

A Practical Introduction to Federal Advocacy for AHA Members

HISTORY AT THE TABLE

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CORE CONCEPTS

WHAT IS ADVOCACY?



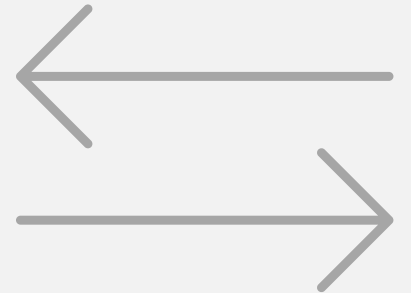
Advocacy



Activism



Lobbying



Influence Peddling

CORE CONCEPTS

WHY DOES ADVOCACY MATTER?

1 Federal decisions shape what historians do.

2 The historical record itself is a federal policy matter.

3 Historians are well-positioned and skilled to advocate effectively.

4 Congress responds to constituents, but it only hears from those who show up.

5 No one else will make this argument if historian-constituents do not.



WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

01

Understanding the Federal Landscape

02

Communicating as Historian-Advocate

03

Engaging on the Hill

04

Key Takeaways and Next Steps



1

UNDERSTANDING THE FEDERAL LANDSCAPE



UNDERSTANDING THE FEDERAL LANDSCAPE

KEY TERMS

Authorization

Legislation that creates or continues a federal program and sets its purpose, structure, and spending ceiling. Does not provide actual funding. NEH, NARA, and IMLS are all authorized by statute.

Appropriation

Legislation that provides actual dollars for a program in a given fiscal year. A program can be authorized and receive \$0 in appropriations. This is the track historians engage most directly.

Markup

The committee meeting where a bill is formally drafted, debated, and amended before a vote. The subcommittee markup is where funding levels for NEH and other agencies are first set — and the most important moment for constituent input.

Continuing Resolution (CR)

A stopgap measure passed when Congress fails to complete appropriations by October 1. Freezes most programs at prior-year funding levels. No new grants, no new hiring, no program growth. CRs have become the norm rather than the exception.

Report Language

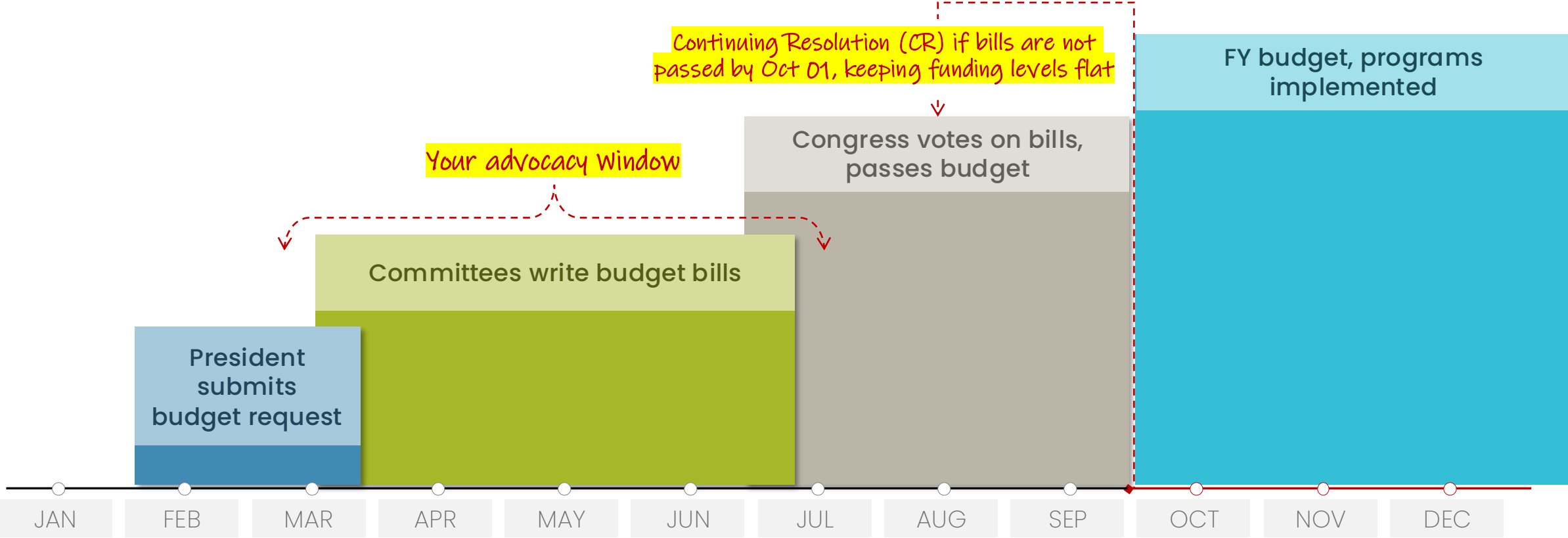
Instructions Congress includes in appropriations reports directing how an agency should use its funds. Not legally binding in the same way as statutory language, but agencies treat it seriously. Can protect or redirect programs without changing dollar amounts.

Subcommittee

The specific committee unit that writes the appropriations bill covering a given set of agencies. Interior and Environment handles NEH, NARA, NPS, and IMLS. Labor, HHS, and Education handles the Department of Education. Knowing which subcommittee covers your agency tells you which members to contact.

UNDERSTANDING THE FEDERAL LANDSCAPE

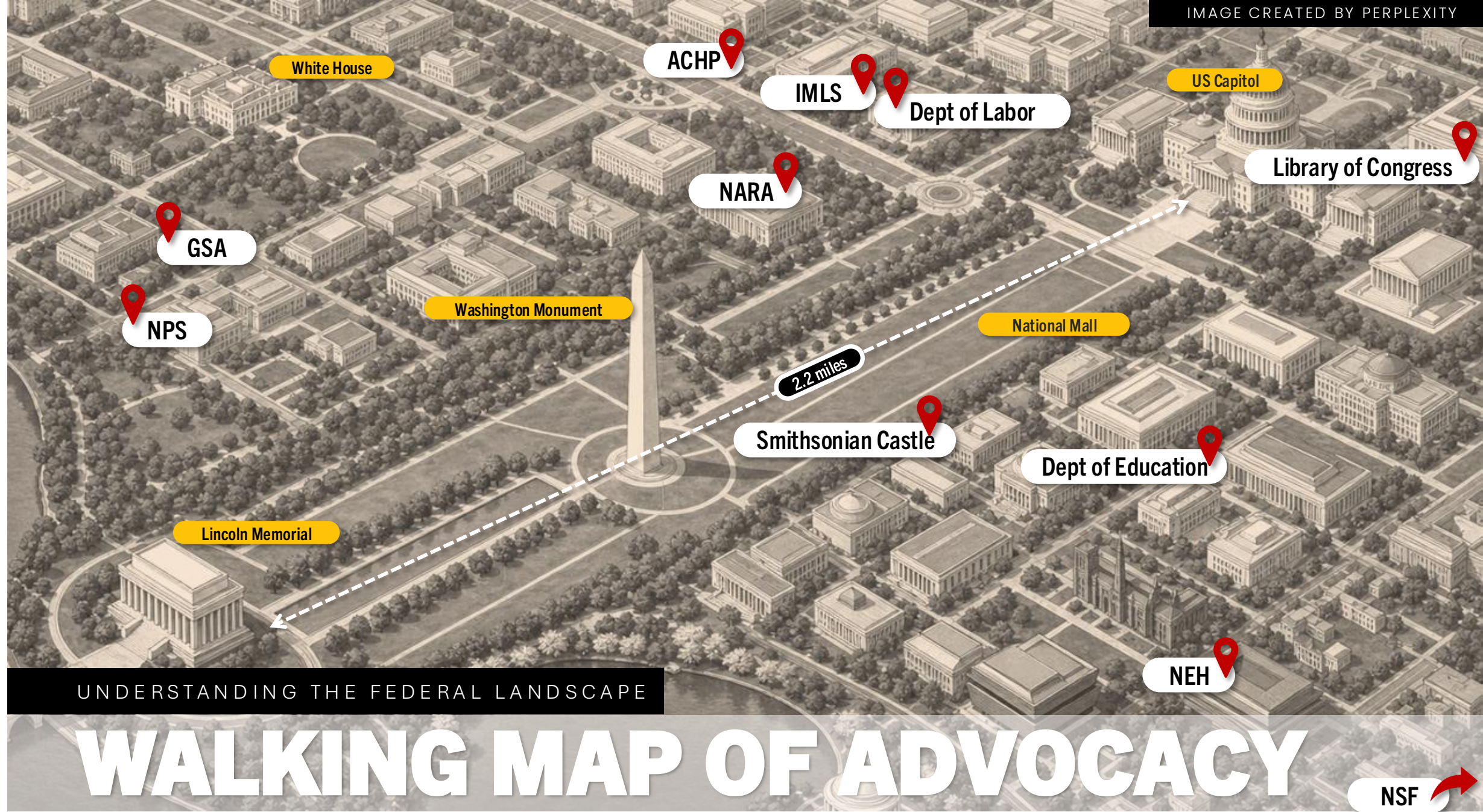
THE APPROPS CYCLE



UNDERSTANDING THE FEDERAL LANDSCAPE

APPROPS SUB-COMMITTEES

SUB-COMMITTEE	AGENCIES	HOUSE	SENATE
Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies	NEH, NARA, NPS, IMLS	M. Simpson (ID, chair) C. Pingree (ME, ranking)	L. Murkowski (AK, chair) J. Merkley (OR, ranking)
Labor, Health & Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies	Dept of Ed	R. Alderholt (AL, chair) R. DeLauro (CT, ranking)	S. Capito (WV, chair) T. Baldwin (WI, ranking)



UNDERSTANDING THE FEDERAL LANDSCAPE

WALKING MAP OF ADVOCACY

NSF 

UNDERSTANDING THE FEDERAL LANDSCAPE

ISSUES THAT MATTER

WHERE ADVOCACY HAS WORKED

Congress rejected elimination of key agencies

The NEH lawsuit is succeeding

IMLS survived and holds in FY2027 House bill

Presidential Records Act case being actively litigated



IMAGE CREDIT: ABC NEWS



IMAGE CREDIT: NBC NEWS

WHERE PRESSURE IS ONGOING

Grant terminations & repurposing

RIFs federal historian workforce

ED reorganization

Academic freedom rule

State curriculum restrictions

Midterm elections



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COMMUNICATING AS HISTORIAN-ADVOCATE



A photograph of a woman with blonde hair and glasses, wearing a maroon top, and an older man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a brown jacket over a red shirt. They are in a library, looking at a book together. Bookshelves filled with books are visible in the background.

WHAT HISTORIANS NEED FROM CONGRESS

- Protect interests of the discipline, profession
- Change policies that interfere with the work of doing good history
- Allocate resources and ensure continued funding



WHAT CONGRESS NEEDS FROM HISTORIANS

- Honest brokers
- Your expertise
- Your skill as educators
- Timely information
- Local stories, data
- Clear, actionable requests
- Recognition for successes

**BEFORE YOU ARE A
SCHOLAR OR AN
EXPERT, YOU ARE A
CONSTITUENT.**



COMMUNICATING AS HISTORIAN-ADVOCATE

MAKING THE ASK

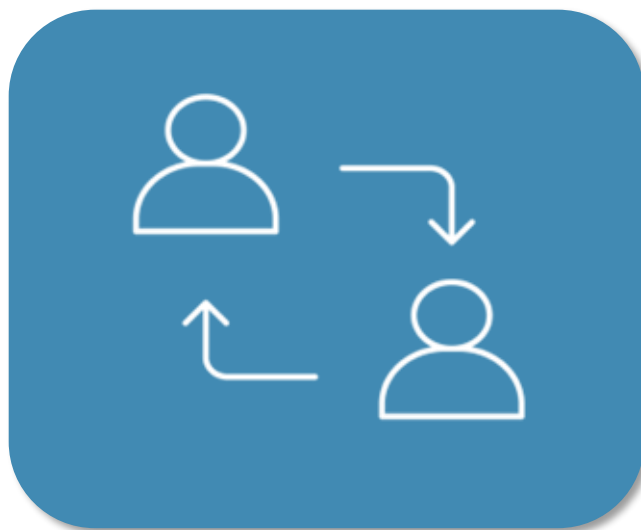


COMMUNICATING AS HISTORIAN-ADVOCATE

SITUATE YOUR EXPERTISE



HISTORIOGRAPHY



PARTNER VS PETITIONER



DIAGNOSTIC HISTORY



COMMUNICATING AS HISTORIAN-ADVOCATE

SITUATE YOUR EXPERTISE



HISTORIOGRAPHY

- What is **one project**, course, or area of research I work on that intersects with agency, regulation, proposed bill, etc.?
- What **pattern or lesson** from that work helps explain what happens when institutions are Underfunded, strengthened, etc.?



PARTNER VS PETITIONER

Which **current decision** on the Hill does this illuminate?



DIAGNOSTIC HISTORY

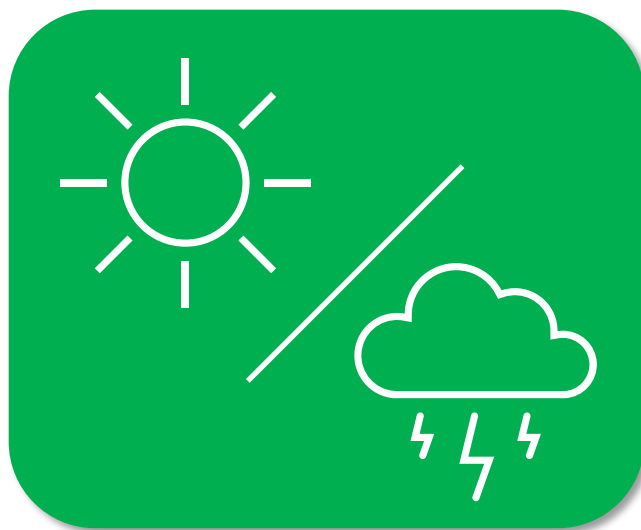
- In my work on topic, the historical record shows that when we do / don't do X, the result over time is concrete consequence.
- That's why the decision you're making on bill, program will likely lead to outcome A vs B.

COMMUNICATING AS HISTORIAN-ADVOCATE

BUILD YOUR EVIDENCE



COMPELLING
LOCAL DATA



DAY WITH VS
WITHOUT SCENARIO



COMPELLING
LOCAL IMPACT



COMMUNICATING AS HISTORIAN-ADVOCATE

BUILD YOUR EVIDENCE



LOCAL DATA

- Student engagement, achievement
- Workforce changes
- Economic impacts
- Population impacts (veterans, rural, voters)
- Global competition, standing
- Historical sites, institutions related to 250th



DAY WITH / WITHOUT

- If program, agency is cut or stuck in a year-long CR, here's what a typical day looks like for student, teacher, etc. in your district: [e.g., stalled grant cancelled class, hiring freeze, etc.]
- If program, agency is funded at level, here's what that same day could look like: [e.g., access to veterans' records, etc.]

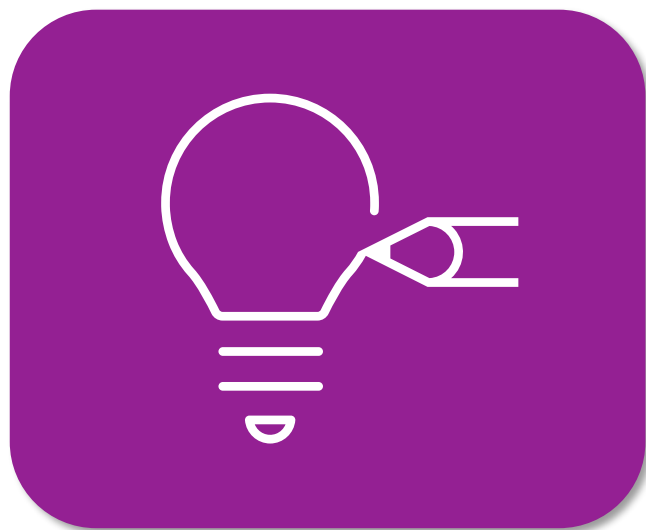


LOCAL IMPACT

- In our district, county, state, this particularly impacts schools, populations, programs, institutions
- YOUR district, schools, alma mater is the perfect example for this issue.

COMMUNICATING AS HISTORIAN-ADVOCATE

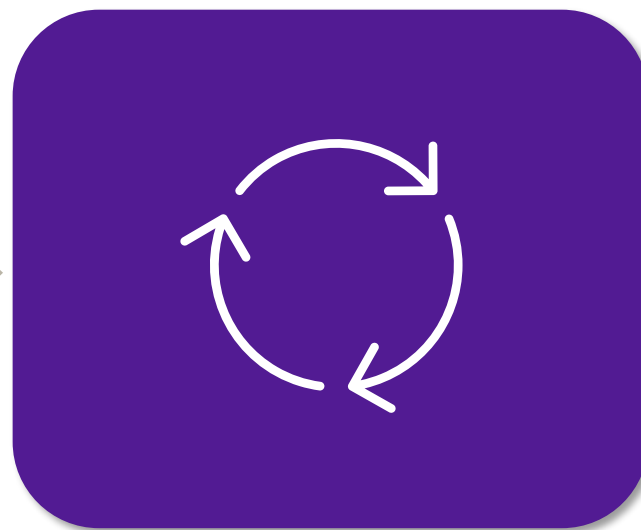
MAKE THE ASK



THE HEADLINE



THE ASK



THE CASE



Request a meeting with NCSS

Kelly McFarland Stratman | kstratman@ncss.org

www.socialstudies.org | @NCSSNetwork

Democracy depends on social studies education.

Democracy requires an informed and engaged electorate, and social studies prepares learners for a lifelong practice of civil discourse and civic engagement in their communities. By examining the past, participating in the present, and learning how to shape the future, social studies centers knowledge of local, national, and global responsibilities and human rights so that learners can work together to create a just world in which they want to live.

Research tells us that it is critical that students participate in civic learning that includes collaboration, cooperation, and consensus-building, an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, and knowledge of the roots of our democracy.

Schools have an obligation to prepare students to be knowledgeable and engaged citizens. Social studies educators have an obligation to help students foster curiosity, explore ideas and connect that learning to the world around them. Using an inquiry-based approach, social studies fosters curiosity by - allowing students to ask deeper questions, engage more fully and think independently, develop empathy and a broader worldview, and become stronger problem solvers.

To mark America 250, we ask that you keep in mind two key facts.

Support for high-quality social studies is key.

Students and teachers thrive when there is consistency in programs, policies, and funding. That means -

- Preserving educational expertise by supporting the professional development of current and new social studies teachers;
- Promoting and building upon successful social studies programs that foster curiosity, inquiry, and debate;
- Implementing research-based and educator-reviewed policies; and
- Respecting academic freedom.

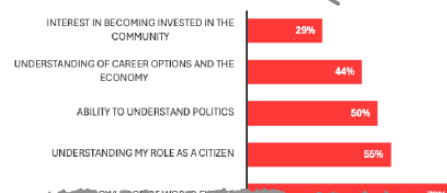
Students see the value of social studies.

NCSS and Encourage surveyed more than 50,000 high school students during the 2024-25 school year. They identified these academic skills and civic benefits as a result of their social studies classes.

Academic Skills Developed



Civic Benefits



COMMUNICATING AS HISTORIAN-ADVOCATE

MAKE THE ASK



HEADLINE



ASK



CASE



3

ENGAGING ON THE HILL



LEGISLATIVE DIRECTOR (LD):
Oversees all policy work, coordinates full legislative portfolio, escalates priority issues to the Member

CHIEF OF STAFF: Manages overall office operations, weighs in on high-priority issues

LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT (LA): Relies on constituents for subject matter expertise, responds to clear, specific, well-sourced asks

SCHEDULER: Controls access to the office

LEGISLATIVE CORRESPONDENT (LC): Handles constituent correspondence and flags (potential) issues

ENGAGING ON THE HILL

CONGRESSIONAL MEETINGS 101





ENGAGING ON THE HILL

BEFORE THE MEETING

How to schedule: If scheduling your own meetings, call the Member's D.C. office. Ask for the Scheduler or the Legislative Assistant (LA) who handles your issue area.

What to say: "My name is name. I am a constituent and role / occupation from district. I will be in DC on date with organization, and I am calling to request a 15-minute meeting to discuss issue."

How to prepare: Work with your organization to outline talking points. Your most important job is to personalize the key message.

- Tell your story
- Focus on expertise, not partisanship
- Define the call to action



ENGAGING ON THE HILL

DAY OF THE MEETING

What to wear: Dress in professional attire. You will be doing a lot of walking between buildings, so wear comfortable shoes.

How to get in: You will go through airport-style security. Bring a government-issued photo ID and allow extra time.

Who you'll meet: You will almost certainly meet with a staff member, not the Member of Congress. It is normal and productive to talk with a Legislative Assistant (LA) or Legislative Director (LD) who handles the issue portfolio you are there to discuss.

Where you'll meet: Capitol Hill offices are crowded. Do not be surprised if your meeting takes place in a busy reception area, at a small table, or even in the hall. Arrive at the members' office 15 minutes early.



ENGAGING ON THE HILL

DURING THE MEETING

Be a constituent first: Start by saying where you live and work in the Member's state or district. This is your most important credential.

Be clear and concise: You have 15 minutes. Deliver the story, make your case, state your "ask."

Be a resource: Staffers cover many issues and may not be experts on your topic. Your job is to be an honest broker of information.

Handle tough questions: If you don't know the answer to a question, do not make it up. Simply say: *"That is an excellent question. I will find that information and follow up."*

Be memorable: Make sure the office remembers this conversation:

- Take a photo
- Leave copies of your one-pager + contact information
- Say thank you + restate promised follow-ups





ENGAGING ON THE HILL

AFTER THE MEETING

Post on social media: Post your photo and tag the lawmaker and your organization. Say, for example: "Great meeting with @Lawmaker'sHandle office today to discuss the importance of [Key Issue] for state / district . Thank you for your time! #Organization

Follow up in writing: Send a brief email to the staffer you met within 24 hours. Reiterate your ask and attach a copy of the leave-behind.

Follow through: If you promised to follow up with an answer to a question or to provide additional information, do so promptly.

ENGAGING ON THE HILL

THE FOUR “R”s



4

KEY TAKEAWAYS + NEXT STEPS



KEY TAKEAWAYS

ADVOCACY CROSSWALK

	Federal	State	Institutional
Contact	Member of Congress or Legislative Assistant	State legislator or legislative staff	Provost, dean, department chair
Credentials	Constituent (voter)	Constituent (voter)	Employee, faculty member, alumnus
Ask	Program funding, report language, agency oversight	Curriculum standards, state humanities council funding, public records	Budget allocations, policy decisions, hiring + tenure
Staff	Young generalists covering 30–50 issues	Often part-time or volunteer staff	Administrators with competing priorities
Tools	The constituent expert: local impact + disciplinary evidence	The constituent expert: local impact + disciplinary evidence	Peer voice: colleagues + students carry weight
Timing	Appropriations cycle: March–July	Legislative session varies by state	Budget planning cycles; academic calendar
Skills	Storytelling, specific ask, constituent framing, state + local data	Storytelling, specific ask, constituent framing, state + local data	Storytelling, specific ask, institutional data

KEY TAKEAWAYS

NEXT STEPS

THIS WEEK

- Find your 3 members of congress
- Sign up for AHA Action Alerts
- Draft a two-sentence constituent statement

THIS MONTH

- Contact your representative's office
- Write one letter or email to your Member on a specific issue
- Identify 1 colleague, organization to partner with

BUILD TOWARDS

- Request a hill meeting if travelling to DC
- Respond to the next AHA call to action on NEH appropriations
- Connect with your state humanities council



THANK YOU.

