their state or district and establish yourself as a constituent. Non-constituent email rarely gets a response.

Explain why you are writing in the first sentence

(i.e., "I am writing to tell you about the impact the National Writing Project is having on teachers and students in our state/district and to thank you for your support of this program.")

The bulk of your letter should focus on what your site is doing for teachers and students in your area and how the Writing Project has impacted both your own teaching and your students' learning. This is very important. Typically, legislators are most concerned about a program's impact on their own constituents.

Be concise.

While one or two pages are acceptable for a letter, you should use only a few paragraphs by email to make your strongest points.

State your position clearly.

Make a concrete request, such as asking for a yes or no vote or asking them to cosponsor legislation. Your letters should also:

- inform your legislators of the work the Writing Project is doing in their state or district
- explain the impact that that work has on students and teachers, and
- thank your legislators for supporting the project in previous years (if, in fact, they backed our program in the past).

Send no attachments.

Do not attach files or images to your initial email.

Do not copy others on the email.

Do not send a copy to everyone. Legislators want to know that you are sincere in appealing to them specifically.

Provide some basic facts about the National Writing Project. For example:

- The National Writing Project is the only national program that works to improve the teaching of writing in the nation's schools.



- The National Writing Project has been proven effective by outside evaluators and has become a model for improving classroom instruction in other academic fields.
- The NWP Legacy Study shows that 98 percent of NWP summer institute participants remain in education until they retire, and 70 percent stay in the classroom throughout their careers.

Extend an invitation.

Invite your legislators to attend a local Writing Project event or to visit the classroom of a Writing Project teacher in their state or district. Periods when Congress is out of session – in recess for work back in the home state or district – are good times to schedule visits with legislators.

Close with a “thank you”

Close the letter by again thanking your legislator for their support of the National Writing Project.

Remember to proofread before sending.

This is essential to making a credible argument.

Options for sending your letter

There are several ways to send your letter. You can submit the letter electronically using the “Contact” page of your member’s website. If you already have a relationship with your member’s education aide, you can also email your letter to that person. You can also fax your letter to your member’s office. Visit www.senate.gov or www.house.gov to find website, phone, and fax information for all legislators. At this time, we do not recommend using postal mail to send correspondence to legislators since it can take several weeks to arrive.

Send a copy of your email to NWP at publicaffairs@nwp.org.

It is important to notify the NWP national office when you’ve contacted a legislator as it helps the governmental relations staff to coordinate legislative strategy and additional advocacy efforts. Also make sure to send a copy of any response you receive.

How do I invite a member of Congress to my site?

Write or call your member of Congress’s district office and invite them to visit your local site. Plan early and get the invitation on a Member’s busy schedule a significant period ahead of time. Even if the visit is not fully planned, it is important to extend an early invitation.

How do I find my member of Congress?

Find members’ contact information, including phone and fax numbers, by visiting www.house.gov, www.senate.gov,
or
by calling the U.S. Capitol switchboard at (202)224-3121 and asking for your Representative or Senator.



Tips for letters and faxes

Identify yourself as a constituent.

Put your name and complete address on both the envelope and the letter. Legislators will feel obligated to respond to constituent mail only, so it's important to establish a district connection.

Use proper forms of address.

Remember to address your lawmaker as "The Honorable." Be sure to get his or her title correct, such as Senator, Representative, or Assemblyman. Use "The Honorable" in the address and the office title in the salutation (Dear Representative Doe).

March 20, YEAR

The Honorable SENATOR
United States Senate
ROOM Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator XX,

Be brief and simple.

Make sure your letter is no more than two pages, preferably one page. Make your request in the first paragraph. You do not need to explain the 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.

Personalize your message.

A personal letter is much more effective than a form letter. Though forms, postcards, and petitions are read and counted, they do not have the same impact as a personalized, individualized letter. If a sample letter is provided, incorporate your own words and personal perspective into the text. Be sure to mention your Writing Project site by name in the body of your letter.

Be polite and do not use threats or ultimatums.

Everyone responds better to kindness and professionalism.

Do not send enclosures.

These extras are rarely read or filed.

Make your message timely.

Do not procrastinate. Be aware of the legislative process—where the legislation is in the process; is it up for a vote tomorrow in committee; on the floor?—and time your letter accordingly. Faxes are more effective at critical times in the legislative process.

Send a copy of your letter to NWP.

It is important to notify the NWP national office when you've contacted a legislator as it helps the governmental relations staff to coordinate legislative strategy and additional advocacy efforts. Also make sure to send a copy of any response you receive.



Tips for phone calls

Prepare ahead of time.

It is imperative that you plan for your phone conversation. If you do not have talking points prepared, jot down a few notes before making the call. Be prepared to leave a message, as lawmakers and their aides often have busy schedules and do not answer calls.

Contact the right person.

When calling a lawmaker's office, ask to speak with the aide responsible for education issues. If this person is not available, leave your name and contact information, the issue you are calling about, and the specific action you want the legislator to take. Write down the name of the aide for future communication.

Follow up.

Always follow up with a letter or email thanking the legislator and the staff for their time. Also use this opportunity to reiterate your position and provide any additional materials.

Modified from the American Planning Association and NSTA websites.



Overview of Congress

Article I, Section 1, of the United States Constitution, provides that:

All legislative powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives.

Congress in Brief

- ✓ A Congress lasts two years and is divided into two sessions, each a year in length. Therefore, the first session of the Congress begins in January after an election, and the second session of the Congress will begin in January of the following year, and so forth.
- ✓ Congress is made up of two Houses: The Senate and the House of Representatives.

Senate

- The Senate is composed of 100 members, two from each state regardless of population or area.
- Senators serve six year terms, and one-third of the Senate is elected every second year. Senators are split into three classes – I, II, and III. Class I Senators are up for re-election in 2012; Class II Senators are up for re-election in 2014; and Class III Senators are up for re-election in 2016.
- The Senator from each state with the longest tenure is referred to as the “Senior” Senator; the other, the “Junior” Senator.
- The two Senators from each state will never be up for re-election simultaneously; therefore, each state’s Senators are in different classes.
- The President of the Senate is the Vice President of the United States. Vice President Biden is the President of the Senate, and his primary role will be to cast the deciding vote in the event of a tie (50-50) vote on legislation.
- Senators deal with all issues affecting our nation, and particularly those issues their constituents care about. However, Senators often play more integral roles on the issues that come before the Committees on which they sit.
- For a complete list of Senators, links to individual Senators’ websites, and more, go to: www.senate.gov.



House of Representatives

- The House of Representatives is composed of 435 Members, plus four non-voting delegates representing American Samoa; District of Columbia; Guam; Virgin Islands; and one Resident Commissioner, elected every four years, representing Puerto Rico.
- All members and delegates are elected every two years (with the exception of the Resident Commissioner from Puerto Rico).
- The number of Representatives is determined by a state's population. Therefore, more populated states such as California and New York have the most Representatives respectively, while less populated states such as Wyoming and Alaska each have one at-large Representative, the minimum number allowed by the Constitution.
- Congressional districts are redrawn after every national census or every 10 years.
- For a complete list of Representatives, links to individual Representatives' websites, and more, go to www.house.gov. There is also a very useful FAQ at www.clerk.house.gov.



How a Bill Becomes a Law¹

To those who aren't familiar with federal policy, the drawing up of legislation and the creation of laws may seem complicated when, in fact, the process is relatively straightforward. Anyone may draft a bill; however, only members of Congress may introduce legislation, and by doing so become sponsor(s). There are four basic types of legislation: **bills**, **joint resolutions**, **concurrent resolutions**, and **simple resolutions**. The official legislative process begins when a bill or resolution is numbered (H.R. signifies a House bill and S. a Senate bill), referred to a committee, and printed by the Government Printing Office.

Step 1. Referral to Committee: Bills are usually referred to standing committees in the House or Senate according to carefully delineated rules of procedure.

Step 2. Committee Action: When a bill reaches a committee it is placed on the committee's calendar. A bill can be referred to a subcommittee or considered by the committee as a whole. It is at this point that a bill is examined carefully and its chances for passage are determined. If the committee does not act on a bill, it is the equivalent of "killing" it.

Step 3. Subcommittee Review: Often, bills are referred to a subcommittee for study and hearings. Hearings provide the opportunity to put on the record the views of the executive branch, experts, other public officials, supporters and opponents. Testimony can be in person or submitted in writing.

Step 4. Mark Up: When the hearings are completed, the subcommittee may meet to "mark up" the bill, that is, to make changes and add amendments prior to recommending the bill to the full committee. If a subcommittee votes not to report legislation to the full committee, the bill dies.

Step 5. Committee Action to Report a Bill: After receiving a subcommittee's report on a bill, the full committee can conduct further study and hearings, or it can vote on the subcommittee's recommendations and any proposed amendments. The full committee then votes on its recommendation to the House or Senate. This procedure is called "ordering a bill reported."

Step 6. Publication of a Written Report: After a committee votes to have a bill reported, the chairman instructs staff to prepare a report on the bill. This report describes the intent and scope of the legislation, impact on existing laws and programs, position of the executive branch, and views of dissenting members.

Step 7. Scheduling Floor Action: After a bill is reported back to the chamber where it originated, it is placed in chronological order on the calendar. In the House there are several different legislative calendars, and the Speaker and Majority Leader largely determine if, when and in what order bills come up. In the Senate there is only one legislative calendar that is controlled by the party in control and the Majority Leader.

¹ Taken from *Congress at Your Fingertips*, edited by Capitol Advantage.



Step 8. Debate: When a bill reaches the floor of the House or Senate, there are rules and procedures governing the debate. These rules determine the conditions and amount of time allocated for debate.

Step 9. Voting: After the debate and the approval of any amendments, the bill is passed or defeated by the members voting.

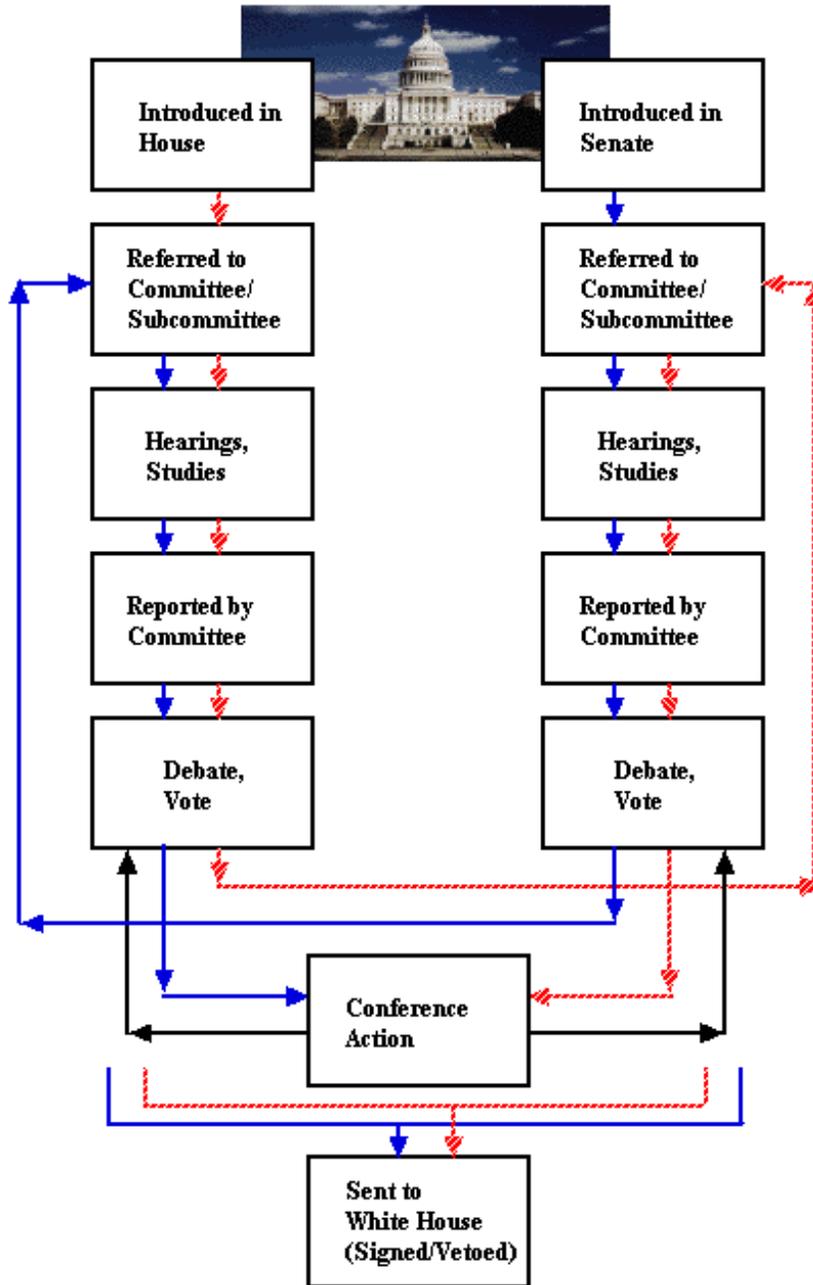
Step 10. Referral to Other Chamber: When a bill is passed by the House or the Senate, it is referred to the other chamber where it usually follows the same route through committee and floor action. This chamber may approve the bill as received, reject it, ignore it, or change it.

Step 11. Conference Committee Action: If only minor changes are made to a bill by the other chamber, it is common for the legislation to go back to the first chamber for concurrence. However, when actions of the other chamber significantly alter the bill, a conference committee is formed to reconcile the differences. If the conferees are unable to reach agreement, the legislation dies. If agreement is reached, a conference report is prepared describing the committee members' recommendations for changes. Both the House and the Senate must approve of the conference report.

Step 12. Final Actions: After a bill has been approved by the House and Senate in identical form, it is sent to the President. If the President approves of the legislation, he signs it and it becomes law. Or, the President can take no action for ten days, while Congress is in session, and it automatically becomes law. If the President opposes the bill he can veto it. A "pocket veto" occurs if the President takes no action and the Congress has adjourned its second session. As with a regular veto, a pocket veto kills the legislation.

Step 13. Overriding a Veto: If the President vetoes a bill, Congress may attempt to "override the veto." This requires a two-thirds roll call vote of the members who are present in sufficient numbers in both Houses for a quorum.

How a Bill Becomes a Law



Source: [University of Pittsburgh Library](#)



How Committees Work

Perhaps the most important phase of the legislative process is the action by committees. The committees consider every possible aspect of a proposed measure and provide a forum for the public to be heard. A tremendous volume of work, often overlooked by the public, is done by the Members in this phase. There are, at present, standing committees in the Senate and in the House, as well as several select committees in both Houses. In addition, there are four standing Joint Committees of the two Houses that have oversight responsibilities but no legislative jurisdiction.

Each committee's jurisdiction is divided into categories under the rules of the House and the Senate. All measures affecting a particular area of the law are referred to the committee with jurisdiction over the particular subject matter. The Speaker of the House or the Senate Majority Leader may refer an introduced bill to multiple committees for consideration of those provisions of the bill within the jurisdiction of each committee concerned. The Speaker or Majority Leader must designate a primary committee of jurisdiction on bills referred to multiple committees.

A member usually seeks selection to the committee that has jurisdiction over a field in which the Member is most qualified and interested. Many Members are nationally recognized experts in the specialty of their particular committee or subcommittee. For example, the Committee on the Judiciary is traditionally composed almost entirely of lawyers. Membership on the various committees is divided between the two major political parties. The proportion of Republicans and Democrats on a particular committee depends upon who holds the majority in that particular House of Congress. In the current session of Congress, the Democrats hold a majority in both the House and the Senate; therefore Democrats hold more seats on each committee. The one exception to this rule is the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, whose membership is always divided equally among the two major political parties.

- Members of the House of Representatives may serve only on two committees and four subcommittees, with limited exceptions.
- Except as otherwise noted, Senators may serve on no more than three committees, and five subcommittees (with the exception of the Committee on Appropriations).
- Members rank in seniority according to the date of their appointment to the full committee. Most often, it is the most senior member of the majority with the most continuous service to the committee that is elected chairman.
- Committee reports are written by the committee staff to describe the purpose and scope of a particular bill and the reasons for its recommended approval. Committee reports generally contain a section-by-section analysis explaining precisely what each section is intended to accomplish.

The Budget and Appropriations Process

Every year, Congress considers 12 “regular” appropriations bills plus additional “emergency” or “supplemental” appropriations bills. These measures provide funding for numerous activities, including education. These measures also fund general government operations such as the administration of federal agencies. Congress has developed certain rules and practices for the consideration of appropriations measures, referred to as the *congressional appropriations process*.²

Budget Resolution

The budget request officially starts the appropriations process and is the President’s suggested level of funding for every federal government program. For more information on the budget request, visit <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/>.

The real business begins when the House and Senate work on their respective budget resolutions. While this process involves arcane budget-speak and lots of talk of big-picture deficit and spending issues, the budget resolution is of critical importance to even the smallest of federal programs.

The vast majority of programs receive federal funding from the discretionary pot. It is important to keep in mind that while discretionary spending is a source of federal funding, it is not the largest area of federal spending—mandatory spending is.

At this point, it is best to think of discretionary spending as dividing a pie. Every federal program is fighting for as large of a piece of pie as it can get. The budget resolution determines how big the pie is—meaning the larger the number, the easier it is for programs to receive funding or, conversely, the smaller the pie, the tougher the fight for funding.

Who decides how big the pie is? The process starts in the House and Senate Budget Committees. Through deliberations, controlled by the majority party, the Budget Committees decide how big the pie is. Amendments are considered in committee and on the House and Senate floor, and finally, the pie is set. From there, it is up to the House and Senate Appropriations Committees to divide the pie accordingly, funding programs such as the National Writing Project.

What is the budget resolution?

The federal government spends its money in three basic ways:

- 1) Paying the interest costs on the federal deficit (similar to paying off a mortgage, except on a much larger scale).
- 2) “Mandatory” spending – these are the things the federal government *must* spend money on regardless of cost. Typically, these are large social programs such as Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and subsidies on student loans.
- 3) “Discretionary” spending – this is everything else. Each year, Congress chooses which programs to fund and which not to fund. They are under no legal obligation to fund anything in particular.

Therefore, if the pie isn’t big enough, there is very little appropriators can do to prevent

² CRS Report: The Congressional Appropriations Process: An Introduction (2004)



programs from being eliminated, let alone provide increases. This is how the budget resolution impacts programs at the Department of Education and all other federal agencies.

Appropriations

Traditionally, once the budget resolution is completed, the House and Senate then set to work crafting appropriations legislation within the parameters set by the budget resolution. The appropriation enables an agency or department to 1) make spending commitments, and 2) spend money. Except in the case of entitlements, an appropriation is the key determinant of how much will be spent on a program.

Congress must pass appropriations bills to provide money to carry out government programs for every fiscal year. Appropriations bills are usually divided up by type of program and agency into twelve separate bills: Agriculture; Commerce/Justice/ State/Science; Defense; District of Columbia; Energy and Water; Foreign Operations; Homeland Security; Interior; Labor/Health and Human Services/Education; Legislative Branch; Military Construction/Veterans' Affairs; and Transportation/Treasury/Housing and Urban Development/Judiciary.

The 10 subcommittees within the House Appropriations Committee and the 12 subcommittees within the Senate Appropriations Committee draft legislation to allocate funds to government agencies within their jurisdictions. These subcommittees are responsible for reviewing the President's budget request, hearing testimony from government officials and the public, and drafting the spending plans for the coming fiscal year.

Their work is passed on to the full House or Senate Appropriations Committees, which may review and modify the bills and forward them to the floor for consideration. Once the bills are passed by each chamber, they move to Conference where the conferees must agree on appropriations levels that fall within the range established by the already-passed House and Senate versions. The resulting Conference reports must be agreed to by both the House and the Senate before the bill can be sent to the President's desk for his or her signature.

Authorizations

Authorizing legislation establishes the funding limits for programs. You will often hear members of Congress, their staff, lobbyists, and advocates say "funding for the program was authorized at \$100 million, but only \$12 million was appropriated." An authorized funding level does not indicate the amount of actual funds.



TRADITIONAL CALENDAR OF CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET ACTIVITIES

[An asterisk (*) indicates a schedule provision formally written in the Budget Act. The calendar below reflects the preferred schedule of activities; some slippage and overlap frequently occur.]

First Monday in February*	Deadline for submission of President's budget.
February 15*	Deadline for submission of Congressional Budget Office report on projected spending for the forthcoming fiscal year.
Six weeks after the President's budget submission*	Deadlines for committees to submit their "views and estimates" to the Budget Committees.
March	House and Senate Budget Committees develop respective budget resolutions. House committee reports in March; full House votes on resolution roughly 1 week thereafter.
April 1*	Deadline for Senate Budget Committee to report its budget resolution. Full Senate acts on budget resolution roughly 1 week thereafter.
April 1-15	House-Senate conferees develop conference report on budget resolution, and each chamber votes on the resolution conference report.
April 15*	Congress completes action on concurrent resolution on the budget.
April 15-May	Authorizing committees develop reconciliation legislation (if necessary) and report legislation to Budget Committees. Budget Committees package reconciliation language and report to floors of their respective chambers. After passage in each chamber, House-Senate conferees develop conference report on reconciliation and bring to floors of House and Senate.
May 15*	The House may begin to consider annual appropriations bills.
June 10*	House Appropriations Committee reports the last of its annual appropriations bills.
June 15*	Congress completes action on reconciliation legislation (if necessary).
June 30*	House completes action on House appropriations bills.
July 1-September 30	Senate completes action on Senate appropriations bills. House-Senate conferees complete action on appropriations conference reports and bring to floors of House and Senate.
October 1	Fiscal year begins.



Capitol Hill Glossary

Many of these definitions are taken from *Congress at Your Fingertips*, edited by Capitol Advantage.

Act – Legislation that has passed both houses of Congress and become law.

Amendment – A change in a bill or document by adding, substituting, or omitting portions of it. Action on amendments can be taken at the subcommittee, at the full committee, or on the floor.

Appropriations Bill – Legislation that provides funds for authorized programs.

Authorization Bill – Legislation establishing a program and setting funding limits. You will often hear members of Congress, their staff, lobbyists, and advocates say “funding for the program was authorized at \$100 million, but only \$12 million was appropriated.” An authorized funding level does not indicate the amount of actual funds. For example, the Math Science Partnership, which makes up Title II, Part B of the No Child Left Behind Act, was authorized at \$450 million in FY2002, yet was appropriated \$12.5 million for that fiscal year.

Block Grants – Lump sums given to the states by the federal government for loosely defined purposes, such as childcare or improving public safety.

Briefing – A session held by members of Congress to inform the public, the media, advocates, and others about an issue, legislation, or the status of legislation. Sometimes questions are taken by the members of Congress; other times it is purely an informational session with no time allotted for questions.

Caucus – Meeting of Republican or Democratic members of Congress to determine policy and/or choose leaders.

Cloak Rooms – Small rooms off the House and Senate floor where members can rest and hold informal conferences.

Cloture – Method of limiting debate or ending a filibuster in the Senate. At least 60 Senators must vote in favor before cloture can be invoked.

Colloquy – A formal conversation, often in written form, between members of Congress to provide clarification on a point or issue.

Concurrent Resolution – Legislative action used to express the position of the House or the Senate, but not having the force of law.

Continuing Resolution – Legislation that gives budget authority for specific ongoing activities used when Congress hasn't yet passed all regular appropriations bills prior to the start of the fiscal year (October 1).

Committee – A working subdivision of the House or Senate that prepares legislation or conducts investigations; committees and their subcommittees have specific areas of concern.

Conference Committee – Meeting between Representatives and Senators to resolve differences when two versions of a similar bill have been passed by the House and Senate.

Congressional Record – Official transcript of the proceedings in Congress.

“Dear Colleague” Letter – A letter circulated to members asking for their participation. It often asks members to cosponsor a bill.



Engrossed Bill – Final copy of a bill passed by either the House or Senate with amendments. The bill is then delivered to the other chamber.

Enrolled Bill – Final copy of a bill that has passed both the House and Senate in identical form.

Extension of Remarks – When a member of Congress inserts material in the Congressional Record that is not directly related to the debate underway.

Filibuster – Tactic used in the Senate whereby a member of the minority party intentionally delays a vote.

Fiscal Year – Accounting year. For the federal government, the fiscal year (FY) is October 1 to September 30 of the following calendar year.

Guidance – Informal letters and guidance from the executive branch explaining its stance, but technically not binding under the law.

H.R. – Letters followed by a number that signify a bill that has originated in the House of Representatives.

Hearing – A committee session in which witnesses are called to testify about a particular issue. Hearings are usually conducted at the subcommittee level first in order to determine whether the issue or bill in question should be taken up in the full committee.

Joint Resolution – Legislation similar to a bill that has the force of law if passed by both houses and signed by the President, generally used for special circumstances. A joint resolution can originate in either the House or the Senate.

Lame Duck – Member of Congress (or the President) who has not been reelected but whose term has not yet expired. The expression can also describe a session of Congress during which the appropriations bills for that year are not passed before the next session of Congress begins.

Logrolling – Process whereby members help each other get particular legislation passed. One member will help another on one piece of legislation in return for similar help.

Motion to Table – Proposal to postpone consideration of a matter in the Senate.

Omnibus Bill – Bill regarding a single subject that combines many different aspects of that subject.

President Pro Tempore – Senator who presides over the Senate in the absence of the Vice President of the United States. The President Pro Tempore is usually the longest-serving member of the majority party.

Pocket Veto – When the President does not sign or veto legislation submitted to him or her within ten days of Congress' adjournment, the bill dies.

Point of Order – An objection that language, an amendment, or a bill is in violation of a rule. Also used to force a quorum call.

Quorum – The number of Senators or Representatives who must be present before a legislative body can conduct official business.

Quorum Call – In the Senate, a method of determining whether there is a quorum. Often used to suspend debate without adjourning.

Ranking Members – The members of the majority and minority party on a committee next in seniority after the chair.



Regulatory – Law-binding regulations issued by the executive branch to clarify and expand upon statutory law. An example would be the regulations issued by the Department of Education addressing the No Child Left Behind Act.

Sense of the House/Senate – Legislative language that offers the opinion of the House/Senate, but does not make law.

Simple Resolution – A measure considered only by the body in which it is introduced, a simple resolution that addresses a matter concerning the rules, the operation, or the opinion of either house alone.

S – Letter followed by a number that signifies a bill that has originated in the Senate.

Statutory – Enacted or authorized by statute. An example of statutory law is the No Child Left Behind Act.

Unanimous Consent – A procedure whereby a matter is considered agreed to if no member on the floor objects. Unanimous consent motions save time by eliminating the need for a vote.

Whip – Assistant leader for each party in each chamber who keeps other members of the party informed of the legislative agenda of the leader. The whip also monitors the sentiment among party members for certain legislation and tries to persuade members to be present and vote for measures important to the party leadership.

Common Acronyms

You'll also quickly learn that denizens of Capitol Hill speak in acronyms. Here are some common ones. A great resource for deciphering the “alphabet soup” can be found on the Web at: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/daltcp/acronym.shtml>.

GAO – Government Accountability Office

GPO – General Printing Office

OMB – Office of Management and Budget

CBO – Congressional Budget Office

CRS – Congressional Research Service

HOB – House Office Building

SOB – Senate Office Building

HBCU – Historically Black Colleges and Universities

NCLB – The No Child Left Behind Act

HEA – The Higher Education Act

IDEA – The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

WIA – The Workforce Investment Act

HELP – The Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee in the Senate

LHHS – The House and Senate Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittees.



Web Resources

Congressional Budget Office

Analyzes budget proposals and provides economic forecasts.

<http://www.cbo.gov/>

Government Printing Office

The information provided on this site is the official, published version of products produced by the federal government.

<http://www.gpo.gov/>

House Appropriations Committee

Grants money to fund government agencies and programs.

<http://appropriations.house.gov/>

House Budget Committee

Introduces a budget resolution that, when approved, becomes the guidelines for appropriation process.

<http://budget.house.gov/>

House Education and Labor Committee

Working to provide quality education for all Americans and ensure the welfare of American workers.

<https://edlabor.house.gov>

Senate Appropriations Committee

Grants money to fund government agencies and programs.

<http://appropriations.senate.gov/>

Senate Budget Committee

Introduces a budget resolution which, when approved, becomes the guidelines for appropriation process.

<http://www.senate.gov/~budget/>

Senate HELP Committee

Deals with issues relating to health, education, labor, or pensions.

<http://help.senate.gov/>

Senate Labor, HHS, Education, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee

Committee that focuses specifically on labor, health and human services, and education issues.

<http://appropriations.senate.gov/labor.cfm>

THOMAS

Established by the Library of Congress to provide access to information about Congress, the legislative process, and legislation.

<http://thomas.loc.gov/>



U.S. Department of Education

Federal agency that outlines the federal government's initiatives and priorities for education.

<http://www.ed.gov>

U.S. House of Representatives

Home page for Representatives of the 110th Congress.

<http://www.house.gov>

U.S. Senate

Home page for Senators of the 110th Congress.

<http://www.senate.gov>

White House Home Page

Provides direct access to federal services, including applications for federal student aid.

<http://www.whitehouse.gov>

Using the Media for Advocacy

Earning news coverage for the National Writing Project and our local sites is critical to raising public and policymaker awareness of its mission and importance. Media coverage of NWP’s work and leadership helps establish credibility, attract allies, and sway public opinion.

Media coverage is also one of the best ways to gain the attention of Members of Congress. All Members monitor the media. Every congressional office has a staff person who monitors the news in the district or state and clips articles that mention the representative or senator by name. Decisions to support legislative initiatives are frequently influenced by the media coverage.

*“If you don’t exist in the media, for all practical purposes,
you don’t exist”*
— Daniel Schorr, former commentator, NPR

Print Media — NWP’s Primary Form of Communication with the Media

Print media are any media consisting of paper and ink, including newspapers, magazines, trade journals, newsletters, etc. Writing project sites are encouraged to focus on their local community newspapers.

You may be asked to communicate with your local newspaper in three ways: interviews, press releases, and letters to the editor.

Tips for Talking to Newspaper Reporters

- Most newspaper interviews take place over the phone. If you pick up your phone and find a reporter on the line—don’t panic. Ask what information the reporter is seeking, ask for the deadline, and call back when you are prepared—**before the deadline**.
- **Always return a reporter’s phone call promptly. As soon you get a message that a reporter wants to speak with you, return the call—even if you are just calling to arrange a time to speak with the reporter.**
- If you are reluctant or uncomfortable talking to a reporter, or if your school policy prohibits you from giving a quote or interview, do not say “no comment.” Instead, find someone who is willing to grant the interview and make sure that person is prepared.
- Remember, there is absolutely no shame in saying “I don’t know the answer to that question.” Tell the reporter you need to look it up or consult with someone else, and offer to



call the reporter back. Again, find out the reporter's deadline and make sure the reporter has the information he or she needs before the deadline.

- Teachers make very credible spokespeople because the public holds them in high esteem. As teachers, you know how to stay on topic. Use your teaching skills to stay on message.
- Never say anything to a reporter that you don't want printed on the front page of a newspaper. For NWP purposes, there is absolutely no reason to say anything off the record, on background, or not for attribution.
- Do not answer hypothetical questions; stick to what you know and do not speculate. Never comment on what others have said, particularly if you haven't seen or heard it yourself. Don't verify something that might not be true.
- Localize, personalize, and humanize your information. Tell the reporter about the importance of the National Writing Project to you, your students, and your community.
- Use plain language and speak slowly because the reporter is most likely taking notes. Avoid acronyms and jargon. Keep your responses brief, direct, and to the point. Don't feel obligated to fill a "pregnant pause." Many reporters will use this technique to get you off message. If you have already made your points, either repeat them or tell the reporter, "That's all I have."
- At the end of the interview, always thank the reporter for the opportunity to discuss the National Writing Project. If you feel comfortable, ask when the reporter's story will appear in the publication. When you see the article in print, please take a couple of minutes to send the reporter a quick email to compliment the story and to thank him again. This makes a huge difference; reporters really appreciate it.
- Many experts agree that you should stand up while conducting a telephone interview because it may help you feel more professional and in control. They also recommend looking in a mirror and smiling during the interview.

Tips for Effectively Expressing Your Opinion in a Letter to the Editor

Letters to the editor are often written in response to an article, editorial, or op-ed in a particular newspaper, although they can be on any newsworthy topic. Before writing the letter, choose a newspaper close to where you live, preferable a weekly paper. The easiest and most efficient way to submit the letter is to go to the "Opinions" section of your newspaper's website. This should take you to a page with instructions and often a submission form. You can use the online form or email the letter; faxing is also acceptable. If the information is not available on the Internet, look at the actual newspaper or give the newspaper a call.

Most newspapers allow about 250 words. Find out the maximum number of words for a letter to the editor in your newspaper and, regardless of how many words allowed, keep your letter short—it is better if you edit or condense your letter yourself, rather than let the editor do it for you.



Tips for Announcing News through Press Releases

One of the best and easiest methods of communicating your message to the news media is the press release. Building support requires ongoing communication and the press release is one of many PR tactics that can accomplish your goals while taking little time and expense. (See the press release template on the following page.)

The vast majority of reporters prefer to receive press releases by email. Always put the release in the body of the message and never send attachments. When sending the release to more than one paper, send a separate email to each reporter and do not use the words “press release” in the subject line since they get hundreds of these a day. Use an attention grabber in the subject line that identifies your Writing Project site.

The first line of the e-mail message should read, **For Immediate Release: [DATE]**. This lets the reporter know the news is authorized for publication on the date they receive it.

After a paragraph return, provide contact information along the right margin: name, phone, and email address. Also include your website address.

Skip two lines and write a headline in bold, followed by a subhead. Keep your headline to ten words or less. Do not write the headline in capital letters because it is harder to read by e-mail.

Skip another line and begin your first paragraph with a dateline: the city, and sometimes the state, where your release is issued, and the date of the release followed by a dash. The lead paragraph should be brief but explain all important points. Try to lead with a provocative, strong first sentence. This paragraph should be from 3 to 5 sentences.

The second paragraph should cover more detail. In general, remember that the most important information should be at the beginning—information at the end is less likely to be read.

The third paragraph is a good place to use a quote. Quotes should be from someone directly involved in the Writing Project. Quotes add a human element and are easy for reporters to incorporate into a story.

The last paragraph is called the “boilerplate.” It is usually no more than two to three sentences, explaining the organization responsible for sending the release. Following is boilerplate text used by NWP:

*Through its mission, the **National Writing Project (NWP)** focuses the knowledge, expertise, and leadership of our nation's educators on sustained efforts to help youth become successful writers and learners. NWP supports a network of local Writing Project sites, located on nearly 200 university and college campuses, to provide high-quality professional development in schools, universities, libraries, museums, and after-school programs. Through its many successful programs and partnerships, the organization reaches 1.4 million Pre-K through college-age students in over 3,000 school districts annually. NWP envisions a future where every person is an accomplished writer, engaged learner, and active participant in a digital, interconnected world. For more information, visit www.nwp.org.*

Finally, close the document with “-30-” or “###,” which are style conventions that signal the end of the press release.



It is best to follow up with a telephone call to make sure the reporter has received the release, that it is on her radar screen, and to ask if the newspaper will make use of it.

Press Release Template

For immediate release: These words should appear in the upper left-hand margin, just under your letterhead. If you want to send a release out in advance, you can embargo it until the date of activities. It would read... **Embargoed** until <Date>

Contact Information: List the name, telephone, and email address information of either you or the appropriate spokesperson.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE May 28, 2009

Headline: Skip two lines after your contact information and use a boldface type.

Contact: <Name, Title>
<Phone Number>
<Email Address>

Thousands of Teachers Focus on Writing over Summer Vacation

Dateline:
This should be the city your press release is issued from and the date you are sending your release.

Berkeley, CA — More than 3,000 kindergarten through college teachers across the country will dedicate four weeks of their summer break to learning new strategies to improve their students’ writing skills. These teachers will study the latest research and effective classroom practices in summer institutes at more than 200 National Writing Project (NWP) sites on college campuses in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Lead Paragraph:
The first paragraph needs to grab the reader’s attention and should contain the relevant information to your message such as the five W’s (who, what, when, where, why)

Quotes:
Should be from someone directly involved in the project. Quotes add a human element and are easy items for reporters to incorporate in a story.

The majority of Americans view good writing skills as essential to success in college and the workplace, according to a recent national public opinion survey, *Writing, a National Pastime, Takes New Forms*, by the research firm Belden Russonello & Stewart. However, they fear that our public schools and our children are falling behind. Just 17 percent believe that when students graduate from high school they have the writing skills they need for college, and 75 percent say that our K-12 education system should put more emphasis on the teaching of writing.

“Teachers who attend NWP summer institutes return to their classrooms with new strategies for teaching writing and with experience using digital tools,” said Sharon J. Washington, NWP Executive Director. “Eighty percent of Americans believe there is a greater need now than 20 years ago for a person to be able to write well in order to succeed. Summer institutes are one of many writing project programs that address this need.”

Text: The main body of your press release where your message should fully develop.

National research studies confirm significant gains in writing performance among students whose teachers participate in NWP programs.

The National Writing Project is the most significant coordinated effort to improve writing in America. NWP sites, located on more than 200 university and college campuses, serve over 135,000 participants annually. NWP continues to add new sites each year with the goal of placing the writing project within reach of every teacher in America. Through its professional development model, NWP develops the leadership, programs, and research needed for teachers to help students become successful writers and learners. For more information, visit www.nwp.org.

Boilerplate: Standard descriptive language that describes the organization.

#####

End tags: Commonly used symbol (or -30-) to indicate the end of the press release.



National Writing Project

nwp@nwp.org

www.nwp.org