The Toolkit

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 outlines the current political landscape, explores how to engage with elected officials, and provides communication tools 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. What follows is a brief overview of the current federal context for which LWDBs find themselves in.

Labor Landscape

Over the past 20 years there has been a steady decrease in America’s labor force participation rate. Birth rates have fallen below replacement rates and continue to decline, while Baby Boomers are retiring at record levels. There is a significant talent shortage in the U.S. and this shortfall is expected to persist for the foreseeable future. As of May 2022, there were 11.3 million job openings, but only 6 million unemployed individuals were looking for work. The most pressing question facing policymakers today—how do we collectively fill a growing 5 million+ job gap? (For additional further detail about talent shortage trends, please see: Emsi’s Part 1 and Part 2 of The Demographic Drought)

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated a nationwide, ongoing reevaluation of work. People have been empowered to critically assess their jobs and consider aspects of their lives beyond wages. This combined with the talent shortage has led to proposed solutions as well as major shifts in required credentials and offered wages by employers. LWDBs are positioned to address many of these issues, however, creating that awareness is key.

The two most important pieces of legislation currently facing Local Workforce Development Boards are the reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) along with Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations.

WIOA Reauthorization

Since the spring of 2021, members on the House Education and Labor (E&L) Committee have been engaged in bipartisan discussions regarding the reauthorization of WIOA. While these discussions were
encouraging, negotiations between the parties broke down over partisan disagreements related to key components of WIOA reauthorization.

On March 31, 2022 Committee Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA) and Subcommittee for Higher Education and Workforce Chair Fredrica Wilson (D-FL) formally introduced the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2022 (H.R. 7309). The committee considered and marked up this legislation on April 5, 2022. Members advanced the legislation out of committee with a Democratic party-line vote, 29-21. A webcast archive of this hearing can be found here. A section by section summary of H.R. 7309, which includes proposed funding levels, was released by House Democrats prior to a floor vote.

On May 17 the House passed H.R. 7309 along party lines (your Representative’s vote can be found here). Forty amendments were introduced with all but four adopted. Among those considered was an alternative WIOA reauthorization proposal put forward by Republican lawmakers. While the proposal was ultimately voted down, it does provide insights into House Education and Labor Committee Republicans’ priorities as they related to WIOA. The Republican’s version focuses on employer engagement to drive hiring, whereas H.R. 7309 focuses on indirectly supporting job-seeker’s ability to enroll in training or obtain employment (supportive services).

After clearing the House, H.R 7309 has headed over to the Senate for further consideration. However, the Senate HELP Committee has shown no indication the bill will be considered this Congress for multiple reasons, some of which go beyond the contents of the proposal.

Fiscal Year 2023 Appropriations

The House Democrats, Senate Democrats, and White House have released their Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23) budget proposals. All proposals would increase WIOA funding levels by at least 5.8%. A full FY23 synthesis and program-by-program breakdown is available exclusively to NAWB members on NAWB Connect.

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Links to proposal text and summary documents are below:

- The Department of Labor’s Budget in Brief
- The House FY23 Labor-HHS-Education Summary and Legislative Text
- The Senate FY23 Labor-HHS-Education Summary and Legislative Text
The President’s budget is unlikely to be significantly determinant of FY23’s appropriation levels. In large part the Presidential Budget Request is now used as a tool to outline the administration's priorities. Historically, the House and Senate spending proposals are reflective of the upcoming fiscal year’s funding levels; the same appropriations package must pass in both chambers. However, as midterms approach in a narrowly divided Congress and the Senate requires a 60-vote threshold for passage, Congressional Democrats’ proposal is likely to change to garner the necessary support from Congressional Republicans.

It is presumed that an appropriations package will not pass before the end of the fiscal year (September 30) resulting in a Continuing Resolution (CR), which temporarily provides programs with the same funding levels as the previous fiscal year to avoid a government shutdown. If this were to take place in the upcoming FY23 fiscal year, a CR would likely be used to extend current FY22 funding levels sometime following the midterm elections. Consequently, FY23 appropriations will be enormously impacted by the outcome of the upcoming midterm elections.

**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**

**WIOA Reauthorization**

- There is a significant talent shortage in the U.S. and this shortfall is expected to persist for the foreseeable future:
  - As of May 2022, there were 11.3 million job openings, but only 6 million unemployed individuals were looking for work; how do we fill the 5 million+ job gap?
To address the labor shortage, it is vital to engage populations that, historically, are less likely to be working: marginalized, disadvantaged, or otherwise underserved populations.

Fortunately, WIOA was enacted for exactly this purpose—to prepare all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds or circumstances, for family-sustaining employment.

Towards this goal, NAWB has been encouraged to note several promising elements in the recent House WIOA reauthorization, including:

- A significant increase in authorized funding levels which will more than double the number of individuals receiving quality career and training services.
- Greater autonomy provided to LWDBs to better address the unique needs of their regional economies.
- An expanded focus on lifelong learning, through the increase in allowable training caps and a greater focus on those who are underemployed.
- The modernization of program and data structures to improve program and service performance.

WIOA has historically been a bipartisan issue and we believe this legacy should continue in the next reauthorization to address the consequential workforce issues our country faces.

**FY23 Appropriations**

- Workforce development funding is at historic lows and adjusted for inflation, funding levels are $3 billion less today than what our nation collectively invested in the publicly funded workforce system in 2000.
- Increased WIOA funding is necessary to properly implement, and complete infrastructure projects funded by recent bipartisan infrastructure legislation. Without a skilled workforce, our nation will be unable to meet the current economic moment and the new workforce demands generated by these important investments.
- At a minimum, WIOA Title I programs should be funded at the levels proposed in the House’s 2022 WIOA reauthorization bill: $1.95 billion for Youth, $1.56 billion for Adult, and $2.49 billion for Dislocated Workers. This increase would:
  - Provide more than one million additional eligible individuals with Career Services.
  - More than double the current participants receiving Training Services.
    - Of those receiving training, this would equate to 70% of participants earning an industry-recognized credential
  - Of the almost two million individuals who can now be served, more than half are from minority, historically underserved, or marginalized communities (i.e., in PY 2019 51% of all participants were a member of a minority population and we expect this trend to extend with new funding).
  - Healthcare, Manufacturing, Construction, and the Transportation/Logistics industries are the top four sectors represented in the training services provided and most reflected in where participants are ultimately employed.
  - Aligning funding levels with the 2022 WIOA Reauthorization bill would therefore have a significant positive impact on the industries most needed to support strong and equitable economic growth.
Short Term Skill Development and Transparency

- Learners of all ages currently lack access to federal financial support needed to access skill development opportunities that lead to sustainable employment.
- Broadening eligibility requirements for the federal Pell Grant program to include high-quality shorter-term postsecondary programs would, for the first time, provide much-needed federal support for training experiences leading to in-demand careers.
  - The Jumpstart our Businesses by Supporting Student (JOBS) Act would take an important first step in addressing this issue.
  - Local workforce development boards, which boast entered-employment rates of over 72%, can help ensure expanded federal investment remains focused on in-demand occupations and supports meaningful outcomes.

As shown through WIOA, data is the most important aspect when measuring outcomes. As the partners of many educational institutions, we are supportive of the College Transparency Act which would improve our understanding of how education and workforce development investments impact learners and improve our wider economy.

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!

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
o Be clear and concise; be sure to weave in your personal story; remember to frame meetings more as a conversation than as a presentation
o 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!
  o 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
o Ask for a photo and permission to share with your community

4. Follow up
  o Always send a thank you note – handwritten is even better
  o Keep the dialogue going and check in every few months
  o 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
  o 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.
  o 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
  o Here is the House Schedule and the Senate Schedule

Midterm Elections and August 2022 Recess

The House’s annual August recess began on August 1, while the Senate is scheduled to remain in DC until August 5. Both chambers are currently set to return after Labor Day. Legislators will be traveling to their home districts where most will be campaigning for reelection. As organizations who represent local labor and economic development initiatives, highlighting LWDBs efforts that support their communities is an attractive asset for many policymakers. Thus, current and potential policymakers are more inclined to interact with you during this time period.

Please be mindful that many LWDBs cannot participate directly in elections due to organizational tax status and board composition. However, you can still act as a nonpartisan resource for information that conveys the importance of the workforce system to incumbent and prospective policymakers. To do so, LWDBs can make use of the tools and strategies outlined throughout this guide to effectively advocate for workforce development in these ways.

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 Manager of Government Relations and 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 Government Affairs and Policy Manager, 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).