Building an Effective Collegiate State Relations Program

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Agenda

• Background
• “What” and “why” of state relations
• Presidential leadership
• Building networks
• Critical functions
• Institutionalizing a state relations program
Project Background

• AASCU Political Perceptions and Policy Priorities Project
  • Task Force on Making Public Higher Education a State Priority
• First product: *New Compact* report
  • State funding through a political lens
  • Strategies
• Next initiative: 1 of 7 advocacy strategies
  • Utilizing a strategic institutional state relations program
Partnering for Prosperity:
Building and Sustaining a Collaborative Relationship with State Government

• Strong state relations program is critical to strengthening the relationship, responsiveness between institutions and state government

• Yet...

• Institutional state relations programs vary greatly in scope, effectiveness

• Often reduced in time of greatest need
Defining a Collegiate State Relations Program

The continual process utilized by an institution to engage with state government, in collaboration with multiple constituencies, in order to maximize its capacity to meet state needs and objectives.
Concepts for a Collegiate State Relations Program

- Integral to colleges’ DNA
  - Yet—are often neglected or underutilized as an institutional priority, resource

- Strategic not ad hoc

- Structural - funded, staffed & supported
State Relations in the Current Context

• New economic and demographic realities

• Tipping point in the privatization of public higher education

• Decreasing institutional memory and bipartisanship
• Presidential leadership is critical to success of the State Relations Program
Campus Presidential Leadership in Advancing a State Relations Agenda

• Serve as voice and symbol of institution

• Interact with governor, legislative leaders & others

• Oversee State Relations Program

• Stay abreast of key strategic issues
Fostering a Campus-wide Culture of State Relations and Advocacy

• Institutional state relations: as much an orientation as it is a set of activities

• State relations should be a functional unit but not “siloed”

• Encourage and involve diverse campus stakeholders in the process
Institutional State Relations: 
*Building Networks to Link and Mobilize Key Constituencies*

At its core, collegiate state relations involves building relationships among and between the institution’s various constituencies and thinking of these relationships as an interlocking network of advocates who can help strengthen the institution’s relations with state government.

The college president should serve as the leader of this network and should consider the importance of developing the network to be on par with other key functions of the institution.
Constituencies of an Institutional State Relations Program

• Seek to harness the full array of college’s constituencies
• To what extent:
  • Have all stakeholders been identified?
  • Are all stakeholders being mobilized?
  • Are all stakeholders clear on actions they can take on behalf of the institution?
  • Are all stakeholders informed of institutional achievements, priorities?
Internal Constituencies

- Senior leadership team
  - Cabinet, Deans
- System head (if applicable)
- Governing board members
- Governing board staff
- Faculty
- Staff

- Students
- Foundation members
- Economic development officers
- Athletic program leaders
- School mascot?
External Constituencies

- Governor
- Governor’s staff
- State legislators
- Legislative staff
- State budget officials
- State agency officials
- Business leaders
- K-12 education leaders
- Labor leaders
- Municipal leaders
- Non-profit leaders
- Parents
- Donors
- Alumni—General
- Alumni board members
- Relevant state-appointed commissions
- Program advisory group members
- Extension personnel
- College sports fans (in selected instances)
Putting a State Relations Program in Context

Accounting for the state relations function
• Presidential articulation of the function
• Assignment of staff, determination of managerial oversight, reporting lines, budget lines
• Possible use of part-time contract lobbyist to supplement representation in the capitol
• Recommended—direct report to CEO, if not a “dotted line”
Putting a State Relations Program in Context

Year-round nature of the function

• Actions taken prior to legislative session can be just as important
• Communicate/work with Governor/staff well in advance of budget release, state of the state address
• Proactive vs. reactive orientation
Putting a State Relations Program in Context

Working within Parameters of System, State Governance

• Each state has its own unique governance structure
• Establish and follow protocols, division of labor among institutions and system office
• Coordinate to the maximum extent possible
  • Priority setting, communications, messaging
Six Critical Functions
of a Highly Effective Collegiate State Relations Program

1. Create Supportive Networks through Relationship-Building

- Positive Relations: the foundation to mobilizing supporters, energizing
- Genuine, mutually-beneficial motives that address constituents’ needs and goals
- Networks must be continually fostered and sustained
- Equip each network with 4 elements: familiarity with institutional priorities, messaging, call to action, feedback channel
Six Critical Functions
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Leading a Unified Institutional State Relations Team

- Presidentially-charged team, assignment of executing state relations plan to designated individual
- Division of labor will vary greatly based on size of institution
- Involve inputs, actors, feedback mechanisms from throughout campus
- Clear delineation of functions, responsibilities (i.e., communications protocols)
- Clear understanding and communication of top institutional priorities
Six Critical Functions
of a Highly Effective Collegiate State Relations Program

3 Serving as a State Legislative Liaison and Resource

• Vigilant monitoring of state matters with potential affects on the institution: regulatory, budgetary, programmatic
• Quick and constant communication with lawmakers regarding affects, stance, possible modifications
  • Best when communicated in unison
• Understand state budget, legislation development processes
• Institutional orientation: responsive, genuine
• Serve as a liaison, information broker, convener
Six Critical Functions of a Highly Effective Collegiate State Relations Program

4. Facilitating Communications with State Government Constituencies

- Internally—Communicating state policy and budgetary developments
- Externally—Communicating institutional contributions to meeting state needs
- Promoting institutional accountability and fiscal stewardship
- Online state relations presence and use of social media
Six Critical Functions of a Highly Effective Collegiate State Relations Program

5 Building External Institutional Support

• Generate support for college’s state government priorities: legislative, regulatory, funding, programmatic
• Mission affirmation: always convey how priorities benefit the state, and stakeholders’ needs/goals
• Build networks of support among constituent groups (emphasis on the business community)
Six Critical Functions

of a Highly Effective Collegiate State Relations Program

Foster Partnerships to Advance State and Institutional Interests

• Seek opportunities to capitalize on institution’s vast array of resources
  • educational, intellectual, research
  • Facilities: Instructional, laboratory, athletic, entertainment
• Cross-sector collaboration: government, non-profit, private-sector
• Multiplier effect of multiple stakeholders around common issues, potential solutions
Four Steps to Institutionalizing a Campus State Relations Program

1. Conduct an Audit of Current Program

- Organizational leadership of the state relations function
- Current effectiveness of the program
- Constituency engagement
Four Steps to Institutionalizing a Campus State Relations Program

2 Set Measurable and Achievable Objectives

- Should respond to audit findings
- Both short-term and long-term
- Should be measurable
Design and Execute Strategies for Accomplishing Objectives

- Defined activities to pursue objectives
  - What, how, when and whom
- Strategies and tactics
- Assurance that campus structures and resources are in place (staffing, buy-in, funding)
Four Steps to Institutionalizing a Campus State Relations Program

Evaluation and Refinement

• Annual or biennial, adjusting accordingly
• Assess key program elements
  • Program objectives
  • Legislative priorities
  • Structure
  • Staffing
  • Resources
  • Constituency networks
  • Engagement
  • Communications
Next Steps & Commentary

• 1st quarter report release, printed copies to all conference participants
• Ideas, suggestions?

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