

IMMUNIZATION PROGRAM POLICY

# RESOURCE GUIDE



*Engage, inform, and educate for sound immunization policy*



Association of  
Immunization  
Managers

[immunizationmanagers.org/policytoolkit](https://immunizationmanagers.org/policytoolkit)

## Introduction

Legislators at the federal and state levels have tremendous influence on policies and programs administered by state and local immunization program (IP) managers. However, we know state and local public health officials are often hesitant to engage in the political process. There is often confusion over what is and is not allowable depending on the funding source—along with the perception that policy decisions are not always based on scientific evidence.

This toolkit is designed to equip members of the Association of Immunization Managers (AIM) and their staff with the tools and information necessary to appropriately and effectively engage with elected officials. Engaging with elected officials can support program efforts to rid the nation of vaccine-preventable diseases, ensure adequate resources for programs, and promote sound immunization policies.

State legislatures, in particular, have witnessed increased vaccination-related activity in recent years. More than 300 bills addressing childhood vaccinations were introduced in state legislatures in 2019. Many proposed bills focused on repealing nonmedical exemption statutes in the wake of measles outbreaks. Other common legislative focus areas included school and daycare entry requirements, safety, scope of practice, and informed and minor consent. This guide focuses on state and federal policy development and highlights the range of partners available for immunization programs to collaborate with.

## Leadership Skills

Throughout the guide, we highlight the crucial role of the IP manager in leading programs through the policy development process. The guide builds upon these key aspects of program leadership:

- **Being strategic.** While IP managers will always be met with urgent requests, developing a policy agenda with broad buy-in from your agency's leadership can provide a unified structure and will clearly communicate priorities.
- **Finding a win-win value proposition.** Broad coalitions are usually involved in any vaccine policy issue. Making sure there is alignment in goals and broad consensus on shared values will help promote sound policies.
- **Cultivating potential champions within key stakeholder groups that share your vision.** Having trusted and credible spokespeople for vaccine issues is essential to clear and persuasive communication.

- **Creating alliances before you need them.** Coalitions are built on trust and shared values. This cannot usually be forged on the fly, so advanced work is needed to lay a foundation for success.
- **Learning who your program detractors and opponents are and what drives them.** It's hard to respond effectively without a deep understanding of the other side's arguments and motivations. Understanding and empathy can provide insights and new paths to the mutual goal of safe and protected communities.
- **Creatively engaging non-traditional partners.** Since community health and workforce trends affect everyone, each member of a community has a stake in vaccine policy. Finding new ways to build connections and develop new partnerships will create additional opportunities to amplify your message and increase your impact.

## How to Use This Guide

The guide is comprised of three chapters, plus an online resource library.

Chapter 1 covers the basics of educating policymakers, including how to distinguish among education, advocacy, and lobbying, an overview of the relevant rules and regulations to ensure appropriate engagement, and fundamental information about the legislative process to guide effective action.

Chapter 2 covers the legislative landscape and highlights the roles of key players.

Chapter 3 discusses avenues for mobilization, including how to engage in a variety of advocacy activities such as analyzing legislation, crafting effective messages, and developing relationships with legislators where appropriate.

The resource library provides access to a collection of AIM, immunization program, and partner resources and tools for appropriately and effectively promoting sound immunization policies.

### ABOUT THIS GUIDE

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**Chapter 3:**  
Effective Strategies  
for Educating  
Policymakers



## Introduction

Effective education utilizes a range of tools to shape public debate and inform sound policy. This chapter highlights several effective approaches to educating the public and policymakers, including developing outreach plans, building personal relationships, and working with the media to deliver compelling messages. Engaging coalition partners, anticipating opposition, and planning to evaluate are also covered.

AIM recommends that all immunization program managers actively educate their policymakers to increase understanding of the critical value of vaccines. With dozens of bills related to vaccination being introduced in state legislatures each year, the strategies covered in this chapter can help position your program as a key resource for the development of sound immunization policy.

Agency leaders are often tasked with developing an agency-wide plan to educate the public and policymakers about public health priorities at the state and federal levels. Below is a checklist of actions to consider taking to develop or contribute to such an outreach plan and meet your program's needs.

### REMINDER! Know Your Role

Chapter 1 of AIM's *Immunization Program Policy Resource Guide* covers the relevant rules and regulations governing advocacy, as well as why immunization program managers should be actively and appropriately involved in the policy process.

Chapter 1 also includes links to CDC guidance on allowable educational activities, including 1) nonpartisan analysis, study, or research reports; 2) examinations and discussions of broad social, economic, and similar problems in conferences and reports; and 3) information provided upon request by a legislative body or committee for technical advice and assistance.

As an additional reminder, no federal funds may be used to support any lobbying activity, and state rules vary. When in doubt, please check with your agency's legislative liaison or other leadership to ensure your policy engagement is fully in compliance with all applicable rules.

## Overview of Suggested Strategies

Strategy	Key Tips
<b>Establish or contribute to an education outreach plan with goals, strategies, and action steps</b>	What are you hoping to accomplish? Your goals will naturally inform your strategies and action steps. Seek input and support from your senior leadership as you craft your plan.
<b>Develop key messages</b>	Prepare and practice an elevator pitch for your top priorities. Have additional talking points and other information resources prepared in advance.
<b>Establish relationships with key immunization policymakers</b>	Ask for meetings with key leaders and aim to become a trusted resource.
<b>Utilize annual and unique opportunities to educate policymakers</b>	What immunization policy activities occur in your state or jurisdiction on an annual basis, and what opportunities occur sporadically? Utilize all opportunities to spread your key messages.
<b>Create a media plan to educate the public that emphasizes personal stories</b>	Work with your chief information officer to prepare and support your agency's chief spokesperson and utilize all appropriate media channels.
<b>Engage coalitions and enlist key partners</b>	Employ credible messengers where appropriate.
<b>Anticipate opposition</b>	Know the arguments being made and prepare factual responses.
<b>Evaluate and adapt</b>	Apply principles of continuous quality improvement.

## Prioritize What is Most Effective

With competing priorities and limited resources, it's helpful for immunization program managers to look for evidence-based, effective ways for communicating with policymakers. The Congressional Management Foundation's mission is to educate citizen groups about how Congress works and give constituents a stronger voice in policy outcomes. The foundation surveyed key Capitol Hill staffers "to better understand perceptions of citizen advocacy."

In the survey, they posed a question to learn how much influence certain advocacy strategies have on the decision-making of a member of Congress who is undecided on an issue. They found that the most effective tactic was in-person visits from constituents or contact from a constituent who represents other constituents. Personalized emails were also perceived as effective, while visits from lobbyists and form email messages were deemed less effective. Understanding these perceptions, as detailed in the chart on page 5, can help program managers prioritize strategies and avoid engaging in less effective activities.

## Establish or Contribute to an Education Outreach Plan

After becoming familiar with your state's policy engagement rules, consider crafting an outreach plan with explicit goals, priorities, strategies, action steps, and expected outcomes. It's likely that your state or locality may also have an agency-wide public policy plan (sometimes referred to as a legislative or policy agenda) to which you can contribute.

Stating what you intend to accomplish can help the state program and your partners focus on what you want them to, be it an increase in resources, a change in state exemption policy, new reporting on school entry requirements, or some other goal. You might consider creating a legislative agenda that ranks policy issues by priority. Your goals will naturally inform your strategies and action steps, and it's a best practice to also indicate what tasks each party is charged with completing to ensure accountability.

As you craft or update an education plan, it is highly advisable to seek input and support from your agency's senior leadership team—particularly your state's designated legislative liaison. Including them in early discussions about your plan and seeking their input can be crucial to securing buy-in and support. Your legislative liaison will likely bring experience in understanding the key policymakers who will need to be engaged to champion your goals. They can help you understand which policy education approaches work best with different legislators, as well as what to avoid and where to anticipate opposition. They can also help strategize how to best utilize your agency's media capabilities and ensure that

any activities you undertake are in full compliance with federal and state rules on advocacy.

## Develop Key Messages

Once you've determined your goals and enlisted the support of your agency's leadership, you can consider developing a single message for each priority that can convey what you are asking and what it is expected to achieve. Aim to keep messages as simple as possible. Policymakers are inundated with information, so you need a message that can break through the noise. This message can be shared in the context of what is called an elevator pitch. To develop your pitch, imagine you are in an elevator with your Governor or a key legislator and have limited time to make your case while you travel just a few floors.

The four key elements of an effective elevator pitch include: 1) a strong opening that explains why your issue matters, 2) a concise definition of the problem, 3) the offer of a viable solution, and 4) a specific ask or call to action. Here's an immunization example that includes these elements:

*Vaccines save lives. However, last year's deadly flu season resulted in 185 childhood flu-related deaths. In 2019, there were 1,282 individual cases of measles confirmed in 31 states, including xx right here in our community.*

*We know these cases can be prevented. But without stronger support for a public health support system that makes sure vaccines are administered to the children and adults who need them, vaccines would just sit on the shelf. This support system includes education of providers and consumers, surveillance of diseases, control of outbreaks, and management of the federal Vaccines for Children Program—which serves millions of children each year.*

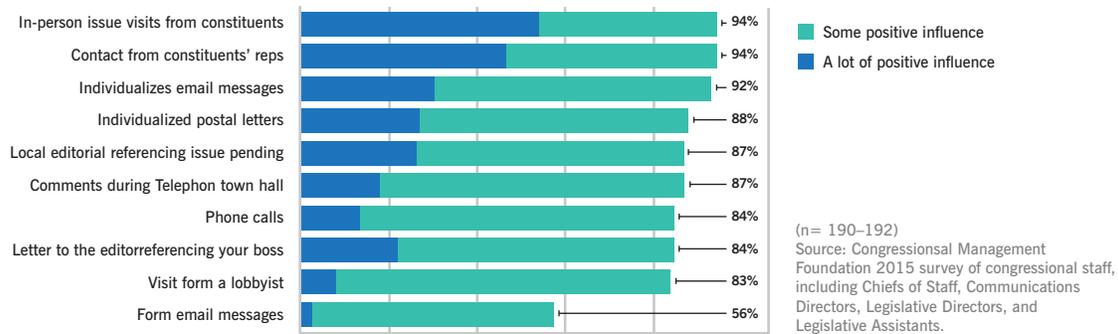
It is important for you to understand what is allowable under your state's rules on advocacy. The following are examples of possible messages depending on your state rules:

**Educational Message:** *Our state receives \$x in federal immunization funds. We are able to serve x individuals and protect the health of all communities by doing x,y, and z. (i.e., focus on success). We have identified these pockets of need.*

**Advocacy Message:** *Our state is working hard to protect communities from vaccine-preventable diseases. We can and should do more by increasing vaccination rates, improving our data systems, and examining the enforcement of our school entry laws.*

**Lobbying Message:** *We are asking all members of Congress to support an appropriation of \$710.8 million for the Section 317 Immunization Program, which*

**If your member/senator has not already arrived at a firm decision on an issue, how much influence might the following advocacy strategies directed to the Washington office have on their decision?**



*is a \$95 million or 13% increase above last year's enacted levels. This increase is critical to implement new vaccines, sustain and update immunization information systems, and respond to the growing number of hepatitis A, measles, mumps, influenza, and other outbreaks. Can we count on your support for this funding level?*

Practicing your pitch is important, along with the ability to adapt it for different audiences and timeframes. You may also want to consider developing additional internal talking points and public issue briefs or fact sheets that can incorporate and expound upon your key messages. Having a range of resources—including data, journal articles, testimony, white papers, synthesis of evidence, and other creative presentations—is needed to be able to quickly follow up with any parties that request additional information.

### Building Relationships with Key Policymakers

Research by the Congressional Management Foundation underscores the importance of building personal relationships to support effective engagement on public policy issues. A recent report suggests that “broader, more dynamic, and more diverse activities—conducted over a longer period of time and resulting in relationships between constituents and congressional offices—are more successful strategies than mass form email campaigns because they provide higher-quality and more nuanced content to inform decision-making.” In an ideal situation, elected officials and their staff would know that you are the go-to resource for any immunization policy-related questions and would seek your input before taking any action. But they cannot seek you out if they don't know

who you are. A good way to begin building relationships is to set up a series of introductory meetings with the key players in your state legislature and federal delegation. You can work through your legislative liaison and in accordance with your state's rules on engaging policymakers to do so.

An important first step in contemplating meetings with your elected officials is determining if your purpose is to educate for vaccine policy or if you plan to lobby if permissible (i.e., urge action on specific pending legislation). This will determine how you frame your request for a meeting, which is the second step. You can meet with your federally elected officials either in Washington, D.C., or in their district office closest to your location. Meetings with state legislators will usually be in your state's capitol building.

It is recommended that you first request a meeting with the staff person who advises the elected official on health issues. Some people initially feel put off by meeting with staff, but meeting with key staff is the norm. The reality is that every elected official is dealing with multiple, complex issues and

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cannot be expected to fully delve into each issue before them. In most Congressional offices, staff handle most meetings on their assigned issues since busy members of Congress cannot be expected to meet with all interest groups. Legislators, therefore, rely on carefully chosen staff whom they trust to hear all sides of every issue in their jurisdiction, synthesize the various viewpoints, and advise them accordingly. Staff have significant power to adopt or reject your recommendations, so it is important to understand and respect their role.

At an initial meeting, you can ask the staffer for guidance on the advisability of meeting directly with the legislator. On potential hot-button issues, it sometimes is best for the member to hear directly from constituents and experts. Again, the health legislative assistant can help you navigate this question.

Requesting a meeting is straightforward. Call the office and ask for the name and email address of the staff person who handles immunization issues. Here is a sample email meeting request:

*Subject: Meeting Request with Local Health Department Professional*

*Body: Dear [insert Health Legislative Assistant's name], I am a constituent from your district, and the [insert job title] at the [insert health department]. I would like to request a time to speak to you at your office in [state capitol/home district/Washington]. Would there be an opportunity to set up a meeting with you [on date/time] to talk about the immunization policy issues affecting our community?*

*Thank you for your attention to this request.*

Once a meeting is set, here are some tips for ensuring a successful meeting:

- ★ **Don't be nervous.** Talking to powerful people can be intimidating, but most legislators and staff want to hear from you. You are the experts that can help them understand complex issues and how their decisions affect their constituents and communities. Remember that providing input as a citizen is a constitutionally protected right in the First Amendment (i.e., the right to petition the government). By following the guidance in chapter 1, you can rest assured that you are complying with your state's rules on advocacy.
- ★ **Be concise.** You should generally plan to present your case in five to ten minutes, allowing additional time for questions and dialogue. Practice your key messages so you can stay focused.
- ★ **Be ready for opposition.** Know what your opposition is saying and be ready to respond to their arguments with factual and evidence-based responses. Have talking points that defend your positions, but don't focus on opposing arguments unless asked. If you are engaged in opposing arguments, be forceful without being argumentative.
- ★ **Be grateful and helpful.** Legislators and their staff are rarely thanked, especially in today's highly partisan environment. Starting your meeting with an expression of gratitude for their public service and willingness to hear from you can go a long way in building a strong relationship. During the meeting, offer to follow up with any additional information requested that might be helpful—and make sure it is delivered promptly. If there are any questions you don't know the answer to, tell them you will find out and respond quickly.
- ★ **Be able to connect the big picture to the community and constituent level.** Legislators generally want to know how any proposed policy will affect the people in the communities they represent. Having data specific to their district or region can go a long way in connecting national issues to local concerns. Sharing stories from constituents is always a great way to put a human face on public policy challenges.
- ★ **Be clear in your ask.** Legislative staff report that one of their biggest frustrations in meeting with interest groups is a lack of clarity in what they can do to help. Having a clear ask is critical to successful policy development. Are you asking them to support a specific bill or amendment? Are you asking for an increase in resources? Sometimes an appropriate ask is simply for that member to pass along your request by talking to another legislator who may be in the leadership or chair of an important committee.
- ★ **Be ready to follow up.** It is always good practice to follow up promptly with a thank you note that reinforces your key points and reiterates your ask.

## Educating Policymakers

Even if your state rules prevent you from making a specific legislative ask (i.e., lobbying), there are a range of permissible educational activities you can conduct to help inform sound immunization policy. CDC guidance notes that grantees are permitted to prepare and disseminate “certain (1) nonpartisan analysis, study, or research reports; (2) examinations and discussions of broad social, economic, and similar problems in conferences and reports; and (3) information provided upon request by a legislative body or committee for technical advice and assistance.” CDC further specifies that “materials must be posted or circulated widely to a diverse and numerous audiences on a nonpartisan basis and must not contain an overt ‘call to action.’”<sup>2</sup>

When considering opportunities to educate policymakers, a good place to start is an assessment of the immunization policy events that occur in your state or jurisdiction on an annual basis (such as state budget requests) and the opportunities that occur sporadically (such as review of policy in light of current outbreaks, etc.). How can you take advantage of recurring educational opportunities such as Mother’s Day, National Infant Immunization Week, National Public Health Week, and other observances or holidays? Crafting and circulating educational messages which promote the value of immunization during these events can increase awareness and help build public support.

Other opportunities might include regularly sharing newsletters, fact sheets, and reports with key stakeholders like advocates, policymakers, and the public. Sponsoring informational briefings and conferences for stakeholders—including advocates and policymakers—can also be effective. Some states have convened task forces and advisory committees to review information and develop policy recommendations.

Finally, one of the best tactics for educating policymakers is inviting them to visit programs where they can see vaccine program delivery in action. Each year, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) encourages all state health officials to invite their Congressional delegation to visit the state health agency during the August Congressional recess. A toolkit supporting this program is available from ASTHO.<sup>†</sup> You may want to check with your state health officer to find out if your state will be inviting policymakers to your agency. If so, make sure that immunization issues are on the agenda.



## Create a Media Plan to Educate the Public

Dramatic events like vaccine shortages or vaccine-preventable disease outbreaks inevitably attract media attention. Using this attention—and seeking proactive opportunities—to promote your key policy messages can ensure the public receives solid information about what your program is doing and what else is needed to improve services. Your state’s chief information officer can help you prepare for media activities, including interviews, background briefings, op-eds, letters to the editor, and supporting the department’s chief spokesperson. It also doesn’t hurt to remind your chief information officer that using pre-cleared personal stories puts a human face on policy issues and should be considered when appropriate.

## Engage Coalitions and Enlist Key Partners

Chapter 2 covered working with partners and coalitions in depth. It is worth considering who among your partners has the most credibility with specific audiences. Work with them to make sure they are supported with information about your key messages.

### Anticipate Opposition

It is critical to be aware of what immunization opponents are saying. Developing factual responses that are based on evidence and sound public health principles can counter their messages. Monitoring the web and social media channels in your state or jurisdiction can provide insight into what types of misinformation and organized opposition you might encounter. Reviewing videos of other states’ legislative hearings on vaccine bills can help you identify both the tactics and key themes of vaccine opposers.

<sup>†</sup> ASTHO’s Meeting with Your Congressional Delegation at Home 2019 Toolkit is available at <https://www.astho.org/ASTHO-Advocacy-Toolkit/>.

## Evaluate and Adapt

Finally, any good outreach plan should include benchmarks and evaluation measures to inform continuous quality improvement. Certain policy outcomes are easier to measure than others, such as whether legislation passed or failed. It may be helpful to plan an annual after-action meeting and report after each legislative session to review what went right and what could be improved.

Because building relationships is so critical in policy development, you may also want to consider measures that assess how often you or your agency leaders are meeting and/or substantively communicating with their senators and representatives on immunization issues.

Other potential measures to consider include:

- \* How well are we collecting and communicating district- and state-specific data about immunization issues?
- \* Are we monitoring the web and social media to monitor and address vaccine misinformation circulating in our community?
- \* Has a key lawmaker visited a facility significant to our cause or participated in one of our events?

## Conclusion

Creating or contributing to an education outreach plan, building personal relationships, and educating the public and policymakers are fundamental steps for improving

immunization policy. Additional tactics include working with the media and utilizing data, evidence, and stories to create effective messages. Finally, engaging coalition partners, anticipating opposition, and planning to evaluate are all important steps in promoting sound immunization policy.

### Advocacy Tips from the National Association of County and City Health Officials

At the basic level, advocacy is building relationships. The goal is to become a valuable resource for policymakers. No matter who the audience is, you should keep in mind the following:

- ▶ Be confident.
- ▶ Frame your message to answer the question, “So what?”
- ▶ Plan and practice your message.
- ▶ Present a clear and compelling message. Less is more.
- ▶ Offer yourself as an expert resource and provide examples from your community. Stories are more compelling than statistics.

Source: The NACCHO Advocacy Toolkit, National Association of County and City Health Officials, Washington, DC, 2017.



# Immunization Program Policy Toolkit



## RESOURCE LIBRARY

Access a collection of AIM, immunization program, and partner resources and tools for appropriately and effectively promoting sound immunization policies.

Find bills, testimony, and immunization program resources for addressing legislation related to exemptions, vaccine ingredients, informed consent, minor consent, and school and daycare requirements.

[www.immunizationmanagers.org/policytoolkit](http://www.immunizationmanagers.org/policytoolkit)



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