

AGENT OF CHANGE ADVOCACY GUIDE



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INTRODUCTION

Dear Advocate,

The Agent of Change Advocacy Guide was created to provide tips and best practices on how to be an effective advocate for issues you care about. MENTOR works to educate, train, and provide opportunities for advocates to take action in support of policy that expands youth mentoring. This Advocacy Guide is aligned with [MENTOR's Advocate Academy](#), which encompasses free skill and professional development courses to help individuals develop their personal policy and advocacy abilities and become more effective advocates. Information in the Agent of Change Advocacy Guide can be used by advocates to engage at the local, state, and/or federal levels of government. It is not an all-encompassing resource; rather, it is intended to provide a foundational level of education. We urge you to consider the current context of your community as you implement the actions outlined in this resource.

MENTOR works to cultivate advocacy leaders across the country to lead and provide assistance for policy efforts to expand and enhance community-based youth mentoring programs. Besides MENTOR's Affiliate Network, the [Mentoring Movement's Agents of Change](#) from your state are leaders in spreading opportunities to take action in support of federal youth mentoring policy. Contact them to stay connected with timely opportunities to take action.

MENTOR is committed to your success as an advocate. Thanks for reading!

-MENTOR's Policy & Advocacy Team



POLICY 101

Government in the United States

The United States is a **representative democracy**, where citizens vote to elect officials to represent them at the national, state, and local (county/city) level of government. Legislators at each level of government make policy (or laws) to govern their area of oversight. Generally, federal law supersedes state and local law, and state law supersedes local law. Each level of government has oversight over policy issues, and may also have similar powers, such as collecting revenue and addressing public health/safety.

- **Federal:** managing foreign relations and declaring war are powers specific to the federal government. However, the federal government provides general oversight and law governing all policy issues.
- **State:** states operate as mini “countries,” governed by their own constitutions. They make their own laws on all policy issues, so long as they aren’t contrary to federal laws.
- **Local:** citizens interact with government the most at the local level, including parks and recreation services, police and fire departments, housing services, emergency medical services, public transportation, and public works (i.e. streets, sewers, snow removal, trash pickup).

Each formed government has their own unique set of procedures to conduct business and enact policy. Typically, there are three branches of government (Executive, Legislative, and Judicial). However, local governments are typically “council” structures – meaning, the legislative body is led by the Executive, and made up of members representing districts within the government’s boundaries.

The Legislative Branch

The primary function of the Legislative Branch is to write and vote on new laws. **Bills** are written to enact new laws, which typically follow an approval process and must be voted on by a majority, or, sometimes, supermajority (2/3 or 3/4) vote. Congress and most state legislative branches (besides Nebraska) are **bicameral**, meaning there are two different sets of representatives that are elected. In these legislative branches, bills must be passed by both houses.

In the Legislative Branch, representatives are elected to represent districts that are evenly apportioned by population. These elected officials might be called “Representatives,” “Assembly People,” “Senators,” or “Council Members.”

During each session of business (for a time period that is set in law), the representatives elect leaders to lead the legislative body. More likely than not, these leaders will come from the party that has a plurality of leaders in the legislative body. In the House of Representatives (or Assembly) of the legislative branch, this leader is typically called the “Speaker.” In the Senate, these leaders are typically called the “Majority Leader.” The leader of the minority party is the “Minority Leader.”

The Legislative Branch also holds what is called the “**Power of the Purse.**” This means that the Legislative Branch is in charge of funding the government, usually with approval of the Executive of the government.

In the legislative branch, internal rules define the procedures for them to conduct business. These rules create committees of some of the legislators, who are in charge of specific topic areas of lawmaking. These committees typically have a chair and vice-chair, who hold the most power on the committee, which include setting the agenda, running hearings, and bringing bills up to a vote.

Representatives in the legislative branch may also choose to form a **caucus**, which is an internal group of legislators that come together to signal their support for certain policies or issue areas. There are more formal, well-known caucuses (i.e. the Congressional Black Caucus; Congressional Hispanic Caucus; House Freedom Caucus; Congressional Progressive Caucus) and others for specific topics (i.e. the Youth Mentoring Caucus, Candy Caucus, or the Whiskey Caucus).



Drafting Policy

All governing bodies in the United States have a “code” of general permanent laws, usually organized by subject. A bill amends this code by “striking” and/or “substituting/adding” language with the purpose of addressing a problem the representative is concerned about. Once a bill is drafted, the representative introduces and becomes the **lead sponsor** of the bill for consideration and approval. Often times, the bill will be introduced with **co-sponsors** – which are other representatives that support it. The bill is officially introduced by delivering a copy of the bill to the **Clerk**, which assigns it a number based on the order of its introduction.

In legislative bodies, there are different types of bills for different purposes:

- Regular bills, which typically start with the acronym H.B./S.B. (for House Bill or Senate Bill) or H.R. (which means it originated in the House of Representatives). These bills make changes to the code of permanent laws.
- Resolutions, which typically start with the acronym H.Res. or S.Res. (for House Resolution or Senate Resolution). These bills express the sense of the legislative body’s opinion on an issue (such as a resolution in support of National Mentoring Month) or makes changes to internal rules. However, it does not change the code of permanent laws.
- Appropriations bills, which fund government programs. Because the legislative branch has the power of the purse, they must make decisions of funding levels for each government program for each **fiscal year**.

Elements of a Bill

Though they may look different depending on the procedures of the governing body, there are a few core elements of a bill that are universal and may help you to understand the changes that the legislation would make:

- Short title: a “nickname” for the bill, or how it can be informally identified
- Purpose/findings: this section presents “why” a bill is important. It discusses research, evidence, findings, and beliefs for why the bill should solve the problem it is trying to address.

- Enacting clause: everything written after the “enacting clause” (usually worded “**be it enacted by the...**”) are the changes that are actually being made to the existing code of laws for the government.
- Effective dates: the dates by which the law is expected to be implemented.

The Legislative Process

The process for a legislative body to approve a new policy will differ slightly based upon the procedural rules that they choose to put in place. However, it generally goes as follows:

- A bill is drafted and introduced by a representative;
- The bill is referred to the committee with jurisdiction over the issue being addressed;
- The Committee may choose to take action on the bill by holding a hearing, debating the bill, “marking up”/making edits to the bill, and voting to report on the bill to the full legislative body favorably or unfavorably;
- The full legislative body may choose to take up the bill on the floor, where they can debate it and make amendments;
- If the bill is called for a vote by the Speaker or the members of the legislative body, the representatives vote to approve or reject it.

If the bill is approved, the bill is sent to the other chamber of the legislature and the process is repeated.

If there are differences between the two bills after approval by both chambers, they are reconciled in a “**conference committee**,” which is made up of members of both parties in both chambers. If the bill is approved by the conference committee, it is sent to the leader of the Executive Branch for their final sign off. If the Executive Branch chooses not to approve the bill, the legislative body can typically vote to make the policy law anyway, typically by a 2/3 or 3/4 supermajority vote.

The Executive Branch

The primary function of the Executive Branch is in the implementation of laws passed by the Legislative Branch. The leader of the Executive Branch is elected to represent the entire constituency, and is typically called “President,” “Governor,” “Executive,” or “Mayor.” The leader of the Executive Branch signs approved bills from the legislative branch into law, and also typically has **veto power** over legislation or policies that are approved by the Legislative Branch.

The laws approved by the Legislative Branch are implemented through **regulations** at **government agencies**, which run **programs** created by the legislative branch. The Executive branch also collects tax revenue and distributes it according to law.

Implementing Policy

Even after a bill is approved and becomes law, there are often opportunities to affect how it is implemented through regulations. Often times, legislative bodies will leave certain decisions to Executive Branch agencies, such as grant applications/preferences and reporting requirements. *Note: in 2024, the Supreme Court overturned the Chevron U.S.A. Inc. v. Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc. court case, which will ultimately curtail Executive Branch agencies’ ability to interpret laws that they administer - shifting this power to the Judicial System. The consequences of this decision will be significant over time, and*

it is unclear how deeply it will impact the regulatory system of the Executive Branch and “Administrative State.”

At the federal level, the Administrative Procedures Act requires **public notice** and the opportunity for feedback when implementing regulations to administer and implement laws. The government agency with oversight of the law posts the proposed regulations for 30-60 days on a website, federalregister.gov, where people may offer comments to affirm, alter, or not finalize them. States also have versions of this law.

The Judicial Branch

The primary function of the Judicial Branch is to interpret the law and apply it to individual cases. There are generally three types of courts:

- Federal courts, including district, circuit, Supreme, and certain specialized courts (i.e. Bankruptcy Court and Tax Court).
- State courts, which lead up to a State Supreme Court. States also establish courts that handle specific matters (i.e. juvenile courts and family courts).
- County/municipal courts, which generally handle matters such as misdemeanor crimes or petty offenses.

Other Forms of Local Government

In your state, there may be additional local government structures set up and with oversight by the federal or state government, which may include, but are not limited to:

- School Boards, which provide oversight for and legislate policy and budgeting for school districts.
- Boards of Regents, which provide oversight for and legislate policy and budgeting for systems of higher education.
- Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs), which are state or local entities in charge of workforce programs funded by the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

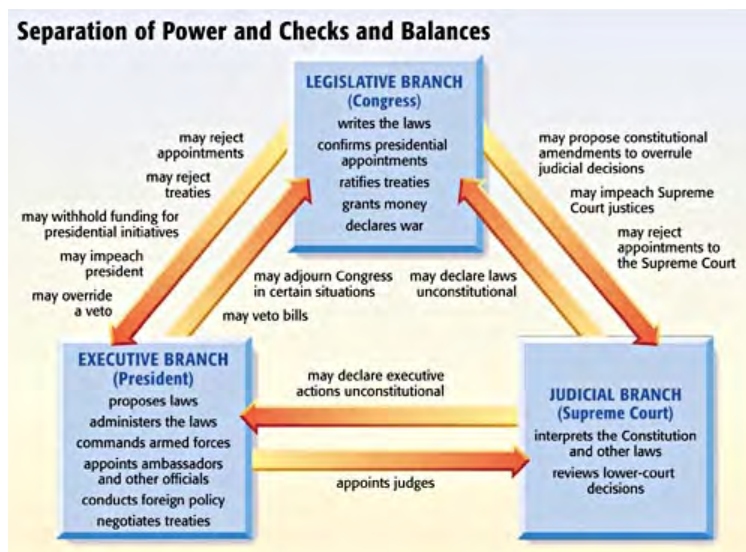


Checks and Balances: What the Government can do for you?

Based on their areas of jurisdiction and oversight, the government can help citizens and constituent groups navigate and try to solve problems in their communities. When citizens or constituents identify a problem, either within their community or with a government agency, the government has tools to address the concern.

- If the government already has policy or funding to address the concern, the problem is usually an implementation issue, to be handled by Executive Branch agencies or the Judicial System.
- If there is not currently policy or funding to address the issue, it is usually a legislative issue, to be handled by the Legislative Branch.

Further, the branches of government have **checks and balances** to hold each other accountable to laws that are enacted.



ADVOCACY 101

Defining Advocacy

Advocacy is an activity by an individual or group that aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and/or social institutions. It can occur in person or digitally, and in public or private settings.

In order for elected officials to address community concerns, they must change the government's **public policy**. That's because it impacts the way that a community operates more than anything else – from how nonprofits and businesses work to meet their missions, to how the average citizen goes about their day. Ultimately, advocating for changes to public policy is how we enact social change.

Types of Advocacy

There are generally three types of advocacy: grassroots, lobbying, and public awareness. Each of these forms of advocacy can be employed through campaigns led by organizations or groups of people.

Grassroots Advocacy

The most critical tenet of grassroots advocacy is that it takes place by individuals in local communities. These advocates collectively organize strategic tactics to educate and persuade decision makers on issues they care about. Fundamentally, grassroots advocacy is about how people advocate for themselves and their community. It can be led by organizations, leaders of campaigns for change, and/or concerned citizens.

Grassroots advocacy is effective because it is the duty of elected officials to listen to their **constituents** and address their concerns. Elected officials are motivated by community recognition, perceived influence, and the desire to be reelected. As such, constituents of elected officials have a more powerful collective voice than any other type of advocacy. Organizers of grassroots advocacy campaigns have a number of tactics at hand, including:

- **Meeting with elected officials and staff:** surveys of congressional staff show that in-person meetings are the most effective way to advocate.
- **Digital campaigns:** contacting your elected officials (usually by calling, writing, or tagging them on social media) to support, oppose, or learn about a policy.
- **Media campaigns:** persuading elected officials to support, oppose, or learn about a policy through advertisements, interviews, or op-eds through mediums such as TV, radio, newspapers, or articles.
- **Public advocacy:** delivering remarks in public settings where other people are present, such as the public comment portion of a public hearing, or a town hall. This tactic not only happens with elected officials present, but could also gain the attention of the community and media outlets.
- **Public demonstrations:** physical and/or visible action to support or oppose a policy, which includes action such as nonviolent protests, boycotts, walk-outs, or marches.

Lobbying

Organizations often contract with or employ “lobbyists” to advocate for the policy issues they care about. Lobbyists (or employees of organizations who spend a significant amount of their time lobbying government officials) are required to register and follow various ethics rules. Direct lobbying involves any attempt to influence specific, pending policies by communicating with government officials.

Lobbyists work to build strong relationships with elected officials and their staff. They do this by using similar tactics that grassroots advocates use: consistent communication, hosting and attending events, and offering their expertise. The best lobbyists advocate strategically with officials based on their seniority, committee assignments, background, and interests, and follow leads.

Lobbyists can help organizations to:

- Monitor, track, and promote legislation relevant to the organization's legislative platform.
- Monitor regulatory changes.
- Draft and find supporters for legislation.
- Facilitate relationships with other key stakeholders that may support the policies.
- Organize advocacy campaigns, events, and meetings between constituents and their representatives (such as a Hill Day).

Public Awareness

Through public information campaigns, organizations can educate the public on a subject they care about. Action may not be explicitly tied in with this form of advocacy; but the campaign often reaches out to audiences of these campaigns later to organize them to take action.

Public awareness tactics might include:

- Events, such as briefings or webinars, that highlight leaders and organizations that speak with expertise and authority on the issue.
- Digital media campaigns, including sharing news, research, impact stories, and data through digital mediums (i.e. newsletters, social media, news sites, TV, or radio).
- Advertising, which could include public community displays such as billboards or flyers.

The best public education campaigns produce accurate and easily consumable information in multiple ways. Further, they are interesting to their audience, timely, and relevant.

Advocacy Communications

Effective communication is critical to persuading elected officials to support your cause. Surveys of congressional staff reveal the following lessons for advocates:

- **Elected officials place a high value on groups and citizens who have built relationships over time with the official and their staff.** Meetings, events in the district, and regular contact from constituents or community groups hold significant sway, and help to build a rapport and strong relationship between advocates and officials/their staff.
- **Elected officials look for specific communication from constituents.** Specifically, elected officials care about hearing a specific ask; the constituent's reasons for supporting/opposing a policy; how a policy would impact the district or state they represent; and personal stories.
- **Direct constituent interactions have more influence on lawmakers' decisions than other advocacy strategies.** In-person visits from constituents, personalized email messages, and phone calls to the offices of elected officials all make an impact on lawmaker decisions.

Communicating with Elected Officials

The most effective and persuasive messages to elected officials:

1. Have a specific ask and clear goal in mind;
2. Discuss the impact, importance, and urgency for constituents;
3. Appeal to the official's perspective and passions;
4. Connect on a personal or human level; and
5. Respond to what the opposition might say.

Determining your Ask

Advocates can ask elected officials to take specific actions to support their cause. These requests can be divided into two categories: policy asks and relationship-building asks. Policy asks are the ideal outcome because they make tangible progress towards the change that advocates are asking for. Relationship-building asks can also be helpful, however, because they can lead to the official responding to policy asks in the future.

Policy asks (ideal)	Relationship-building asks
Mostly for Legislative branch; sometimes Executive or Judicial.	Apply to Executive and Legislative branch officials; helps get to wins on policy asks.
Introduce, vote for, or vote against legislation.	Visit people or places in the community that relate to the issue (i.e. a school-based mentoring program celebration; mentoring conference).
Send a letter to a government agency about a specific concern.	Write an article for your newsletter or local/national media.
Draft or sign onto Dear Colleague Letters (or other formal methods of communication).	Share a message on social media to communicate support for your issue.
Help constituents find and gather information from agencies and research services.	Make a speech on the House or Senate floor about the issue.
Submit a statement to the official record.	Hold a town hall/community meeting on the issue.
For Executive branch: request to change agency rules, such as grant preferences .	

Discussing Impact: Research, Data, and Talking Points

When drafting advocacy messages, it's important to include research to support your claims and demonstrate the critical nature of your ask. The points you make must also be provable and accurate, which is why it's important to consume quality media that reports on the latest research.



To deliver persuasive information that helps to demonstrate the importance of their ask, advocates should:

- Review the websites of trusted organizations for talking points, research, and information.
- Research the officials they're advocating to, including their legislative record, committees, and party
 - To identify the official's history and interest in the issue you're advocating for, Google their name with key words to see if they have past statements on the topic.
 - Search for connections between what you're advocating for and the elected official's life experience.
- Prepare data of your own community and industry impact.
 - Information like the number of constituents affected, estimated economic impact, and success stories from the community can be especially convincing.

Connecting to Humans: Articulating your Personal Story

Officials cite personal stories that have swayed them towards a specific position often. As such, when preparing to communicate with an elected official, advocates should prepare to share a story of impact that demonstrates the importance of what they're advocating for.

Questions that can help frame your story could include:

- Why did you become an advocate for this issue?
- How does what you're advocating for affect you?
- Do you have friends, family, clients, customers, or colleagues with compelling stories that you can share?

Responding to Opposition

Before arriving at a decision, elected officials will do their due diligence to understand all sides of an issue brought to them. As such, advocates should be prepared to respond to opposing viewpoints by identifying and researching potential opponents. Pre-emptively addressing opposing viewpoints in your initial communications may help make your case stronger.

ADVOCACY IN ACTION 101

Ultimately, changing public policy to address community concerns requires effective and timely advocacy actions. Leaders of campaigns will organize various strategic tactics to draw attention and a response to the issue they're advocating for.

As you take action, be sure to consider if the timing makes sense; for example, an elected official may be too busy to participate in a site visit when their legislature is in session.

On the flip side, organizing grassroots advocates to contact their elected officials may be especially effective when there are deadlines approaching that would “kill” the bill or initiative.



Whether you are leading an advocacy initiative or just want to be a good advocate for an issue you care for, this section outlines some proven and effective tactics that you can utilize.

Responding to Action Alerts

At strategic times, organizations like MENTOR will issue an **action alert** to bring your attention to a policy change that it is organizing action on. Through an action alert, organizations will encourage you to submit an email/message, make a phone call, and/or post on social media to get the attention of your elected representatives. Organizations will make this as easy as possible for you by providing template letters/posts or talking points; it can take as little as ***2 minutes*** to do your part!

However, for your message to resonate with the elected official, it is helpful to personalize your message. How will the policy personally impact you and your organization? How could it help your organization make a deeper impact? Are there any stories you can share to bring the point home? Edit template messages to include these points.

Virtual and In-Person Meetings

Meeting directly with elected officials and/or their staff about a specific issue is one of the most effective advocacy tactics. It's important, however, to ensure that your meetings are also productive. Here are some tips to ensure that happens:

Before your meetings

- Contact the office of the elected official to schedule a meeting – identify yourself as a constituent, say what you want to meet about, and identify potential times.
- Do your research – check their voting record and past statements on the issue.
- Have relevant documents pulled up for your meetings.
 - Have talking points written out and available to you.
- Make a plan with any others who will be in the meeting with you.
 - Decide who will speak first and talk about each issue.
- Check in to your meeting early, if possible.

During your meetings

- Introduce yourself and your group.
- Don't shy away from chit chat but be mindful of time. You will likely only have 15-30 minutes in total to get your point across.
- Make your pitch and tell your story. Never mention your support or opposition for them as a candidate or if you donated money to them.
- Carefully listen to how they respond and take notes.
- Get a commitment when possible.
- Promise to follow up with contact information and materials.
- Allow time for questions (both directions).
- Take a picture!

After your meetings

- After meeting with an official or their staff, stay in contact by following up, staying in contact, sending them relevant information, inviting them to events, and continuing to build a relationship.
- Send a personalized thank you note.
- Post on social media about your experience and tag the elected official.
- Follow up immediately with the office with any information you promised; then again 2-3 weeks after that to follow up on commitments.

Site Visits

Organizing site visits with elected officials is a great way for them to see the work you do in action. Here are some tips for coordinating a site visit:

1. Contact the scheduler from the office of the elected official you'd like to invite. In this communication, you should express specific information about your program, the purpose for a site visit (be clear about this request), and potential dates.

2. If you don't hear back initially, follow up! The scheduler may offer for a district representative to visit instead; it's up to you whether to take them up on their offer or propose alternative dates that could work for the elected official.
3. Once a visit is scheduled, work with the elected official's communications staff to coordinate a media and public relations plan, and if there is an opportunity for the official to share remarks.
4. Inform relevant stakeholders (i.e. Board of Directors, volunteers, mentees, parents, etc.) that an elected official will be visiting, and prepare them to answer questions, if appropriate. Do your best to keep the visit educational and respectful. You can always schedule a separate follow-up meeting to discuss specific legislative issues.
5. Create materials to share with the elected official and/or their staff that explain your programming and its impact. Further, be sure to send an agenda for the site visit to the scheduler/point of contact in advance.
6. After the visit, send a thank you message to the elected official and their staff for arranging the visit. Continue to stay in contact with the office to build a stronger relationship and gain their support for your advocacy asks.

Advocating on Social Media

Social media outlets – such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and LinkedIn – are spaces where you can stay up to date and informed on the latest news and trends, including staying connected with community stakeholders, colleagues, and elected officials. They also provide unique opportunities to start a dialogue, share information, and inform people in your network about issues impacting your community. Here are a few tips for effectively using social media to advocate:

- **Complete your profile.** Having a photo and description on your social media profile helps show that you're a real person and adds a human element.
- **Identify who and what to follow.** Effective social media advocates follow the right people and organizations. To start, do a little research and find community organizations who support your cause, local reporters or news outlets, researchers and other experts in your field, and elected officials, and follow them. Some social media platforms let you track hashtags – utilize this to find your state political hashtag, city/town political hashtag, and others of relevance. Often, people will use these hashtags to contribute to the conversation about a specific topic; through searching these hashtags, you may discover new people to follow and interact with.
- **Be social.** It sounds simple, but an overlooked component of social media is interacting with other people's content. It is one way to share your message with others and grow your followers. The more followers you have, the greater impact your content has.
- **Personalize and use visuals or links when possible.** Do not rely on auto-generated content. Consider revising and personalizing any content someone asks you to share. Further, posts that include videos, photos, and links perform better than posts with just text.

External Communications

Working with the media can be a key component of any advocacy effort. There are a few ways you can work with the media to get your message out to a broader audience.

- **Press releases** (or media advisories) are factual, informational announcements about events, awards, programs, studies, accomplishments, etc. They generally come from an organization, as opposed to an individual; convey who, what, where, when, and why; and are distributed to multiple media outlets at the same time. An effective press release can easily be turned into a short article.
- **Op-Eds** are opinion pieces published in a newspaper but written by someone who is not on the newspaper's editorial staff. They are usually 500-800 words, written by someone with subject matter expertise on the topic.
- **Letters to the Editor** are brief, directed responses to a story that has been or is being covered in the newspaper, and usually run on the outlet's official editorial page. They are very short (150-250 words), come from an individual (not an organization), and almost always convey a local perspective. You can use a letter to the editor to respond to a specific news article or column, to share your perspective/expertise, to point out or correct an error, to reinforce a point, and/or to reflect on the significance of an event.

When interacting with the news media, keep in mind these guidelines:

- **Think local.** Start with your local newspapers. Major newspapers are inundated with submissions of all kinds, and are often very difficult to break into.
- **Be relevant, clear, concise, and accurate.** When writing for print, make sure your topic is relevant to the community. Try to tie in a local angle to help the audience connect personally with the story. Avoid meandering sentences and using acronyms. Always be sure to check (and double check!) your facts and sources of information.
- **Understand your audience's perspective.** Even when trying to convey the simplest information, you will be much more effective when you consider why people would care, what's in it for them, what role they may play in the problem/solution, and how the information you are presenting meets their needs.
- **Submit the piece to the right person.** Press releases generally go to the news or metro editor. Letters to the Editor and op-eds would go to the editorial/opinion page editor. This information may be available on the outlet's website; if not, simply call the newspaper and ask for the person who handles the topic or type of piece you are submitting.

Public Testimony

Delivering written or oral **public testimony** when a bill you support (or oppose) is scheduled for a hearing, is a highly effective way to advocate. Be sure to check the committee's procedure for testimony - some committees will only accept certain formats of written testimony or may have time limits for verbal. Some committees will allow as many members of the public as would like to speak on the issue, if they stay within time constraints. Others will limit the number of speakers. Regardless, those testifying will likely have between 2-3, and certainly not more than 5, minutes to concisely convey why the policy change is important.

Coalition Letters

One effective way to demonstrate broad support (or opposition) for a policy is through a letter, signed by community groups. Leading advocates will often draft the letter and distribute it to organizations that may be interested in signing on. Look out for these opportunities and sign your organization on when it makes sense. The advocates who organized the letter will then add the community groups as signatories and e-mail it to elected officials.

Recognizing elected officials

Elected officials are highly motivated by recognition, because they want to be seen as doing good in their community. If an elected official takes a positive action that supports your mission, *thank them publicly* through social media or newsletters. You may also consider creating an annual award for public officials who go above and beyond to support your organization or your cause.

Tracking Legislation

Each governing body's legislative website has a database to help the public monitor its activities, including pending legislation. You can typically find relevant legislation by searching key words; then, you can sign up for regular updates on the bill's status. Finding and tracking this information (when bills are submitted, marked up, or scheduled for a hearing) will help guide you on the best times to communicate with offices about your requests.

Advocacy Coalitions and Partnerships

Finding other like-minded organizations concerned about the same issue will only help you increase your people power and the skills, resources, and information available to you. Coalitions that are diverse and include well-known community groups may help draw particular interest to your issue. Consider building strategic partnerships with these organizations to increase your collective power and demonstrate broad support for what you're advocating for.

Hill Days

A “**Hill Day**” is an event where an organization or group of advocates coordinates participants to meet in person or virtually with elected officials and/or their staff about their policy priorities, in order to encourage them to support it. With multiple advocates visiting with elected officials in one day, there is a higher likelihood of increasing overall support for the policy and creating collective impact.



KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

Administrative state: a term used to describe the power that government agencies in the Executive Branch have to write, judge, and enforce their own regulations.

Advocacy: an activity by an individual or group that aims to influence decisions within political, economic, and/or social institutions. It can occur in person or digitally, and in public or private settings.

Action alert: a message delivered usually through e-mail or social media that encourages people to take action to advocate on a current issue to influence public policy.

Bicameral: a legislature that has two branches or chambers.

Bills: a draft of a proposed law presented to a legislature.

Caucus: a conference of members of a legislative body.

Checks and balances: a principle of government under which separate branches are empowered to prevent actions by other branches in order to share power.

Clerk: a senior administrative officer who supports the legislative process.

Conference committee: a joint committee that is appointed to work out differing versions of a bill.

Constituents: a voting member of a community.

Co-sponsors: a member of a legislature that signs on their official support for a bill.

Dear Colleague Letters: an official correspondence sent by a member of the legislature to their colleagues.

Fiscal year: a 12-month period chosen by a government to coincide with planning, budgeting, or revenue cycles.

Government agencies: a non-political organization within a government that is responsible for administering or overseeing a specific area of study, sector, or field.

Grant preferences: information that government grant reviewers will more significantly consider than other information.

Hill Day: an event where an organization or group of advocates coordinates participants to meet in person or virtually with elected officials and/or their staff about their policy priorities.

Lead sponsor: the representative in the legislature who introduces a bill for consideration; the chief advocate for the bill.

Letters to the Editor: brief, directed responses to a story that has been or is being covered in the newspaper, and usually run on the outlet's official editorial page.

Op-Eds: opinion pieces published in a newspaper but written by someone who is not on the newspaper's editorial staff.

Power of the purse: the authority of the legislature to manage and control the government's budget and spending.

Press releases: factual, informational announcements about events, awards, programs, studies, accomplishments, etc. They generally come from an organization, as opposed to an individual; convey who, what, where, when, and why; and are distributed to multiple media outlets at the same time.

Programs: the activities or responsibilities of an agency used to implement public policies and achieve government priorities as outlined by the law.

Public notice: an official announcement from a government that informs the public about a regulatory or rule change that may impact them.

Public policy: a system of laws, regulations, funding priorities, and courses of action that a government may create and implement.

Public testimony: submitting information, verbally or written, for the official record in order to provide insight to the issue at hand.

Regulations: rules or mechanisms that are created by government agencies to interpret and implement laws.

Representative democracy: a type of government structure where citizens vote to elect officials to represent them.

Veto power: the authority of the Executive to block enactment of a law by not signing a bill presented to them.

By following these guidelines, your nonprofit can navigate election years effectively, maintain a nonpartisan stance as required, and help young people explore civic participation.

NONPARTISAN APPROACH:

- **DO:** Keep all activities and communications nonpartisan. Focus on educating your audiences about candidates and their views, especially those of relevance to your nonprofit.
- **DON'T:** Endorse any candidate or their campaign position on key issues over another.

EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT:

- **DO:** Use local election issues as discussion topics with young people, allowing them to explore and share ideas without judgment.
- **DO:** Share information about candidates' positions relevant issues to your organization equally.
- **DON'T:** Indicate support for a candidate's views on behalf of the nonprofit.
- **DON'T:** Share partisan information or links directly from candidates' campaign websites.

VOTER PREPARATION:

- **DO:** Host voter registration widgets on your website, or share nonpartisan voter registration links on social media and in your newsletters (for example, the [Nonprofit Votes registration tool](#)).
- **DO:** Educate young people about voter registration processes, including early registration opportunities where applicable (learn more about state-specific rules [here](#)).

MAINTAINING BOUNDARIES:

- **DO:** Set clear guidelines for acceptable behavior regarding political views and activities for staff, volunteers, and young people in your program.
- **DON'T:** Allow partisan apparel at work or work-sponsored events.
- **DON'T:** Use work-supplied equipment or emails for partisan activities or donations.

PROMOTE VOTING:

- **DO:** Ensure staff and volunteers have time to vote on Election Day.
- **DO:** Encourage families and mentors to involve young people in the voting process.
- **DON'T:** Penalize staff for using accrued leave time to support voting activities (like driving people to the polls).

PUBLIC EVENTS & SPACE USAGE:

- **DO:** Share information with your audiences about public events featuring all candidates, especially if they will be discussing issues of importance to your work.
- **DO:** Organize ways young people and supporters can participate in these events.
- **DO:** Offer your nonprofit's physical space equally and at fair market rate to all candidates, documenting equal outreach to candidates' campaign officials.

Learn more about the legalities around nonprofits during election years [here](#).

Increasing Funding for Youth Mentoring – Partner & Grassroots Advocacy Toolkit

Drafted with support from Pritika Kharkwal, Youth Advocate

OVERALL MESSAGING:

Main message: One in three young people are growing up without a mentor – constituting America’s ‘mentoring gap.’ In recent years, the gap has continued to grow, and young people under the age of 24 are still in need of and want more mentoring support than they are currently receiving. In fact, almost 70% of today’s young people could remember a time when they wanted a mentor for support, but didn’t have one. One of the core missions of the mentoring movement is to increase public investment into programs at the local, state, and national level to ensure every young person has at least one trusting relationship with an adult in their life, outside of their family.

Goal: To increase government funding to expand and enhance youth mentoring programs across the country.

Priority Ask: Elected officials at all levels of government should legislate and advocate for increased government investment into youth mentoring programs in their community.

TOP MESSAGES:

- **Mentoring and Mental Health:** Mentoring has been shown to have positive impacts on young people in many facets of their life, including their mental health. With a well-documented and significant increase in mental health issues among young people in recent years, mentors can help prevent and intervene during periods of stress, depression, anxiety, suicidal ideation and other mental health challenges that young people may experience.
 - The positive benefits of mentoring on mental health are supported by national studies: “A 2016 evidence review by the National Mentoring Resource Center concluded that mentoring programs specifically designed for youth with mental health challenges have demonstrated meaningful positive impacts on mental health symptoms and academic success of participating youth.”
 - Real world example: Kristin Howard mentors a young adult named Alyssa; Alyssa has shared the life changing effects of mentoring on their life. Mentoring allowed them to find a safe space and inclusive community. Read Alyssa’s story [here](#).
- **Mentoring to Increase Connection and Combat Loneliness and Isolation:**
 - A 2023 report from the Surgeon General, Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation, paints a stark picture of where the nation stands in terms of social connection and belonging: only 39% of Americans indicate that they felt “very connected to others. This can have negative impacts on mental health, productivity, sense of fulfillment in life and other integral parts of life. There may be no more direct way to help reduce isolation and loneliness for a young person than providing them with a relationship that is tailored to their needs and circumstances. Mentoring programs, by definition, are focused on connecting youth to not only individual relationships, but deep engagement with



program staff and other participants. Relationships with supportive adults are considered a key developmental asset; trusting relationships create a nourishing environment for adolescents to explore the world around them and engage in healthy risk-taking.

- **Mentoring and Youth Violence Prevention and Intervention:**

- Mentoring serves as one of the few prevention and intervention strategies that can effectively address multiple risk and protective factors simultaneously. Mentoring has also been found to reduce aggressive behaviors such as fighting, bullying, and delinquency. Effective services can help young people heal, and can assist youth who have engaged or are at risk of being offenders of violence by providing them with role models who support positive, prosocial behavior. Mentoring programs have successfully partnered with agencies, community-based organizations, and private sector entities to implement whole community approaches designed to address violence.

- **Mentoring Special Populations:**

- Mentoring supports young people from diverse, often underrepresented populations, including, but not limited to, youth in rural communities, youth impacted by opioids and substance abuse/misuse, youth with disabilities, military-connected youth, LGBTQ+ youth, and foster youth.
 - Low-income rural youth report some of the lowest rates of mentoring of any demographic group in the country. Studies show many acute benefits to young people in rural communities, such as health improvements, mental health gains, academic achievement, and externalizing negative behaviors.
 - Mentoring offers a practical approach to supporting military youth and their families, and has been shown to improve academic performance and decrease symptoms of depression, while improving social support and parental ratings of stress in the home.
 - Access to caring adult mentors is a protective factor for young people, lowering the likely incidents of drug use and other harmful behaviors. This is especially true in youth who have a parent, caregiver, or other loved one struggling with or dying as a result of drug misuse. Further, because mentoring programs can offer support at all three prevention levels (primary, secondary, and tertiary), practitioners are important resources in combating the opioid crisis. While the primary prevention work is the most critical from a public health perspective, research demonstrates that caring relationships can bolster treatment and recovery.

SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLKIT:

These messages can be used for posting on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or LinkedIn:

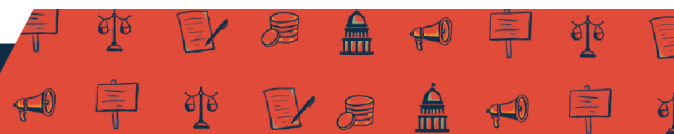
- A public survey in 2019 found that 83% of all Americans express some agreement that government funds should be used for youth mentoring. Advocate for more public funding for youth mentoring at <https://www.mentoring.org/advocacy/>
- 1 in 3 young people in the U.S. will reach the age of 19 without having a mentor of any kind. We must to reduce this gap! Urge your elected officials to invest in the future of our youth and next generations: <https://www.mentoring.org/advocacy/>



- Why mentoring? Because it unites and positively changes the lives of many. Take action and support mentoring funding today: <https://www.mentoring.org/advocacy/>
- The average American gives the mentors they had growing up more than 50% of the credit for their success in life. Invest in the success of our next generation: <https://www.mentoring.org/advocacy/>
- More than 80 percent of adults support government investment in mentoring, and more than 67% are already mentoring or willing to consider it. So what are you waiting for? Take action today and tell Congress to invest in our future: <https://www.mentoring.org/advocacy/>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

- [Tracking and Accessing Public Funding for Mentoring](#), MENTOR.
- [Issue-Specific Advocacy Resources](#), MENTOR.
- [Congressional Communications in Support of Expanding Youth Mentoring](#), MENTOR.



OVERALL MESSAGING

Main Message: Young people with experience in foster care face many challenges, including disruptions in education and a lack of stable and permanent housing that can make it difficult to maintain strong relationships. Mentoring relationships can help young people address mental health issues, support their identity development, and give them a sense of belonging. Further, mentoring at the time of emancipation from foster care can have a positive impact on transition-related outcomes such as employment, housing stability, and avoiding involvement in the criminal justice system. The Foster Youth Mentoring Act seeks to address the greater need for critical programs that support our country's most vulnerable young people.

Goal: To create a competitive federal grant program to provide foster youth with healthy volunteer and peer mentor relationships.

Priority Ask: We owe it to ourselves as a nation to support and protect foster youth by offering them quality mentor relationships and investing in them today. Congress can do that by passing The Foster Youth Mentoring Act.

Top Messages:

- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services estimates that there are over 400,000 young people currently in foster care in the United States.
 - Most youth are in the system for at least a year, with 38% for two years or longer.
 - Unfortunately, as a result of the many challenges that can come with unstable and impermanent housing, disruptions in education, and a lack of strong relationships with adults, only 50% of youth in foster care complete high school by the time they are 18 years old, and only 20% enroll in higher education upon graduation.
 - We all have a role to play in supporting vulnerable young people to be the innovators, leaders and problem-solvers who shape our world.
- The evidence is clear that mentoring services for foster youth are effective prevention and intervention strategies that have a positive impact on a wide range of factors:
 - A 2017 research synthesis of over 30 studies on youth in foster care concluded that mentoring services had a positive impact on mental health, educational functioning and attainment, peer relationships, placement outcomes, and life satisfaction.
 - Additional research has demonstrated that mentoring at the time of emancipation can have a positive impact on several transition-related outcomes, such as employment, housing stability, and avoidance of involvement with a criminal justice system.
 - A study funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) of a transition-age program found that these mentoring programs potentially provide a benefit of three times the public expenditure, for every day in jail that program participants avoid.
- Young people are facing a deficit in access to quality relationships with adults, which we know can lead to positive outcomes in their education, work experiences, mental health, identity development, and more.
 - In recent years, there has been an uptick in the number of youth reporting that they had no mentor at all growing up.



- Even people who grew up with mentors remember times when they wanted more mentoring.
- More than eight out of ten (83%) of Americans support at least some level of the use of government funds for youth mentoring programs.
- Mentoring programs that serve young people with ACEs (adverse childhood experiences) can cost up to twice as much per youth, highlighting the need for additional investment in these types of programs.

THE FOSTER YOUTH MENTORING ACT SUMMARY

- The Foster Youth Mentoring Act seeks to address the need for greater support of mentoring programs that support the country's most vulnerable young people. The bill provides funding to programs that aim to provide foster youth with healthy relationships with volunteer and peer mentors. Specifically, the bill:
 - Authorizes \$50 million funding to expand and enhance mentoring programs that serve foster youth. Grantees may use funding for critical mentor recruitment and screening to ensure long-term and quality mentor-mentee relationships.
 - Provides evidence-backed training to volunteers who serve as mentors to foster youth to ensure that they have a strong understanding of child development, family dynamics, the child welfare system and other relevant considerations that affect foster youth.
 - Ensures that youth voice is included in program development, design, and implementation.
 - Provides funding to support peer-to-peer mentoring relationships for young people with experience in foster care.
 - Ensures that programs receiving a grant follow best practices for screening volunteers and matching mentors with mentees.
 - Increases coordination between mentoring programs and child welfare systems.

WAYS TO ADVOCATE FOR THE FOSTER YOUTH MENTORING ACT

- **Sign MENTOR's Coalition Letter of Support.** Use [this form](#) to sign your local, state, or national organization on to a letter to Members of Congress in support of the Foster Youth Mentoring Act.
- **Advocate and Share MENTOR's Action Alert.** Take just two minutes to [write to your Member of Congress](#) and advocate their support for this bill. Then, share the link with grassroots advocates in your network!
- **Help collect and uplift impact statements.** MENTOR is seeking stories from young people with experience in the foster care system to elevate in the digital media campaign in support of this bill. Selected participants will be compensated a stipend of \$50 for participating. Potential participants can use [this form](#) to express interest.
- **Participate in the Foster Youth Mentoring Act Digital Campaign.** Use the social media templates below and other messages in this toolkit to publicly share your own and your organization's support for this bill.



SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLKIT

Facebook

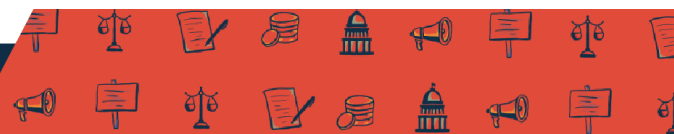
- Youth with experience in foster care often face difficulties including disruptions in education and a lack of stable and permanent housing. But positive relationships with a trusting adult can help them navigate these obstacles. The Foster Youth Mentoring Act helps facilitate these relationships through mentoring programs. Take action today here: <https://www.votervoice.net/MENTOR/Campaigns/104707/Respond>
- The Foster Youth Mentoring Act establishes funding for mentoring programs that serve foster youth. We must invest in the future of opportunity youth in our country! (@ Tag Member of Congress), please support this bill!
- Foster youth represent some of the most vulnerable young people in the United States. There is no time to waste: Congress must invest in relationships and mentoring for foster youth! (@ tag member of congress), as a constituent, I urge you to support this bill!
- Did you know: There are over 400,000 children currently in foster care in the United States? The Foster Youth Mentoring Act would provide mentoring services to prepare foster youth for a better future. Take action today here: <https://www.votervoice.net/MENTOR/Campaigns/104707/Respond>

Twitter

- The Foster Youth Mentoring Act will protect and support foster youth today through relationships and mentoring programs. Support the FYMA today! (@ tag Member of Congress) #MentoringAmplifies
- All youth deserve relationships that support them through life. The Foster Youth Mentoring Act helps do just that. (@ tag member of Congress), as your constituent, I urge you to support this bill. #MentoringAmplifies
- EVERY young person deserves to receive quality relationships, which lead to a better education, mental health, and work experiences. That's why we need The Foster Youth Mentoring Act! Take action here: <https://www.votervoice.net/MENTOR/Campaigns/104707/Respond>
- Our nation's mentoring services and programming must include quality training for mentors & volunteers to support foster youth. The Foster Youth Mentoring Act does just that. Take action to support it today: <https://www.votervoice.net/MENTOR/Campaigns/104707/Respond> #MentoringAmplifies

Instagram

- American society faces significant challenges to ensure vulnerable youth are adequately prepared to enter higher education. Now, there's a bill in Congress that would help address those gaps! Tell your member of Congress: Support The Foster Youth Mentoring Act. #MentoringAmplifies

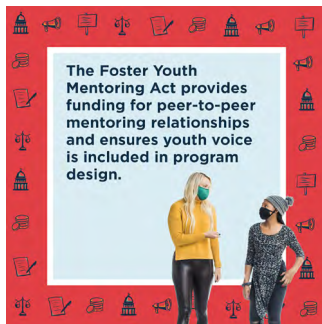


- It's critical that vulnerable young people have access to mentoring relationships that help them prepare for quality education. Tell Congress: invest in young people by supporting The Foster Youth Mentoring Act! #MentoringAmplifies

LinkedIn

- The Foster Youth Mentoring Act invests in mentoring programs serving foster youth serving. Tell your Member of Congress: Invest in the future of the most vulnerable young people in our country: <https://www.voterveice.net/MENTOR/Campaigns/104707/Respond>
- Foster youth often face many challenges: disruptions in education and a lack of stable and permanent housing, just to name a few. Mentoring services could be the key to help reverse this trend for them. Take action to support this bill today: <https://www.voterveice.net/MENTOR/Campaigns/104707/Respond>
- Did you know there are over 400,000 children currently in foster care in the United States? The Foster Youth Mentoring Act would provide mentoring services to give youth the stable relationships they need to build a happy and healthy future. Take action today: <https://www.voterveice.net/MENTOR/Campaigns/104707/Respond>

Graphics



[DOWNLOAD GRAPHIC 1](#)



[DOWNLOAD GRAPHIC 2](#)



[DOWNLOAD GRAPHIC 3](#)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- [Mentoring and Foster Youth Research Summary](#), MENTOR.
- [Foster Youth Mentoring Act, 117th Congress](#), Congress.gov.
- [Mentoring for Youth in Foster Care Model/Population Review](#), National Mentoring Resource Center
- [Resources for Youth in Transition](#), Child Welfare Information Gateway.
- [Resources for Current & Former Foster Youth](#), Foster Coalition.
- [Foster Care Statistics](#), Child Welfare Information Gateway.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[MENTOR's Youth-Led Advocacy Guide](#) is a practical tool for youth mentoring programs, youth-serving organizations, and current and aspiring youth advocates looking to establish and expand effective youth-led advocacy activities and initiatives. This guide was a culmination of the vision and expertise of a team of youth advocates, committee members, and staff at MENTOR Affiliates and MENTOR National.

[Tracking and Accessing Federal Funds for Mentoring](#) is a guide that includes information of how mentoring organizations can access and stay on top of over 15 federal funding opportunities.

MENTOR has periodically released a number of short research summaries to help advocates create messaging that shares evidence of the impact of mentoring on different topics. Past themes include education, youth with experience in foster care, mental health, loneliness and isolation, youth in rural communities, military-connected youth, youth impacted by the opioid crisis, career exploration, and violence prevention. These summaries can be found on **[MENTOR's issue-specific resources page](#)**.

Each January, during **[National Mentoring Month](#)**, MENTOR provides various opportunities for advocates to take action to help elected officials celebrate the power of relationships and commit to investing in youth mentoring programs.