



NATIONAL
IMMIGRATION
FORUM

IMMIGRATION ADVOCACY AND MEDIA TOOLKIT

A Handbook for Legislative Advocacy and Media Communications

www.immigrationforum.org
www.communityresourcebank.org

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OVERVIEW

Why these materials? What is their purpose? What is in this toolkit?

In recent years immigration advocates, nationally and locally, have found themselves covering an ever-expanding range of issues both at the state and local level, as well as at the federal level. A number of leaders in the field have been discussing how to maximize our effectiveness by unifying our work, where possible, under a common “message” umbrella for our advocacy and media work.

The goal of this toolkit is to get to the point that when someone talks about the CLEAR Act in Seattle, it resonates to what someone else is saying about DREAM in North Carolina, what someone in DC says about SOLVE, and what CLRA advocates say in New York. Over time, the idea is to unify our voices, magnify our power, and, in the process, create a successful strategy that frames the overall debate in our terms.

The toolkit includes a “meta message” framework as well as messages boxes on major legislative priorities for 2004 and beyond (i.e. defeat CLEAR, enact DREAM, AgJOBS, sponsor SOLVE and CLRA) and ideas on how to implement a media and/or legislative advocacy campaign. The messages are based on the recent public opinion research conducted for the National Immigration Forum and a number of processes and meetings with the larger immigration field.

What else is needed?

These materials are by far complete-- to do that we need **your** input and feedback. What’s missing? What materials are needed? Are there specific resources out there that should be included? Have you developed and/or used materials/messages you found key and effective? The Forum is collecting answers to these questions as well as your general feedback on these materials.

Who can I reach out to in D.C. for additional resources?

This effort is meant to complement the great work that lead organizations have initiated to enact/defeat our legislative priorities. They continue to be a great resource on the work that is being done locally and nationwide:

- DREAM
 - National Immigration Law Center: Josh Bernstein bernstein@nilc-dc.org
 - Center for Community Change: Maricela Donahue mdonahue@communitychange.org
 - National Council of La Raza: Melissa Lazarin mlazarin@nclr.org
- AgJOBS
 - Nueva Vista Group: Irene Bueno irene.bueno@nuevavistagroup.com
 - Farmworker Justice Fund: Bruce Goldstein bgoldstein@nclr.org
- CLRA
 - Rights Working Group: Katherine Newell Bierman knewell@napalc.org
 - Local Advocacy: Shoba Sivaprasad ssivaprasad@immigrationforum.org

- SOLVE
 - National Council of La Raza: Michele Waslin mwaslin@nclr.org
 - National Immigration Forum: Lynn Tramonte ltramonte@immigrationforum.org
- CLEAR
 - National Immigration Forum: Lynn Tramonte ltramonte@immigrationforum.org

Who can I contact at the Forum?

Please send your feedback and suggestions on these materials to Vanessa Cárdenas at vcardenas@immigrationforum.org or by calling (202) 383-5984.

Message Box Overview

The immigrant rights field has been discussing the importance of carrying out a systematic and coherent message campaign that seeks to build a coordinated movement that is “tight” with respect communications and coordination but “loose” with respect to strategies and tactics. The following are sample “message boxes” on our overarching or meta-messages and our legislative priorities: CLRA, CLEAR, SOLVE, DREAM and AgJOBS. They are based on the findings of the public opinion research conducted for the Forum and input from colleagues across the country. The messages boxes are an effort to provide simple, proven, messages that can be used nationally and locally to appeal to both immigrant communities and the general public. The following is an overview of the structure and elements that make up these message boxes.

A message box is simply a tool. It seeks to lay out the elements of your persuasive argument in a way that serves as a visual reminder while allowing the spokesperson to stay “on message” and in control of the interview. Rather than linear talking-points, a message box allows you to more fluidly tailor your messages and responses to your audience and to the questions you may face in an interview or debate.

Key messages are important, yet it’s not just *what we say* but also *how we say it*. Interviews, and most forms of communication, work best when they include the following elements: (not always in order, although values always go first.)

Establish Common Values: Immigrants= Us

In his book, A Nation of Immigrants, President John F. Kennedy spent nearly 100 pages of a 150 page treatise on immigration policy discussing who we are as a nation and the values and aspirations of immigrants who come to this country. He spent very little time actually discussing policy issues, yet by the end of the book; the reader is persuaded that because immigrants share our values and it’s a tradition reflecting the best this nation has to offer, the policy prescriptions make sense. The lesson of Kennedy’s book, written over 40 years ago, is still true today. To be persuasive on policy change, we should actually devote a great deal of our time and energy connecting the values that make this country what it is (or what it aspires to be) and who immigrants are with all segments of the American public.

The restrictionists’ main message is that immigrants are different than the rest of America. Their message is simple: it’s “us” versus “them.” In order to open the hearts of our audience, and thus their minds, we need to first and foremost establish that “us” *are* “them.” To do that we need to reaffirm who we are as a nation--a nation based on the principles of democracy, opportunity, and fairness-- and then define who immigrants are-- hard working, tax paying, English learning-- people who want to be full partners in this democracy and achieve the American Dream.

What’s the Problem: In Our Terms

We must take the initiative to define the problem in terms that make sense and resonate with the American public. Often in the public debate, the problem is framed as “bad people violating good laws.” Instead, we know it should be framed as “bad laws affecting good people.” The problem is a broken immigration system that does not reflect our values and undermines the rule of law.

What's the Solution? What Needs to be Done to Fix It

It's not enough to diagnose. It is equally -- or perhaps more -- important to offer a cure. The general public needs to hear solutions, realistic options that make sense. Fortunately, the polling indicates that most Americans agree, at least in concept, with our solutions: we need to fix the broken system so that it lives up to our traditions. Immigrant communities and the American public at large are anxious to hear how solutions will lead to fair rules that will be evenly and effectively enforced.

Why it Matters? To Our Community, State, or Nation

Explain why this issue/solution is important. In other words, what's at stake for the individual, community or state if we fail to act? This must connect with the audience. Why is it in their enlightened self-interest to act?

The Ask: Your Call to Action

While the messages are always, and should be, the same regardless whether you are speaking to immigrants or mainstream audiences, your call to action will most likely vary. For immigrants it may be to mobilize, while for wider audiences and/or legislators it may be to support or oppose specific legislation.

These message boxes are not set in stone; they are a snapshot of what we feel works at this given moment. The messages are also a starting point, you may come up with other messages that work and resonate well with your audience. The idea is to become familiar with these tools, apply them and collect feedback.

Meta-Message Box

Who we are as a nation/community. Who immigrants are.

- A nation based on ideals and values; realize our nation’s promise of liberty, opportunity, and fairness.
- Nation of hard working immigrants and a nation of just laws.
- Nation ruled by laws, not men; self-correcting democracy that rights wrongs and fixes broken laws.

What’s the problem?

- Immigration system broken. Justice system out of balance. System out of step with reality.

- Fix it so we live up to ideals and values, traditions and principles.

- Fix is so we serve our interests, true to our ideals/traditions/promise. The system should be safe, legal, orderly, and fair.

- The problem: bad laws that hurt good people. The problem: government with no sensible checks and balances targeting innocent people based on background, not good intelligence or bad conduct.

The Ask:

- Immigrants work hard, pay taxes, struggle to learn English, and want to be citizens.

- Today’s immigrants much like yesterday’s immigrants.

Why is this important?

- It’s who we are. *Example:* it helps realize America’s promise of liberty, opportunity, and fairness; it will fulfill America’s finest ideals and values.

- It will work better. It’s better for you (select as appropriate; appeal to self-interest of the audience), the economy, national unity, workers, employers, communities, the public, law enforcement, the nation’s standing in the world, politicians seeking votes, parties seeking majority status, etc.

- It will be better regulated. It will make it (select as appropriate) better regulated; better managed; more efficient; more effective; better balanced; more controlled; safer; more orderly.

- Our nation/community/world is changing. More immigrants, aging society, changing world, migration part of globalization, reality needs to be basis for reform.

What’s the solution?

- Reward work
- Reunite families
- Respect rights (human, civil, labor)
- Reduce illegal immigration/genuine threats
- Renew citizenship
- Redeem the American Dream
- Restore the rule of law with a realistic, workable system.
- Reinforce security with smart, targeted, effective measures

SOLVE Message Box

Who we are as a nation/community. Who immigrants are.

- A nation based on ideals and values; realize our nation's promise of liberty, opportunity, and fairness.
- Nation of hard working immigrants and a nation of just laws.
- Nation ruled by laws, not men; self-correcting democracy that rights wrongs and fixes broken laws.

What's the solution?

- SOLVE Act is a comprehensive solution to a broken system.
- A more complete solution than previous proposals, which fix only parts of the problem.
- Would make our immigration system safe, legal and orderly.
- Reunites families, rewards work, respects workers and reduces illegal immigration.

- Immigrants work hard, pay taxes, struggle to learn English, and want to be citizens.
- Today's immigrants much like yesterday's immigrants.

What's the problem?

- Bad laws affecting good people.
- Immigration laws outdated and unenforceable.
- There are insufficient channels for people to come to the U.S. legally.
- Our broken system forces many immigrant families to be separated from loved ones for years, even decades.

The Ask: Support the Safe, Orderly, Legal Visas and Enforcement Act (SOLVE)

Why is this important?

- Need reasonable, common-sense rules that are fair and can be effectively enforced and evenly applied.
- Help local governments ease the integration of immigrants in their communities.
- Eliminates illegality which drives the black market in human trafficking, fake documents and unscrupulous employers.
- Better wages, more bargaining power and better condition for all workers.
- Help build the economy, stabilize the labor market, shore up Social security and allow people to put down roots.
- Federal government fails to act, local communities left on their own to accommodate undocumented population.

Civil Liberties Restoration Act Message Box

Who we are as a nation/community. Who immigrants are.

- America's democracy, including the right to a fair trial and equal treatment under the law, have served as models for countries around the globe and are essential to the American way of life.
- One of our strongest weapons against extremists is restoring basic American principles like equal treatment under the law.
- These rights are models for democracies around the globe and are essential to the American way of life.

- Law abiding, hard working families who want to continue to be part of American society.
- Refugees who have fled their homelands to escape persecution, and build a new life in America.
- Families who came here for freedom and opportunity.

What's the solution?

- It is important to all those who cherish freedom and liberty, and want to keep our nation safe.
- The Civil Liberties Restoration Act reaffirms the values of fairness, equal treatment before the law, due process, and transparency in government – values that have served this country well.
- It is consistent with the American system of justice and equal treatment under the law.
- It puts an end to blanket secrecy of trials, ensures that people who are locked up are told about their charges.
- It ends discriminatory programs like special registration, sending the message that intelligence, not national origin and religion, should drive antiterrorism measures.
- It restores basic rights to all and extends special rights to none.

- The government should get tough on terrorists who hate America, not hardworking, freedom-loving new Americans who love it.

- The Inspector General at the Department of Justice confirmed our worst fears about what happens when detainees are locked up in secret without sufficient checks and balances.

- The federal government has an obligation to protect our freedoms and at the same time we protect our nation.

The Ask: Support the Civil Liberties Restoration Act

Why this matters?

- Democracy dies behind closed doors.
- In the fight against terrorism, we must isolate terrorism without isolating America.

- When the U.S. government detains hundreds of immigrants with no connection to terrorism, denies them access to a lawyer, and subjects them to inhumane treatment, these basic and sacred rights are threatened for all of us.

- Upholding basic rights and the rule of law is essential to our long-term success in countering terrorism and creating a safer and more stable world.

What's the problem?

- Government actions that have cast a wide net, hauling in hundreds of innocent persons and creating an atmosphere of fear in immigrant communities.

- Effective steps must be taken to enhance our security, but our government must not trample on basic human rights that are essential to our liberty here and credibility around the world.
- After September 11, the Department of Justice's own Inspector General found that our government detained hundreds of immigrants with no connection to terrorism, denied them access to a lawyer, and subjected them to inhumane treatment. This is un-American.

- Instead of looking for the needle in the haystack, the government has added bale after bale of hay to that haystack.

- Shortsighted policies represent false solutions to real problems and do not enhance our security.

DREAM Message Box

Who we are as a nation/community. Who immigrants are.

- America is a nation of immigrants and a nation of laws.
- Immigration system should keep open the promise of liberty and opportunity that America represents.
- Immigrants work hard, pay taxes, want to learn English and have strong work ethic and family values.

- Like previous immigrants, newcomers come here to build a better life, and provide for their families.

- Education is the cornerstone of the American Dream.
- We believe in helping young people pursue their dreams.

What's the problem?

- Every year there are hundreds deserving students cannot attend college due to out of state tuitions.

- These students live in our communities, attend our schools and churches, and most come from tax-paying households.

- Bad laws affect good people, in this case youth.

- Our outdated immigration laws are, in fact, keeping students from achieving their American dream.

- The government does not provide a means for these students who have lived most of their lives in the U.S. to normalize their immigration status.

- These students came to the U.S. as children; they had nothing to do with their parents' decisions to come to the U.S.

- Without the DREAM Act, high school graduation is the "end of the road" for hard-working immigrant students.

What's the solution?

- The DREAM Act would benefit students who have been living in the U.S. for more than five years, speak English, graduated from high school and have good moral character and who want to pursue higher education or a career in the Armed Forces.

- The DREAM Act would allow students to pay in state tuition thus attend college.

- The DREAM Act has wide and deep support from many groups and members of Congress because it is a clear, fair and pragmatic bill that would benefit deserving students. The DREAM Act would allow undocumented students the opportunity to pay the same tuition rates as their peers-- no more and no less.

The Ask: Support the DREAM ACT

Why is this important?

- Need reasonable, common-sense rules that are fair for these students.

- It would help local governments ease the integration of immigrants in their communities and in turn those students will help lift up communities.

- Reduce high school dropout rates and social services; increase revenues from taxes, shore up social security and ensure an educated workforce.

- These students have been transplanted once, they deserve a chance to put down roots in a country they consider their own.

CLEAR Message Box

Who we are as a nation/community. Who immigrants are.

- A nation based on ideals and values; realize our nation's promise of liberty, opportunity, and fairness.

- Nation of hard working immigrants and a nation of just laws.

- Immigrants are hard-working, law-abiding members of our communities who provide for their families and are proud to be American

- Immigrants are our neighbors, co-workers, family members, and friends.

- Want the same things: safe streets, good schools, and a shot at the American dream.

- State and local police's job is to solve crimes and protect the public; immigration enforcement is a federal job.

What's the solution?

- Police should continue to concentrate on criminal enforcement; the feds are responsible for immigration enforcement.

- Defeating this legislation would allow police to do their jobs and keep our streets safe

- Congress should listen to police who say this legislation is dangerous.

- Police work is most effective when it targets behavior, not backgrounds.

- We need to create a path to legal status and documentation. As President Bush said, this will enhance security by allowing DHS to focus on real threats.

What's the problem?

- Congress is proposing a misguided new law that would make police immigration agents.

- Cops oppose this bill because it would make immigrants afraid to report.

- This law would turn the clock back on community policing.

- It places the federal immigration enforcement burden on state and local governments.

- It would make our communities less safe

The Ask: Oppose the CLEAR Act and the Homeland Security Enhancement Act

Why is this important?

- Community policing only works when all residents trust local police and report crimes.

- When everyone is encouraged to come forward and report crimes or assist in investigations, we are all safer.

- Since 9/11, police have taken on new duties with dwindling resources. Takes them away from other priorities, shifts the costs to states and localities, and is simply not their job.

- It's unrealistic to think we can round up and deport every undocumented immigrant.

- We need to fix our broken immigration system. This requires reforming our federal laws, not piling more work on the backs of state and local police

AgJOBS Message Box

Who we are as a nation/community. Who immigrants are.

- A nation based on the promise of liberty, opportunity and fairness.
 - Nation of immigrants and a nation of laws.
 - Self-correcting democracy that rights wrongs.

- Farmworkers are: hard working, law abiding, have strong work ethic and family values. Many of them pay taxes.

- Want to learn English, become full citizens and a fair shot of the American Dream.

- They want to build a better life and provide for their families
 - Undoc farmworkers take: hardest, most difficult jobs other American workers won't take/ toil every day in the sun and bitter cold to produce fresh fruits and vegetables sold at relatively cheap prices.

- Farmworkers perform some of the most important labor in our nation; feeding America and much of the world.

What's the problem?

- About 85% of farmworkers are undocumented.

- Undoc. farm workers, are among the most vulnerable/exploitable of workers in our nation, performing some of the most dangerous jobs and working long hours in difficult conditions.

- Their sweat and toil help put food on the tables of all Americans.

- The agricultural industry wants to be on side of the law and a legal and stable work force.

- Farmworkers are vital for the health and safety of our nation.

- This sector remains the backbone of our economy.

The Ask: Support the AgJOBS bill

Why is this important?

- Many undocumented farm workers will have the chance to come out from the shadows and participate in our society as immigrants; seek better wages and working conditions; request government labor law enforcement, and build a future for themselves and their family members.

- Our government will know who resides within our borders and who works in an industry that has become known for employing undocumented workers.

- To take no action would condemn hundreds of thousands of farm workers, who work in the third most dangerous occupation in the nation, to a fundamentally unfair economic and legal status.

What's the solution?

- Give undocumented farm workers an opportunity to participate in this earned adjustment program.

- Undocumented farm workers want to be legal permanent residents of this country and continue making crucial contributions to America's economy.

- AgJOBS is a widely supported bipartisan bill. It represents a compromise between farm workers and agricultural employers negotiated over several years.

- AgJOBS has 63 senate co-sponsors and more than 400 organizations supporting it, from employer and labor to immigrant rights and religious groups

- Provide agricultural employers with a stable, legal labor supply.

- To be eligible for this legislation, workers need to have been working in agriculture for the past 18 months/meet other immigration-law and security requirements.

- Work at least 360 days over a 3 to 6 year period. When not working in agriculture, they would be free to work in other industry or occupation.

MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

The Top 10 Ways of Getting Press in the 21st Century

1. Develop Messengers

- Unusual messengers draw the press (i.e. businessperson, respected leader, clergy, etc.)
- Individuals impacted by law and/or lack of action are the best messengers.

2. Set up a Communications Program

- Develop media lists, get intern to keep updated
- Have an internal system for how press calls are handled efficiently and effectively
- Return calls promptly

3. Press Releases

- Establish relationships with reporters
- Respond promptly to current crises or breaking news
- Use email to contact reporters

4. Create a Media Event

- Press conferences, briefings or interesting events
- Find hooks (holidays, anniversaries, etc.)

5. Op-eds/Letters to the Editor

- You can control the message in what you write.
- Letters to the Editor are often printed (follow tips on page 22)
- Use important signatories

6. Editorials and Columns

- Visit your editorial boards, bring diverse group
- Pitch stories to columnists

7. Pitching Stories to Reporters/radio shows/TV talk shows

- Get to know your reporters well so you know what they're interested in
- Don't worry about getting a "no", if you do try again

8. Publications/Studies

- Reporters love studies, it doesn't need to be complex (i.e. interview your clients about their concerns and possible solutions and turn it into publication)
- Do a big press conference with researcher

9. Website

- Keep it updated, promote it

10. Track Press Coverage

- Look on websites every day (have intern do it)
- Listen to radio, TV, cable talk shows

Quick Tips on Writing and Disseminating a Press Release

Style: Like all other communications to the press, press releases should be catchy and concise. Do not attempt to make all of your arguments in one press release. Instead, stick to your strongest messages and most important points.

Length: Try to keep it short—one page is best. If you do use more than one page, be sure to include your organization’s name and the contact person’s information on each page. At the bottom of the first page type “(more)” so that the reader knows there is additional information. Multi-page faxes to newsrooms sometimes get separated, which is yet another incentive to keep the release to one page if possible.

Controlling the Message/ Messengers: The purpose of the press release is to communicate your organization’s perspective or position on the issue, and in writing the press release you have complete control over how you word your argument. You should also be prepared to field follow-up calls from reporters, and have a plan for referring reporters to other sources. People who personify or can add a “human face” to the issue you are pushing for are ideal referrals. For example, in calling for enactment of the DREAM Act or Student Adjustment Act, good messengers would be undocumented immigrant students who have excelled in high school but can’t afford to pay international tuition rates and attend a public university. Other good messengers would be high school teachers and guidance counselors, university presidents, and Congressional sponsors of the legislation. Business leaders who have a stake in a well-educated workforce and religious leaders who carry an air of moral authority can be good messengers, as well. These are all people to whom you can and should refer reporters’ questions, but it is important to vet these sources to see who would be most comfortable talking to the media and who can make the most compelling arguments in favor of your position.

Organization:

Title – Be as catchy and enticing as possible; think of this as the headline you want to see in tomorrow’s newspaper.

First paragraph – This is your “lead” paragraph. It should include the most pertinent information and what you are calling for.

Body – Allow yourself one to two short paragraphs to briefly explain the issue.

Close – Give your organization’s position in the form of a quotation from your spokesperson. Try to use a couple of quotes from your organization’s director, and make sure they say exactly what you want to read in tomorrow’s newspaper. Remember, this is the only time you will have complete and careful control over exactly what is said by your organization on a particular topic. Many reporters will pull these quotes right from the release and use them in stories, so take your time in crafting them.

Dissemination: Fax and/ or email the release to your press list (mailing takes too long). Do not send the release too early, as reporters may lose it. Send the release within one week of when the topic will be relevant news. If you are particularly interested in certain reporters or media outlets

carrying your story, call to follow-up on the release. Reporters get so many press releases, it's important to make yours stand out. For broad and immediate distribution, you can make arrangements with a newswire service (like U.S. Newswire at 1.800.544.8995 or P.R. Newswire at 202.547.5155) for them to disseminate your release.

Remember, even if reporters do not use your press release, it's a good way to put your organization on the map so that reporters will call you when the *do* write about the issue.

Sample Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 15, 2002

Contact: Frank G. White
(555) 234-5678
fwhite@immigrationcoalition.org

Honor Roll Students Ask Congress to Make the Grade

On Wednesday, July 17, dozens of high school students and recent graduates, their teachers, and immigrant advocates will visit Capitol Hill to show support for legislation that would remove barriers some immigrant students face in obtaining a college education.

The DREAM Act/ Student Adjustment Act (S. 1291/H.R. 1918) would restore states' ability to extend in-state tuition rates to long-term undocumented immigrant students who have grown up in this country and excelled in our public school system. It would also provide an avenue for qualified students to become permanent U.S. residents and work legally in their chosen fields. The bills are supported by legislators from both sides of the aisle, including Senators Orrin Hatch (R-UT) and Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Representatives Chris Cannon (R-UT) and Howard Berman (D-CA).

Gennifer Lara, an honors student from Frederick Douglass High School in Hanover, Washington, said: "Ever since I came to this country, I've been working hard and striving to succeed. Now that I find out I don't qualify for in-state tuition rates, I can't afford to go to college and I feel like it was all for nothing. My hope is that Congress will listen to my story and pass this bill so that people like me don't get left behind." Ms. Lara will be meeting with the offices of her Senators and Representative on Wednesday to make her case and ask Congress to pass this legislation.

Jandara Carioca, Executive Director of the Portland Immigration Coalition, one of the groups participating in the July 17 meetings, agreed. "Students like Gennifer are exactly the kind of people we want in this country, contributing to our nation's success while building better lives for themselves. That's the kind of work ethic we honor here in America. It helps no one to keep these smart, talented students from realizing their full potential. Now that Congress has the chance to fix this problem, it should act without delay," said Ms. Carioca.

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Opinion Essays, Guest Columns, Commentary and “Op-Eds” 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 that 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.

Messengers: 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 looked up to, 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 read on. Use strong, colorful language, humor, unusual examples, and establish what or who is at stake. Sympathetic anecdotes about the people that would be effected 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 buy your point of view and for getting editors to publish the piece in the first place. Be creative and spend time getting these two 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.

Example of an Op-Ed on the DREAM Act/Student Adjustment Act*RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL: 'DREAM' Act is the right thing to do*

By Emma Sepulveda

SPECIAL TO THE RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL

6/29/2002 01:51 pm

June 20 marked the first step toward a change in our country's laws that could have a permanent impact on the lives of many Latino students who are in the U.S. today. The Senate Judiciary Committee passed Senate Bill 1291 which repeals the provisions of the current federal law that discourages states from providing in-state tuition to undocumented student immigrants. The bill would also permit long time resident immigrants, young people with "good moral character," to obtain legal permanent resident status once they graduate from high school in this country. Interestingly, the bill is titled the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act (Dream Act).

It has not been an easy ride for this bipartisan bill, and this is only an early step in the legislative process. Although the bill has a "D" and an "R" co-sponsoring it, the parties usually split on immigrant issues. The morning that the bill came before the committee, I was in Washington, D.C. and witnessed business as usual in the political process.

Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wa., spoke eloquently about the students who have lived here most of their lives, finish high school with an excellent grade point average, but can't attend college to continue their education because they don't have a green card. On the other side, Sen. Jon Kyl, R-Az., and Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., spoke against the bill. They argued that the passage of S.1291 would give more incentives to immigrants to come to this country illegally. They also emphasized in their arguments that the bill would reward "lawbreakers" who have come to this country undocumented and then remained here without changing their status.

In this difficult situation, the arguments are strong on both sides of the issue. But there can be no doubt that if the bill continues its course through the Senate and House and is signed by the President, the effect of the reform will touch the lives of thousands of students and will have a lasting impact on rest of the country. In the final analysis, the strongest argument for this bill is that the new law is much better that the law we have now.

At this moment immigrant students who have attended school in the here for most of their lives, and have graduated from a high school in this country, even with a perfect 4.0 GPA, cannot attend most universities unless they have the proper immigration papers. Some of these students have lived here since early childhood. As far as they can remember, this is their country. Their parents brought them here when they moved north in search of a better life. Some of them speak little or no Spanish. Denying these students access to the universities does not mean that they will return to their country of origin. These students will continue to live in this country, but the high school diploma will be their terminal degree. What will their future be like? What kind of jobs will they obtain?

The choice is clear: Either we give them access to higher education or we close the doors to a better economic future for them and we all suffer the impact of that choice throughout our lives. Limiting access to education has never proven to be a good solution for any country, especially for one that prides itself on promoting education as a basis for attaining the American Dream. Allowing a young mind to go to college is simply the right thing to do, even if that mind doesn't have a green card.

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Letters to the Editor 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. Letters to the Editor are often written in response to a recent news article or other story printed in a newspaper or magazine. When a letter written by your organization gets printed, it is another chance to get your point across to a large audience. Letters to the editor are usually short, no more than 200 words long.

- A) Write it and get it to the paper ASAP, on the day an article appears that invites a response, if possible. Utilize e-mail 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 say what you most want to say, succinctly.
- 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 be 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 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, e-mail 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

Dear Editor:

An important piece of federal legislation is moving through Congress that will open up educational opportunities for our children and make higher education more accessible for certain immigrant high school students in our community. Currently, undocumented immigrant students, even if they have lived here for most of their lives, are treated as international students and charged a higher rate to attend public colleges and universities. The DREAM Act will give states the option of extending in-state tuition to these long time residents. Furthermore, it will give students who stay in school the opportunity to gain the papers they need to work and become full participants in our community.

I see it as an important investment in the future of our state and a recognition that we should not punish children for our failed immigration policies. Many of the children who would benefit from the DREAM Act were brought here as young kids by parents seeking to make better lives for their children. Now, unless we change the law, we are putting a cap on their achievement, even if they have worked hard in school to make the best of themselves. These children are long-term state residents and have worked hard to succeed in our public school system. It is only fair that we allow them to further their education and realize their full potential. Furthermore, the DREAM Act creates a great disincentive to dropping out of school, which is something we should all applaud.

This is a good plan that will not only benefit deserving students, but will also benefit our economy and our community.

Sincerely,

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY

Lobbying Considerations Before You Start

For organizations-- As 501(c)(3) organizations, non-profits are subject to limits on lobbying members of Congress and the Administrative branch regarding changes to federal law. However, current rules afford non-profits wide latitude in lobbying federal officials and in educating government staff and the public about issues that affect their communities. Yet it is always best to check with a lawyer if you have any doubts. You may also check the following websites:

Charity Lobbying in the Public Interest

http://www.clpi.org/lobby_law_hm.html (See the “Quick Tutorial on the Lobby Law”)

Independent Sector

The Non-Profit Lobbying Guide

<http://www.independentsector.org/programs/gr/lobbyguide.html>

For Individuals-- Persons acting on their own do not have limits on their ability to contact members of Congress and advocate for or against specific legislation. That is how the process works—members of Congress are most responsive to their constituents’ needs and requests, because they were elected to serve them.

First Things First: How to Plug In

Working Groups-- Immigrants’ rights groups in D.C. have organized themselves into “working groups” on various topics, and/or have established list-servs where advocates from around the country can share information. In general, these working groups and list-servs are managed by one or more lead organizations, with local and national participation. While the working groups often share information via email, they also meet via conference calls or in person. To find out about which working groups or list-servs deal with which issues, please contact the National Immigration Forum at (202) 383-5984 or vcardenas@immigrationforum.org

Bill Status and Co-sponsors-- This information can be found at <http://thomas.loc.gov>, the Library of Congress’ legislative search engine. To find the bill you are looking for, you will either need to know the bill number, title, or chief sponsor, or do a search on key words. For analysis of legislation you can contact any of the major national organizations, such as the National Council of La Raza, National Immigration Law Center, National Immigration Forum, MALDEF, etc.

Communicating to Members of Congress and the Administration

Communicating with your members of Congress and Administration officials is the most important advocacy step you can take. You may want to follow these tips:

The most important voice is your own-- Lobbying is most effective when done by constituents. Immigration issues are complex, and often the easiest way for elected officials and their staff to understand the policy changes needed is through real-life examples.

Communicate, Communicate, Communicate-- It takes just a minute to pick up the phone, put pen to paper, or log onto e-mail and let your representatives in Washington, DC know how you feel about the issue you care about. While this communication is often used to ask them to support policy or defeat harmful legislation, also remember to thank legislators when they act on your wishes or take a position you agree with.

Some elected officials have consistent anti-immigrant policy positions, or don't communicate much on these issues. It is important to contact these officials, and let them know that his/her constituents are supportive of immigrants' rights. While you may not be successful in convincing them that your position is correct, it is important to create the space for dialogue and for him/her to hear your perspective. Education and politics can, over time, change people's minds.

In addition, you may also want to voice your opinion to Congressional leadership and key committee offices. These leaders are responsible for setting national policy and should be responsive to a broader sampling of public opinion. The committee with jurisdiction over many immigration issues is the Judiciary Committee (in both the House and Senate) and, by extension, the Immigration Subcommittee of the Judiciary. However, many other committees and subcommittees have jurisdiction over legislation that impacts immigrants in the U.S. If you are unsure, look up the bill by number at <http://thomas.loc.gov> and check the remarks under "Status" to see which committees have received copies of the bill for consideration.

How can I get in contact with them?

Capitol Hill

To get the names and phone numbers and addresses for your members of Congress call the Capitol Hill switchboard at 202.224.3121 or visit:

www.house.gov for the House of Representatives

www.senate.gov for the Senate

You can also write to your Congressional representative through this program:

<http://www.house.gov/writerep/>.

The White House

White House Comment Line: 202.456.1111.

Or by writing to:

1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW

Washington, DC 20500

Fax 202.456.2461

President president@whitehouse.gov

Vice-President vice.president@whitehouse.gov

Complete White House contact information (including a direct email program) is available at:
<http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/>.

Other Administrative Agencies

To find out contact numbers for other agencies, visit:
www.firstgov.gov

Meeting with Members of Congress and the Administration

Adapted with guidance by the American Immigration Lawyers Association

www.aila.org

Face-to-face meetings are the most effective way to influence policymakers. You can meet with them either in their district offices or in Washington, DC. If you are unable to see policymakers in person, you should still meet with their staffers.

Arranging The Appointment

- To meet with your senators and/or representatives, call the legislator's office (either in Washington, DC or at home). Identify yourself as a constituent (if you are) and ask to speak to the staffer who is responsible for immigration. Generally, members of Congress are in Washington, DC Tuesday through Thursday, and are frequently home Friday through Monday and when Congress is not in session.
- If you are asking for a meeting with White House staff or staff for other administrative agencies, it may be more difficult to identify with whom you need to speak. At the White House, immigration policy is often handled by Domestic Policy staff, although the President's political advisors have great influence.
- When you speak to the staffer, explain the purpose of the meeting and who will be attending.

Preparing For The Meeting

- *DO YOUR HOMEWORK!* Know exactly what you want to say and carefully review your messages. See www.immigrationforum.org for more information.
- If possible, compile information about the impact of specific immigration issues on the members of Congress' district/ state. 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. Or, consider including in your meeting individuals who would be affected by the policy change.
- To encourage policymakers to support a specific immigration issue, present materials that clearly articulate your position, using specific case examples when possible.
- Know the counter-arguments and be ready to respectfully answer any questions or disagreements.
- Make sure everyone in your group is prepared. Brief everyone attending the meeting and make sure they have any written materials to review well ahead of time.
- Be organized. Agree ahead of time 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 behind that could include background information, fact sheets and/ or newspaper clippings. Attach your card to the packet.
- If arranging a meeting with White House or other Administration staff, you may have to give your name, date, and social security number to the person chairing the meeting, for a security check. Please do not give your contact information and social security number if you do not have stable immigration status.

Making the Presentation

- Be on time! Allow extra time to clear security, especially at the White House, on Capitol Hill, and in busy federal office buildings.
- 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. 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 the policymaker to do.

- Do not fight with the policymaker 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, say so, and promise to get back with the answer. Be sure to follow-up with your answer as quickly as possible after the meeting.
- Make sure you do not do all of the talking! Give the policymaker opportunities to ask questions or state his or her opinion. Members and staff will appreciate the chance to be heard, and you will learn much more by listening. Also ask questions.
- Stay away from jargon and acronyms. Remember that the policymaker deals with dozens, if not hundreds, of issues each week, each with its own "language."
- Thank the policymaker if he or she has been supportive. They get thanked far less than they get criticized. They will appreciate your recognition.

- Be sure to ask for the policymaker's support. If he or she is already 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. Think of other ways to maintain the relationship you have initiated.

And finally, but very importantly...

- **Report back to your national allies.** These reports are invaluable in developing legislative strategies and tracking Members' positions on issues important to the pro-immigration community at large.

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Advocacy Ideas

Your Congressional and Administrative advocacy is not limited to the forms of communication and lobbying discussed earlier. Organizations have come up with creative formats for advancing their policy agendas when other avenues are unavailable (or unproductive.) Just remember that every action must be tailored to the particular needs, perspective, and possibilities of the local community.

Here are some ideas for your consideration:

Action Alerts: Short, concise, and with enough background information and context for your contacts so your allies can communicate their position to the right person. It should include a suggested form of communication (i.e. “Call your member of Congress” or “E-mail the President”) and all of the relevant contact information. Some groups organize call-in days or action weeks where targeted members of Congress are flooded with calls/ letters/ visits/ other activities. Organized events often have great impact, but a steady drumbeat of constituent calls and mail is also good because it keeps the issue on staff’s minds, and suggests an spontaneous concern versus a coordinated campaign.

Examples of action alerts can be found at:

<http://www.immigrationforum.org/DesktopDefault.aspx?tabid=513>.

The Internet: Many private web sites use a technology that allows constituents to email or fax letters to their elected officials for free. The programs allows you to customize the letter’s text as you see fit. The chief caveat with this approach is that staff can tell when the letter is part of an Internet campaign. However, a pre-fabricated letter is much better than no letter at all.

To get started, explore the American Immigration Lawyers Association web site at <http://capwiz.com/aila2/home/>.

Sign-on letters: When an issue affects a number of organizations or constituencies, a “sign-on letter” may be an effective tool to communicate a collective message and demonstrate power. They can be sent to the entire Senate and House (or just to key members), used in legislative meetings with Congressional staff, and sent to the press. Sign-on letters have been inserted into the record during Congressional hearings, printed in newspapers as op-eds, and have served as the blueprint for important federal policy changes. They are serious and important advocacy tools.

In most cases, organizational sign-on letters do not include individuals’ names. Instead, an effective way of harnessing individuals’ support has been through on-line petitions. This is similar to a sign-on letter, but easier to manage when individuals are your intended signatories. See <http://www.petitiononline.com/> for more information.

After you send the sign-on letter to you targets, please remember to send a copy of the final version of the letter to every group that has signed on. Organizations like to keep copies of these letters for their records and to use in future advocacy.

An example of a sign-on letter can be found on the National Council of La Raza web site at: <http://www.nclr.org/content/publications/detail/2639/?PHPSESSID=dc8fc278ad32683d3a78f1ad771c75ac>

Postcard campaign: The advantage to a postcard campaign is that it gives community members a concrete, low-tech action they can take when they come to community forums or other events. You can design basic postcards and print up as many copies as you need, at little expense and mail it to as many elected officials as you need to.

Other ideas

- Building a **diverse coalition** of interests (business, labor, civil rights, faith-based, et cetera) and advocating for policy changes as a group.
- Passing a **local resolution** at the city or county level that supports one of our immigration policy agenda items. (Also passing a state resolution, in some cases.)
- Holding a “town hall” meeting or **public hearing** where immigration issues and their impacts on local families are addressed.
- Putting an uncooperative member of Congress on the spot by attending one of his own **town hall meetings** and bringing up immigration questions there.
- Speaking to a **community of faith** about the issues of concern and encouraging their support.
- Staging a **protest** or boycott of an institution or product that is operating counter to immigrants’ rights.
- Attracting press attention through **unusual media events**. In Washington, DC, advocates organized a mock graduation for high school students who will be unable to pay for college because they lack immigration status. In New York, another group organized a press event to chronicle the return of families who traveled across the country to visit loved ones in immigration detention. Both of these unique media events caught the eye of press outlets and ensured that their issue would get coverage.
