



National Association
of Workforce Boards

Workforce Advocacy Toolkit
August 2023

If you were to ask a median U.S. voter what a Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) is, they likely would not have a ready answer. Nonetheless, LWDBs change lives and the results they produce benefit every American, regardless of their background or zip code. So why is a system with an undeniable track record of success largely unnoticed by the public?

The National Association of Workforce Boards' (NAWB) Advocacy Toolkit is designed to help bridge this persistent awareness gap among lawmakers, thought leaders, and the general public. This Toolkit explores how to engage with elected officials for you to use to make your case for LWDBs and the workforce development efforts they oversee.

It is important to remember though, advocacy should not be a siloed function within an organization – it must be present within a business' strategic plan. Advocacy is about creating awareness. Building a rapport with policymakers takes time, but to yield positive results, continuous action must be undertaken with purpose and with resolve.

Political Context

Understanding the current political landscape is a critical first step to any successful advocacy strategy. In the workforce development policy space, many factors contribute to the trajectory of policy. Beyond the impact a piece of legislation may make, a slew of additional forces must also be understood.

Labor Landscape

Due to a multitude of factors, there has been a [hollowing out of middle-skilled workers](#) in the U.S. labor market. In *The Globalization of Inequality*, former World Bank Chief Economist Francois Bourguignon describes the effects globalization and technology have had on the U.S. labor market: it is subject to a skills premium where growing demand outweighs the supply of highly skilled workers. Recently, [75% of U.S. businesses reported a skilled talent shortage](#), a clear indication of a widening skills gap.

In the U.S., there are nearly two available jobs for every unemployed person, and the labor force participation rate remains four percentage points lower than two decades ago. At the same time, birth rates are falling, while an aging population retires en masse. Simply put, there will not be enough workers to replace the current workforce. [Experts predict we will continue to face a labor shortage for the next century.](#)

Paired with rapid advancements in technology, these fluctuating market conditions underscore the necessity of innovative approaches to workforce development that enable participation in the labor market. To continue to grow— and to remain globally competitive— the U.S. must modernize the workforce ecosystem, extending opportunities to advance skill sets that reflect the economic and technological realities of today and prepare workers for what's to come.

Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations

Program	FY23	President FY24 Proposed	% Change	House FY24 Proposed	% Change	Senate FY24 Proposed	% Change
Title I (in thousands)							
WIOA Adult ETA	\$ 885,649	\$ 899,987	3.4%	\$ 173,649	-80.4%	\$ 885,649	0.0%
WIOA Youth Activities	\$ 948,130	\$ 963,837	3.3%	\$ -	-100.0%	\$ 948,130	0.0%
WIOA Dislocated Worker ETA	\$ 1,095,553	\$ 1,155,278	5.5%	\$ 1,095,553	0.0%	\$ 1,095,553	0.0%
WIOA DW National Activities	\$ 325,859	\$ 364,386	11.8%	\$ 360,859	10.7%	\$ 305,859	-6.1%
Native Americans	\$ 60,000	\$ 63,800	6.3%	\$ 60,000	0.0%	\$ 60,000	0.0%
Migrant & Seasonal Farm	\$ 97,396	\$ 97,396	0.0%	\$ 97,396	0.0%	\$ 97,396	0.0%
Youthbuild	\$ 105,000	\$ 145,000	38.1%	\$ 105,000	0.0%	\$ 105,000	0.0%
Ex-offender / Reentry	\$ 115,000	\$ 170,000	47.8%	\$ 115,000	0.0%	\$ 115,000	0.0%
Workforce Data Quality Initiative	\$ 6,000	\$ 11,000	83.3%	\$ 6,000	0.0%	\$ 6,000	0.0%
NAA Expansion	\$ 285,000	\$ 335,000	17.5%	\$ 285,000	0.0%	\$ 290,000	1.8%
Job Corps	\$ 1,760,155	\$ 1,835,467	4.3%	\$ -	-100.0%	\$ 1,760,155	0.0%
SECTOR Program	\$ -	\$ 200,000	0.0%	\$ -	0.0%	\$ -	0.0%
Climate Corps	\$ -	\$ 15,000	0.0%	\$ -	0.0%	\$ -	0.0%
National Youth Employment Program	\$ -	\$ -	0.0%	\$ -	0.0%	\$ -	0.0%
Veterans Climate Training Program	\$ -	\$ -	0.0%	\$ -	0.0%	\$ -	0.0%
Youth Climate Corps	\$ -	\$ -	0.0%	\$ -	0.0%	\$ -	0.0%
Title I Total	\$ 5,683,742	\$ 6,256,151	10.1%	\$ 2,298,457	-59.6%	\$ 5,668,742	-0.3%
Title II (in thousands)							
Adult Education State Grants	\$ 715,455	\$ 715,455	0.0%	\$ 715,455	0.0%	\$ 715,455	0.0%
Title III (in thousands)							
Wagner Peyser Labor Exchange	\$ 680,052	\$ 698,862	2.8%	\$ 680,052	0.0%	\$ 675,052	-0.7%
Title IV (in thousands)							
Vocational Rehabilitation	\$ 4,092,906	\$ 4,253,800	3.9%	\$ 4,397,033	7.4%	\$ 4,397,033	7.4%
WIOA Total	\$11,172,155	\$ 11,924,268	6.7%	\$ 8,090,997	-27.6%	\$11,456,282	2.5%

Advocacy vs. Lobbying

All lobbying is advocacy, but not all advocacy is lobbying. Advocacy is an informative action in which you are supporting, promoting, or educating individuals about the impacts of issues. Lobbying is communicating with decision makers such as elected officials and their staff or even the general public and urging them to vote for or against *specific* legislation or provisions within legislation.

Examples of Advocacy

- Educating elected officials about the wider impacts of workforce development policy
- Publishing an article that argues why the workforce system needs more funding
- Using social media to promote issue awareness about specific topics such as how LWDBs can help combat workforce shortages

Examples of Lobbying

- Urging an elected official or their staff to vote for or against, amend, or introduce specific legislation
- Requesting members contact their elected officials to vote for or against, amend, or introduce specific legislation
- Asking the public to contact their elected officials demanding they vote for or against, amend, or introduce specific legislation

Talking Points on Bolstering the Workforce Development System

Download a copy of NAWB's legislative priorities and talking points [here!](#)

Engaging with Elected Officials and Business Leaders

LWDBs must interact and engage with elected officials and business leaders at a local, state, and federal level to continue effective operations; many are members of LWDBs. Without these individuals, boards would not exist. LWDBs do incredible work, why wouldn't you want to share your achievements?

1. Do your research
 - Understand who you are talking to and what motivates them
 - Identify areas of potential comradery and common ground and use it when building a prospective relationship.
 - Be sure to examine public sources of information to learn more about a policymaker. Platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube can be valuable sources of information helping to facilitate successful engagement.
 - Consider also—what is the best way to communicate with this individual? Is it professional or casual, through written or spoken form, in person or online?
2. Prepare
 - What questions are they most likely to ask and how can I answer in an easily understandable manner that resonates with them?
 - What are the data and resources I can recommend to further educate them?
 - How do I effectively intertwine success stories and data to create personal affinity?
 - Be sure to relate to both job seekers and employers!
 - Practice
3. Interact
 - Introduce yourself, thank them for taking the time to meet with you, and explain the purpose of your visit
 - Address them by their title such as Representative or Senator for elected officials and Mr./Ms. for business leaders unless instructed otherwise
 - Be clear and concise; be sure to weave in your personal story; remember to frame meetings more as a conversation than as a presentation

- If you don't know the answer to a question, tell them you will follow up; this also allows you to interact with them again!
 - Once the meeting is over, thank them for their time, leave your card or any other relevant information behind, and offer yourself as a resource in the future
 - Ask for a photo and permission to share with your community
4. Follow up
- Always send a thank you note – handwritten is even better
 - Keep the dialogue going and check in every few months
 - This is a relationship, not a transaction, so giving is just as important as asking
 - Flag any big wins they could highlight
 - Offer your organization's services as a resource
 - Keep them included and apprised of your organization's activities and efforts

How to contact your Federally Elected Officials

- Contact information for your [U.S. Senators](#) and [U.S. Representatives](#) is available on their websites; you can reach their office by calling the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121.
 - Remember, telephone calls are usually answered by interns and staffers, not elected officials. Please be sure to identify yourself and ask to speak to the staffer associated with the policy issue or legislation that you are calling about.
- You don't have to be in D.C. to interact with your Representatives – they also have state and district work periods where they return home to interact with constituents
 - Here is the schedule for both the [House and Senate](#)

Advocacy Tools

Advocacy can take on many forms and should be thought of as an adaptive strategy. The idea is to get creative and think outside the box. Below you will find a list of several example advocacy tools and strategies. NAWB members can receive assistance with networking, writing letters, social media posts, and more by contacting NAWB's Associate Director of Government Relations & Policy Kyle Marinelli (MarinelliK@nawb.org)

Engagement

- Engagement and networking are by far the most critical tool within advocacy. As they say in business "you are your network." Advocacy is all about relationship building, and to build relationships, you must engage with a wide array of individuals and entities to accomplish your advocacy goals and objectives. Consider attending community events, volunteer, get involved locally; your goal isn't to just talk about workforce development, but to gain mutually beneficial relationships
- Bring people to you
 - Hold town halls open to the public to grow community awareness
 - Host job fairs to attract more talent
 - Take on fundraisers with local non-profits
- Interact with elected officials and their staff

- Interacting with your local, statewide, and federal officials yields positive results – for example, funding specific projects through earmarks
- Elected officials act as great connectors
- Cultivate the relationship and become a resource, advisor, or source of positive press
- Office staffers often carry the most detailed information
- Build a relationship with reporters
- Build a coalition
 - There are over 570 local workforce development boards in the country, many have the same goals
 - Coordinated advocacy by a formal or informal group of like-minded organizations is more likely to be effective
 - Reach out to your neighboring boards and identify any areas of potential collaboration
 - NAWB members have access to [NAWB Connect](#), a platform designed for peer-to-peer collaboration, knowledge sharing, and information gathering among local workforce development boards

Written and Online Communications

Written communications are some of the easiest advocacy tools you can utilize. If you don't write it down, it doesn't exist; it's a double-edged sword and can have both positive and negative consequences. Be mindful that releasing letters, reports, statements, and social media posts can be called upon in the future; really think about the appropriateness, relevancy, and impact it may have before you click "send" or "post". In today's hyper-connected world, one little tweet can spread like wildfire. If you are unsure about any form of written communications and are a member of NAWB, please reach out to NAWB's Associate Director of Government Relations & Policy, Kyle Marinelli (MarinelliK@nawb.org) for assistance!

- Letter to elected officials
 - Writing formal letters to your elected officials at a local, state, and federal level can be utilized to document organizational viewpoints, concerns, or successes
 - Obtaining signatures from multiple organizations (coalitions) can emphasize the letter importance
- Letter to the editor
 - Submitting a piece to your local newspaper highlighting workforce topics is a classic way to engage your community
- Blog posts / Medium posts
 - Utilize your organizations website to highlight news, success stories, and innovation
 - Use [Medium](#) to reach a nontraditional audience – your piece can range from a few paragraphs to an entire research report
- Social media
 - Social media is all about constant engagement and is not a "one and done" exercise; continuous use is imperative to success
 - Use infographics to catch people's attention

- Tag your elected officials or those with a larger audience, especially on twitter – retweets can produce awareness
- Share photos of events to showcase results
- Use already produced work such as program reports, data points, and newsletters to redirect traffic to your website

Hone Your Message

When engaging with elected officials you will have limited time to deliver your message. You should be able to succinctly address who you are and what you do. Think in advance about your message and be ready to deliver succinct answers. The answers to the following points provides a great start to delivering a message that gets attention and action:

- What are the 2-3 questions elected officials may have about my issue that I should be prepared to answer when I meet them?
- What are the facts/figures and resources I should have in advance of my meetings with elected officials to best help them understand my position on an issue?
- What partners/additional voices (who share my perspective) should I encourage to meet with the same elected officials?
- What are the most effective strategies/tactics you can use to communicate with each elected official?

Conclusion

Advocacy is not a siloed function. Rather, advocacy can be easily integrated into your organization's overall strategy. Your role as an advocate is to inform, educate, and build awareness about all the positive impacts workforce development boards have on their communities. If you have any questions, need assistance, or want to talk strategy please reach out to Kyle Marinelli (MarinelliK@nawb.org).