Start your advocacy now for 2016!

This will be an important year, as it includes a presidential election and numerous critical statewide and local races. That means more voters, weighing in on more issues, many of which will affect you and your work. To help you take advantage of this opportunity, we are sharing a number of tools to help you elevate your policy issues in the public eye during an election cycle, and sharing stories and examples from clients who have done this work well. Our best advice for the moment? Start your 2016 electoral advocacy work NOW.

Building Your Strategy for an Election Year

As a major election year, 2016 will be a year of opportunity for advocates of all stripes. More people vote in presidential years than at any other time, which means you have to be prepared with a clear message and strategy. Ramping up your message and swaying opinion to support your issue can mean big wins for ballot issues. An election year is a great time to raise awareness among candidates, insert your issue into the public debate, and ensure that those who are elected will become allies of the issues that are important to you and your organization.

Of course, making the most of an election cycle takes a well-planned strategy. One staple in the ACS online advocacy toolbox, “Building an Effective Electoral Strategy,” will help you cover all the bases. This free, downloadable guide will help you:

- Assess your own organization’s capacity for election-year advocacy
- Understand the political landscape
- Build key relationships
- Create a plan of action that includes clear goals, target audiences, concise messages, and concrete next steps, while you also acknowledge your competition, budget and timeline
- Monitor and evaluate your efforts

What does an election year advocacy strategy look like in action? Check out the National Association for the Education of Young Children’s (NAEYC) Early Ed for President “$16 for 16” campaign. This creative strategy (designed with the help and guidance of ACS) is helping NAEYC build support and raise funds to achieve a clear advocacy objective: making investments in early childhood education—and those who provide it—part of the national conversation.

Gearing Up for 2016 Legislative Sessions

Although the 2016 Presidential election will grab much of the headlines and focus in the coming year, practically every state in the nation will convene a state legislative session earlier in the year, and that’s a perfect opportunity to engage policymakers on the issues that matter now.
Client Spotlight:
The Ohio 8 Coalition Highlights Recent Accomplishments

In November 2015, ACS client, The Ohio 8 Coalition, released their 2015 Year-at-a-Glance Infographic that highlights the accomplishments and activity of Ohio’s eight city school districts. ACS assisted coalition members in developing the concept, collecting, and analyzing data that would create the biggest impact on target audiences. This year-at-a-glance document reflects The Ohio 8 Coalition’s commitment to support the unique educational needs of every student in each of their districts, no matter where they came from, the amount of money their family earns, the languages they speak, or the physical or cognitive challenges they face. One significant highlight is the fact that The Ohio 8 Coalition represents 11% or nearly 200,000 of Ohio’s students attending public schools. For additional highlights, see our latest news about the infographic.

The Ohio 8 Coalition is a strategic alliance composed of the superintendents and teacher union presidents from Ohio’s eight urban school districts—Akron, Canton, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Columbus, Dayton, Toledo and Youngstown. The Ohio 8 Coalition’s mission is to work with policymakers to improve academic performance, increase graduation rates, and close the achievement gap for students in Ohio’s urban communities.

Gearing Up for 2016 Legislative Sessions

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ACS is pleased to offer four new tools that can help you build relationships with policymakers (and 2016 candidates, too!), understand the federal budgeting processes and terms that guide federal expenditure decisions.

- **Five Rules for Policymaker Engagement** presents a winning formula for building long-term relationships with policymakers to further your cause.
- **Key Tips for Meeting with Policymakers** offers a comprehensive, step-by-step guide to planning, preparing for and conducting meaningful meetings with elected officials or their key staff.
- **ACS’s Federal Budget Process** Guide to the gives you a behind-the-scenes look at how the federal budget is determined, and the sometimes stark contrast between theory and reality in the budget process.
- **Lost in confusing federal budget terms like “continuing resolution” and “sequestration”?** The Federal Budget and Appropriation Term Glossary can help you make sense of them all and give your vocabulary a boost for critical budget discussions with policymakers.

Clients like The Ohio 8 Coalition use these concepts to help them maintain relationships with state policymakers as they track and address ongoing policy issues affecting public education, like school discipline, charter schools, testing and assessments, funding, and more. The relationships they develop have been key to planning their legislative agenda and responding quickly when opportunities for advocacy arise during the legislative session.

All of these tools are available for free download from the ACS online toolbox. Don’t see a tool you’d like to have or need help with implementing a tool? Let us know and we can help you get to the next step in your advocacy effort. Email Scarlett Bouder: scarlett@advocacyandcommunication.org.
Once your strategy is defined, the ACS online advocacy toolbox also contains a number of resources to help you engage candidates and mobilize voters to make them stalwart supporters of your issue. These tools include:

- **Organizing a Successful Voter Registration Effort**—a step-by-step guide to ensure everyone in your community can exercise their right to vote.
- **Get Out The Vote (GOTV)**—a complete guide for creating a plan to achieve maximum voter turnout on election day
- **Hosting a Successful Candidate Forum**—10 steps for engaging candidates in a specific discussion about your issue.
- **Do’s and Don’ts of Electoral Advocacy**—a clear overview of the rules that govern the activities of 501(c)(3) organizations with regard to ballot measures, interactions with candidates, meeting with elected officials, educating voters, sharing advocacy messages, and more.

NAEYC used this suite of tools to help build the advocacy capacity of its affiliates in three states with key elections in November 2015—Wisconsin, Idaho, and South Carolina—leading up to the general elections in those states. ACS helped each state understand and deploy voter registration campaigns, get-out-the-vote efforts, candidate forums, and more in order to build awareness and support for improving opportunities for 0-5-year-olds.

In all three states, NAEYC was able to elevate the discussion and position early childhood issues as a higher priority in the minds of voters and candidates, helping to create a growing movement of support.

“Before we started working with ACS, we had zero capacity to conduct electoral advocacy activities,” says Sally McClellan, Ph.D., South Carolina Association for the Education of Young Children. “After working with ACS for just two months, we were able to identify our assets and leverage our partners around the state to begin our electoral advocacy efforts. We now have seven partners engaged in this work. The technical assistance we received from ACS helped us to build our internal capacity and attach deadlines to our work to increase our accountability. As we continue our work into 2016, our goal is that every candidate for every office is talking about young children and their families. We will be using ACS’ Electoral Strategy Planning tool to build our long term strategy for electoral advocacy.”

ACS Welcomes New Clients

Two new clients take the spotlight this quarter, with exciting projects that will leverage ACS’s lobbying and communication expertise, as well as our ability to help create and advance statewide networks.

**Fair Housing Coalition**
Following recent legislative activity related to housing issues at Ohio’s Statehouse, the Miami Valley Fair Housing Center and Toledo Fair Housing Center have enlisted ACS to help develop an advocacy strategy for an emerging statewide Fair Housing Coalition. ACS will help this budding group develop an advocacy strategy that will support policymaker relationship development and help them move from reactive policy responders to proactive policy informers.

**Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health (WI-AIMH)**
The Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health (WI-AIMH) is a statewide group of early childhood practitioners and advocates that works to promote social and emotional wellness for infants and young children—especially through their closest and most important relationships with parents or other caregivers. ACS will help WI-AIMH develop a communication strategy to raise awareness of the organization and the issues among policymakers, professionals and the public.

Want to learn how communication, strategy development or advocacy can move your organization forward?

Need an expert for training sessions or conference presentations?

Contact one of our team members, call toll-free at 1-877-372-0166 or visit our website at advocacyandcommunication.org

Lori McClung, President,
lori@advocacyandcommunication.org

Scarlett Bouder, Vice President,
scarlett@advocacyandcommunication.org

Rebecca Cohen, Senior Director,
rebecca@advocacyandcommunication.org

Cassie Gaffney, Policy Associate,
cassie@advocacyandcommunication.org

Heather Lenz, Policy Associate,
heather@advocacyandcommunication.org

Cait Kennedy, Office Administrator
cait@advocacyandcommunication.org

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ACS online advocacy toolbox

For more information about ACS please contact us at info@advocacyandcommunication.org.