

A MANUAL FOR COMMUNITY COLLEGE LOBBYING

by

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## ABSTRACT

It is the responsibility of the leaders of the higher education institution to ensure that the community college stays relevant by keeping members of the state legislature informed and aware of the needs of the college. The impact on a college that does not know how to effectively lobby its state representative directly affects student success. This study focused on researching strategies and tactics for community college leaders to use to lobby their state legislatures effectively.

Qualitative research in the form of interviews with staff members of the Texas legislature informed this study. Information from the interviews was intertwined with the knowledge and experience of the researcher and combined with available literature and resources in lobbying the state legislature. The study's focus areas were lobbying laws, the legislative process, preparation to lobby, and the relationship between college leaders and elected officials. This product dissertation was conducted to create a manual focusing on community college lobbying strategies and tactics for community college leaders. The researcher conducted the phenomenological study based on personal experience working in the United States House of Representatives coupled with qualitative research to inform a helpful product and fill a gap in current knowledge. The manual will serve as a resource for community college leaders who desire to begin lobbying or improving a current program.

**KEY WORDS:** community college policy, lobbying, state legislature

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### INTRODUCTION

Every other year the Texas legislature meets in January for a regular session lasting six months. The 31 state senators and 150 state representatives gather in the capitol building to form committees, hold hearings, and vote for legislation on the floor of each chamber. Decisions made by the state legislature affect community colleges. Whether it is a bill about allowing community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees, tying funding to student outcomes, or making changes to the formula allocations put forth in a bill, a community college should have input and dialogue with their respective representative and senator. It is the responsibility of the leaders of the higher education institution to ensure that the community college stays relevant by keeping members of congress informed and aware of the needs of the college.

In the 2023 legislative session, one of the overall topics the legislators will address affecting the state of Texas is how to spend the budget surplus (Harper, 2023). Community colleges in Texas are also closely watching a bill that would base their state funds on student program completion rates (McGee, 2022a). As these topics are addressed and the bills debated, community colleges have the opportunity to advocate for what they know will help the college the most. It is worth the time and effort for the college to stay informed and be actively involved in the legislative process.

## **TERMINOLOGY USED IN THIS STUDY**

For the purpose of this study about working with state legislatures, the state-level elective representatives and senators will be referred to as “members” or “the member.” Additionally, the term “congress” refers to both the house and the senate together.

## **IMPORTANCE OF THIS STUDY**

All community colleges nationally must maintain a working relationship with their legislative members who represent the district in which the community college is located so that they can support the mission and vision of the college. In the researcher’s experience, it is a common practice for community college leaders to gather a group of college employees or even students and send them to the state capital to “lobby” the state legislature on a particular issue or bill that is pending. In most instances, however, community colleges are unaware of the best methods for lobbying their state legislature, and there are no clear guidelines available to help them that are focused on the specific needs of community colleges.

Community colleges, no matter the size, are compelled to create and maintain a relationship with their members of congress. Awareness of the proposed legislation pending before the state legislature that could affect the community college is essential for community college leaders, particularly the chancellor, president/CEO, and the board. While most community colleges do not have the capacity for an entire team devoted to following the legislature’s activities, there are times when crucial pieces of legislation are being crafted or debated in which the college wishes its voice to be heard and its opinion to be known. It is at this point that the typical community college will ask for volunteers to go to the capital to meet with the legislators. In some cases, various staff, faculty, or administrators are tasked with

going to the legislature to make a case with the members of congress. Often, community colleges have a reactive approach to the state legislature rather than a proactive approach to lobbying.

Lobbying the state legislature can be quite a successful endeavor when the college has a specific goal and an understanding of the legislative process. For example, in 2019, Lone Star College-Tomball desperately wanted to have its program for students with cognitive disabilities recognized by the state legislature. The college has a program called lifePATH, which is a program for adults with cognitive disabilities that affect executive functioning. In the lifePath program, students take classes together in a cohort for two years. Upon completing the program, they can continue taking courses to eventually earn an associate degree. The lifePATH program was designed to serve a population of students who were not being served and did not have access to an associate degree. House bill 3165 began the process of making lifePATH a recognized program, but it needed some help. Dr. Lee Ann Nutt, president of Lone Star College-Tomball, worked directly with the State Representative, Dr. Tom Oliverson, who authored the bill to edit the bill as needed. The chancellor of the college was also involved. Ultimately, Dr. Nutt testified before the Texas House Higher Education Committee to explain the importance of the program (Cruz, 2019). The legislation was passed out of committee, brought to the floor, and passed. It eventually passed the Texas Senate as well and was signed into law by the governor.

There is a reciprocal relationship between the members of congress and the community college located in their district: "It's clear that higher education and government desperately need each other to create a high-functioning democratic society and national prosperity"

(Bowles, 2022, para. 2.). While community college leadership should maintain a relationship with elected officials, it is equally beneficial for elected officials to have a healthy relationship with the college. Community colleges serve the local community by expanding access to higher education and meeting the community's educational and vocational needs.

Public community colleges serve a vital role in our state's economy by developing our workforce and preparing students for further academic study. Created specifically to expand access to higher education, the state's 50 community college districts also play an important role by meeting the specific educational and vocational needs of their service areas. (Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, 2018, para. 1.)

The campus of a community college is a hub of activity as they host local events and bring in community members for a wide variety of events. The campus is also a convener of opportunities for elected officials to interact with their constituents. For example, the local Chamber of Commerce meets at Lone Star College each month: "In fall 2017, 46% of Texas' higher education students—about 700,000—were enrolled in community colleges, more than any other type of institution of higher education" (Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, 2018, para. 3.). Members of congress benefit politically from staying involved in the community college, but they also are able to better serve their constituents through interaction with the people they represent at local community college events. The college serves as a place where a member of congress can listen to a wide range of constituents while also understanding the value that a community college brings to the community.

## **LOBBYING – DEFINITIONS AND GUIDELINES**

The Texas Ethics Commission defines lobbying as "making direct communications with members of the legislative or executive branch of Texas state government to influence legislation or administrative action" (Lobbying in Texas: A Guide to the Texas Law, 2022, p. 4). It

is important to define “direct communication.” The Texas Ethics Commission leaves no room for confusion in noting that direct communication includes “contact in person or by telephone, telegraph, letter, facsimile, electronic mail, or other means of communication,” which would cover texting and direct messaging (Lobbying in Texas: A Guide to the Texas Law, 2022, p. 4). Each state defines lobbying, and each state determines whether lobbying registration is required. In Texas, there are thresholds for compensation, reimbursement, expenditures, and time. If representatives of the college reach the designated monetary threshold for compensation, reimbursement, or expenditures, they are each required to register as a lobbyist. The Texas Ethics Commission establishes the amounts of each threshold.

Some Texas colleges choose to hire an outside lobbyist or lobbying organization to represent the college. This is considered lobbying by the college, and the lobbyist would naturally be registered as a lobbyist. It must be noted that if the community college communicates with the member or the staff of the member to “generate or maintain goodwill for the purpose of influencing potential future legislation or administrative action, the communication is a lobby communication” (Lobbying in Texas: A Guide to the Texas Law, 2022, p. 4).

The number of hours spent on lobbying activities also must be considered. In Texas, whatever a college representative’s lobbying activities are, and no matter how much they are compensated or reimbursed, if they spend less than 40 hours lobbying during a calendar quarter, they are not required to register as a lobbyist. This is an incentive for colleges to use staff members for lobbying activities. However, the 40 hours include preparatory activities, so the hours can accumulate quickly. Also, if the lobbying time is below 40 hours, but the person’s

expenditures exceed the expenditure threshold, then the person must register as a lobbyist (Lobbying in Texas: A Guide to the Texas Law, 2022). The Texas Ethics Commission's page called "Starting to Lobby" provides a checklist to help a lobbyist determine if they are under the compensation and expenditure thresholds (Starting and Ending Lobbying, n.d.). Registering is not difficult, but there is a cost involved. Currently, there are 11 colleges in Texas that are registered with the Texas Ethics Commission, with individuals officially lobbying for them (Texas Ethics Commission 2022 Lobbyists, 2022).

The other dynamics of the relationship between the college and elected officials can be even more important than the act of lobbying. These communications include the college providing factual information about higher education to the representative or senator upon request. The college can request a written interpretation of a law, regulation, rule, policy, practice, or procedure that is already in place (Commission Rules Chapter 34, n.d.). During a hearing, the college might be asked to provide a staff member to make a public comment at the hearing in person or in writing because they can provide expertise in the area of higher education. This is not considered lobbying. There can also be conversations at the college between staff members about legislative matters. This would not be considered lobbying.

### **SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS**

Since 1924, Texas has had a community college association whose main purpose is to build "and maintain relationships with legislators to promote its primary mission of advocacy" (Texas Association of Community Colleges, n.d., para. 4). From 1924 to 1947, the group was called the Texas Public Community/Junior College Association; however, since 1947, it has been named the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC). This organization has a legislative

committee made up of 16 Texas community college presidents and chancellors whose purpose is to advocate for Texas community colleges in the state legislature. TACC tracks legislation and provides a recap of the bills passed at the end of the legislative term. Of the 50 community colleges in Texas, 45 of them are members of the TACC. There are other organizations that advocate for community colleges, such as the Community College Association of Texas Trustees (CCATT), the Texas Community College Teachers Association (TCCTA), and the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB), all showing that there is a rich history of community colleges support and advocacy at the state level.

Community colleges located in states other than Texas can search for supporting organizations within their state: “There are 24 states in which a statewide community college association represents trustees, CEOs, and/or both” (ACCT, n.d., para. 1) Some of the states that have active associations include Michigan, California, Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, and Maryland. Each association has a unique focus, whether it be active lobbying or simply watching the legislature and making official statements. Being aware of the state organizations and their activities and efforts to lobby on behalf of community colleges can help college personnel target their own efforts.

Since 1991, lobbying in the state of Texas has been regulated by the Texas Ethics Commission. This commission was created by an amendment to the Texas Constitution that Texas voters approved, and the commission has rule-making authority when it comes to lobbying (Ethics Commission: Promoting Public Confidence in Government, 2017). The laws that govern lobbying in the state of Texas are housed in the Texas Government Code, which includes the Texas Constitution and all statutes that are a part of the constitution, making up Texas laws.

The Texas Ethics Commission maintains a document called “Lobbying in Texas,” which explains the current lobbying laws. Those in other states interested in lobbying for their institution would be wise to look for similar documents in their respective states.

## **THE STATE LEGISLATURE**

The Texas state legislature is made up of two bodies, the house and the senate, much like the federal legislature. The state has 31 seats in the Texas State Senate and 150 seats in the Texas House of Representatives (State of Texas: Texas Legislative Council, n.d.). It is important for community colleges to maintain a relationship with their members so that when there is a bill before the legislature, the college is in a better position to voice its opinion or explain the impact the bill will have on the college. Waiting to meet a member of congress for the first time because there is a bill up for a vote is too late.

It is imperative that community colleges understand the statutory prohibitions related to lobbying as defined by their state. While this study will refer to laws that regulate lobbying in Texas, the study focuses on the relationships that are established, the communication that takes place, and the best way to use college resources to accomplish the mission. Community colleges need to reach out to the legislative members from time to time to advocate the position of the college either for or against the passage of a bill, but there are other times when the member from the district in which the college resides will reach out to the college to seek information about higher education issues. In either case, already having a relationship established between the members’ offices and the college administrators sets both up for successful communication.



## HOW THE TEXAS LEGISLATIVE PROCESS WORKS

Community college leaders will be better prepared to advocate for the college in the state legislatures if they understand how the legislative process works. For states other than Texas, the website for the federal level congress has a convenient page with direct links to the state legislatures of all 50 states. The page is found at [congress.gov](http://congress.gov). The legislative process in Texas is explained in detail at [Texas.gov](http://Texas.gov), and the following is a summary of the process (Texas House of Representatives, n.d.).

Members of the Texas House and Senate get ideas for legislation by listening to their constituents—the people they represent. They can also get ideas for bills that grow out of interim committee studies that are completed outside of the regular legislative session. Members write bills, often with legal assistance. Any member of the house or senate can write and propose a bill. Bills are introduced on the floor by providing a copy of it to the house or senate. Sometimes a similar bill is introduced in the other chamber because of collaborative work between members. For example, a senator may draft a bill in coordination with the representative from their district. The senator would propose a bill in the senate chamber, whereas the representative would propose a bill in the house chamber. The similarities in the bills would stem from the collaboration, and if both bills passed their respective chambers, the differences would be worked out later in a conference committee. Bills can originate in either chamber except for bills that raise taxes or raise money to be used by the state. Those bills must originate in the house. Bills must be introduced during the first 60 days of the 140-day session, or special provisions must be made (Texas House of Representatives, n.d.).

Once a bill is introduced to its chamber, its summary must be read aloud to the chamber. The bill is then assigned to a committee, and from there, it waits for consideration or in some cases, is assigned to a subcommittee. Committee chairs decide when to meet and which bills will be considered. Public testimony is usually solicited for bills to allow citizens to present information or explain different sides of the bill. The bill must pass out of the subcommittee, if there was a subcommittee, and pass out of the committee before it can be considered on the floor of the chamber. If the bill reaches the chamber floor, each body, the house and the senate, have their own process for deciding whether or not the bill will be considered for debate. If the bill is debated on the floor by the full body, any member may offer amendments to the bill. A bill can pass by voice vote or recorded vote, and when it passes, the amendments are added, and it is sent to the other chamber, where it is referred to committee to begin the same journey (Texas House of Representatives, n.d.).

The Texas Legislative Council is the organization that assists members of congress in writing bills. Their website provides detailed information about how a bill moves through congress (See Figures 1 and 2 in Chapter Four). Flowcharts are also available and would be good resources for anyone trying to learn the Texas legislative process (Publications, n.d.).

Knowing the process of how a bill moves through the state legislature helps the college leaders know when and where to utilize their lobbying resources. For example, if a bill is sitting in a subcommittee and has not moved, it would not be as crucial to meet with a member about the bill as it would if the bill were sitting on the calendar about to be debated on the floor of the chamber. Anyone who lobbies for the college or represents the college's interests and

communicates with the members would benefit from knowing how to speak about the bill's status and prospects of reaching the floor for a vote.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

In Texas, 22% of community colleges are registered with the Texas Ethics Commission for lobbying (Texas Ethics Commission, 2023). This means that 78% of the community colleges are either not participating in the legislative process or are working below the thresholds that require registering with the Texas Ethics Commission. The impact on a college that does effectively lobby their state representative directly affects student success because no matter what the bill is about, if it addresses community colleges, students are affected. Student success is at the heart of every community college's mission. The impact is also a loss of time and resources for the staff members who are asked to lobby as well as a missed opportunity for the college to impact the proposed legislation. The cause is a lack of understanding and knowledge of how the college can best use its time and resources.

In this study, the researcher will provide concrete and valuable assistance for community college leaders to understand the value and process of lobbying the state legislature. The product of the study is a concise manual that provides strategies and tactics for community college leaders to effectively lobby their state legislature. It also guides college personnel in establishing and maintaining an ongoing relationship with the state legislators representing the district in which the college is located. While the focus of this study is on how community colleges can effectively lobby their state legislatures with a focus on the Texas state legislature, the principles apply to all state legislatures, including the unicameral Nebraska state

legislature. Each community college should familiarize itself with the makeup and procedures of its own state legislature to make appropriate applications of the study.

### **GOAL OF THIS STUDY**

The goal of this study was to create a manual of strategies and tactics that community college leaders can use to lobby their state government. This manual fills a need for community colleges because it can help them focus their efforts and understand the lobbying process so that they are using their resources most effectively.

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLE BEHIND THE MANUAL**

The guiding principle providing the basis for informing and guiding the manual to achieve the intended purpose and is as follows:

- What strategies and tactics must community college leaders employ to be effective lobbyists in their state governments?

### **CONCLUSION**

When a community college lobbies the state legislature, the people representing the institution must understand that they should meet with their own respective house and senate members. They should know what efforts have already been made on their behalf by supporting organizations that understand issues facing community colleges. Knowing the legislative process is key to understanding where legislation is within the journey to the chamber floor. There is currently a gap in resources for community colleges and lobbying their state legislature effectively. The time and money spent to influence state elected officials can be wisely channeled to the right people at the right time with guidance.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### INTRODUCTION

No matter the state in which a community college resides, identifying the tools and information available to help navigate the legislative system of the state is essential. It is crucial to understand the ins and outs of the state's legislative process as well as the resources that are already in place to help community colleges use their time and resources most efficiently.

Within the scope of the literature review related to lobbying the state legislature of Texas, common categories of information should be available in every state in the union. The laws that govern lobbying should be reviewed. There may be organizations that already exist whose purpose is to lobby on behalf of higher education institutions, and some may focus solely on community colleges. These groups often have useful websites that offer resources for anyone who is planning to lobby. Knowing the history of how the community college has attempted to lobby in the past will prevent repeating actions that were not successful. Finding out if there are lobbyists who are known to the legislature and are already working on issues that are related to the college could also be beneficial. Along with knowing the laws that govern lobbying, it is vital to understand the process by which a bill moves through the legislature. Staying abreast of news about the legislature can be educational, and that includes the election cycle of the representatives and senators.

## LAWS

Lobbying in the state of Texas is regulated by the Texas Ethics Commission. This organization publishes a guide to Texas law that is essential for understanding the laws that govern lobbying in the state. The guide is written in layman's terms and helps a community college determine if they will lobby to the extent that they need to register with the state. It also outlines what representatives from the college can do and what limits they have (Lobbying in Texas: A Guide to the Texas Law, 2022). The publication is essential because it succinctly outlines reporting thresholds and helps a community college define lobbying so that it determines the level to which it would like to become involved in the legislative process. The guide is more user-friendly than navigating the Texas Constitution and Statutes.

The Texas Constitution and Statutes provide the statutes of Texas, called codes, which are part of the Texas Constitution (State of Texas, n.d.). The codes are updated after each legislative session, which in Texas means every other year since the Texas legislature meets every other year. The statutes are divided into codes such as the Agriculture Code, the Education Code, and the Election Code. Section 571 of the Government Code is what the Texas Ethics Commission uses to create its lobbying guide. The two documents contain the same information, but the lobbying guide is easier to understand, whereas the Texas Constitution and Statutes site is written in legal language and may be harder to interpret and apply to the community college setting. Similarly, Chapter 305 of the Government Code specifically addresses when lobbyists need to register as lobbyists and when they do not. This is the actual law that the Texas Ethics Commission is interpreting when it creates the Lobbying in Texas document. The commission often quotes this law when defining lobbying. Lobbying takes place

when the person “Communicates directly with a member of the legislative or executive branch to influence legislation or administrative action” (Registration of Lobbyists, Title 3 Texas Legislative Branch, Section 305, 1985). This means that any variation of the phrase about communication includes contact in person or by telephone, telegraph, letter, facsimile, electronic mail, or other electronic means of communication. The definitions in Section 305 are also important because they clarify that any effort to establish goodwill with a member of congress for the purpose of later communicating to influence legislation is still considered lobbying. That means that the time spent on a campus tour by the member or a dinner just to chat would need to be calculated into overall lobbying time as community college leaders determine whether or not individuals have spent enough hours lobbying that they need to register with the state as an official lobbyist.

The Texas Ethics Commission also provides a breakdown of Section 305 with hyperlinked chapters for easy navigation. One of the subchapters is called Chapter 34 of Commission Rules – Regulation of Lobbyists (Commission Rules Chapter 34, n.d.). This chapter includes definitions from the Government Code Section 305 and explanations about registration requirements. This resource is helpful for community college leaders if they want to go straight to the explanation about registering as a lobbyist. However, the lobbying guide created by the Texas Ethics Commission contains the information worded in a way that will be easier to interpret for the average person.

Beyond reading the actual laws about lobbying or reviewing the guide created by the Texas Ethics Commission, another way to become familiar with the application of the laws is by reading articles about the laws. Transparency USA is an organization that aims to provide

information about lobbying in every state. The site allows one to choose the state and read articles about lobbying in that state, which often requires the organization to analyze the laws that govern lobbying. This organization is important because it watches the money and informs the public. In the article “How the Sausage Gets Made,” the daily spending limits for lobbyists in Texas are explained, which would be helpful for a community college to see the application of the law. “Lobbyists in Texas enjoy a high threshold for detailed reporting. They are only required to report lobbying expenditures if the amount exceeds 60% of the legislative per diem, which is currently set at \$221 per day. This means only expenditures more than \$132.60 per legislator lobbied, per day, must ever be reported to the TEC” (Transparency USA, 2021, para. 9). This high threshold for reporting stands in contrast to the campaign contributions that take place when the legislature is meeting.

During each regular session of the Texas Legislature, campaign contributions for statewide officials and legislators stop, with these politicians barred from taking any campaign contributions. A donor who wants to contribute \$100 to a legislator may not do so until 30 days after the session ends in late May. This is designed to prevent donors and PACs from currying favor with legislators while they are casting votes. Lobbyists, however, may continue making expenditures of any amount to influence legislators during this time. (Transparency USA, 2021, para. 12)

Information like the reporting that watchdog organizations do, such as Transparency USA, can help the community college understand how the rules surrounding lobbying are followed so that the institution can make its own decisions.

## **LEGISLATIVE PROCESS**

Knowing the rules and laws that govern the state’s lobbyists is as important as knowing the legislative process. The Texas House of Representatives provides an overview called “How a Bill Becomes a Law” that walks the reader through the process of a bill moving through



congress (Texas House of Representatives, n.d.). While both the house and senate are covered, this document focuses more on the house side. Since this document is a single-spaced narrative format, it is also useful to have flowcharts for both the house and the senate sides. A flowchart is important because it allows one to find where a piece of legislation currently sits, such as in a committee, and follow the process of where it needs to be in order to move through to the floor. The Texas Legislative Council provides the process flow charts for both chambers (Publications, n.d.). The council also serves as an impartial, nonpartisan legislative agency that provides research and information to the legislature. They help members write bills and obtain information “on specific legislative problems or matters affecting the general welfare of the state” (Council, n.d., para. 1) The Texas Legislative Council literature can provide is important because a community college needs to know where members obtain their information and data related to bills that affect the college.

Part of understanding the legislative process includes being able to look up pending bills and track the legislation. The Texas legislature provides valuable resources for community colleges (Council, n.d.). The documents found on the capital of Texas website include information on all committees in the house and senate, frequently asked questions, research centers, and news reports. Community colleges looking to learn about legislation and follow it would benefit from the documents offered by the Texas Legislative Council.

The *Texas Tribune* is a member-supported, nonpartisan media organization. Located in Austin, it was launched as an organization on election night in 2009. The site covers public policy, politics, government, and statewide issues. In a January 10, 2023, article entitled “Texas Legislature 101,” the Tribune gave a rundown of how a bill becomes a law (Mendez, 2023).

Unlike the other publications that explain the legislative process, the article is simplified and written for the average layperson to understand. This resource is a valuable article that can help a community college understand the basic process. It is an important resource for any educational institution in Texas.

## **ORGANIZATIONS**

Many organizations support higher education and provide excellent information for community colleges that are interested in lobbying. The Texas Association of School Boards (TASB) aims to promote educational excellence in Texas and provides services to community colleges. All 50 Texas community colleges are members of TASB. The group provides legal expertise as well as policy development and maintenance. They provide a useful frequently-asked-questions publication about legislative advocacy that is invaluable for community colleges who are interested in lobbying (TASB, 2018). The document has common questions about lobbying and also cites the Texas Government Code, noting where the information is found if the community college wants to research it further. A Community College Policy Reference Manual (Community College Policy Reference Manual, n.d.) is also available to members of TASB. While this document covers the legal framework for key areas of college operations, it also has a section on community and governmental relations that includes information on interacting with the state legislature.

The Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC) has a heavy representation among Texas community colleges with 45 of the 50 as members. This organization is a non-profit advocate for community colleges. The group has a mission to work on behalf of all of the community colleges, both collectively and individually. Because TACC organizes Community

College Day at the Texas Legislature, they provide a useful document that explains step-by-step how to set up a meeting with a member (TACC, 2023). This information is important for community colleges because it is geared toward students; thus, if a community college decides to take a group of students to Austin to lobby, this document will guide them to arrange their own meetings ahead of time. The organization also supports over 400 community college trustees and regents, helping board members participate in advocacy for their community colleges.

The Texas State Teachers Association (TSTA) also offers a guide to lobbying. This organization recommends contacting TSTA's legislative staff for the latest information on issues before contacting a legislator (TSTA/NEA, 2011). The guide to lobbying provides helpful information about the different types of lobbying and has a lengthy list of general "rules" to follow when trying to influence a legislator. The organization is focused on public schools, and they have some sage advice for lobbying, similar to the Texas Faculty Association (TFA). This non-profit organization seeks to protect the rights of higher education faculty and support staff and tracks bills that have been filed that impact higher education. The tracking report summarizes the bill and also helpfully provides the last action taken so that the reader knows where to focus efforts. However, the report that TFA offers is created by TSTA, so the two organizations support each other. A third organization that provides helpful literature related to lobbying with a focus on faculty is the Texas Community College Teachers Association (TCCTA). The TCCTA bill tracker is updated more frequently than TSTA. The association has published recommendations to the Texas Commission on Community College Finance. Besides tracking every bill related to higher education, the TCCTA also has references available focused on public

policy information for two-year college educators (Texas Community College Teachers Association, 2023). TCCTA is the largest organization of post-secondary educators in Texas and provides helpful information directly related to legislation, so this organization is important for planning lobbying strategies.

Despite Texas being the 10<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world, only 34% of people over 25 have some type of college degree. The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB) aims to provide leadership for the higher education system “to promote access, affordability, quality, success, and cost efficiency to the state’s higher education plan” (Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board [THECB], 2021, para. 3). THECB has challenged the higher education system with a program it calls 60x30TX. In this plan at least 60% of Texans aged 25–34 will have a degree or certificate by 2030 with their loan debt not exceeding 60% of their first-year wages. To help accomplish these goals, THECB has the Texas Commission on Community College Finance (TCCCF) provide a report to the Texas legislature to outline what they would prefer the legislature do to support higher education and programs such as 60x30TX. This 28-page report makes recommendations to the legislature for the current session and notes that they are “both aspirational and achievable” (TCCCF, 2023, p. 19). The highest priority of THECB is to develop a competitive workforce in Texas, and the report to the legislature outlines what legislative priorities will make that happen. For a community college that is preparing to lobby, reading the most current report as well as prior ones would benefit the college and help provide strategies for lobbying.

When a community college is preparing to lobby, the Preservation Leadership Forum is another organization that offers suggestions for community colleges involved in lobbying. This

organization is a network of preservation professionals brought together by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. While focused more on the national level, the Preservation Leadership Forum provides an “Advocacy Toolkit” that is useful whether lobbying at the state level or national level (Lobbying 101: Getting Ready to Lobby, n.d.). Topics include communicating with elected officials, developing grassroots networks, working with advocacy coalitions, and providing useful advice, such as encouraging people to use real-life examples when they talk to members. These documents would be useful to community college leaders who are preparing to lobby for the first time.

While Texas has several organizations that provide helpful literature related to lobbying the state legislature, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) should not be overlooked. This organization works to advocate for the nation’s community colleges. Yet another “Advocacy Toolkit” is provided by the AACC, which is a 13-page document (American Association of Community Colleges, 2018). For community colleges wanting to establish a relationship with their members, which is also considered lobbying by definition, there is a section in the toolkit about hosting a campus visit. While it is important to visit members and discuss legislation, inviting the members of the legislature that represent the college to the campus is crucial to developing or maintaining a relationship. This document explains the best way to plan for the visit. This publication is a beneficial document for community colleges.

## **RESOURCES**

For community college leaders at the beginning of their lobbying journey, the first step is finding which representative and senator represent the area in which the community college is located. College administrators may know who their own legislators are based on their home

addresses, but what matters is what legislators represent the location of the college. The Texas capitol site offers a resource called “Who Represents Me?” (Who Represents Me?, 2022). Colleges can use this site to enter the address of the college to discover who represents the college in Austin. Once the legislators representing the college are known, if the Texas legislature is in session, the sessions can be watched live from a feed that the *Texas Tribune* offers (Essig, 2023). This resource makes toggling between the Texas House and the Texas Senate only one click.

Resources that are helpful to community colleges abound online and start with the legislature itself. The United States Congress has a site that links to every state legislature (US Congress, n.d.). If community college leaders are looking for key links to their own state’s legislature, this site addresses every state in the union. Similarly, the site of the Texas legislature has links to the Texas House and the Senate and includes news, media, information for visitors, committees, and a list of all members along with their contact information. While it may seem obvious to go straight to the source for information, these sites are often overlooked.

Once the college administrators know who their representatives are and know how to watch live sessions, the next helpful resource is the Legislative Reference Library of Texas, “your partner in legislative research” (Texas Legislative Reference Library, n.d., para. 1). This helpful site provides information on current issues, the status of bills, copies of legislation, and legislative records. It serves the needs of the legislature and its staff and committees but also assists the public with legislative research. A community college would want to have this resource at its disposal when learning about past and pending legislation.

Regarding budgetary items, the Legislative Budget Board (LBB) is a useful resource for community colleges. The LBB is a permanent joint committee of the Texas legislature, meaning that it is a committee for both the house and the senate (Legislative Budget Board, 2021). The committee develops budget and policy recommendations for legislative appropriations. It also completes fiscal analyses for proposed legislation, and the site has documents separated into house documents and senate documents. There is also a link to the current budget. If a community college were interested in legislation related to funding, this would be a useful site for the college to research.

Also related to funding is the Texas Comptroller's site. The comptroller's office serves all citizens as the chief tax collector, accountant, revenue estimator, treasurer, and purchasing manager. The agency keeps the books for the budget that the legislature passes. Being familiar with the comptroller's office can help community college officials speak to a legislator knowledgeably. The Texas comptroller also has a resource called the "Good for Texas Tour" that highlights how Texas community colleges "impact the Texas economy as they help meet the specific educational and vocational needs of the areas they serve" (Good for Texas Tour: Community College Edition, 2020, para. 1.). This resource also provides statistics showing the statewide impact of community colleges on employment, output, and compensation and compares Texas to other states' statistics. If a community college were making a case about their importance to their member of the legislature, this source would provide valuable data to support the discussion.

## **LOBBYISTS**

Some community colleges choose to enlist the help of professional lobbyists to help communicate the college's needs and desires to the legislature. It can be helpful for a community college to know where to find the names of current lobbyists using a resource such as Transparency USA. This site shows Texas lobbying data where colleges can see the names of the lobbyists trying to persuade Texas lawmakers in various areas (Texas Finance Summary, 2022). The site allows the user to search by state, and the data for that state is presented in many forms, including pie charts, and the names of all the lobbyists are provided. Knowing who is already lobbying the legislature on a particular issue can be helpful for community college leaders to strategize their approach.

## **HISTORY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE LOBBYING**

As a community college prepares to lobby, it can be beneficial to understand the history of bills that have passed and decisions that the legislature has made as well as bills that have been proposed and never passed. The Texas Association of Community Colleges provides a recap of the regular legislative session every other year at the end of the session. The document recaps the past session, which includes legislation that affected community colleges. For example, in 2021, the report noted,

Faced with sharp enrollment declines and the potential for resulting funding cuts, Texas community colleges entered the session with a focused agenda of maintaining state support and meeting the workforce challenges presented by the pandemic. While work remains to be done, community colleges came away from the session with a modest increase in state appropriations as a sector and successfully advanced a significant workforce initiative, the TRUE Program." (The 87th Texas Legislature - Regular Session Recap 2021, 2019, p. 3)



The report is organized by community college names and shows bills that passed and data on how the bill affects each college. For example, it shows the contact hour change from 2019 to 2021 per community college. Knowing what the legislature did in the previous session can help determine what might be significant in the next session.

Another tool for learning the history of community college lobbying is the Texas State Historical Association. This organization was founded in 1897 and has a mission to “foster the appreciation, understanding, and teaching of the rich and unique history of Texas” (TACC, n.d., para. 1). The site has the history of community colleges and the history of the Texas Association of Community Colleges, a strong lobbying force for community colleges. Knowing the history of community colleges, how they were funded, and how they are supported by the legislature today helps colleges have the foundational knowledge to build their own lobbying program.

### **LOBBYING ACTIONS IN THE NEWS**

When trying to formulate a lobbying strategy, colleges can learn what is effective by analyzing news related to lobbying. The *Texas Tribune* is a valuable resource for community colleges to stay abreast of what the legislature is doing. The Tribune is a member-supported, nonpartisan media organization in Austin that covers public policy, politics, government, and statewide issues. In a recent article published as the current legislative session was beginning, the Tribune informed readers in an article entitled, “Here are 6 things we’re watching” (Barragán & Svitek, 2023). The budget surplus is at the top of the list. In another Tribune article entitled “Texas commission recommends tying community colleges’ state funding to their performance,” the pushes for change from state higher education leaders were outlined prior to the legislative session beginning (McGee, 2022). The article explains that the Commission on

Community College Finance made recommendations in a report given to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board prior to legislation being drafted for the current legislative session. The article was a follow up to an article the previous month that first introduced readers to the idea of tying community college funding to student outcomes (McGee, 2022a). Articles like this are important because they help community colleges understand the issue at hand, the process by which it is being managed, and the issue's status in the legislature. Having this background knowledge is key when it is time to meet with legislators and their staff.

Similarly, the same funding issue was covered by the Texas Association of Community Colleges. TACC tracks its own news and publishes it on its websites to help community colleges stay informed. A September 12, 2022, article entitled "Texas could tie community college funding to student outcomes" also covered the concept of college funding (TACC, 2022). Another article by TACC informed community colleges that there would be a special community college day at the capitol where all colleges could come and meet with legislators to share their agenda for the new session (TACC, n.d.). News and information put out by the associations that support the missions of community colleges can be a valuable resource for any college as they plan their lobbying activities.

Looking at the news on other community colleges' sites can also be informative. Austin Community College (ACC) had an article in 2019 about its students lobbying lawmakers for more funding and dual credit classes (Davis, 2019). When the day for student lobbying arrived, another article explained the approach the students had, which was an umbrella approach at the beginning of the session to hit major topics that ACC thought should be covered during the session (Pruitt, 2019). Weatherford College published an article on their institution's site about

actions the Texas legislature had taken in 2021 to increase the bachelor's degree limit from three to five (Weatherford College, 2021). This information was important to Weatherford College because it had a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, and this news meant that it could add a Bachelor of Applied Arts and Sciences in Organizational Leadership the following fall. When community colleges are aware of what is going on with other colleges, it can be important in their own strategies and prioritization.

## **ELECTION CYCLE**

Finally, looking at what resources and literature currently help support community college lobbying, it is important to note that community colleges should stay informed about the election cycles of their representatives and senators. Ballotpedia is an organization that has information about every state's legislative body (State Legislative Elections, 2022, n.d.). Another informative resource is the Texas Secretary of State's site. The site has important election dates with detailed explanations of each date through 2024 (Important Election Dates 2021–2022, n.d.). Community colleges have the responsibility of staying informed and knowing who is running to represent them in Austin. Whether it is a primary election or a general election, colleges have the resources to keep themselves informed about these important elections.

## **CONCLUSION**

All community colleges, no matter where they are located, can identify the tools and information available to help navigate the state legislative system. The literature presently available related to lobbying the Texas state legislature is informative in many categories. There are many resources to help colleges navigate the laws surrounding lobbying. Understanding the legislative process is also explained by a variety of sources and at different levels of detail.

Texas has several organizations that have prioritized representing the interests of community colleges in the state legislature. Based on the analysis of the available literature on lobbying, there is a gap in the knowledge of community colleges building and maintaining a relationship with its respective state legislatures. None of the documents directly address the importance of establishing and maintaining a relationship with members and their staff or how to do it. The suggestions for how to write a letter, how to schedule a visit, and how to follow up were similar on every document, but none addressed the human factor and the value in getting to know who represents the community college.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHOD FOR CREATING THE MANUAL

### INTRODUCTION

No matter where a community college resides, tools and resources are available that address lobbying the state legislature. The current literature about the Texas Legislature is informative in a general way. The resources teach about laws that govern the lobbying process and how a bill moves through both houses of congress. Several organizations try to support community colleges by lobbying on behalf of the colleges that are members of their organization. Newsgroups such as the *Texas Tribune* work to keep people informed, especially during a legislative session. A college can hire individual lobbyists or a lobbying firm to represent the views and needs of the community college. However, the gap in the knowledge is that no one publication ties the laws, the legislative process, the supporting organizations, the resources, the history, the newsgroups, the election cycle, and the lobbyists together. Most importantly, none of the resources address the need for an ongoing relationship between elected officials and the community college.

### TYPE OF STUDY

To create a manual about community college lobbying strategies and tactics, the researcher conducted a phenomenological study. The researcher used personal experience working in the United States Congress coupled with qualitative research to inform a useful product and fill a gap in current knowledge. Since staff members needed to be interviewed to

determine the most effective methods that a community college might use to lobby, qualitative research was chosen. Eighteen questions guided the interviews with a focus on effectiveness. It was necessary to focus, not just on what the typical lobbyist or visitor does, but on what was most effective. The questions were open-ended so that the legislative staff members could offer any explanation for what works best when lobbying. For example, staff members were asked, "What could a community college leave with you that would make an impression or make an impact?" Each staff member had to think about the question and what would be the most effective action for the community college representative to take.

The nature of the phenomenological study allowed the researcher to pull from past experiences and use them as examples in the manual. Short stories about experiences help the manual to be more relatable and applicable. For example, as the researcher explains why colleges should focus on their own elected members as opposed to going down the hall and lobbying all offices, the researcher was able to recount lessons learned when working for a freshman member of congress. Explaining about knowing whether an issue is dealt with at the local, state, or federal level, the researcher was able to tell a story about low-flow toilets that will help the reader know that the level of the issue cannot be assumed. It is necessary to double-check the level of the issue. Finally, this phenomenological study allowed the researcher to compare personal knowledge and experience to that of the participants who were interviewed. The interviews helped balance out the researcher's knowledge and assumptions.

## **INTERVIEW ANALYSIS**

To determine the most effective way to lobby that makes the most significant impact on the member, the researcher went straight to the most knowledgeable on the subject, which

were the very people being lobbied. The intention was to interview at least four staff members who either worked or had recently worked in the Texas legislature. Even though the topic of lobbying is considered nonpartisan, the researcher wanted a balance of staff members and had the goal of including two Republicans and two Democrats. The second goal in searching for participants was to find staff members who worked for members of congress who represent a variety of types of community colleges. The researcher looked for participants who worked for members who served small rural areas as well as members who served large community college systems. The researcher knew that getting to interview a member or former member of the legislature would be a bonus to the study.

#### **LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

The reality of finding congressional offices willing to be interviewed proved difficult. At first, dozens of offices were called targeting specific areas of Texas using a map of congressional and senatorial districts and a list of community colleges. For example, Ranger College was a goal because of its small size and rural location. Lone Star college was not a goal because the researcher was more familiar with the Lone Star College system, having worked there and having an understanding their lobbying efforts. Offices were so unwilling to be interviewed that, in the end, the researcher ultimately went through a list of dozens of house and senate members asking if they were willing to be interviewed. Unfortunately, only Democratic offices were willing to participate. The outcome of the study remained the same, but the researcher had hoped for a balance of participants from both parties.

The researcher interviewed two senatorial aides, one house aide, and one former house member for the study to get different perspectives on community college lobbying. The results

of the four interviews conducted were analyzed with a deductive approach, meaning that there were preconceived themes that the researcher expected to find based on existing knowledge. By reading the transcripts of the interviews, the researcher was able to create a spreadsheet that included every question and answer. After becoming familiar with the answers on the spreadsheet, the data was coded by looking at the answers and then putting the data into groups identified by the codes. The themes that were identified included:

- Interactions with visitors
- Effectiveness of communication
- Information exchanged or received
- Follow-up communications
- One-pagers
- Impact
- Relationship

Once the themes were identified, they were compared to the original answers to make sure that nothing was missed.

## **RESULTS**

The analysis results were that all interviewees talked extensively about interacting with visitors. This interaction was one of the areas where there was some inconsistency. Two of the interviewees said that their office would only meet with visitors who were constituents. Two of the interviewees said that their office would meet with any visitor. The two interviewees who said they would meet with anyone were considering their members' placement on committees that would attract more attention than just that of constituents. In the researcher's own



experience, this was true when working for a more senior member of congress who was the chair of a subcommittee. He was willing to meet with people outside of his own voters when it was to discuss a crucial subcommittee issue. When discussing the effectiveness of various types of communication, all four interviewees agreed that having a face-to-face meeting made the largest impact on the member. All noted that even an online meeting was preferable to a phone call, email, or letter. The interviewees all agreed that in meetings with representatives from the community college, they would be listening and learning as opposed to talking and providing information. All the interviewees said that the best type of follow-up from the community college after a meeting is an email, with one saying that a phone call would be appropriate as well. The most reoccurring theme throughout all four interviews was the use of "one-pagers." These are one-page documents that the college can bring to the staff member or member of congress that summarize what the college wants to say about the legislation. When asked in separate questions about the impact of the visit, the information that should be left, the format in which information should be communicated, and the best way to follow-up after a visit, the answer was consistently, "in a one-pager." The interviewees agreed that lobbying by a community college significantly impacts the member's vote. All suggested that the college maintain a relationship with the member and the office staff throughout the year, not just during the legislative session.

## **HOW THE MANUAL WAS DEVELOPED**

The manual is based on the researcher's own experience and information gathered from the laws, the legislative process itself, the supporting organizations, the resources available about lobbying in general, the history, the latest news, the election cycle, and interviews with

three staff members and one former state representative. Information was obtained by reviewing laws that govern lobbying in Texas and apply to anyone who lobbies. The legislative process was also analyzed because, while the Texas legislature is structured in the same basic way as the federal legislature, there are some critical differences in how a bill makes its way to the floor of each chamber. Organizations that support community colleges and the resources that they provide were also evaluated for usefulness. Using news articles about lobbying, the history of community college lobbying was also considered. Finally, the election cycle and the latest news stories about the legislature as it relates to the current session and community colleges were also included.

The interviews conducted in the study were semi-structured and relied on specific questions asked of each interviewee. Each participant met with the researcher using Microsoft Teams so that a transcript of the interview was automatically created. The participants were allowed to share their personal experiences due to the semi-structured nature of the interview questions. This approach was beneficial because each person being interviewed had personal experiences to share and advice to offer related to working with a member of congress to accomplish the community college's goals regarding pending legislation. For example, each person interviewed shared their opinion on what type of communication is most effective and what type of follow-up has the most significant impact. The questions that guided the conversation were as follows:

1. What do you do in your role of handling educational issues?
2. How do you interact with visitors who want to talk about pending legislation or ideas for proposed legislation?

3. Please discuss the effectiveness of an in-person visit vs. a phone call, email, letter, etc.
4. When do you elevate a meeting to involve the member, or if you are the member, when are meetings elevated to you?
5. How do you communicate to the member what a person or organization has relayed?
6. Is a meeting normally an exchange of information such as you telling the status of a bill and the college representatives explaining how it affects their college, or do you mostly listen?
7. How do you prefer to receive the information from the college representatives? (flash drive, email, printed materials)
8. How much information from the college representative do you prefer to receive? (highlights, detailed documents, historical context)
9. What could a community college leave with you that would make an impression or make an impact?
10. What is the impact of representative(s) from the community college coming personally to the office to meet you or the member?
11. When visiting in person, do you prefer appointments with advanced materials, drop-ins, or informational appointments?
12. What type of follow-up by the college representative is effective?
13. Overall, is hearing from one representative as effective as having a group visit? A person high in administration? A student? A group of students? Someone from your district? A representative from the college in your district who resides outside of your district?
14. What impact does the communication from the community college have on the member's voting decision?
15. What would foster the best relationship between your office and the community college in your district?
16. What could the community college provide you to make your job easier?
17. Which office location is the best for the representatives from the community college to interact with – district or state?

18. How effective would it be to invite your office (legislative assistant or member) to the campus for a meeting instead of campus representatives visiting your office?

The manual is also based on the researcher's experience working in the US House of Representatives during the 103<sup>rd</sup> and 104<sup>th</sup> Congress. During the researcher's time on Capitol Hill, she worked for three different members of the United States Congress, two freshmen and one senior member. The researcher learned lessons about lobbying from each of the experiences. The researcher also brought experiences of being sent to Austin to lobby the state legislature—once as a student working on a bachelor's degree, and once as an unsuspecting parent who thought she was taking three children to a homeschool group's "learn how a bill becomes a law" day that turned out to be a "let's send our children to lobby our agenda" day. These experiences were combined with research and interviews to create a manual about strategies and tactics for community college leaders.

### **KEY ELEMENTS OF THE MANUAL**

The manual is designed to provide strategies and tactics for community college leaders to be effective lobbyists in their state governments. Once the decision to lobby has been made, the manual will provide strategies about how to lobby and tactics for who exactly to lobby and how to do it. Preparation is covered along with the importance of knowing the laws and the legislative process. As administrators and staff plan their lobbying, including the money allocated for it, the manual will answer questions such as, "Is a trip to the capitol building necessary?" as well as "If so, how many people should we send?"

The manual is not designed to address any particular legislative session, such as the one that began in Texas in January 2023, but is rather a general guide that can be applied to any session, any year. While Texas was used as the basis for the development of the manual, the

information in the manual should prove beneficial to all community colleges. Every community college is encouraged to do their own research to know what organizations are working on their behalf in their state. Knowing the laws and legislative process is also key, and this would vary by state as well.

## **CONCLUSION**

The manual created for this study has been created by combining informative interviews, literature and document reviews, laws, processes, current news, and the researcher's own experience. Basic information is included for community college leaders who have never considered lobbying. Then the manual slowly progresses to more complicated aspects of lobbying for college leaders who have attempted lobbying but need guidance in better allocating their resources towards the effort.

## CHAPTER FOUR: A GUIDE TO COMMUNITY COLLEGE LOBBYING



# Community College Lobbying

## MANUAL CONTENTS

*Introduction*  
*Lobbying defined*  
*Local vs. state vs. federal*  
*Lobbying laws*  
*Legislative process*  
*Lobbying the right person*  
*Mail, call, visit, virtual meeting*  
*Preparation*  
*Duplicating efforts*  
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*Trip to the capitol building?*  
*Summary*  
*The One-Pager*

## INTRODUCTION

Every other year the Texas legislature meets in January for a six-month session. State senators and representatives gather in the capitol building to form committees, hold hearings, and vote for legislation on the floor of each chamber. Decisions made by the state legislature affect community colleges. Whether it is a bill about allowing community colleges to offer bachelor's degrees, tying funding to student outcomes, or having input on changes to the formula allocations put forth in a bill, the community college should have a voice through their representative and senator. It is up to the leaders of the community college to ensure that the institution stays relevant by keeping members of congress informed and aware of the needs of the community college.

This manual was created by combining informative interviews, literature and document reviews, laws, processes, current news, and the author’s own experience as a congressional staff member in the United States House of Representatives in Washington, DC. While this research focuses on Texas, it can be applied to any state. Basic information is included for community colleges who have never considered lobbying, and then the manual slowly progresses to more complicated aspects of lobbying for community colleges that have lobbied but need guidance in better allocating their resources towards the effort.

## **LOBBYING DEFINED**

In each state, laws strictly define lobbying. The college needs to look at everything it does related to elected officials and determine if it falls within the definition of lobbying. The institution may find that they have been lobbying and did not know it. Each state will define lobbying differently, but in Texas, the Texas Ethics Commission defines lobbying as “making direct communications with members of the legislative or executive branch of Texas state government to influence legislation or administrative action” (Lobbying in Texas: A Guide to the Texas Law, 2022, p. 4). Some Texas community colleges choose to hire an outside lobbyist or lobbying organization to represent the college. Having an individual represent the interests of the community college is considered lobbying by the college, and the lobbyist would naturally be registered as a lobbyist under the name of the college. It must be noted that if the community college communicates with the member or the staff of the member to “generate or maintain goodwill for the purpose of influencing potential future legislation or administrative action, the communication is a lobby communication” (Lobbying in Texas: A Guide to the Texas Law, 2022, p. 4).



## **LOCAL VS. STATE VS. FEDERAL ISSUES**

When I was on the staff of a freshman congressman in Washington, DC, one day we received a letter about toilets. This letter was one of hundreds that we received on a daily basis, but as is the practice in all offices, the city of origin was checked first. Yes, it was from the congressman's district. Next, we read the letter to determine the issue so it could be assigned to a legislative assistant, and yes, it was a complaint about a new toilet being "low flow." Thus, the question was, which legislative assistant would craft a reply? Most letters were easy to assign. If the letter was about education, it would be put in the in-box of the aide who dealt with education issues. If it were about the military, it would go to the aide who dealt with the military. But this letter had us puzzled. It became an office discussion about who should answer it. One aide suggested that it be sent back with a quick form letter explaining that the author's toilet was not a federal issue. At that moment, the congressman himself walked through the office and asked what we were discussing. We told him about the letter, and he quickly explained. The Environmental Protection Agency had a regulation that all new toilets sold must use less water. He went on to say the letter was definitely a federal issue, and the legislative aide assigned environmental issues would be writing back a sympathetic reply from the congressman. Knowing the context of the topic was essential for an appropriate response.

When preparing to lobby on behalf of the community college, you must determine the appropriate governing body to address the issue. Is the issue one that the state legislature has jurisdiction over, or is the issue a federal issue? Perhaps it is a local matter. For example, one federal issue is Pell Grants; state issues might include state funding for IT modernization projects; and a local issue might be property tax appropriations.

If community college leaders contact a federal representative over a state issue, the Washington, DC, office would politely let the college know that it is not their area. To save time and reflect professionalism, the college should approach the correct governing body. If the college is not sure at which level the issue is to be addressed, it is perfectly acceptable to ask. But whom should the college ask? A quick call to the representative's office and a chat with the staff member who deals with education issues can identify if the issue is state or federal. Sometimes it takes a little investigating when the issue is not obviously linked to federal, state, or local concerns, but knowing which one it is will lay the groundwork for the college's next steps.

## **LOBBYING LAWS**

Lobbying in the state of Texas is regulated by the Texas Ethics Commission. This organization publishes a guide focused on lobbying laws. The guide is written in laymen's terms and can help the community college determine if it is going to lobby to the extent that they need to register with the state. It also outlines what representatives from the college can do and what limits they have by providing time and spending thresholds (Lobbying in Texas: A Guide to the Texas Law, 2022). The publication succinctly outlines these reporting thresholds and helps a community college define their lobbying efforts and determine the level to which it would like to become involved in the legislative process. The guide is also more user-friendly than trying to navigate the Texas Constitution and Statutes.

Whether the community college is in Texas or another state, it is the institution's responsibility to know the laws governing lobbying. Some activities will fall under the time threshold, such as sending a group to the capitol once a year, but there are spending thresholds

as well. For example, in Texas, just because a person is compensated or reimbursed for lobbying does not automatically mean they have to register. If the person spends less than 40 hours lobbying during a calendar quarter, that person is not required to register as a lobbyist. This time threshold is an incentive for colleges to use staff members for lobbying activities. However, the 40 hours include preparatory activities, so the hours can accumulate quickly. Also, if the lobbying time is below 40 hours, but the person's expenditures exceed the expenditure threshold, then the person must register as a lobbyist (Lobbying in Texas: A Guide to the Texas Law, 2022). The Texas Ethics Commission's page called "Starting to Lobby" has a checklist to help a lobbyist determine if they are under the compensation and expenditure thresholds (Starting and Ending Lobbying, n.d.). Registering is not difficult, but there is a cost involved. Currently, 11 of the 50 community colleges in Texas are registered with the Texas Ethics Commission (Texas Ethics Commission 2023 Lobbyists, 2023).

As the community college leaders put together a plan for lobbying, the time spent by each person and the money spent both individually and by the college should be calculated so that the college can register as lobbyists or feel confident that the activities they have planned will be under the thresholds. While the budget for the college is crafted, knowing how much is allocated for lobbying is a good place to start to determine the level to which the institution will be lobbying. If it is determined that the college needs to go ahead and register, the budget can be adjusted accordingly.

It is essential to define "direct communication." The Texas Ethics Commission leaves no room for confusion in noting that direct communication includes "contact in person or by telephone, telegraph, letter, facsimile, electronic mail, or other means of communication,"

which would cover texting, direct messaging, and virtual meetings (Lobbying in Texas: A Guide to the Texas Law, 2022, p. 4). If the college communicates with the member of the staff to “generate or maintain goodwill for the purpose of influencing potential future legislation or administrative action, the communication is a lobby communication” (Lobbying in Texas: A Guide to the Texas Law, 2022, p. 4). That means that the time spent on a campus tour with a representative or senator or a dinner just to chat about other topics would need to be calculated into the overall lobbying time. These considerations must be made as the college determines whether they have spent enough hours lobbying that they need to register with the state as an official lobbyist.

The Texas Ethics Commission also provides a breakdown of Chapter 305 of the Texas Statutes with hyperlinked chapters for ease of navigation. One of the subchapters is titled Chapter 34 of Commission Rules – Regulation of Lobbyists (Commission Rules Chapter 34, n.d.). This chapter includes definitions from the Government Code Chapter 305 and explanations about registration requirements. This resource is useful for a community college if it wants to go straight to the explanation about registering as a lobbyist. However, the lobbying guide created by the Texas Ethics Commission contains the information worded in a way that will be easier to interpret.

Beyond reading the actual laws about lobbying or reviewing the guide created by the Texas Ethics Commission (TEC), another way to become familiar with the application of the laws is by reading articles about the laws created by watchdog organizations. Transparency USA is an organization with a mission of providing information about lobbying in every state. The site allows the navigator to choose a state and read articles about lobbying in that state, which

often requires the organization to analyze the laws that govern lobbying. Transparency USA watches spending and informs the public. In the article “How the Sausage Gets Made,” the daily spending limits for lobbyists in Texas are explained, which would be helpful for a community college to see the application of the law: “Lobbyists in Texas enjoy a high threshold for detailed reporting. They are only required to report lobbying expenditures if the amount exceeds 60% of the legislative per diem, which is currently set at \$221 per day. This means only expenditures in excess of \$132.60 per legislator lobbied, per day, must ever be reported to the TEC” (Transparency USA, 2021, para. 9). This high threshold for reporting stands in contrast to the campaign contributions that take place when the legislature is meeting:

During each regular session of the Texas Legislature, campaign contributions for statewide officials and legislators stop, with these politicians barred from taking any campaign contributions. A donor who wants to contribute \$100 to a legislator may not do so until 30 days after the session ends in late May. This is designed to prevent donors and PACs from currying favor with legislators while they are casting votes. Lobbyists, however, may continue making expenditures of any amount to influence legislators during this time. (Transparency USA, 2021, para. 12)

Information like the reporting that watchdog organizations do, such as Transparency USA, can help the community college understand how the laws surrounding lobbying are followed so that the institution can make its own decisions.

## **LEGISLATIVE PROCESS**

I have been sent to the Texas legislature to lobby twice—once voluntarily and once unknowingly. As an undergraduate, I attended a small, private university and received financial aid. My school asked if I would be willing to travel four hours to Austin with other students to lobby congress, and I said, “sure.” To be honest, I had no idea why we were going to Austin, but a free trip sounded like fun. The school assured us that we would be guided as to what we were

to do in Austin once we arrived. When we pulled up to the state capitol, there were hundreds of other college students. We went to the gallery of one of the chambers and watched the legislature in session. Our school sponsors gave us talking papers and told us to walk down each hall, go to each member's office, and read the paper to them. As students, we did not know what we were talking about, whom to talk to, or why we were there, but we did it. We met some very patient staff members.

As we attempted to lobby congress, we were missing some key information. We did not know the basic legislative process. I still do not know if the sponsors of the trip knew. They at least knew there was a bill pending that would affect our private school but was the bill being voted on the floor of the house or senate, or was it still in committee? That basic information would have allowed our visits to be more targeted. If the bill were in committee, it would have made more sense to target members who were on the committee. If the bill were on the floor, it would have made more sense to let each student visit their own senator or representative, depending on which house the bill was located, to explain how the passage or failure of the bill would affect each student personally. Randomly walking the halls of congress and going into each office is not productive.

Community colleges will be better prepared to advocate for themselves in their state legislatures if they understand how the legislative process works. Members of the House and Senate get ideas for legislation by listening to their constituents—the people they represent. They can also get ideas for bills that grow out of interim committee studies that are completed outside of the regular legislative session. Members write bills, often with legal assistance. Any member of the house or senate can write and propose a bill. Bills are introduced on the floor by

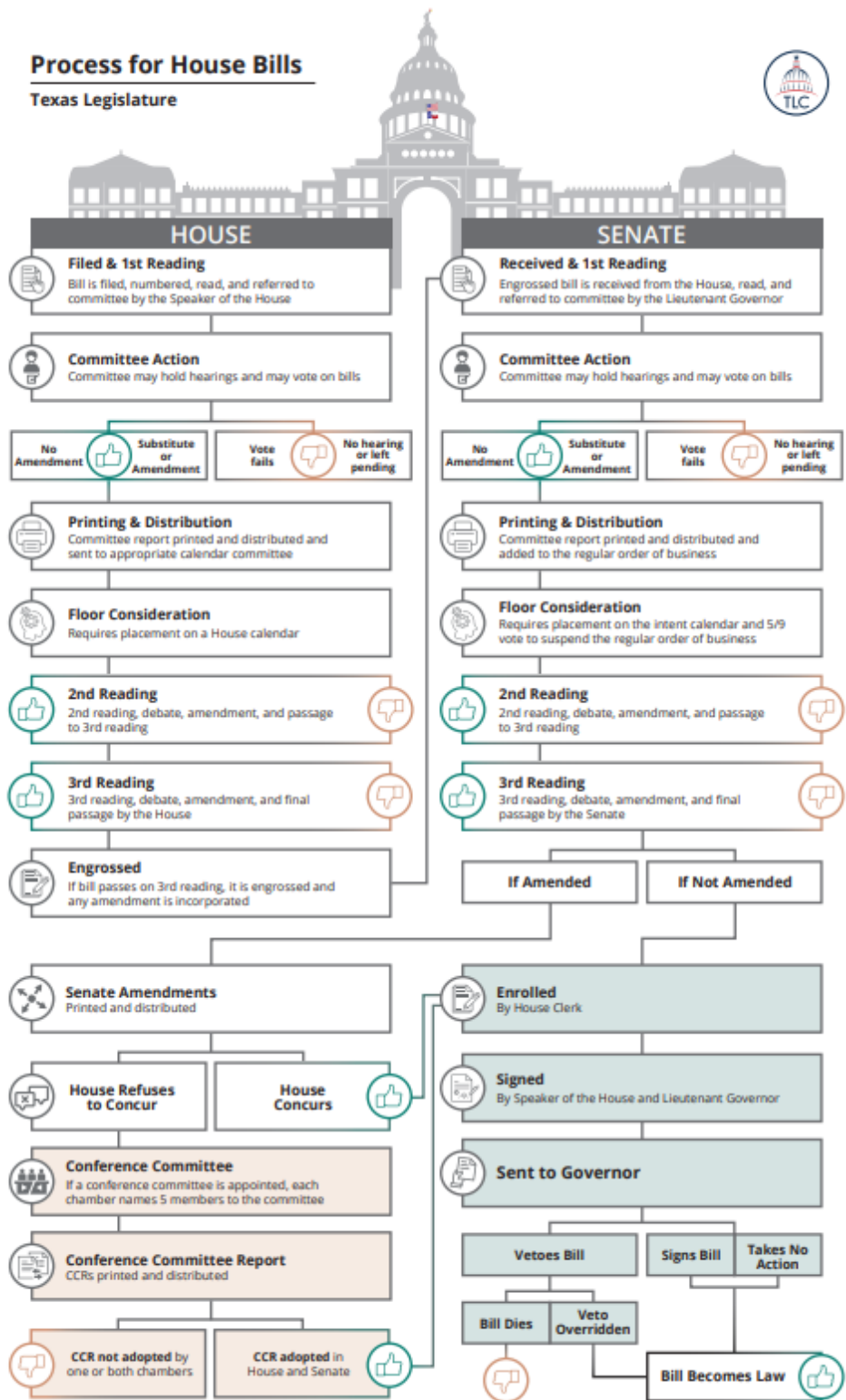
providing a copy of it to the house or senate. Sometimes a similar bill is introduced in the other chamber because of collaborative work between members. For example, a senator may draft a bill in coordination with the representative from their district. The senator would propose a bill in the senate chamber, whereas the representative would propose a bill in the house chamber. The similarities in the bills would stem from the collaboration, and if both bills passed their respective chambers, the differences would be worked out later in a conference committee. Bills can originate in either chamber except for bills that raise taxes or raise money to be used by the state. Those bills must originate in the house. Bills must be introduced during the first 60 days of the 140-day session, or special provisions must be made (Representatives, n.d.).

Once a bill is introduced to its chamber, its summary must be read aloud to the chamber. The bill is then assigned to a committee, and from there, it waits for consideration or in some cases, is assigned to a subcommittee. Committee chairs decide when to meet and which bills will be considered. Public testimony is usually solicited for bills to allow citizens to present information or explain different sides of the bill. The bill must pass out of the subcommittee, if there was a subcommittee, and pass out of the committee before it can be considered on the floor of the chamber. If the bill reaches the chamber floor, each body, the house and the senate, has its own process for deciding whether or not the bill will be considered for debate. If the bill is debated on the floor by the full body, any member may offer amendments to the bill. Bills can pass by voice vote or recorded vote, and when it passes, the amendments are added, and it is sent to the other chamber, where it is referred to committee to begin the same journey (Representatives, n.d.).

The Texas Legislative Council is the organization that assists members of congress in writing bills. Their website provides detailed information about how a bill moves through congress. Flowcharts can also be found and would be good resources for anyone trying to learn the Texas legislative process (Publications, n.d.). The Texas Legislative Council provides the process charts for both chambers (see Figures 1 and 2 below). The council also serves as an impartial, nonpartisan legislative agency that provides research and information to the legislature. They help members write bills and obtain information “on specific legislative problems or matters affecting the general welfare of the state” (Council, n.d., para. 1) The literature that the Texas Legislative Council can provide is important because a community college needs to know where members obtain their information and data related to bills that affect the college.

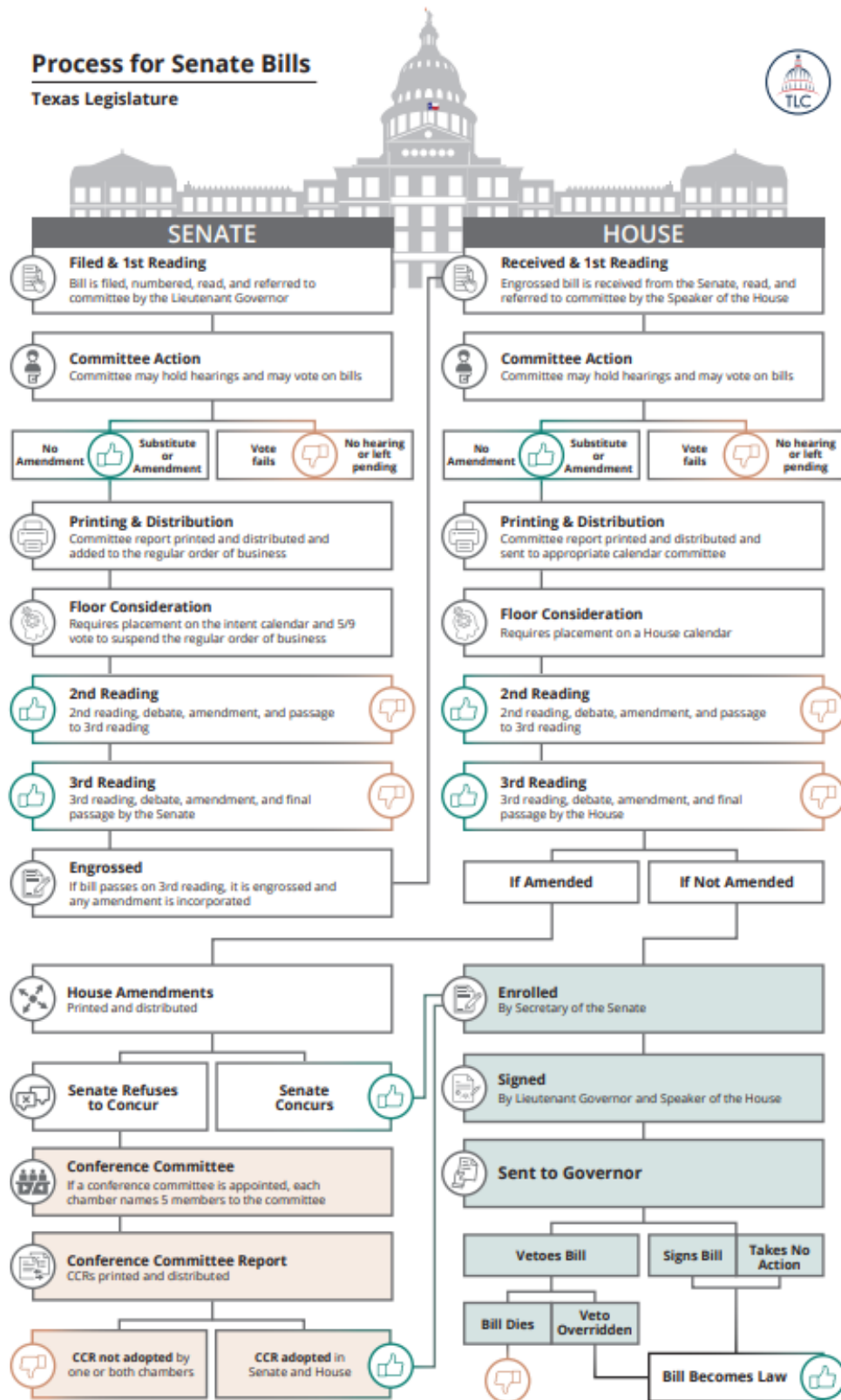


Figure 1: Process for House Bills



Source: Texas Legislative Council (Publications, n.d.).

Figure 2. Process for Senate Bills



Source: Texas Legislative Council (Publications, n.d.).

Knowing the process of how a bill moves through the state legislature helps community college leaders know when and where to utilize their lobbying resources. For example, if a bill is sitting in subcommittee and has not moved, it would not be as crucial to meet with a member about the bill as it would if the bill were sitting on the calendar about to be debated on the floor of the chamber. Anyone who lobbies for the college or represents the college's interests and communicates with the members would benefit from knowing how to speak about the bill's status and prospects of reaching the floor for a vote. It would also be helpful to know that a bill that is sitting in subcommittee and has not been scheduled for hearings might not warrant spending a great deal of money on lobbying the institution's respective house and senate members. Time would be better spent trying to convince the subcommittee chair to see the importance of the bill so it can be put on the calendar for a hearing.

### **LOBBYING THE RIGHT PERSON**

In 1994, the United States Congress was in its 103<sup>rd</sup> session in Washington, DC. I worked as a congressional staffer in the US House of Representatives, serving as the scheduler to a freshman congressman from a southern state. Besides creating the congressman's daily schedule from the dozens of invitations and meeting obligations that came in the form of mail bundles three times a day, I was also the gatekeeper at the door of the office, greeting every visitor. If anyone wanted to get on the congressman's schedule, whether planned or impromptu, they had to go through me.

One summer day, two NASA astronauts clad in their NASA jumpsuits came through the door and stopped at my desk. Asking if the congressman was in, they explained that they had a gift for him. The astronauts had just returned to Earth from space, successfully completing their

mission, and they had brought the congressman a framed and autographed photo of the seven-person crew. While that was a nice gesture, there also happened to be an authorization bill that was pending before the House that would have a detrimental effect on NASA's funding for the next fiscal year, and the two astronauts wanted a few minutes of the congressman's time to talk about the bill.

Being new to the position of a congressional staffer, I was impressed that NASA would send actual astronauts to advocate for their administration's funding. When I contacted the congressman and told him about the guests, to my horror, he refused to come and meet with the men. I was embarrassed to tell the astronauts he would not be joining them. I looked at the next best option and contacted a legislative assistant in the next room who was assigned issues related to science. The legislative assistant asked me to take a business card and promise a call, but he would not walk 10 feet into the next room to meet the astronauts. Apologizing profusely, I took the astronauts' business cards and their lovely, framed photograph and half-heartedly promised a phone call, knowing at that point that it would never happen.

Why did the congressman and the legislative assistant refuse to meet with the astronauts? Simply put, they were not constituents—as in voters. Not only were they not from the congressman's district, but they also were not even from his state, not that being from the same state would have mattered. They could not vote in the congressman's district.

When it comes to giving their time to a lobbyist, no matter how impressive the person may be, it matters whether or not the visitor can cast a vote for the member in November. If the astronauts had visited their own representative in congress, they would have had more luck and saved themselves some time. It was a painful lesson for me to learn, and the same scenario

would play out over and over throughout my time working in the House of Representatives, especially when it came to freshman members because they had not been on Capitol Hill long enough to earn a high-ranking position on a committee.

I learned an exception to this voter rule when I worked for a senior member of congress who was the chair of a subcommittee. The congressman had to meet with many people who were linked to the subcommittee's bills. Some of the appointments were with potential witnesses who were scheduled to testify, and others were with concerned citizens who wanted him to schedule a hearing on a bill that the subcommittee held. Unlike working for a freshman congressman, I had other criteria to consider when planning the senior congressman's meetings.

As stated before, knowing the process by which a bill moves through congress can help the college know whom to lobby and when. If time, energy, and money are going to be used to send a college staff member or a group of people to lobby, there are many aspects to review when it comes to the legislative process. If there is a bill of great interest to the college that was just assigned to a committee, and that committee referred it to a subcommittee, the subcommittee members would be the best members to visit, particularly the chair of the subcommittee. If hearings are not being held, or the bill is not brought up for a subcommittee vote, the bill is not going to go anywhere. Going to the college's representative and senator to talk about a bill that is sitting in committee or subcommittee when that member is not on either one would not be the best use of time. If it looked as though the bill would eventually end up on the floor for a vote, the college could let their opinions be known and offer information for the member to consider. However, if the bill is stuck in committee, visiting the

college's respective representative or senator would be more about asking the member to speak to the committee chair to move the bill along by scheduling hearings or votes. If the person lobbying does not know the legislative process, they would not be able to speak about voting a bill out of committee intelligently. The college needs to send representatives, whether administrators, faculty, staff, or students, who know the legislative process.

Is the bill a house bill or a senate bill? Are there versions of the same bill moving through each chamber? Is it stalled in the senate but moving in the house? Representatives of the college have to be informed to lobby effectively. When a bill is going to be debated on the house or senate floor, that is the time that meeting with the representative or senator who represents the college would be beneficial because committee assignments are no longer as important as actual votes on the chamber floor.

There are tools for finding out the status of a bill so that representatives of the college can go into a meeting well informed. The Legislative Reference Library of Texas, "your partner in legislative research" (Texas Legislative Reference Library, n.d.) is a helpful site that provides information on current issues, the status of bills, copies of legislation, and legislative records. It serves the needs of the legislature and its staff and committees but also assists the public with legislative research. The site for the Texas Legislature also has a place to check the status of a bill (Texas Legislature Online, 2023). A bill can be found by searching for keywords or by the number of the bill (Figure 3). Once the bill is located, the status, history, author, text of the bill, and actions taken can be viewed (Figure 4).

Figure 3. Keyword Search

**88th Legislature Regular Session  
Texas Legislature Online**

[Home](#) | [My TLO](#) | [House](#) | [Senate](#) | [Legislation](#) | [Search](#) | [Committees](#) | [Calendars](#)

**\* The bill number does not exist for the selected legislative session.**

**Texas House**

- [Home](#)
- [Speaker of the House](#)
- [Members](#)
- [Committees](#)
- [Committee Meetings](#)
- [Committee Witnesses](#)
- [Calendars](#)
- [Current Amendment](#)
- [Journals](#)
- [News](#)
- [House Research Organization](#)
- [Kids' House](#)

**Texas Senate**

- [Home](#)
- [Lieutenant Governor](#)

**Search Legislation**

Legislature:    
 Word/Phrase  Bill Number

**Additional Searches**

- [Text Search](#)
- [Statutes](#)
- [Bill Lookup](#)
- [Constitution](#)
- [Bill Search](#)
- [Reports](#)
- [Amendments](#)
- [View Votes](#)
- [Sections Affected](#)
- [Administrative Code](#)
- [Legislative Archive System](#)

**How Do I ...**

- [Find list of filed bills?](#)
- [Follow the status of a bill?](#)
- [Contact my legislator?](#)
- [Find how a legislator voted?](#)
- [Find when hearings are scheduled?](#)

**Access Mobile**

Access a mobile and DistrictView device. From the [www.txlegis.com](http://www.txlegis.com) features within all mobile devices.

**Legislative Access**

- [Video Broadcast](#)
- [Today's Calendar](#)
- [Today's Meeting](#)
- [Today's Filed Bills](#)
- [Today's Votes](#)

**Legislative Process**

- [How a Bill Becomes Law](#)
- [How to Find Dates](#)

Figure 4. Status and History

**Bill:** HB 1

**Legislative Session:** 88(R)

**Last Action:** 01/18/2023 H Filed

**Caption Version:** Introduced

**Caption Text:** General Appropriations Bill.

**Author:** Bonnen

**Subjects:** State Finances--Appropriations (I0746)

**Actions:** (descending date order)

Description	Comment	Date	Time	Journal	Page
H	Filed	01/18/2023			

A community college would want to have these resources at its disposal when learning about past and pending legislation. Other states have similar websites to help navigate the state legislature.

#### MAIL, CALL, VISIT, VIRTUAL MEETING

When the state legislature is in session, the capitol building in Austin is buzzing. Staff members are rushing from place to place, and tourists are wanting a glimpse of any legislative action. Lobbyists make their way around as well as groups of representatives from different organizations try to navigate the capital and the various members' offices. A former house member and several staff members from various state congressional offices were asked which type of communication is more effective in conveying a message about a bill to a member—



United States Postal Service mail, email, call, visit, virtual meeting platform, or even text. Each person firmly noted that a visit is the most memorable, most effective, and makes the biggest impact. The second choice was an online meeting through a platform such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Facetime, etc. Beyond that face-to-face contact, the results varied as to whether a call or a letter were more effective. This explains why the halls are filled with people trying to meet with representatives and senators during the legislative session. Face-to-face interactions allow for an exchange of information rather than one-sided communication.

The college may have an agenda when the representatives of the college meet with their member, but the college is also a resource for the member. Meetings should be exchanges of ideas and information, which are more challenging to accomplish in a letter, email, or phone call. Representatives from the institution should know their lobbying purpose, know the status of the bill, and know which person would be the most strategically important contact for the matter at hand. The representative of the college must be prepared, not only to give information, but to listen as well. Meetings should be beneficial to the member as well as the college. The member should walk away with some information he or she did not know before, and the college should return home with information from the member.

## **PREPARATION**

Once the college decides to lobby, preparation never stops. During the legislative session, the status of a bill can change minute by minute, day by day, and that progress has to be followed closely. As an individual or group prepares to meet with their member, there is preparation that must be done in the long term and short term. It is a waste of the college's

resources and staff members' time to go to a meeting unprepared simply to check a box that says "Yes, we met with our representative and senator."

Long-term preparation begins with knowing the issue at hand. That includes not only the current status of a bill, but also the history behind the bill and the college's history of supporting or opposing the type of bill. You must know if the college is changing its position from previous legislative sessions. Another key to long-term preparation is knowing the legislative process. It would be difficult to be an expert on the entire legislative process and all possibilities in the life of a bill, but a working knowledge of the overall process is a must. This can be studied without knowing the details of a particular piece of legislation.

Short-term preparation is typically focused specifically on the bill at hand. The Legislative Reference Library has copies of bills and excellent overviews of the bill, so college representatives should not attempt to lobby without reviewing the bill personally. Staff members at the legislature know if representatives from the college are reading notes from a one-pager or speaking knowledgeably about a bill and how it will affect the college. Identifying whom to lobby is more of a short-term decision. If the community college plans to lobby in two weeks, identify where the bill likely to be at that point. If meetings were planned with a committee chair and the bill moves to the floor right before the meetings, the visit may need to shift its focus to the representative and senator of the college's district rather than members of the committee. Knowing the status of the bill falls into the short-term preparation category as well. Driving to Austin should involve checking the status of the bill right up until it is time for the face-to-face meeting.

If someone is sent to Austin to lobby and they are uninformed, the meeting is doomed to be a shallow, unproductive meeting. Let us look at two scenarios to demonstrate how a meeting can go.

#### SCENARIO 1: CHAMPION COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S PLANS FOR A BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM

Champion Community College (CCC) has a goal in its strategic plan to offer a baccalaureate degree program in the field of business administration. The president has heard that the Texas legislature may address baccalaureate programs in community colleges, so she tasks a staff member, John, with going to Austin and making sure that the senator and representative that represent the college know the views of Champion Community College.

John heads to Austin the next day with a mission of meeting with both the house member and the senate member to share the desires of Champion Community College. Upon arrival, John goes to the state representative's office without an appointment and asks to speak to the representative. With no appointment, the best the office can do is to grab a staff member who handles education issues for the meeting. During the short meeting, John lets the education legislative assistant know that CCC would really like to see a bill passed that would allow them to offer a baccalaureate degree program. The legislative assistant has John wait for a few minutes while she does some quick research. She informs John that the bill that addresses community college districts offering a baccalaureate degree program is a senate bill, not a house bill. John thanks her and heads to the senate.

Upon reaching the senate, a similar scene plays out. The senator is not available, so an education legislative assistant takes the meeting. John informs her that CCC would like the bill passed that would permit the institution to offer a baccalaureate degree program. Having

gotten a phone call from the house member's office, the senate staffer is prepared to let John know that Senate Bill 487 is the only bill to which John could be referring; it was filed on January 18, 2023 but has not been voted out of committee. In fact, the committee has taken no action. Furthermore, the bill would allow community college districts to offer a baccalaureate degree program in education, not business. Frustrated, John leaves Austin.

#### SCENARIO 2: HILLSIDE COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S PLANS FOR A BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM

Hillside Community College wants to offer a baccalaureate degree. The president of Hillside Community College hears from a colleague that the Texas legislature has a bill that would authorize community colleges to create a baccalaureate program. HCC has a long-term goal of the college to do this. John is tasked with researching the legislation and lobbying for the bill's passage if it is deemed appropriate. Seeking first to gather information, John turns to the Texas Legislature Online website to find what bills are pending related to authorizing community colleges to offer a baccalaureate program. With a few clicks, he learns that there has been one bill filed in the senate, and it has not moved out of committee. John makes a phone call to the senator who represents the college and speaks with the legislative assistant who handles education issues to gather more information. He finds out that the bill is not scheduled for hearing, and receives the names of the chair and ranking members of the committee. In the same phone call, he sets an appointment with the senator for the following week. He then calls the offices of the committee chair and ranking member to schedule appointments.

By the time John gets to Austin, he is well aware of the fact that the senate bill will authorize community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees in education, not business. He will

check the status of the bill on his way to the capital and also know if any hearings have been scheduled. When he meets with the senator, he is armed with a one-page document that explains HCC's interest in the passage of the bill along with statistics about the current number of teachers in the senator's district, the potential impact that offering a baccalaureate program in education could have on the community, trickling all the way down to the impact on students in the K-12 classroom. Giving the senator this information, John has a candid conversation with the senator about the importance of the bill to the college, the community the college serves, and the entire senate district. He then asks the senator for help in moving the committee process along. He lets the senator know that he will be meeting with the chair and ranking member or asks for assistance in reaching out to them if he had difficulty arranging meetings.

John leaves Austin having had meaningful conversations where information was exchanged. He also brought a bill to the attention of his college's senators in a way that could make some real progress by showing the impact the bill would have on the community. In Scenario 1, the two meetings that John had were pointless. The house member could not vote on the bill, the senator could not vote on it because it was still in committee, and the senator was not on that specific committee. Scenario 2 cost the same amount of money for the college but had the potential to make a real difference. The second scenario also created an excellent opportunity to build and maintain a relationship with the senator and legislative assistant. John put the idea of having a baccalaureate program for a business degree on the back burner, possibly for the next legislative session, so that more preparation could be completed. When lobbying successfully, preparation makes all the difference.

## **DUPLICATING EFFORTS**

When a community college decides to embark on lobbying the state legislature, they are not alone. It can be a comfort to the institution to know that it is not solely up to the college to communicate the needs of their institution because there are organizations that help. However, no person or organization is going to know the needs of the college as well as its own administrators. Several organizations lobby on behalf of community colleges, so it is important to stay abreast of what efforts they are making and where their areas of focus are so that the community college can create the most useful strategy.

Since 1924, Texas has had a community college association whose main purpose is to build “and maintain relationships with legislators to promote its primary mission of advocacy” (TACC, n.d., para. 4). From 1924 to 1947, the group was called the Texas Public Community/Junior College Association, but since 1947, it has been named the Texas Association of Community Colleges (TACC). This organization has a legislative committee made up of 16 Texas community college presidents and chancellors whose purpose is to advocate for Texas community colleges in the state legislature. TACC tracks legislation and provides a recap of the bills passed at the end of the legislative term. There are 50 community colleges in Texas, and 45 of them are members of the TACC. Other organizations advocate for community colleges, such as the Community College Association of Texas Trustees (CCATT), the Texas Community College Teachers Association (TCCTA), and the Texas Association of School Boards (TASB), all showing that there is a rich history of community colleges support and advocacy at the state level. It is up to the community college to find out what these organizations are already doing on their behalf so that the institution can determine what strategy they could implement to

complement what is already being done by an organization. For example, TACC may be lobbying in general about tying funding to student outcomes, so the community college leaders could focus their lobbying efforts on how the bill would directly affect the students and community. Each community college needs to tell its own story and speak for its own students and community while the organizations tell the bigger picture overall.

Community colleges located in states other than Texas can search for supporting organizations within their state: “There are 24 states in which a statewide community college association represents trustees, CEOs, and/or both” (ACCT, n.d., para. 1). Some of the states that have active associations include Michigan, California, Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, and Maryland. Each association has a unique focus, whether it be active lobbying or simply watching the legislature and making official statements. Being aware of the state organizations and their activities and efforts to lobby on behalf of community colleges can help college personnel target their own efforts.

When looking at the organizations that work on behalf of community colleges, it might seem like it would be easier to pay dues and let them do the work. However, their efforts complement what the community college can do, not replace it. The community college must work to create and maintain a relationship with their elected officials, so that when there is a vote at the committee level or a vote on the floor, the college is in the back of the representative or senator’s mind as well as the community that each serves. Knowing what the supporting organizations are doing is part of being prepared to lobby. It does not replace lobbying by the community college.

## **MAINTAINING A RELATIONSHIP**

Community colleges that decide to lobby must choose the right people to take on the task. Whether a group or an individual is tasked with dealing with governmental affairs and whether the institution decides to send administrators, faculty, staff, or students, it is important that the college send informed and prepared representatives of the school. The representatives should know the legislative process and the status of the bills they are lobbying. All of these parts of lobbying are important, but none of them will be effective if the college does not focus on the overall relationship it has with its elected officials.

The Texas legislature meets every other year for six months. That leaves 18 months for the college to build and maintain a relationship with its elected state representative and senator without the pressure of an ongoing legislative session. For the same reason, face-to-face meetings are the most effective. The college staff should focus on getting to know the elected officials and developing a relationship, which is effective because it is about the people. This is a time when the members can become more familiar with the institution, and ideas can be shared for the next legislative session. The community college serves the community as do the legislators. It is also to their benefit to know the administrators of the local college and be familiar with its wants and needs.

Building a relationship with state legislators takes time and constant effort. The community college should not expect to get much leverage out of a relationship that only entails sending a group to Austin every other year. The school should communicate regularly with the offices of the state legislator and be familiar with their staff members that deal with education issues. The members and their staff should be regular guests at the college, not just



for a one-time tour, but for community events. The more the college can keep the members involved in the college, the more the members will understand the value and purpose of the college when it comes time for a legislative session.

When community college administrators have a relationship with their state legislators, meetings over controversial pieces of legislation become less heated. A meeting during the legislative session will be more productive if it begins with “nice to see you” versus “nice to meet you.” While the school will still arrive at meetings prepared and informed, there will be a mutual understanding already in place because a foundation has already been laid and the elected official will have a true understanding of the value and mission of the community college.

Creating and maintaining a relationship with the elected state representative and senator allows for a more reciprocal relationship. The state legislator holds hearings during their legislative session, and hearings need witnesses. When a member knows the college in their district well, they will not hesitate to ask the college to send someone to testify on behalf of the college or even on behalf of all community colleges because the member knows the heart of the school and what will be communicated. At times, too, the state legislature in Texas creates committees outside of the regular session to explore certain ideas. When a relationship with the community college has already been established and a committee needs members from the community, the state legislators will turn to the community college to provide someone to serve on the committee, giving the college a voice before the legislation is even written. This kind of opportunity comes from establishing reciprocal relationships with elected officials.

## **TRIP TO THE CAPITOL BUILDING?**

Community colleges must determine whether they want to become involved in working with their state senator and state representative and to what degree. While it may be working to be content to pay dues to an organization and trust that that group will represent the college's needs, when community college leaders are ready to dip their toes into the world of lobbying, it takes commitment. The worst mistake would be to decide to start participating in the legislative process without allocating enough time, money, and staff.

It is recommended that the college start off small by looking at what the institution has done in the past. Knowing the history of the community college's relationship with its elected officials and what the college and the members may have accomplished together in the past can lay a foundation for a lobbying program. If history shows that no lobbying has ever been attempted, and there is no foundation, that is helpful information as well. The first step, then, is for the community college to analyze what it is currently doing. Sometimes in community college districts or large community colleges, it might not be common knowledge that the institution has been making efforts in the area of government relations. After reviewing what has been done in the past and what the community college is currently doing, it is time to brainstorm and plan what role the institution could have in the legislative process in the future. Important, too, is that the future plan be aligned with the strategic plan of the college so that it can be included in budget discussions.

Lobbying can be done with a fairly small budget, or large amounts of money can be allocated. The community college can decide to hire professional lobbyists, which some of the larger college systems have done, or the school can represent itself just as effectively. The

process begins with seeking to understand where the school currently stands and where it wants to go. Once that is established, the journey can begin with establishing a relationship with the elected state legislators.

The staff that will be taking on governmental affairs will need to make sure they are up-to-current on lobbying laws and the legislative process. Knowing that process will help them determine the best place to start, but everything begins with the relationship that needs to be cultivated between the office staff, the college, the member, and the college. Should they make a trip to the capitol building? Eventually yes, but first a foundation must be laid. The representative and the senator should be introduced to the college and its mission. Even if they live in the same town, the college may have been off their radar. We know that it never hurts to remind college staff what the mission and vision are of the school, so it certainly would be good to remind the elected officials what it is. With a well-established foundation, the community college can build a program where there is a reciprocal relationship between the institution, the legislators, and their staff. The school will have more of a voice and be able to serve its students at all levels.

## **SUMMARY**

Decisions made by the state legislature affect community colleges. Each state defines lobbying differently, and it is up to the college to know the laws of its state. A college must look at everything it does related to elected officials and determine if its lobbying activities fall within the legal definition of lobbying so it can plan out the college's lobbying strategy as the budget is being created.

When preparing to lobby on behalf of the community college, it is important to determine the appropriate governing body to address with the issue at hand, whether it be local, state, or federal. There are many avenues for becoming more familiar with lobbying that include analyzing the application of the laws by reading articles and updates by watchdog organizations, learning the state's legislative process inside and out, reading past and present news articles about bills that the legislature has considered, and following bills as they move through the legislature.

The most important way that a community college can prepare for lobbying and advocating for themselves in their state legislatures is by understanding how the legislative process works. Knowing how a bill moves through the state legislature helps community college leaders know when and where to utilize their lobbying resources.

The college may have an agenda and issues they need to be addressed by their member of congress, but the college is also a resource for the member. Meetings with elected officials should be exchanges of ideas and information, which are more effectively accomplished in face-to-face meetings.

Preparation to lobby never stops. During the legislative session, the status of a bill can change minute by minute, day by day, so bills must be followed closely. As an individual or group prepares to meet with their member, there is preparation that must be done in the long term and short term. It wastes the college's resources and staff members' time to go to a meeting unprepared. Preparation begins with understanding the mission of the college and knowing the issues that impact the college.

When a community college decides to embark on lobbying the state legislature, they are not alone. It can be a comfort to the institution to know that it is not solely up to the college to communicate the needs of their institution because there are organizations that help. However, no person or organization is going to know the needs of the college as well as its own administrators. The community college must work to create and maintain a relationship with their elected officials so that when there is a vote at the committee level or a vote on the floor, the college is in the back of the representative or senator's mind, as well as the community that each serves.

Community colleges that decide to lobby must choose the right people to take on the task. Whether a group or an individual is tasked with dealing with governmental affairs and whether the institution decides to send administrators, faculty, staff, or students, it is essential that the college send informed and prepared representatives of the school. Building a relationship with state legislators takes time and constant effort. The college can lay a foundation for an effective lobbying program by preparing on every level.

The next page provides an example of a "One-Pager," useful for communicating your key points to a member.

# COMMUNITY COLLEGE LOBBYING



## GETTING STARTED

- Know how lobbying is defined in your state.
- Determine if your concern or interest is a federal, state, or local issue.
- Familiarize yourself with your state's lobbying laws and reporting requirements.

## LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

- Understand the legislative process of your state legislature.
- Determine who would be the correct person to lobby, depending on the issue.

## MEETINGS

- Prepare for meetings and other interactions.
- Meet face to face.
- Know who is duplicating your efforts.

## RELATIONSHIPS

- Maintain a relationship with your representative and senators.
- Include your contact information on all correspondence and one-pagers.

For more detailed information, read *Community College Lobbying* by Diane Elliott, Ed.D., [diane.elliott@wgu.edu](mailto:diane.elliott@wgu.edu)

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

### INTRODUCTION

It is up to the leaders of each community college to ensure that their institution stays relevant by keeping members of congress informed and aware of the needs of the community college. Colleges have the opportunity and responsibility to advocate for what they know will help the college the most. It is worth the time and effort for the college to stay informed and be actively involved in the legislative process. This dissertation's aim was to provide community college leaders strategies and tactics to lobby their state governments effectively and build a relationship with elected officials for the purpose of influencing legislation that affects student success.

Few resources exist to help community colleges identify best practices and methods for lobbying their state legislature. While the review of the literature demonstrated that there are many available resources regarding lobbying, a specific guide is not available for community colleges. However, another gap was that none of the guidance offered about lobbying addresses the importance of creating and maintaining a relationship with legislators and their staff in an effort to stay involved and communicate the needs of the college. The manual presented here was created to help community colleges lobby the state legislature and addresses the importance of knowing the legislative process, whom to address, as well as how and when to communicate. Most importantly, it addresses the concept of creating a professional

relationship between the college and the elected officials so that it is not always just about lobbying a particular bill. The college can be a source of information for the legislator, and its staff can serve on fact-finding committees and testify before congressional committees.

### **RESTATEMENT OF THE GOAL OF THE STUDY**

The goal of this study was to provide community college leaders with a manual covering strategies and tactics that will help them effectively lobby their state governments and build a relationship with elected officials. This guide fills a need for community colleges because it can help them focus their efforts and understand the process of lobbying so that they are using their resources in the most effective way. The time and money spent to influence state elected officials can be wisely channeled to the right people at the right time with guidance.

The review of the literature revealed and thoroughly addressed the existing resources available that generally address lobbying at the state level with a focus on Texas. Several organizations track legislation and even offer guidance on lobbying. However, even though there are several resources available, they do not focus on community colleges. The goal of the study, determining what community college leaders need to know and understand to be effective lobbyists in their state governments, has been met within this research and in the guide included.

### **LIMITATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS**

The information in the guide was enhanced based on input from one former state representative and three current legislative staffers. Two of the staffers were senate staff, and one was staff for a representative. The staff members were asked 18 questions that focused on what they found to be the most effective methods used in lobbying and communicating with



their office. The remainder of the information for the manual was informed by the review of literature and the researcher's own experience as a congressional staff member in the US House of Representatives. The focus of the guide was on the Texas legislature and the 50 community colleges in Texas.

A limitation of the participants was the availability of congressional staff. At the beginning of the study, staff members were not available because the impending November election was near. Because of redistricting in the previous legislative session, the entire Texas senate was up for reelection. Texas house members serve for two years, so the entire house was up for reelection as well. With elections pending, staff members were more focused on whether they would have a job in January. After the November election, staff members were difficult, if not impossible, to reach because they were either setting up the office and preparing for the upcoming legislative session in January, or they were on a break for the holidays expecting to return in January. In January, with the session set to begin on January 10, 2023, staff members felt the pressure of the upcoming session and were reluctant to meet.

Another limitation was that all of the staff members and the former representative were Democrats. Twice as many Republican offices were contacted as were Democrats in an effort to have a balanced pool of participants, but the Republican offices refused to engage, including the researcher's own representative and the representative from where the researcher was raised. The Democrats who agreed to participate did so because one member was passionate about education, and each expressed their desire to help the researcher. A small limitation was that one of the staff members was less experienced than the other staff members and noted

that he had been with the senator for six months. The other two staff members were chiefs of staff.

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher's main assumption was that every participant would say that representatives from the college should meet only with their own state representative or senator. The researcher's personal experience working with freshman congressmen in the US House of Representatives reflected this practice: the congressman would not give time to people from outside the district. However, only one of the interviewed participants agreed with this practice. The reason they disagreed is the committee process. Because the researcher's employer, the senior member for whom the researcher worked, was the chair of a subcommittee, the congressman felt compelled to meet with people who were associated with upcoming hearings, whether they were in his district or not. One of the participants who was a chief of staff explained that when a state senator or a representative is a high-ranking member of a committee, they must set aside constituent-only visits and understand that the legislation that the committee is considering affects the entire state. Because all state representatives and senators serve on committees and sometimes subcommittees, the manual reflects the committee process and the importance of meeting with committee leaders for the purpose of lobbying them. This practice made it even more important to focus on the legislative process and knowing where a bill sits, so that the proper member can be lobbied accordingly.

## **FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS**

In future studies about community college lobbying, it is recommended that investigations be extended to other states. All states have a bicameral legislature except for

Nebraska, but each state makes its own laws and has its own legislative rules specific to that state. Studies on each of the other states, or a more extensive study, would be helpful to investigate legislative practices, identify the similarities among states, and develop a guide that could more easily be applied to multiple states.

A second recommendation would be to gather participants from a larger number of congressional offices. Four interviews certainly informed the product, but more interviews might bring even more credibility to the best practices advice. In addition, while the discussion about lobbying is nonpartisan, in future studies, interviewing members of both political parties would provide a more obviously balanced product.

Finally, looking closer at Texas, more information about the 78% of colleges that are not registered as lobbyists could be researched. The colleges could be surveyed to find out if they are participating in lobbying below the reporting thresholds, not participating at all, or relying on other member organizations to represent them in Austin.

## **CONCLUSION**

With every session of the state legislature, bills are proposed that affect community colleges. The house and senate members who represent the area in which a community college is located can be partners with the college and truly represent the mission and vision of the school. Community colleges should want to know that their voice is being represented, no matter how big or small the impact of a piece of legislation.

The manual created as a result of this study is a guide to aid community colleges in knowing how to lobby their state legislature. For schools that have never lobbied, it is a starting point for beginning the process of understanding the basics of lobbying, the legislative process,

and the best people to meet when discussing pending legislation. For more experienced schools, it has tips for being more effective and making a bigger impact on the community college. All community colleges can benefit from learning that the relationship between the member and the college is a reciprocal one. The college serves the member's constituents, and the college and the member working together will always serve and benefit the entire community.

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## APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

# FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD  
1010 Campus Drive FLITE 410 Big Rapids, MI 49307  
www.ferris.edu/irb

Date: November 7, 2022

To: Susan DeCamillis, EdD and Diane Elliott  
From: David R. White, Ph.D., IRB Chair  
Re: IRB Application *IRB-FY22-23-32 A Manual for Community College Lobbying*

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, *A Manual for Community College Lobbying (IRB-FY22-23-32)* and approved this project under Federal Regulations Exempt Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your protocol has been assigned project number IRB-FY22-23-32. Approval mandates that you follow all University policy and procedures, in addition to applicable governmental regulations. Approval applies only to the activities described in the protocol submission; should revisions need to be made, all materials must be approved by the IRB prior to initiation. In addition, the IRB must be made aware of any serious and unexpected and/or unanticipated adverse events as well as complaints and non-compliance issues.

This project has been granted a waiver of consent documentation; signatures of participants need not be collected. Although not documented, informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and participant rights, with the assurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must be provided, even when documentation is waived, and continue throughout the study.

As mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) the IRB requires submission of annual status reports during the life of the research project and a Final Report Form upon study completion. **The Annual Status Report for this project is due on or before November 6, 2023.** Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Please let us know if the IRB can be of any future assistance.

Regards,



David R. White, Ph.D., IRB Chair  
Ferris State University Institutional Review Board

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What do you do in your role of handling educational issues?
2. How do you interact with visitors who want to talk about pending legislation or ideas for proposed legislation?
3. Please discuss the effectiveness of an in-person visit vs. a phone call, email, letter, etc.
4. When do you elevate a meeting to involve the member, or if you are the member, when are meetings elevated to you?
5. How do you communicate to the member what a person or organization has relayed?
6. Is a meeting normally an exchange of information such as you telling the status of a bill and the college representatives explaining how it affects their college, or do you mostly listen?
7. How do you prefer to receive the information from the college representatives? (flash drive, email, printed materials)
8. How much information from the college representative do you prefer to receive? (highlights, detailed documents, historical context)
9. What could a community college leave with you that would make an impression or make an impact?
10. What is the impact of representative(s) from the community college coming personally to the office to meet you or the member?
11. When visiting in person, do you prefer appointments with advanced materials, drop-ins, or informational appointments?
12. What type of follow-up by the college representative is effective?
13. Overall, is hearing from one representative as effective as having a group visit? A person high in administration? A student? A group of students? Someone from your district? A representative from the college in your district who resides outside of your district?
14. What impact does the communication from the community college have on the member's voting decision?
15. What would foster the best relationship between your office and the community college in your district?
16. What could the community college provide you to make your job easier?
17. Which office location is the best for the representatives from the community college to interact with – district or state?
18. How effective would it be to invite your office (legislative assistant or member) to the campus for a meeting instead of campus representatives visiting your office?