



As the Election Year Approaches, It's Time to Prepare for the National Legislative Summit

IT'S NOT TOO EARLY TO START PLANNING FOR 2024 —
AND ENSURE CONTINUED BIPARTISAN SUPPORT FOR OUR INSTITUTIONS.

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EACH YEAR, COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERS AND students gather in Washington, D.C., to learn the latest in federal higher education policy, share the goals and challenges of their campuses, and meet with elected officials at the Community College National Legislative Summit, often referred to as “the NLS.” The next NLS, taking place February 4 – 7, 2024, will occur at a critical time for community colleges’ advocacy. Going into a presidential election year, in a divided Congress with small-margin majorities in both chambers, 2024 is sure to be a high stakes year in federal politics.

We know thanks to this year’s Fiscal Responsibility Act that the Fiscal Year 2025 Appropriations bills will have spending caps that will keep funding levels at just above the current year. Beyond that, it’s unclear how much legislating will happen in a year where neither party will want to give the other a “win” going into elections. The 2024 election cycle could end in many ways: with either party taking full control of Congress, a second Biden term, the end of the Biden presidency, the return to a unified government, or the continuation of a divided government with party controls reversed. It could also mean more of what we have seen this year. But each of these scenarios means very different things for community colleges, our priorities, and our advocacy work.

Visiting Washington during a presidential election year allows you to strengthen the bipartisan support for our institutions in anticipation of any of the potential outcomes from November 2024. It will give you a head start in forming relationships with

elected officials from both parties. With possible changes in party control in each chamber, it’s also crucial to continue or renew relationships with elected officials who may move into leadership roles. Bringing together your institution’s leadership — trustees, president, and students — to visit Washington is the best way to share about your campus, discuss the federal role in community colleges, and encourage support for the sector and the learners it supports.

The benefit of the National Legislative Summit for your college increases greatly if your team works together in advance to prepare. Below is a guide to help you get ready.

November: Pick Your Team

Decide who will represent your college in Washington. This group should include a combination of trustees, the president, senior government relations staff, and students (such as student trustee, student government leader, or students who participate in federally funded programs such as Pell Grants).

December: Learn About Your College and Your Community

Meeting with your elected officials is an opportunity to share about your college and to ask how the federal government can support it. Learn about your institution’s mission, key programs offered, and facts about the student population. Information to share also includes the communities served and their demographics,

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the number and size of your campuses and student populations, businesses served by your institution, and economic impact.

December is also an important time to reach out to your community and ask questions such as:

- What are the needs of the community?
- How is your community changing?
- How is the college responding to these changes?

Early January: Schedule Your Meetings

To schedule meetings, use the letter template from the ACCT toolkit at nls.acct.org and customize it for each of your requests. Review your entire delegation, including which committee assignments they have and if they are chair or ranking member. Those colleges in states with active associations should also reach out to the associations for meeting coordination.

Mid-January: Meeting Preparation

For meeting preparation, it's important to decide not only what information to share about your institution, as gathered in December, but also which issue areas or requests your college would like to make. ACCT will provide in-depth backgrounders on key issues as well as the one-sheet guide on timely topics known as the "Green Sheet."

Your college team should also consider what your "ask" of your elected official will be. These can include introducing legislation on a key priority, support or opposition on a specific bill, advocacy for federally funded programs that support your school and students, a campus speaking engagement or visit/tour, or funding through Congressionally Directed Spending (Senate) or Community Project Funding (House).

Late January: Know Your Legislators and Federal Funds

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Additionally, you should get to know your legislators. Do some research into their backgrounds; doing so helps you make a connection and communicate in a way that gets your point across most effectively.

Early February: Plan Your Meeting Agenda

Before the meeting, choose one person to be the spokesperson. Use the meeting worksheet to determine who speaks on each topic and who will take notes.

Mid-February: Follow Up

The follow-up email is an important opportunity to continue building your relationship with your representatives and their staffs. It allows you not only to say thank you for their time, but also to share materials electronically, put any specific questions in writing, and provide any information asked for in the meeting that you didn't have immediately on hand. Also be sure to follow up with ACCT by emailing publicpolicy@acct.org with a summary of your meeting and expected outcomes or next steps.

Contact us at if you need any further guidance on planning your visit. A little planning will go a long way in forging new relationships, nurturing established ones, and yielding the most effective possible outcomes. We look forward to seeing you in February.



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