



LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY FOR COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS



AN NCLR TOOL KIT

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) – the largest national Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in the United States – works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. Through its network of nearly 300 affiliated community-based organizations (CBOs), NCLR reaches millions of Hispanics each year in 41 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. To achieve its mission, NCLR conducts applied research, policy analysis, and advocacy, providing a Latino perspective in five key areas – assets/investments, civil rights/immigration, education, employment and economic status, and health. In addition, it provides capacity-building assistance to its Affiliates who work at the state and local level to advance opportunities for individuals and families.

Founded in 1968, NCLR is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan, tax-exempt organization headquartered in Washington, DC. NCLR serves all Hispanic subgroups in all regions of the country and has operations in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Phoenix, Sacramento, San Antonio, and San Juan, Puerto Rico.

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An NCLR Tool Kit

Office of Research, Advocacy, and Legislation

National Council of La Raza
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www.nclr.org

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Background on the National Council of La Raza and Civic Participation

SECTION 1

NCLR Field Advocacy Programs

Founded in 1968, the National Council of La Raza (NCLR) – the largest national Latino* civil rights and advocacy organization in the U.S. – works to improve opportunities for Hispanic Americans. NCLR’s theory of change centers on ensuring that Latinos have both the ability and the opportunity to improve their socioeconomic status.

As a complementary piece to its policy and legislative advocacy efforts, NCLR has developed a variety of civic participation initiatives. The civic participation strategies focus on three programs: the Emerging Latino Communities (ELC) Initiative, Latino Empowerment and Advocacy Project (LEAP), and Field Advocacy Project (FAP). Each program couples technical assistance with community engagement to help community-based organizations (CBOs) increase Latino voices and civic participation. Through this approach, NCLR has lent assistance to many state and local groups to strengthen their role as promoters of grassroots leadership and agents of social change. As part of this effort, NCLR has prepared and disseminated a wide range of policy materials, organized advocacy and media training sessions, and provided technical assistance to groups, particularly in the areas of education, health, criminal justice, and immigration.

* The terms “Hispanic” and “Latino” are used interchangeably by the U.S. Census Bureau and throughout this document to identify persons of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central and South American, Dominican, Spanish, and other Hispanic descent; they may be of any race.

Emerging Latino Communities Initiative

ELC focuses on strengthening organizations committed to working in new and emerging Latino communities, advancing models that can be adapted by groups in other regions, and facilitating the creation/expansion of community networks. ELC works closely with NCLR's Field Advocacy Project and Latino Empowerment and Advocacy Project. Through the interconnected work of these programs, ELC seeks to build a culture of participation that helps community groups become active participants in shaping their own destinies, partnering with others to increase Latino voices and engagement, and fostering an organization-wide approach that supports community organizing. In particular, ELC focuses on community organizing as a means to increase Latino CBOs' ability to: a) respond to current inequalities; b) build a movement that incorporates grassroots participation in creating lasting systemic change; and c) participate in national networks and advocacy efforts.

Latino Empowerment and Advocacy Project

LEAP was designed to engage Latino CBOs and service providers not traditionally involved in civic engagement efforts to participate in and, in the process, become permanent conduits for nonpartisan voter registration, education, and mobilization activities. In the short term, the project's goal is to produce a measurable and sustainable increase in Latino political participation. In the long term, the project aims to strengthen local CBO capacity and infrastructure to continue nonpartisan voter registration and mobilization and to incorporate these activities into the mission of their organizations.

In addition to the work on voter registration, education, and turnout – an ongoing effort since 2002 – LEAP is working to develop strategies for increasing CBO participation in promoting citizenship and in helping new citizens become fully engaged in the American political process. Its focus is on creating a seamless continuum that links immigrants to naturalization; naturalized citizens and the unregistered to voter registration and civic education; registered voters to the polls; and engaged immigrants to advocacy opportunities in their community.

Field Advocacy Project

NCLR's public policy expertise at the federal level, which includes a number of key issues also significant at the state level, has provided fertile ground for collaboration with state and local groups engaged in education, health, economic mobility, civil rights, and immigration issues. Through this work, NCLR hopes to create greater synergy among advocates working at the local, state, and federal levels; provide a state perspective in shaping the organization's national advocacy work; and disseminate information to Affiliates and other partners regarding the implications of federal policy debates on their states. Field advocacy follows two approaches – the NCLR Staff Model and the Training and Technical Assistance Model. The NCLR Staff Model builds on NCLR's proven record of advocacy successes by placing NCLR staff in selected state capitals to work on legislative affairs of interest to the Latino community. The cornerstones of this approach are Texas and California – the two states with the largest Latino populations and the potential to set policy trends nationwide on issues affecting Latinos. Operations in Texas began in 1998 and in California in 2001. A premium has been placed on forming coalitions with Latino and immigrant advocates in both states to advance policy agendas responsive to both communities.

NCLR uses the Training and Technical Assistance approach to help strengthen the role of state and local groups. For example, NCLR's work with local groups has contributed to significant school-wide reforms in Denver and to the prevention of low-income tenant displacement in Washington, DC. In the area of immigration, NCLR has been working with groups around the country – including California, Colorado, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, North Carolina, Oregon, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and Utah – providing materials and training and assisting in drafting and advancing legislation.



SECTION 2

Legislative Advocacy and the Role of Community-Based Organizations

Legislative Advocacy

Community members and community-based organizations do not live or work in a vacuum. We are all affected by decisions made by bodies of government, including city councils, state legislatures, Congress, and the courts. Decisions that affect the community in the form of laws and rules are known as “public policy.”¹ Ideally public policies reflect the input and serve the interests of the entire community. Individuals and community-based organizations can ensure that public policies reflect their communities’ needs by participating in the public policy process. Public policy is one avenue to improve opportunities for Latinos in the United States. This tool kit will help you and your organization influence public policy through legislative advocacy.

Advocacy

“Advocacy represents the strategies devised, actions taken, and solutions proposed to influence decision-making at the local and state level to create positive change for people and their environment.”²

Advocacy happens on a variety of levels; individual advocacy is providing consistent service to clients, while large-scale advocacy is acting on behalf of people for a particular change in policy. For example, CBOs can engage in advocacy efforts to educate decision-makers and the broader public about the lack

of access to health care services for the Latino community. Empowering the Latino community to engage in advocacy efforts requires the following:

- ▶ Educating constituencies on political power structures
- ▶ Educating constituencies on specific public policy issues
- ▶ Providing a structure to allow clients to drive the organization's advocacy efforts
- ▶ Prioritizing the advocacy issues to match the capacity and interest of the organization

Examples of Advocacy:

- ▶ Testifying at public hearings
- ▶ Organizing a rally
- ▶ Holding a press conference
- ▶ Writing a letter to the editor
- ▶ Hosting an issue forum

Community-Based Organizations Should Participate in Legislative Advocacy

- ▶ Legislative advocacy is an important activity that your organization can carry out to achieve your mission and engage clients as agents of change.
- ▶ Your organization can build upon its mission, address inequalities, and develop solutions to systemic problems by engaging legislative advocacy strategies.
- ▶ Community-based organizations should be viewed as part of the community rather than strictly servants of the community, and community members should be active participants in social change.
- ▶ By integrating legislative advocacy into their work, community-based organizations can help change the systems that create the need for services.

"Nonprofit organizations – with their millions of board members and volunteers – have enormous potential to improve this country's laws and, by doing so, to improve the lives of the people they serve."³

Using Legislative Advocacy to Achieve NCLR's Mission

NCLR uses legislative advocacy to improve outcomes for Hispanics in the areas of assets/investments, civil rights/immigration, education, employment and economic status, and health.

Defining Legislative Advocacy

Community-based organizations can get involved in legislative advocacy within certain legal frameworks. NCLR encourages community-based organizations to participate in legislative advocacy at the level that is appropriate for the organization. Some organizations will orchestrate full-level campaigns while others will participate in a coalition or join a sign-on letter. All activities play an important role in influencing the policy-making process.

Legislative Advocacy

“Lobbying, as well as other advocacy activities such as media advocacy and grassroots organizing, can influence the legislative process.”⁴

Legislative advocacy consists of advocacy and public policy activities, including, but not limited to lobbying. Nonprofits, as tax-exempt organizations, are restricted in the amount of money that they can spend on lobbying. Certain advocacy and public policy activities are not lobbying and are therefore not restricted. Nonprofits can engage in these activities without limit.

NCLR's legislative advocacy strategies led to gains for the Latino community. The following are just a few of the many examples of lobbying activities NCLR uses to create positive change:

In 2002 NCLR collaborated with partners to reinstate food stamp eligibility for hundreds of thousands of immigrants. In 1996 the Welfare Reform Act denied immigrants access to food stamps. NCLR collaborated with partners, including grocery stores and civil rights, religious, ethnic, labor, and nutrition groups to lobby for changes to the Farm Bill which would extend food stamp eligibility to low-income immigrant children, the disabled, and refugees. This coalition carried out a campaign to send bags of paper plates with comments written on them to members of Congress to communicate the importance of food stamps. The campaign led to the restoration of food stamp benefits for immigrants who have legally resided in the U.S. for at least five years and meet the income and resource requirements of the Food Stamp Program.

In 2002 Representative Dana Rohrabacher (R-CA) introduced an amendment that would force doctors and nurses to alert federal authorities if they suspect patients of being undocumented immigrants.

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Advocacy and Public Policy Activities that Are Not Considered Lobbying

(for organizations taking the 501(h) election; please see page 9 for more information)

- ▶ Contacting government officials or legislators to try to change regulations
- ▶ Commenting on proposed regulations
- ▶ Testifying on legislation at a hearing, provided the legislative body asked your organization, in writing, to testify
- ▶ Advocating with the executive branch of government on nonlegislative policies or programs
- ▶ Discussing broad social or economic issues without taking a position on specific legislation
- ▶ Conducting a nonbiased, nonpartisan policy analysis of legislation or other policy and making the results available; results must give equal space to both the pros and cons to be considered nonbiased, nonpartisan

Continued from Page 7

NCLR joined a coalition of national, state, and local organizations to write and send a sign-on letter to Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL). The amendment was defeated by a vote of 331 to 88.

NCLR's housing counseling organizations send letters and emails every year to the House Committee on Appropriations to make the case for more federal funding for housing counseling. These letters document their organization's work and success at connecting low-income families with homeownership opportunities. In addition to individual letters from local organizations, a sign-on letter is also sent from all of the participating organizations. In 2007 the budget passed in the Senate with an extra \$108 million for housing counseling programs to benefit all communities.

Lobbying Is:

“A focused form of advocacy that shapes public policy in arenas of influence at the local, national, or global level.”⁵

“A specific, legally defined activity that involves stating your position on specific legislation to legislators and/or asking them to support your position. Lobbying is classified as direct or grassroots.”⁶

Lobbying is actively supporting or opposing specific legislation (at the local, state, or federal level) or a rule change in a governmental department (e.g., Medicaid rule change). Nonprofit organizations are within legal parameters to engage in lobbying activities, so long as they abide by lobbying rules and restrictions.

Rules for Nonprofit Lobbying

To carry out lobbying activities the federal government requires that nonprofits limit the amount of money they can spend on lobbying activities. There are two standards that define how nonprofits lobby. The first is known as “taking the 501(h) election” and the second is the “insubstantial part test.” NCLR recommends that nonprofits take the 501(h) election.

- ▶ Federal and public funds cannot be used for lobbying
- ▶ Many foundations do not allow their funds to be used for lobbying. (You should check with the foundation.)

“Insubstantial Part Test”

The “insubstantial part test” requires that “no substantial part of a charity’s activities...be carrying on propaganda or otherwise attempting to influence legislation.” “Substantial” is not defined, neither are the types of activities that can be considered “attempting to influence legislation.”⁷ Nonprofits can lose their tax exemption if they spend more than a “substantial” amount on lobbying.

“Taking the 501(h) Election”

The 501(h) election sets defined spending limits and definitions for nonprofit lobbying activity under section 501(h) and 4911 of the Tax Reform Act of 1976. These guidelines are not automatic for every nonprofit. A nonprofit must choose to follow these regulations by filing paperwork. A nonprofit only needs to file a one-page form (Form 5768; example in the appendix) with the IRS. Once this form is filed the nonprofit does not need to file any other paperwork unless they choose to stop electing 501(h); then they use the same form.

Why Lobby? *

1. You can make a difference.
2. People working together can make a difference.
3. People can change laws.
4. Lobbying is a democratic tradition.
5. Lobbying helps find real solutions.
6. Lobbying is easy.
7. Policy-makers need your expertise.
8. Lobbying helps people.
9. The views of local nonprofits are important.
10. Lobbying advances your cause and builds public trust.

* Alliance for Justice, “Worry-Free Lobbying for Nonprofits: How to Use the 501(h) Election to Maximize Effectiveness.” Washington, DC, 2003, 6.

Taking the 501(h) election is the easiest method for nonprofits who want to participate in lobbying activities. Nonprofits report their lobbying expenditures annually through Form 990. On this form you will need to report staff time, office resources, and money spent on lobbying.

Under 501(h) election lobbying activities are divided into two types: (1) direct lobbying and (2) indirect lobbying, also known as grassroots lobbying.

Direct Lobbying

“Direct lobbying is a communication with a legislator, staff person, or policy-making administration official who participates in the formulation of legislation. It must refer to a specific piece of legislation and express a view on it.”⁸

Tell your legislators (e.g., member of Congress, senator, state representative, local representatives, or other government officials who participate in creating legislation) your organization’s position on a piece of legislation.

EXAMPLE:

The Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition (TIRRC) directly asks Representative Kathy Ashe (D-GA 56th) to vote “Yes” on HB 114.

Indirect Lobbying (also known as grassroots lobbying)

“A grassroots lobbying communication is an attempt to influence specific legislation by encouraging the public, other than the organization’s members, to contact legislators about that legislation. It must refer to specific legislation, reflect a view on it and encourage the recipient to take lobbying action on it.”⁹

Tell the general public your position on legislation and ask them to communicate this position to their legislators. Indirect, also known as grassroots lobbying, occurs when any form of “call to action” is made in the communication.

EXAMPLE:

TIRRC asks its members to urge Rep. Ashe to vote “Yes” on HB 114.

Spending Limits

The 501(h) election states that a nonprofit can lobby up to a defined dollar limit based on the organization's budget.

Nonprofits cannot spend more than 20% of their total budget on direct lobbying activities.

Nonprofits cannot spend more than 25% of their lobbying budget, or more than 5% of the total budget of the organization, on grassroots lobbying activities.

EXAMPLE:

Your organization has a budget of \$100,000.

\$50,000 = federal grant

\$50,000 = unrestricted funds*

You may use a portion of the \$50,000 in unrestricted funds for lobbying.

\$20,000 = your total direct lobby limit

\$5,000 = your total grassroots lobby limit

Limits to Nonprofit Political Activities

While nonprofits can participate in lobbying and public policy activities they cannot engage in strictly political activities.

- ▶ Nonprofits cannot endorse political candidates or align themselves with a political party.
- ▶ Nonprofits cannot establish a political action committee (PAC) for political activities.

Additional Lobbying Rules

State Rules

- ▶ Contact the state association of nonprofits and/or the state attorney general and secretary of state. Each state will have its own rules for state-level lobbying.

* "Unrestricted funds" refers to money that can be used for lobbying. Nonprofits can devote funds from individual contributions, membership fees, fundraising, and income generating activities to lobbying expenditures. Nonprofits cannot use federal or public funds for lobbying.

Initiatives and Referenda

- ▶ Communicating to the public about an initiative or referendum, not electioneering, is considered direct lobbying.

Benefits to “Taking the 501(h) Election”*

- ▶ Clear definitions of lobbying activities
- ▶ Generous and clear spending limits
- ▶ Only count money spent by the organization, not volunteer and cost-free activities
- ▶ Easy tracking of lobbying expenses with the simple 990 form.
- ▶ No increased risk of audit
- ▶ Protection for officers and directors

* Bob Smucker, “Make a Difference for Your Cause,” Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest. 2006 Also available at http://www.clpi.org/Make_a_Difference_Resource_Guide.aspx

Positive Outcomes of Lobbying

Even if all of your lobbying does not end up producing the ideal bill (or any bill at all) it is important to remember that generating a lot of activity and concern on your key issues can have important positive outcomes. For example, while lobbying a family unity provision (protection against deportation for the spouses and children of legalized immigrants) NCLR ended up encouraging the former Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to adopt its own family unity policy. As our momentum mounted on the Hill, the INS had more incentive to address the problem. The INS policy exactly matched the first family unity amendment to pass the Senate. In addition, working on an issue now and making offices familiar with the arguments can often make it easier in a later Congress to get something done. Sometimes it takes a while for things to percolate, but time spent lobbying is rarely wasted.

Additional Resources for Information on Nonprofits and Lobbying

CENTER FOR LOBBYING IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST (CLPI)

www.clpi.org

CLPI works to promote nonprofit lobbying and advocacy. Their website contains additional publications and information on trainings for those interested in nonprofit lobbying.

ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE

www.afj.org

The Alliance for Justice is a national association of environmental, civil rights, mental health, women's, children's, and consumer advocacy organizations. Their website contains a section just for advocacy by nonprofits and foundations with informative publications and technical assistance. For more complex legal questions you can contact the Alliance for Justice.

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE (IRS)

<http://www.irs.gov/charities/index.html>

The IRS website section on charities and other nonprofits maintains current information on tax reporting requirements for nonprofits. Several publications also outline the lobbying limits for nonprofits.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SECRETARIES OF STATE

<http://www.nass.org/>

From this website you can locate your secretary of state's website. Your secretary of state will have detailed information on lobbying rules and reporting procedures for nonprofits in your state.



Carrying out Legislative Advocacy

SECTION 3

Strategic Lobbying: An Overview

This overview provides an outline of the steps involved in successfully integrating lobbying into an organization. Your organization can use these steps for every level of legislative advocacy. The following section will also give you insight into NCLR's legislative strategy and how vital your organization is to influencing federal public policy.

While this guide focuses on influencing federal legislation you can also use these steps to work on state and local legislative advocacy. Whether your organization decides to lobby through small initiatives or develop a full campaign, these steps will help you concentrate your efforts to achieve maximum impact.

What: Know the Goal

Before you begin lobbying, determine the issue you want to work on and define your goal. Are you trying to change minds? Change policy? Are you looking for a symbolic or substantive gain? Are you trying to gain something as a coalition or as an individual organization?

An organization ought to develop its own "check list" to determine if engaging in legislative advocacy on a particular issue is in the best interest of the organization. A national organization like NCLR maintains set criteria for choosing which issues it will engage in, while a local organization might use a simpler approach.

Model for Choosing an Issue: NCLR

NCLR chooses its issues by asking the questions outlined below:

Impact on the Hispanic Community:

Are many people affected?

Are few people affected, but in a big way?

Expertise (Ability to Influence the Outcome):

Can it be done without us? Can we add something to the debate? Can someone do it better than us?

Resources:

Do we have funding to address the issue?

NCLR Model:

Does the issue fit our two models?

TRADE ASSOCIATION MODEL:

Representing the Affiliates

Creating CBO-run programs

Seeking funding for Affiliate-run programs

CIVIL RIGHTS MODEL:

Representing the community

Protecting Latino, immigrant, and language rights

Identifying the “CBO angle”

Who: Identify and Develop Coalitions

Once you choose your issue, your organization should begin to survey the landscape and 1) identify a coalition already working on this issue and determine how to engage that coalition, or 2) build a coalition. When elected officials discover that the people they serve have joined together in a coalition with a common goal, they will have to give the group more attention; therefore, the group has a greater chance of making an impact and influencing public policy decisions.

Joining or Collaborating with an Existing Coalition

- ▶ Identify coalitions that work on your issues.
- ▶ Determine if the coalition shares your organization’s goals and vision for the particular issue.
- ▶ Identify the added value your organization brings to the table.

How to Build a Coalition¹⁰

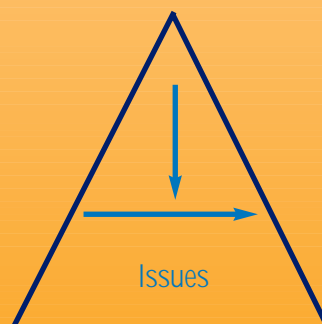
1. Solidify Base of Supporters
 - ◆ Identify your current supporters.
 - ◆ Bring supporters together.
 - ◆ Make sure to “share the load.”
 - ◆ Develop strategies to pull more people into the core of supporters.
2. Identify Potential Allies
 - ◆ Who could benefit from the issue you are supporting?
 - ◆ Identify “usual suspects.”
 - ◆ Think outside the box to identify nontraditional allies.
3. Set up Means of Communication with Base and Allies
 - ◆ Phone lists
 - ◆ Email lists
 - ◆ “Snail mail” lists
 - ◆ Periodic meetings

Model for Choosing an Issue: Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition*

TIRRC offers the following model for choosing an issue:

The issue should be deep – something that gets to the core of the problems in the community.

The issue should be wide – something that reaches a large number of people in the community.



* “Steps for Effective Immigrant and Refugee Legislative Advocacy & Organizing,” adapted from the PowerPoint from the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition.

How: Decide Level of Engagement

Your organization will need to determine your level of engagement. Will you take the lead in the campaign or will you support the work of others? Are there different roles for different groups and does your organization play a specific role?

Not all organizations will undertake a full campaign. Some organizations may choose to support the work of large, national organizations that carry out lobbying, such as NCLR. Your organization can play an important role by joining a sign-on letter, making phone calls to your representatives and senators, or visiting their office when they are in your district.

How: Create a Strategy

Once your organization decides your level of engagement on a particular issue you will need to identify the elements of your strategy. To meet your goal of influencing the outcome of legislation you will focus on a legislative strategy that will require you to target elected representatives. You will also need to develop a media strategy to help you influence your targets and gain community support.

Legislative Strategy

1. Determine Targets

Who has the power to create the change you are seeking?

If you are trying to impact federal legislation your targets will be your representative and senators. If you choose to engage in legislative advocacy at the local and/or state level your targets will be the decision-makers on your chosen issue.

2. Conduct a Power Analysis

You can use the following questions to help you research your targets and conduct a power analysis:¹¹

- ◆ What congressional committees do your targets sit on?
- ◆ What issues do they focus on?
- ◆ Who has the power to influence your targets?
- ◆ What are your targets' political bases?
- ◆ What are their voting records in Congress?
- ◆ Do they generally support or oppose this issue?
- ◆ Were their last elections close?
- ◆ Have they responded to your group or similar groups in the past?
- ◆ How can you really move the target?
- ◆ What will it take to get them to champion your cause?

Media Strategy

Media can be an integral part of your legislative advocacy strategy; unfortunately for too many CBOs, media is an afterthought and often sought only as a reactionary tactic. Similar to the development of the overall legislative advocacy strategy plan, your organization should include a well thought-out media plan prior to engaging in legislative advocacy.

1. Determine a Goal
 - ◆ How do you describe the goal?
 - ◆ How do you defend it?
2. Decide Who Will Be Involved
 - ◆ Who are your messengers?
 - ◆ Who is your audience?
 - ◆ Are there different message and different messengers for mainstream media vs. Spanish-language media?
3. Carry out Media Activities
 - ◆ Should there be media events (e.g., a press conference or briefing)?
 - ◆ How do you determine which media inquiries you respond to?

Written Materials

As a supplement to your legislative and media strategy you will need written materials. You can either choose to develop your own materials or use materials from other organizations. You can also create your own materials using templates and examples from other organizations. If you choose to develop your own materials you should use facts and statistics, and keep the documents as straightforward and simple as possible. You may want to use different types of written materials to create a packet on your particular issue. Keep in mind that any written materials distributed in lobbying activities must give equal space to the pros and cons of the piece of legislation in question. NCLR produces written materials including fact sheets and one-pagers which are available online. The following is a sample list; each type of written material will be described in the Tools for Lobbying section and examples are included in the supplemental materials of this tool kit:

- ▶ Op-ed (Opposite editorial)
- ▶ Letters, sign-on letters
- ▶ Issue briefs
- ▶ Fact sheets
- ▶ Talking points

Federal Legislative and Budget Process

The legislative process will help guide your advocacy activities. To advocate for a new piece of legislation, change legislation, or defeat legislation you will use the steps of how a bill becomes a law to follow the legislation and decide when and how to advocate. To advocate for federal appropriations you will monitor the separate, but similar federal budget and appropriations process. While many states follow a similar process for passing laws you should look up your specific state legislative process to engage in state and local advocacy.

How a Bill Becomes a Law

With some differences outlined below, the legislative process is essentially the same in both the House and the Senate, and includes six basic steps:

Introduction and Referral to Committee

The bill is given a number and usually referred to the appropriate subcommittee. The most intensive consideration of a bill takes place in committee. A committee can choose not to act on a bill and the bill is considered dead. There are 19 committees in the House and 16 in the Senate and several select committees.¹² There are four joint committees of the two Houses with oversight responsibilities. Each committee is divided into subcommittees.

EXAMPLE:



House Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee on Early Childhood Elementary and Secondary Education



Find out which committees your members are on by visiting house.gov, senate.gov, or congress.org. You can let them know your thoughts on their committee's issues.

Subcommittee

Once a subcommittee is created two steps are normally followed:

1. **Hearings** – The subcommittee listens to testimony from relevant government departments and agencies, members of Congress, senators, and private individuals. A transcript is made of committee hearings, which becomes public record.
2. **Markups** – After hearings are completed, the subcommittee will gather to formally draft the bill. The “base bill” or bill that was introduced (sometimes with modifications made by the subcommittee chair, known as the “Chairman’s Mark”), is amended and voted on and subsequently “reported out” of the subcommittee to the full committee.



The subcommittee level is where the legislative process really begins. You can use the information you gathered on your representatives’ committee memberships to contact them about issues they address in subcommittee. You help inform their staff about issues they might not know about and develop legislation. This is the stage at which you might prepare and submit testimony in person or in writing for a hearing.

Full Committee

The full committee follows the same steps as the subcommittee. Hearings are frequently excluded and a formal written report is always included, which provides details on the intent of the legislation and its impact on existing laws and programs, position of the executive branch, and views of dissenting members of the committee.



This is a critical stage to contact members who are on committees that deal with your chosen issue. Members will debate during committee whether specific pieces of legislation should be included or excluded. The more voices members hear, the more powerful the message, and the more likely they will argue and vote your way.

Floor Action, Debate, and Voting

After a bill is approved by its assigned committee it will be reported back to the chamber, House or Senate, in which it was introduced. The bill is placed in chronological order on the calendar. The calendar determines if, when, and in what order bills will come to the floor for debate and a vote. In the House there are different legislative calendars and the Speaker and majority leader determine where a bill is placed on the calendar. Once on the floor the chamber considers and votes on amendments and a vote is taken on final passage of the bill. If the bill passes it is referred to the other chamber to begin the process of committee and floor action.



Contact all members, regardless of committee assignments, since they will all vote on the proposed legislation. You will make phone calls, send letters, faxes, and emails asking your representative and senators to vote for or against a specific piece of legislation or amendment. It is crucial that you contact your representatives at this stage. Sending your lobbying materials to reporters who cover your issue and to editorial boards can also be very helpful.

Conference Committee

If a bill passes both the House and the Senate, a joint committee will meet to resolve the differences between the two versions. The final result, or the Conference Report, is sent back to both chambers for consideration.



If your members are on the Conference Committee, let them know your position about which pieces of legislation you think should be in the final bill. If your members are not on the Conference Committee, ask them to convey your messages to their colleagues on the committee.

President’s Signature

Once the Conference Report is voted on and passes in the House and the Senate, the bill is sent to the President. Once the President signs the bill it becomes public law. The bill dies if the President decides to veto the bill, unless Congress decides to override the veto. The House and the Senate must both vote by a two-thirds majority to override the President’s veto.

Differences Between the House and Senate

Amendments

House

In the House, each bill must be considered by the Committee on Rules before floor consideration. The Committee governs the types and order of amendments that may be offered to the bill, the length of time the bill can be considered, and other technical considerations (including rulings on parliamentary points of order against the bill). The Committee determines certain restrictions for each bill and packages these into a rule for that bill. A majority vote must agree to the rule before the bill can be considered.

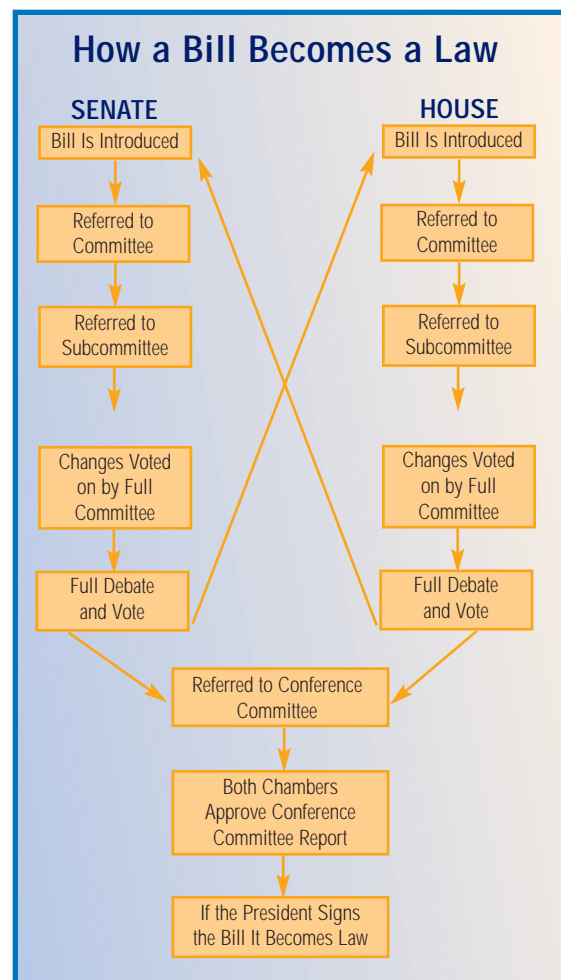
There are several categories of rules that can be attached to a bill. Open and closed rules are examples of two of these categories.

EXAMPLE:

- Closed rules do not permit amendments of any kind.
- Open rules permit any and all amendments.

Senate

In the Senate, the majority leader puts the bills on the calendar. Once on the calendar the bill is eligible for floor consideration. The Senate does not have a rules committee to limit the parameters of the debate. The majority leader usually sets a time limit for consideration of the bill on the floor. The time limit determines the number of amendments that can be offered.



Relevance

In the House, only amendments that are directly relevant to the base bill are permitted for consideration. Congress uses the term “germaneness” to describe an amendment’s relevance to the base bill. Whether an amendment is considered germane depends on a number of technical and legal factors; final determinations are made by the House parliamentarian. In the Senate, the rules permit “extraneous” amendments.

Filibusters and Time Limits

House

In the House, floor action is governed by a five-minute rule which limits most members’ statements to a maximum of five minutes. In the House, the total amount of time allocated to consideration of a bill is usually limited by the rule.

Senate

With rare exceptions, Senate floor statements are not time-limited. In the Senate, a “filibuster” or “extended debate” can result in almost indefinite consideration of certain bills or amendments. Filibusters can be stopped by invoking cloture, a procedure move that requires at least 60 votes; even after cloture is invoked, debate on the bill can continue for up to 100 hours (one hour per senator).

Legislative Terms

Cloture: The only procedure by which the Senate can vote to place a time limit on consideration of a bill or other matter, and thereby overcome a filibuster. Under the cloture rule (Rule XXII), the Senate may limit consideration of a pending matter to 30 additional hours, but only by vote of three-fifths of the full Senate, normally 60 votes.¹³

Cosponsor: A member who formally adds his/her name as a supporter to another member’s bill. An initial cosponsor is a member who was listed at the time of the bill’s introduction, not added on later.¹⁴

Companion Bill: Similar or identical legislation which is introduced in the Senate and House. House and Senate lawmakers who share similar views on legislation may introduce a companion bill in their respective chambers to promote simultaneous consideration of the measure.¹⁵

Filibuster: Informal term for any attempt to block or delay Senate action on a bill or other matter by debating it at length, by offering numerous procedural motions, or by any other delaying or obstructive actions.¹⁶

Motion to instruct conferees (MOIs): A motion to instruct asks House or Senate conferees to take a certain negotiating position in conference committee. In

conference with the other house, the conferees are free to follow or to ignore the advice of their chambers. Conferees are given this flexibility to resolve differences between the House and Senate versions of a bill.¹⁷

Resolution: A resolution refers to a measure that does not become a law. This is used to differentiate these measures from bills (which also technically begin as resolutions but can subsequently be passed, becoming acts). The chambers of Congress often use resolutions to express their approval or disapproval of something which they cannot vote upon due to its being out of their jurisdiction. For instance, a resolution might support a nation's troops in battle, carrying no legal weight, but adopted for the purpose of demonstrating moral support.¹⁸

Sponsor: The member who introduces a bill and is its chief advocate.¹⁹

Unanimous Consent: Most bills come to the Senate floor with a unanimous consent agreement, which limits time and sets parameters for amendments. A senator may request unanimous consent on the floor to set aside a specified rule of procedure so as to expedite proceedings. If no senator objects, the Senate permits the action, but if any one senator objects, the request is rejected.²⁰

Whips: Assistants to the floor leaders who are also elected by their party conferences. The majority and minority whips (and their assistants) are responsible for mobilizing votes within their parties on major issues. In the absence of a party floor leader, the whip often serves as acting floor leader.²¹

Federal Budget and Appropriations Process

The federal budget and appropriations process follows a specific timeline by which the budget must be considered and approved. The timeline follows the fiscal year, rather than the calendar year.

Budget Timeline

February: White House releases its budget for the federal government.



Mobilize press response to White House budget, preferably with local angle (e.g. making the connection between the federal budget and how it impacts your community). Sample language: Under the President's budget proposal 350 potential homeowners will not receive housing counseling in [insert your city].

February Through March: Appropriations subcommittees hold hearings on funding for different departments and agencies.



Provide written testimony to subcommittees on funding priorities.

February Through April: Budget Committee considers Budget Resolution, setting spending parameters for appropriators.



Letters to Budget Committee members **prior to** April.

June Through July: House and Senate Committees mark up appropriations bills and ready them for floor votes.



Letters to committees and full House/Senate.

August Recess: Representatives and senators spend August in districts and states.



Invite Congress members to visit programs, host breakfast/lunch/dinner meetings with Congress members, host town hall meetings.

September: Appropriations bills to be completed.



Letter to Appropriations Conference Committee members, full House and Senate.

September Through December: Office of Management and Budget Develops the White House budget for the next fiscal year.

February: President releases following fiscal year budget.



Affiliates working on the same federally funded project, for example, housing counseling, should send a group letter to the White House and release the letter to the press.

Budget Formulation Key Players and Key Terms

Key Players and Roles

- ▶ Office of Management and Budget (OMB) – The budget arm of the White House
- ▶ House/Senate Budget Committees – Set the parameters for overall spending and revenues
- ▶ House/Senate Appropriations Committees and Subcommittees – Write spending bills
- ▶ Departmental Budget Service Offices – Write departmental budget and policy proposals

Key Terms

Appropriations: Appropriations bills provide spending for specific programs through “line items” and “report language.” Line item funding is for significant “authorized” programs, such as adult education. Report language can provide instructions for the use of funding. For example, report language in an appropriations bill can instruct the Department of Education to set aside a certain amount of adult English as a second language (ESL) program funds for community-based organizations. Report language cannot supersede a law, i.e., it cannot make permanent changes to a federal program.

Authorization: For federal programs to receive funding, they must receive “authorization,” i.e., they must be approved by Congress and enacted by the President. Authorization can take place through an authorizing committee (for example, the House Education and the Workforce Committee authorizes programs such as Head Start and the Workforce Investment Act), or through the Appropriations Committee. However, because appropriations bills are active for only one fiscal year, programs authorized in an appropriations bill expire at the end of that fiscal year.

Budget Resolution: The budget resolution covers total spending (programs), total revenues (taxes), and the deficit. It is intended to guide spending and other policy decisions, so it is not signed into law by the President. However, it sends a political message about congressional priorities.

Discretionary Spending: These funds are provided by the Appropriations Committees and are included in each fiscal year's appropriations bills. These are for domestic programs, such as Head Start, health clinics, housing counseling, job training through the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), etc.

Fiscal Year: The fiscal year is the accounting period for the federal government which begins on October 1 and ends on September 30. The fiscal year is designated by the calendar year in which it ends; for example, fiscal year 2006 begins on October 1, 2005 and ends on September 30, 2006. Congress passes appropriations legislation to fund the government for every fiscal year.

Mandatory Spending: These funds are provided mainly for entitlement programs that have been permanently authorized, and amounts are based on the number of eligible participants, such as Medicaid, Social Security, etc.

Tools for Lobbying

This is a brief guide to the types of tools that you can use to carry out your legislative advocacy work. Full examples and additional information about these are included at the end of this tool kit.

Letter from One Organization or Individual Constituents

There are different types of letters that can be used to lobby. When an issue is ready for a vote your organization can send a letter to your member of Congress, senator, or local lawmaker to state your official position.

You can also ask your community members, clients, and supporters to write letters or even emails to their representatives. Lawmakers keep track of the letters, emails, and faxes they receive on a piece of legislation. A letter says that you care enough about the issue to take the time to share your thoughts with your representative.

Sign-On Letter

Your organization can also write or participate in a sign-on letter. A sign-on letter states the position of several organizations about a piece of legislation or a change in policy. After workplace raids of immigrants became more frequent in the spring of 2007 NCLR wrote a sign-on letter to President Bush asking the administration to consider the impact of workplace raids on children. A strong message can be sent when a letter contains the signature of many organizations, demonstrating that many are opposed or in favor of a policy.

Phone Calls from Constituents

As an organization you can encourage your community and clients to make phone calls to their lawmakers. This form of grassroots lobbying can have a large impact. Members of Congress and senators record and track the number of phone calls they receive in favor of or against a particular piece of legislation or issue. Phone calls let legislators know what their constituents are thinking when they cannot check in with their home district.

Office Visits

These are staples of lobbying; never underestimate how much you can achieve on a simple 20-minute visit with a congressional staffer. You may meet with your representative or senator, but most likely you will meet with one of their staffers. By knowing the difference between the different staff members and their roles you can be sure to ask to meet with the best person to listen to and communicate your message. A detailed description of staff roles and how-to's for office visits is included in the supplemental materials.

You accomplish several things by showing up. You establish that you care enough about an issue to wear out your feet; you provide verbal arguments with your written materials, thus increasing the likelihood the staffer will read your literature; and you also get a sense of what materials might be persuasive.

You can meet with your representatives and senators when they are in the district during congressional recess. You can also meet with their staff in the local office when your representatives are not available.

Action Alerts

You can use an action alert in the form of an email to ask your clients and supporters to make a phone call or write a letter when you need urgent action. Be sure to frame the issue in fairly straightforward terms, focusing on what is most important for your reader to know. Always include sample letters or a sample agenda for a visit and a target list of critical members with their phone numbers and addresses.

Legislative Advocacy Days at the Capitol

You can organize a day when your clients and supporters travel to your state capitol or to Washington, DC to visit the offices of your representatives. A legislative advocacy day can be an opportunity to train your organization how to lobby, the legal rules of lobbying, and the legislative process. This type of event can maximize your voice by addressing all of the issues important to you and your organization in one visit. This type of event can empower your community by giving them an opportunity to influence public policy. The NCLR legislative advocacy day tool kit will contain more information on how to organize and carry out a state-level Legislative Advocacy Day.

One-Pagers on Legislation and on a Theme

These are critical for lobbying. If you can get your arguments in support of or opposition to a specific provision of a bill down on one page, you can win the hearts and minds of staffers and their bosses. A concise summary of the issue and the arguments is your best tool to lobby offices that are not experts on an issue. A one-pager, which can take the form of a fact sheet or talking points, should provide a concise summary of the issue and the arguments. You will use this one-pager to communicate with staff members in a representative's or senator's office, the media, and the public. These audiences are not experts on your issue. A one-page summary of the facts and the pros and cons will help them understand your message. Attach documentation that supports your case, but make sure to include all of the important information in the one-pager. You can also use one-pagers or short issue briefs on a theme to provide a concise description of bigger issues (e.g., Are immigrants good for America? Do Hispanics benefit from job training programs?). Again, try to stick to one page with bullets and highlighted topic sentences.

Testimony

Testimony is very important in establishing a record on an issue, and in making thorough arguments. If you are giving oral testimony, it will be much shorter than your written statement; you will probably only have time to make your main points and respond to questions. The written statement is important because it outlines in detail all of your arguments and establishes what your priorities are. You would be surprised how many members' offices read these statements carefully.

Old Votes

Looking up previous votes on related matters helps you to get a sense of how representatives vote on your particular issues.

Detailed Materials

It is critical to have some materials that cover your issue in detail, particularly when you are at the subcommittee stage, where members and staff are usually experts. NCLR policy analyses and fact sheets, and outside research, are just a few examples of the kinds of materials that can help you make your case. Be prepared to be very helpful in copying and distributing these kinds of documents; the more available they are, the more likely these arguments are to appear in the debate.

Issue Briefs

Unlike the one-pagers, issue briefs go into more detail (three to five pages) about what a specific bill or piece of legislation does and its impact on the Latino community. It allows you more space to articulate your arguments and expound on your data. Issue briefs are appropriate for when you are visiting committee staffers, conducting congressional briefings, communicating with federal departments working on the legislation, or talking to reporters who are doing in-depth stories on the legislation or issue area. NCLR maintains timely issue briefs on its website.

Op-Eds, Letters to the Editor, and News Articles

A few news articles and editorials support the credibility of your arguments. If a story that appeared in a representative's hometown paper supports your arguments or shows local concern for an issue, it can be very persuasive. You can write an op-ed for your local newspaper on your issue.

Press Conference

Press conferences can be a very effective way to present brief and well-defined messages on an issue or piece of legislation to a group of members of the media (print and television). Press conferences are usually more effective when done in conjunction with a coalition of other like-minded groups and/or members of Congress (preferably from both parties). Try to limit your speakers to the principal leaders on the issue/legislation and make sure to have press statements from all participating organizations and/or members of Congress to hand out to members of the media. The more people in attendance the better – try to pack the room and/or the camera areas (behind the podium). Signage and visuals can also be very effective.

Briefings

Briefings are a useful way to present information on an issue to a large group of congressional staffers or members. At the subcommittee stage, it can be a helpful way both to present detailed information on an issue and to get a reading on what members of the committee are thinking. When preparing for a floor vote, briefings are a great way to cover dozens of offices at once (saves you individual visits). Briefings are usually sponsored by members (it helps to have one from each party) or by subgroups of Congress (like the Congressional Hispanic Caucus). Try to have representatives from several organizations speaking, and make sure to have many handouts for staffers to take with them.



SECTION 4

Additional Resources

These websites are useful sources for developing and carrying out your lobbying strategy.

Resources for Planning and Strategizing:

CENTER FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE

<http://www.communitychange.org/>

FAIR IMMIGRATION REFORM MOVEMENT

<http://www.fairimmigration.org/learn/>

ILLINOIS COALITION FOR IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS

<http://www.icirr.org/>

TENNESSEE IMMIGRANT AND REFUGEE RIGHTS COALITION

<http://www.tnimmigrant.org>

Find Your Representatives, Track Legislation and Voting Records

These websites will help you gather information about legislation and legislators' voting records. Organizations that work solely on policy and advocacy and coalitions that work on particular issues will often track legislation on their websites or through email list serves. By reaching out to these organizations and joining email list serves you can keep on top of an issue's legislative progress without having to dedicate too much of your organization's time and resources to researching legislation.

PROJECT VOTE SMART

<http://www.vote-smart.org/>

This website allows you to look up all of your federal and state elected officials and candidates during election season simply by entering your zip code.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS LEGISLATIVE INFORMATIONwww.Thomas.gov

This is the official U.S. Congress online resource. You can read the text of a bill from the current or past Congress, search for legislation by keyword, and see the final vote on each piece of legislation.

CAPITOL ADVANTAGEwww.Congress.org

This website provides much of the same information as Thomas.gov in a user-friendly format with extra information about members of Congress, including which committees they sit on, contact information, and links to their office websites.

NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA ACTION CENTER<http://www.capwiz.com/nclr/issues/>

NCLR maintains an action center with updates on NCLR's position on current legislation and key votes. You can also sign up for the Action E-list which will send you alerts to let you know when your involvement can make a critical difference.

Policy Research

These websites publish policy research and analysis on issues that affect Latino communities. These organizations also write fact sheets, issue briefs, and one-pagers. You can ask to use their materials or use their research to supplement your own written materials. Be sure to cite your sources.

NCLRwww.nclr.org**NATIONAL IMMIGRATION LAW CENTER**www.nilc.org**MEXICAN AMERICAN LEGAL DEFENSE AND EDUCATIONAL FUND**www.maldef.org**NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LATINO ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS (NALEO)**www.naleo.org**PEW HISPANIC CENTER**<http://pewhispanic.org/>**URBAN INSTITUTE**www.urban.org**TOMÁS RIVERA POLICY INSTITUTE**www.trpi.org/

Building Coalitions²²

Coalitions – groups of independent organizations that join together for information-sharing, advocacy, or other cooperative activities ranging from research to service delivery – are an increasingly important vehicle for accomplishing positive community change. The most powerful effort that today’s advocates can undertake to effect change is to build a coalition of people and groups in their communities who are sympathetic to their point of view. By approaching, and then convincing, potential partners to join together to work for a common goal, the advocates gain a coalition whose combined strength will provide them with greater opportunities to reach out and spread their message to the public.

Building a grassroots effort with business, labor, community activists, and other “nontraditional allies,” along with more “traditional” immigrant advocates, will help fight through opponents’ noise to be heard. Your clout will increase due to an active organized effort supported by several segments of the community. Several voices together are always stronger than one. When elected officials discover that a coalition of people they serve has joined together for a common goal, they will have to give the group more attention, and therefore, a greater chance of making an impact and influencing public policy decisions.

Why Form a Coalition?

Coalitions are typically formed to meet one or more of the following needs:

- ▶ **To accomplish a specific advocacy goal**, where individual advocacy agency efforts are likely to be less effective than a unified community voice in support of or opposition to a particular policy, program, or action.
- ▶ **To reduce staff and other costs to accomplish a common goal by sharing work and responsibilities.**
- ▶ **To share information or ideas** so that all coalition members are better informed about important issues or programs – such as new proposals to force state and local police to enforce federal immigration laws.
- ▶ **To decrease isolation and increase collaboration**, enabling organizations that cannot easily carry out specific activities individually to participate indirectly through the coalition’s activities.

The effectiveness of a coalition depends to a considerable degree upon the organizational skills, commitment, interest, and contributions of time and effort of its members. Even with staff, coalitions are rarely effective unless they are bound

by commitment, shared interests, and priorities sufficient to ensure ongoing participation by a significant proportion of their members. A coalition is likely to survive if it proves effective enough that there is a high positive return on the time and other resource investments of its members. Thus, a coalition that successfully supports or opposes legislation or regulations, or accomplishes other agreed-upon objectives, is likely to survive and grow.

Characteristics of Effective Coalitions²³

1. **Clearly defined purpose and scope.** Goals, objectives, and strategies are made clear and understandable. The coalition does not try to do everything; instead, it has a clear focus. The coalition may suffer or become ineffective if some members wish to broaden the scope.
2. **Coordinate.** Legislators do need to hear from many groups repeatedly, but when time and resources are limited, a “divide and conquer” strategy may work better than everyone focusing on the same lawmaker. Divide up responsibilities rather than have everyone contact the same people, especially when time is limited.
3. **Share resources.** All coalition members should share and receive the same legislative alerts, newsletters, and other materials. Put your coalition partners on your mailing list.
4. **Network.** While you may not know anyone who can get your senators on the phone, perhaps one of your coalition partners does. If you are working together, the “contact” can speak for the entire coalition (if everyone agrees), rather than just one group.
5. **Do not take positions that are bound to be divisive** because they pit the interests of some coalition members against the interests of other members.
6. **Work together.** Visit legislators as a coalition to demonstrate a “united front.” When appropriate, you may also want to draft a coalition letter that each member or organization signs.
7. **Sponsor public events.** Press conferences shortly before an important vote or event help get the coalition’s message across and demonstrate the breadth of support.
8. **Expand.** Continually seek out other groups who share the coalition’s concerns and positions on the issues. Encourage them to join your coalition.
9. **Obtain time and resource commitments from members.** One group cannot do all the work or supply all of the resources. Allow groups with limited financial resources to make in-kind contributions.

How to Meet with Legislators²⁴

Preparing for the Meeting

- ▶ Do your homework. Know exactly what you want to say and carefully review your message.
- ▶ If possible, compile information about the impact of specific issues on the legislator's district/state. However, do not compile a long list of statistics; your elected officials will not remember them and they will lose their impact. Prepare a few dramatic numbers or anecdotes to illustrate your points. Collect recent local news articles that illustrate the issue. Like most people, it is easier for legislators to remember examples conveyed in human and personal terms.
- ▶ To encourage legislators to support your positions, present materials that clearly articulate your views, using specific case examples when possible.
- ▶ Know the counterarguments and be ready to respectfully answer any questions or disagreements.
- ▶ Make sure everyone in your group is prepared. Brief everyone attending the meeting prior to the meeting and make sure they have any written materials (biographical profile of legislators and their views, etc.) to review well ahead of time.
- ▶ Be organized. Agree ahead of time on the role each participant will take, who discusses what, and in what order participants will speak.
- ▶ If you are going as part of a larger coalition, meet ahead of time. It is unwise to have an internal debate or conversation in front of your elected official. Be certain everyone agrees on your group's central message and what you want to ask the legislator to do for you.
- ▶ Prepare a packet to leave with your legislator which could include background information, fact sheets, and/or newspaper clippings. Attach your business card to the packet.

Making the Presentation

- ▶ Be on time!
- ▶ Begin by introducing yourselves.
- ▶ Explain to the legislator/staffer why you asked for the meeting.

- ▶ Present your concerns simply and directly. Get to your “bottom line” immediately. Be brief, direct, courteous, and positive. When presenting each issue, do not assume that your legislator has any prior knowledge of the subject. Presentation of each topic roughly should follow this outline:
 - ◆ **Background:** Explain the issue in the simplest possible terms.
 - ◆ **Impact:** Explain how the issue directly affects your community or the group you represent.
 - ◆ **Recommendation:** Indicate what you would like your legislator to do.
- ▶ Do not fight with your legislator or staff members. Politely answer questions and concerns, but if you disagree, make your point and move on. Remember, you are meeting with the member or staff person to inform him/her about your positions on issues.
- ▶ If you do not know the answer to a question, admit it, and promise to get back with the answer. Be sure to follow up with your answer as quickly as possible after the meeting.
- ▶ Listen well. Make sure you do not do all of the talking. Much of lobbying is listening, looking for indications of the legislator’s views, and finding opportunities to provide good information. Give your legislator opportunities to ask questions or state his or her opinion. Members and staff will appreciate the chance to be heard. Also ask questions.
- ▶ Stay away from jargon and acronyms. Remember that your legislator deals with dozens, if not hundreds, of issues each week, each with its own “language.”
- ▶ Thank your legislators if they have been supportive. They get thanked far less than they get criticized. They will appreciate your recognition.
- ▶ Be sure to ask for your legislator’s support. If your legislator already is very supportive, ask him or her to cosponsor the relevant bill and/or take a leadership role in moving the bill through the process, getting additional cosponsors, or other ways.

Following Up After the Meeting

- ▶ Send a note thanking the member or staff person for meeting with you. Briefly summarize the main points of the meeting.
- ▶ Remember to follow up with responses to any questions the member or staff person asked but you could not answer at the time.
- ▶ Do not think of the meeting as an isolated event. Although you may not have a face-to-face meeting again for some time, invite your elected officials to speak at an event or meeting. Think of other ways to maintain the relationship you have initiated.

- ▶ Report back. These reports are invaluable in developing legislative strategies and tracking members' positions on issues important to the pro-immigration community.

Congressional Staff Roles²⁵

Each member of Congress has staff to assist him/her during their term in office. To be most effective in communicating with Congress, it is helpful to know the titles and principal functions of key staff.

Commonly Used Titles:

- ▶ **Administrative Assistant or Chief of Staff:**
The Administrative Assistant reports directly to the member of Congress. He/she usually has overall responsibility for evaluating the political outcome of various legislative proposals and constituent requests. The Admin. Asst. is usually the person in charge of overall office operations, including the assignment of work and the supervision of key staff.
- ▶ **Legislative Director, Senior Legislative Assistant, or Legislative Coordinator:**
The Legislative Director is usually the staff person who monitors the legislative schedule and makes recommendations regarding the pros and cons of particular issues. In some congressional offices there are several Legislative Assistants and responsibilities are assigned to staff with particular expertise in specific areas. For example, depending on the responsibilities and interests of the member, an office may include a different Legislative Assistant for health issues, environmental matters, taxes, etc.
- ▶ **Press Secretary or Communications Director:**
The Press Secretary's responsibility is to build and maintain open and effective lines of communication between the member, his/her constituency, and the general public. The Press Secretary is expected to know the benefits, demands, and special requirements of both print and electronic media, and how to most effectively promote the member's views or position on specific issues.
- ▶ **Appointment Secretary, Personal Secretary, or Scheduler:**
The Appointment Secretary is usually responsible for allocating a member's time among the many demands that arise from congressional responsibilities, staff requirements, and constituent requests. The Appointment Secretary may also be responsible for making necessary travel arrangements, arranging speaking dates, visits to the district, etc.

▶ **Caseworker:**

The Caseworker is the staff member usually assigned to help with constituent requests by preparing replies for the member’s signature. The Caseworker’s responsibilities may also include helping resolve problems constituents present in relation to federal agencies, e.g., Social Security and Medicare issues, veteran benefits, passports. There are often several Caseworkers in a congressional office.

▶ **Other Staff Titles:**

Other titles used in a congressional office may include: Executive Assistant, Legislative Correspondent, Executive Secretary, Office Manager, and Receptionist.

Sample Lobby Visit Report Form

This is the lobby report form that NCLR used for its annual Advocacy Day. You can use this form as an example of how to record your lobby visits for your organization’s records or to inform NCLR of your legislative advocacy efforts.

Lobby Visit Report Form

This form will help us follow up and keep track of the progress made on the issues addressed during the National Advocacy Day visits. Please fill it out immediately after your meeting(s), and give it to your NCLR team leader or return it to NCLR staff in the Longworth House Office Building Cafeteria before 5:00 p.m.

Name: _____

Organization: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Phone: _____

Member Visited: _____

Congressional Staff Present: _____

| <u>Issue(s) Discussed</u> | <u>Outcome of Discussion</u> |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Even Start Funding: _____ | |
| “DREAM Act”: _____ | |
| Improving Children’s Health: _____ | |
| WIA Reauthorization: _____ | |
| Credit Card Industry: _____ | |
| JJDPA Reauthorization: _____ | |
| Gang Prevention Act: _____ | |
| Immigration Reform, generally: _____ | |

More specifically, on immigration reform, does the member support:

1. A path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants? _____
2. A temporary worker program that would give the worker a path to permanent status? _____
3. A reduction of the family backlog so that families do not have to wait so many years to be reunited? _____

What follow-up actions does your organization need to take?

What follow-up actions would you like NCLR to take?

Communicating with Elected Representatives²⁶

Tips for Telephoning Your Elected Representatives

To find your senators' and representatives' phone numbers, you may use our searchable online congressional directory or call the U.S. Capitol Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and ask for your senators' and/or representatives' office.

Remember that telephone calls are usually taken by a staff member, not the member of Congress. Ask to speak with the aide who handles the issue about which you wish to comment.

After identifying yourself, tell the aide you would like to leave a brief message, such as: "Please tell Senator/Representative (Name) that I support/oppose (S.____ /H.R.____)."

You will also want to state reasons for your support or opposition to the bill. Ask for your senators' or representatives' position on the bill. You may also request a written response to your telephone call.

Tips for Writing Congress

The letter is the most popular choice of communication with a congressional office. If you decide to write a letter, this list of helpful suggestions will improve the effectiveness of the letter:

1. Your purpose for writing should be stated in the first paragraph of the letter. If your letter pertains to a specific piece of legislation, identify it accordingly, e.g., House bill: H.R. _____, Senate bill: S._____.
2. Be courteous, to the point, and include key information, using examples to support your position.
3. Address only one issue in each letter and, if possible, keep the letter to one page.

Addressing Correspondence:**To a Senator:**

The Honorable (full name)

__ (Rm. #) __

(Senate building name)

Senate Office Building

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator:

Note: When writing to the Chair of a Committee or the Speaker of the House, it is proper to address them as: Dear Mr. Chairman or Madam Chairwoman: Dear Madam Speaker or Mr. Speaker:

To a Representative:

The Honorable (full name)

__(Rm.#)__

(House building name) House Office Building

United States House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Representative:

Tips for Emailing Congress

Generally, the same guidelines apply as with writing letters to Congress.

Subject: Bring the “DREAM Act” up for a Vote! Support and Cosponsor the “DREAM Act”!

I am writing to urge you to do what you can to pass the “DREAM Act” (S. 774) this year.

The “DREAM Act” provides a six-year path to legal status for individuals who were brought to the U.S. years ago as undocumented children and who have stayed in school and out of trouble. This school year, another 65,000 of these young people will graduate from high school.

These graduates cannot put their lives on hold while Congress debates, so the “DREAM Act” must pass now, not next year or the year after that.

Please do what you want to pass the “DREAM Act” by cosponsoring the bill (S. 774) and by pushing for its passage this year.

Sample Email from an NCLR Action Alert

When NCLR sends an Action Alert it will ask you to take action. The alert will include main points it wants you to communicate in an email or a phone call to a congressional office. This sample alert asks you to send a letter to the editor and provides a sample letter. If your organization would like to create its own action alerts you can check the NCLR website at <http://capwiz.com/nclr/home/> for more examples.

September 5, 2007

NCLR Alert: The Numbers Are In - Take Action Today!

The Numbers Are In - Take Action Today!

Take Action!

Latino Children Need Health Care Answers Now!

There is a clear need to improve Latino children's inclusion in the national debate on children's health care. Last week, the U.S. Census showed that nearly 200,000 more Latino children have become uninsured in the past year. They continue to represent two-fifths of all of the uninsured children across the country and the numbers keep increasing.

Congress has the ability to take immediate steps to eliminate this major disparity for Latino children, by addressing core reasons that keep Latino families uninsured and prevent them from accessing health care during the reauthorization of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). The U.S. House of Representatives has already issued one set of commitments to Latino children by passing H.R. 3162 – the Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act (CHAMP) – which repeals extensive restrictions that legal immigrant children and pregnant women face to Medicaid and SCHIP, and includes many more provisions that enhance Latino children's access to care. However, in the coming weeks, we need to ensure that the entire Congress remains strong in the fight to restore coverage to low- and moderate-income children as they consider the final SCHIP bill.

Over the coming weeks, as the SCHIP program faces expiration on September 30, there will be numerous articles and stories that speak of the many children who will lose health coverage without access to public health coverage programs. In many cases, the voice of Latino children – the most uninsured ethnic group in the country – is often missing from these stories.

It's easy to help!

Make sure that Congress gets the message by sending a letter to the editor today in response to articles on SCHIP and health care for children. You can send a letter to your local media outlets. We have provided a Sample Letter to the Editor that you can modify to include your viewpoint. Please note that media outlets can't always place your comments, but letters continue to help raise awareness about these important issues.

Sample Sign-On Letter

Organizations Representing Millions of Parents and Children Call for Increased Even Start Funding

February 8, 2007

Dear Member of Congress:

We, the undersigned 635 national, state, and local organizations, including representatives from the Hispanic, African American, Native American, literacy and early childhood communities, write to urge you to help restore funding for the William F. Goodling Even Start Family Literacy Program.

We have seen firsthand the effectiveness of Even Start in helping tens of thousands of extremely low-income families obtain the necessary skills they seek to become productive and successful in our society. The program helps parents become full partners in their children's education by providing adult literacy and educational services, including English as a second language.

(deleted text, for full text please see <http://www.nclr.org/content/viewpoints/detail/44167/>)

Our organizations, representing millions of parents and children across the nation, urge you in the strongest possible terms to save the Even Start program. Elimination or further reduction in funding will force many programs to close their doors and leave behind thousands of our nation's severely economically and educationally disadvantaged families. Without Even Start, too many families will struggle to find English language classes, literacy services in rural communities, and information on how to fulfill their role as their child's first and most important teacher.

Even Start – what it has and can continue to accomplish – is a top priority for us and hopefully for you in making America a more literate society.

On behalf of,

National
Academy for Educational Development
AVANCE, Inc
Barber National Institute
Center for Applied Linguistics
Center for Law and Social Policy
Children's Defense Fund
Education Development Center, Inc
Goodling Institute for Research in Family Literacy
Hispanic Association for Colleges and Universities

-more-

Sample of NCLR Fact Sheet

NCLR
NATIONAL COUNCIL OF LA RAZA

2006

FACT SHEET

Common Myths About Undocumented Immigrants

Myth: Undocumented immigrants do not want to be legal residents.

Fact: Immigrants come to the U.S. for a variety of reasons — to reunite with family or to find better employment opportunities — and would prefer to do so through legal channels. However, the U.S. immigration system is extremely limited, and undocumented immigrants in the U.S. cannot simply apply for a visa and obtain legal status.

Myth: Undocumented immigrants are lazy.

Fact: Ninety-six percent of undocumented men living in the U.S. are employed, which exceeds the labor force participation rate of legal immigrants and U.S. citizens by 15 percentage points.¹ Many work two or more jobs. It is clear that employment is a major driving force behind undocumented migration; many industries, such as restaurants, hotels, and agriculture, report that they rely on these hardworking migrants.

Myth: Undocumented immigrants take jobs from Americans.

Fact: Immigrant labor is needed to fill jobs in the U.S. that an older, more educated American workforce is not willing to fill, especially at the low wages and poor working conditions many unscrupulous employers offer.² Currently, there are approximately nine million undocumented workers in the U.S. filling important gaps in the labor market. There is substantial evidence that their presence in the labor force creates jobs and strengthens local economies.

Myth: Undocumented immigrants do not pay taxes.

Fact: Undocumented immigrants pay taxes in a number of ways, including income and sales tax. The majority of undocumented immigrants pay

income taxes using Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers (ITINs) or false Social Security numbers. All immigrants, regardless of status, will pay on average \$80,000 per capita more in taxes than they use in government services over their lifetime.³ The Social Security system reaps the biggest windfall from taxes paid by immigrants; the Social Security Administration reports that it holds approximately \$420 billion from the earnings of immigrants who are not in a position to claim benefits.⁴

Myth: Undocumented immigrants drain the welfare system.

Fact: Undocumented immigrants are ineligible for the vast majority of state and federal benefits and are only eligible for those that are considered important to public health and safety. In fact, many legal immigrants are also ineligible for most federal benefits. As a result, health care spending for immigrants is approximately half that of citizens.⁵

Myth: The best way to stop undocumented migration is by increasing enforcement.

Fact: Between 1986 and 2002 the number of border enforcement agents has tripled, the number of hours they spent patrolling the border grew by a factor of approximately eight, and the Border Patrol's budget has increased tenfold. At the same time, the number of undocumented immigrants in the U.S. has continued to increase.⁶ Support is growing for a more comprehensive approach to immigration control which combines smart enforcement with measures to create a legal path for those who come to the U.S. to work, and those who are already in the workforce.

1 Passell, Jeffrey S., Randolph Capps, and Michael E. Fix, *Undocumented Immigrants: Facts and Figures*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, January 2004.

2 Paral, Rob, "Essential Workers: Immigrants are a Needed Supplement to the Native-Born Labor Force." Washington, DC: Immigration Policy Center, March 2005.

3 Smith, J.P. and B. Edmonston, *The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration*. Washington, DC: National Academy Press, 1997.

4 *Testimony on the "ITIN" and Social Security Number Misuse*, presented by Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr., Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General, to the House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Oversight, Subcommittee on Social Security, U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, DC, March 24, 2004, www.ssa.gov/oig/communications/testimony_speeches/03102004testimony.htm.

5 Mohanty, Sarita A, Steffie Woolhandler, David U. Himmelstein, Susmita Pati, Olveen Carrasquillo, and David H. Bor. "Health Care Expenditures of Immigrants in the United States: A Nationally Representative Analysis." *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 95, No. 8, August 2005.

6 Massey, Douglas, "Beyond the Border Buildup: Towards a New Approach to Mexico-U.S. Migration." Washington, DC: Immigration Policy Center, September 2005.

www.nclr.org

Tips on Working with the Media³⁰

- ▶ **Be a consumer of media – follow reporters’ stories.** To understand the news media, become a consumer of the news. Read at least one daily newspaper and watch your local evening news broadcast. This will help you understand what reporters are looking for.
- ▶ **Be responsive and prompt.** When a reporter calls you for information, he/she is usually in a hurry. Return the call as quickly as possible. Be helpful and steer reporters to good sources if you don’t have the answer. Reporters develop the habit of calling people who have helped them in the past.
- ▶ **Never lie to a reporter.** If they find out, they will never call you again. If you don’t know the answer to a reporter’s question, don’t be afraid to say “I don’t know.” If you think you can get the answer quickly or just need to take a minute to prepare your response, ask if you can call back in a few minutes.
- ▶ **Develop personal relationships with reporters.** Creating personal relationships is the best way to get your story told.
- ▶ **Observe reporter deadlines.** At most newspapers, reporters must file their stories by 5:00 p.m. or 6:00 p.m. After 3:00 p.m. they are probably writing their stories and are “on deadline.” If a reporter on deadline calls you, try to respond immediately. If you call a reporter, first ask if it is a good time to talk. If the reporter seems hurried and says no, get off the phone immediately and say you’ll call back tomorrow. They will appreciate the respect that you show for their work.
- ▶ **Provide good quotes.** Reporters are always looking for good quotes. They should be short and colorful. As much as we hate it sometimes, we live in a sound-bite world. As you become a consumer of news, you will gain a sense of the kind of quotes reporters are looking for.
- ▶ **Respond immediately to negative press.** Whether the negative press is in the form of a news story or an op-ed, respond immediately with either a letter to the editor or by asking for a meeting with the reporter and his/her editor. The longer a story remains in the public marketplace without being challenged, the more damage it will do as it begins to settle in as fact.
- ▶ **Write op-eds and letters to the editor.** Find out your newspaper’s policies regarding submission and use this opportunity. This is your chance to get your views into the newspaper, unfiltered and unedited.

Opinion Essays, Guest Columns, Commentary, and “Op-eds”²⁸

Quick Tips

Most newspapers and magazines publish opinion essays submitted by community leaders, experts, elected officials, and just plain citizens. Known generically as op-eds because they often appear opposite the editorial page, these items offer advocates an opportunity to make their case in their own words, drawing attention to a problem or a success, or an issue of general importance. They may not be the most-read part of a newspaper, but those who read them tend to be the most influential opinion leaders in the community. An op-ed also carries with it the implicit endorsement of the paper as being an opinion to which it is important to pay attention.

Op-eds are short, 700-800 words maximum, but each paper that runs them determines its own guidelines for length, submission, topics, etc. Observe what type and style of op-ed is running, from whom, and see if they have published their guidelines either in the paper or on the paper’s website.

While you may be the best person to write an op-ed because of your knowledge on the issue, you may want to enlist someone prominent or influential in the community to submit it under their name. Ghost writing op-eds for others is very common. Sometimes it helps get the piece published or read because the person is well-known. It can also help the power of your message because the person is admired, is an expert or academic, or because they have no obvious self-interest in the issue being discussed.

Basic Elements

Grab their attention – An opening paragraph should get the reader’s attention and invite them to continue reading. Use strong, colorful language, humor, unusual examples, and establish what or who is at stake. Sympathetic anecdotes about the people who would be affected if action is taken, or not taken, are a good way to draw readers in.

State your case – After grabbing the reader’s attention, you need to move quickly to the position you are advocating. Be concise and clear (e.g., “Congress should enact the ‘DREAM Act,’” or “Senator Jones should support the bill.”). You want to structure your argument so that readers walk away agreeing with your position.

The first two elements are the most important for getting readers to agree with your point of view and for getting editors to publish the piece in the first place. Be creative and spend time getting these two elements right.

Your evidence – The next several paragraphs provide supporting evidence and examples that develop your argument, but always connect back to the case you are making. Don't overload and make every argument in your arsenal. Rather, be succinct and give priority to the most important or compelling evidence. If forced to edit down a piece for space, start by trimming the less important evidence.

Provide a summation – Restate your case and underscore how each piece of evidence you have provided leads you to your logical conclusion. This part needs to draw the connection between the reader and the position you are taking. Why is it in the best self-interest of the reader to agree with your position? What's in it for them?

The closer – Again, the closing can be an opportunity to engage the reader, put a human face on the problem, state the consequences of not taking your position, or to end with a clever and memorable “zinger.”

About the author – A one-line description of who the author is should stress why they are qualified to advise the rest of us on what position we should take.

Be prepared for the paper to suggest edits for clarity or space. You do not have to accept the paper's suggestions, but the piece may not get published if you refuse. Most papers will give the writer an opportunity to review edits to a piece in advance if they are significant, but not all extend this courtesy.

Letters to the Editor²⁹

Quick Tips

Community leaders, politicians, business leaders, educators and the media pay a great deal of attention to letters to the editor and other opinion pieces in the newspaper. A good letter delivers your message to these people with the implicit endorsement of the newspaper that publishes it.

- A) Write it and get it to the paper ASAP on the day an article appears which invites a response, if possible. Use email and faxes to expedite delivery.
- B) Make a brief, clear point. Avoid balanced, pro/con essays that give more information than the format requires.
- C) You control the message, so succinctly express what you want to say.

- D) Use sarcasm, catchy phrases, wit, fury, enthusiasm, colorful language. You want to give the editors a well-written letter that readers will enjoy and remember.
- E) Keep it short. The maximum is 200 words, but the shorter it is, the more likely it will fit into the paper quickly. Be prepared to trim below 200 words if the editors request it.
- F) Letters to the editor policies and guidelines for length, language, and submission are different from paper to paper. Often these are spelled out by the paper or are available on their web page. Notice what gets published and craft your letter accordingly.
- G) Always mention the title, author, and date of the article that sparked your letter.
- H) Identify yourself with a one-line description (e.g., “The writer is the executive director of the Portland Immigration Coalition.”).
- I) Include all of your contact information including name, mailing address, email address, phone, and fax.
- J) The newspaper may ask to edit your letter, but it should not be published without your prior approval if significant edits are made. You don’t have to accept their proposed changes, but the price of refusing their edits may be that you are not published.

Sample Letter to the Editor

LETTER TO THE EDITOR:

[Date]

Dear Editor:

Regarding [title of recent news story on health care here (date that story appeared)], it is important for your readers to know that Congress will soon vote to bring health coverage to millions of children in the U.S. The State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) is a successful and popular way for states to make sure that children from low-income families receive regular preventive care and medical treatment. SCHIP has helped to provide more than six million children with health coverage.

However, there are nine million children in the U.S. who still do not have health insurance; nearly 40% of them are Latino. Congress can make a difference in these children’s well-being by voting to restore this vital health care coverage immediately to low-income children and pregnant women who are legal immigrants. Kids who receive regular health care are more likely to do well in school and become productive members of our nation’s workforce than those who grow up uninsured.

Sincerely,

Sample News Release



News Release

Contact:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 4, 2007

[Deidre Swesnik](#)
National Fair Housing Alliance
(202) 898-1661

[Mistique Cano](#)
Leadership Conference on Civil
Rights
(202) 466-3311

[Janis Bowdler](#)
National Council of La Raza
(202) 785-1670

NATIONAL CIVIL RIGHTS GROUPS CALL FOR IMMEDIATE MORATORIUM ON FORECLOSURES RESULTING FROM RISKY SUBPRIME LOANS

Washington, DC – National civil rights groups, including the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the NAACP, the National Fair Housing Alliance, the National Council of La Raza, and the Center for Responsible Lending called today for mortgage lenders, loan servicers and loan investors to institute an immediate six-month moratorium on subprime home foreclosures resulting from reckless and unaffordable loans in the subprime market.

The groups want to stop home losses for families that received unaffordable subprime mortgages with “payment shock.” The predominant loan type marketed by subprime lenders in recent years are hybrid subprime mortgages, which begin with a temporary fixed interest rate that changes to a much more costly adjustable-rate mortgage (ARM). These “exploding” ARMs, as well as other types of non-traditional mortgages, have been a driving force in massive foreclosures occurring today.

(text deleted, for full text please see <http://www.nclr.org/content/news/detail/45150/>)

Recent lending data show that subprime mortgages—which make up only 13 percent of the overall mortgage market—account for over 60 percent of new foreclosure filings. “Latino and African-American families are being pushed into high-cost and risky home loans. The result,” said Janet Murguía, president of the National Council of La Raza, “is that more of our families are falling victim to loans that were not a good fit in the first place. This is eroding the hard-earned wealth our communities spent decades fighting for.”

The groups also called on Congress to pass anti-predatory legislation, including a private right of action, to assure protection for minority and other communities and to see that this situation does not happen again.

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This press release was produced by the following coalition of organizations:
Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
Center for Responsible Lending
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

Making a Difference for Hispanic Americans

www.nclr.org

Sample OP-ED

SAMPLE OP-ED

Note: This op-ed is a sample and should not be submitted to any media outlet as written. This piece reflects the different components of an op-ed that help to ensure its successful placement. You can use the accompanying “Do’s and Don’ts” to gain ideas on how to customize your document. Community-based organizations and NCLR Affiliates seeking technical assistance with the composition of an ICHIA op-ed can feel free to contact Jennifer Ng’andu, National Council of La Raza, (202)-785-1670, to be connected with staff who can assist you in shaping your op-ed.

Skinned knees, colds, and earaches are common – and usually minor – childhood ailments. Parents apply kisses, bandages and ice packs, and memorize the pediatrician’s phone number just in case they need to get help for more serious illnesses and injuries. For some parents, the question is when to make a doctor’s appointment, but far too many must ask themselves if a trip to the doctor is even possible without health insurance. Sadly, there are nine million children in the U.S. who cannot count on seeing a doctor when they need to because they don’t have health insurance; nearly 40% of these children are Latino.

It has long been accepted in our nation that the majority of people who have health insurance are those who qualify for employer- or government- provided coverage, yet few would argue in favor of a system that leaves millions of people to fend for themselves. Health costs in the U.S. have soared to the point where hardly anyone can afford to pay for medical treatment without insurance coverage. This has motivated some government leaders to become creative and look for ways to bring more people – especially children – under the health insurance umbrella.

The State Children’s Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) is a government program that offers a solution. SCHIP encourages states to enroll children whose families are low-income and do not have health coverage. Many states have been aggressive in searching for children who qualify for SCHIP, and the results – four million children insured nationwide – deserve applause. In Arkansas, for example, the number of uninsured children went from approximately 150,000 to about 50,000, a 60% drop in the first six years after SCHIP was enacted.

SCHIP could do even more if Congress restores health insurance access to legal immigrant children, who represent a growing and significant part of the U.S. population. Currently, these children, and pregnant women who are also legal immigrants, are barred from SCHIP and Medicaid for five years after they first come to this country, despite their tax contributions and their qualification as low-income families. This arbitrary time limit shuts out a significant portion of Americans from medical services.

Congress must act now to pass the “Legal Immigrant Children’s Health Improvement Act (ICHIA) of 2007” and extend SCHIP coverage to an even greater number of children. When more children enjoy the protection that comes with health insurance, they can get more cost-effective preventive care as well as immediate medical attention when they become sick or injured. By seeking early treatment and developing relationships with pediatricians, parents can likely reduce expensive emergency room visits and a great deal of heartache and anxiety for their families.

Children benefit in so many ways from access to health care – in their physical and developmental growth and well-being, and in their ability to attend and succeed in school. Society also benefits from SCHIP; coverage that includes as many children as possible helps to strengthen public health and provides preventive care that saves millions of health care dollars in the long run. And a broad SCHIP umbrella makes sure that America’s future workers, taxpayers, and leaders all have access to health care.

The success of SCHIP proves that it is more than just a band-aid on our health insurance crisis. It is a true solution that Congress must extend to all children right now. Children who are legal immigrants deserve the same opportunity as any other children in America to grow up healthy. SCHIP is essential because sometimes ice packs and hugs are just not enough.

Endnotes

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