

STATE LEGISLATIVE PLAN

Jobs for America's Graduates' National Network relies on state legislatures for well **over half** of its funding—and that percentage will increase as the National Network grows. Twenty (20) state legislatures invest directly in the statewide program—the largest number of state legislatures to invest in a youth-serving program.

State legislatures are similar in how they are organized, transact their business and make decisions. At the same time, each is unique in the personalities of the legislators, the political and economic environment within which they operate, the relationships within the legislature, as well as between the Governor and his/her Administration and the Legislature.

There are best practices proven to capture interest, build support and appreciation for Jobs for America's Graduates' statewide programs. These best practices should be considered in building a legislative educational program.

JAG strongly encourages all state affiliates—with or without legislative funding—**to develop a state legislative strategy** that incorporates the following core components:

1. **A twelve-month, year-round process of educating and informing the key Legislative leadership** and chairs and members of key committees of the program, successes, results, and growth plans.

This is not a process that can be undertaken once the Legislature convenes. It is a process that must be underway year-round with continuous communications, conversations and information to keep the organization “in the face” of key legislators. People tend to be supportive about which they are the most knowledgeable or informed. Legislators are no different.

2. **Secure and sustain the support of “champion legislators” who are enthusiastic advocates among their colleagues and in their day-to-day activities.** The value of advocacy legislators—particularly those well positioned in the Legislature—cannot be underestimated. Failure to have outspoken and knowledgeable advocates in a tough budgetary year—where tough choices have to be made—will result in a funding loss.

3. **While the Legislature is in session—do not take your eyes off their actions.** There is an old saying on the walls of a large number of governors and state legislators: **“No person is safe in their freedom or property so long as the legislature is in session.”**

Every committee hearing, every budget-making decision meeting, and every behind-the-scene negotiation is crucial. Having genuinely committed advocates on the “right” committees will assure a greater chance of success—and protect the statewide program against others who would like to shift funding from a JAG affiliated program to their favorite program.

4. **Visibility is important.** Positive press visibility is invaluable. Legislators who see favorable reports on television, in the newspapers or on the radio tend to gain support. Visibility also requires members of your state and/or local boards, participants and staff interacting with legislators on a **regular** basis—both formally and informally.

5. **Put a “face” on the program.** For most legislators—like most people—when someone thinks about a program, we tend to picture a real person. Having a favorable image in the minds of legislators is vitally important when they are making difficult decisions. The young people benefiting from the services delivered by the program are among the best ‘faces’ for legislators to be remembering.

The face of a participant or a graduate—preferably from the legislator’s district—is the ‘best face.’ It is also important that the legislator remember a well-known member of your Board, state staff, or an event that is unique to the program. The statewide program must be recognized as a statewide program that achieves extraordinary results, is well connected and has the ‘best faces’ in the minds of legislators.

6. **Those who matter most are the undisputed opinion leaders in their district or state.** Everyone matters to legislators—but some matter more than others. Organizational leaders from legislative districts are vitally important. Business people, educators, business or trade association leaders, religious leaders and community-based organization leaders who are active and vocal in their support of the statewide program have a disproportionate impact on legislators. Those who are major contributors to political campaigns have even greater leverage. A highly vocal, forceful, and determined donor to legislators is a nuclear weapon.
7. **Jobs for America’s Graduates stands ready to help in any way that it can.** As the legislative education program is designed, state affiliates should call on JAG for ideas, support and the mobilization of staff, board members and corporate donors. JAG board members have traveled to meet with state legislatures and participate in hearings. Some JAG leaders have been given the opportunity to address the Legislature. We are particularly appreciative of the commitment of Governor Racicot, Senator Carper and Julie Eisenhower. In support of a state’s legislative strategy, numerous telephone calls and personalized letters have been directed to key legislators. The national organization stands ready to assist in both the design and implementation of a state’s legislative plan.

SUGGESTED STRATEGY OUTLINE

The suggested monthly educational program must be “customized” to fit the legislative schedule in each state. Of particular importance is the process by which sub-committees, committees, and each House arrive at their decisions—especially budget decisions. The Initiation and Installation Ceremonies and Career Development Conference should also be factored into the state legislative plan.

SEPTEMBER

- Governors begin the budget development process. **Every effort should be made to reach the Governor**, as well as the appropriate Commissioner/Secretary of Education and those responsible for drafting the budget. The best possible case must be made to include the statewide program and, preferably, an increase in funding (if funding already exists) should be encouraged. **This is a crucial moment**—being in the Governor’s budget is **a vital step in the budgetary process**.
- Legislators should receive a letter of invitation and a personal invitation by a respected person. They should be invited to be the guest speaker or honored guest at Initiation and Installation Ceremonies, Leadership Congress, Career Association chapter meetings, and other beginning of the year events.
- State leaders should receive continuous communications from program champions and advocates. The results of the statewide and national program should be included.
- A legislative plan should be developed in concert with members of the statewide (or local) oversight board and other advocates to ensure their ownership, commitment and involvement throughout the year.
- At least one (and, preferably several) “champions” should be identified, recruited, and motivated within each House of the Legislature. The Education and Appropriation Committees deserve particular attention.

These individuals should be fully briefed, invited to program events, meet directly with the board, and/or other steps to build ownership, enthusiasm and support for the statewide program.

OCTOBER

- A legislative plan should be ready for review with champions and advocates in the Legislature as well as with trade association lobbyists who support the program.
- Maximum efforts should be expended for the program to be included in the Governor's budget.
- A favorable program reference in the Governor's State of the State Address would be invaluable to gaining visibility and credibility for the statewide program.
- Legislators should receive invitations to I&I Ceremonies and to visit the program. Follow-up contacts should be launched to encourage their acceptance and participation.
- Inclusion of the statewide program should be contained in the Department of Education's budget if separate from the Governor's budget.

NOVEMBER

- Stay focused on inclusion of the statewide program in the Governor's budget.
- Legislators should be approached and encouraged to visit local programs. Legislators who visit should receive appropriate follow-up and thank-you notes.

DECEMBER

- This is the final opportunity for inclusion in the Governor's budget.
- Final Statewide Legislative Plan should be fully operational.
- Letters prepared with program statistics—participants served, services delivered and/or results achieved. The letters should arrive as the Legislature convenes.

JANUARY

- The Governor's State of the State Address to reference the program and its successes to date.
- Legislatures typically convene and programs should be visible to them through calls/letters/meetings by Board members and/or senior staff. Visits with legislators to seek their advice on funding should happen now.
- Efforts should be made to secure opportunities for participation in appropriate hearings to describe the results and the success of the program.

FEBRUARY

- Staff should be visible in critical meetings and participate in hearings of the Appropriation and Education Subcommittees:
 - **All members of the Appropriation and Education Committees should be invited to see the program first-hand**, and meet with board members, staff, program participants, and graduates.
 - If budget hearings are held, a program report should be presented with compelling results.

MARCH

- Hearings continue—visibility becomes more important.
- Updated program information should be transmitted by mail and/or in person from the most recognizable champion—a member of the Board, yourself or a key business or educational leader.
- There must be a continuous touching of bases with legislative members and supporting lobbyists from companies or other organizations to assess progress, identify issues and capture concerns.
- Arrangements made for legislators to participate and be the keynoter at the Career Development Conference (preferably, the President of the Senate or the Speaker of the House). Governors and the Chief State School Officer should also be invited to address a general session.

APRIL

- Career Development Conferences are held with active participation by key members of the Legislature as well as the Governor and Chief State School Officer.
- A final budget will be assembled by the Legislature as projected revenue numbers for the next year become available.
- Face-to-face meetings with key legislators and/or participation in events where program staff and board members can be involved are crucial. Program visibility and continuous recognition are crucial.

MAY AND JUNE

- Legislative committees are making critical budget decisions.
- High level of program visibility, recognition and awareness should be the focus of all champions and advocates.
- Issues of concern should be quickly identified and the key committee of the statewide or local boards should be available on a moment's notice.

Recommendation—Recruit a legislator with stature and experience to serve as the chair of a statewide board committee to be a link to the Legislature.

The program's leadership should be actively involved in the legislative process but that's not enough! More eyes and ears are needed to capture and maintain legislative funding. The goal should be to involve as many champions and advocates as possible. Program leaders have a highly accountable, highly visible, and results-oriented statewide program to run!

Recommendation—A “Legislative Committee” should be formed and involve members of the statewide board, corporate or organizational lobbyists that support the program and, potentially, two or three legislative champions. The committee should meet formally on two or three occasions and/or by conference call. The committee should be ready to move immediately to contact key legislators when issues or concerns surface that would jeopardize initial or continued funding.