



ENGAGING WORKFORCE PARTNERS

IN ADVOCACY FOR ADULT EDUCATION

Overview:

Adult education programs provide a pathway for Americans to master the skills needed to thrive in the workforce and build better futures for themselves, their families, their employers, their communities, and our nation. As Congress becomes increasingly focused on return on investment and workforce development outcomes, there's no better time to elevate how adult education drives both. By engaging workforce partners and employers directly in advocacy, we can help policymakers see the real-world connection between adult education and economic growth. Authentic stories and joint advocacy demonstrate how adult education supports not only business success but also community well-being.

Step 1: Identify the Right Partners

Start by selecting employers who can authentically illustrate the value of adult education. Aim for a balanced advocacy voice with businesses large and small. Ideal partners include:

- Employers where you already have an existing relationship through developing workforce pipeline programs or other initiatives to support learners.
- Past or current employers of adult learners who can speak to the skills and contributions learners brought to their workforce as well as success stories or measurable outcomes tied to adult learners.
- Employers engaged in providing adult learners with opportunities for internships, upskilling, or apprenticeships who can share their experience with developing the talent of adult learners.
- **Bonus:** Employers with strong community ties that have existing Congressional relationships or interest in public engagement.

Other workforce partners you can include in your advocacy: Members of workforce boards, local chambers of commerce, and nonprofits that support adult education and/or workforce development.

Step 2: Connect and Educate

Many employers want to support adult education but don't yet understand why their voices matter in advocacy. Your role is to connect the dots.

Key Message to Share:

Employers bring credibility and real-world perspective that policymakers value. When a business leader explains how adult education programs helped them fill jobs, improve retention, increase productivity, foster community and family well-being, and strengthen their local economy, it connects federal and state investments directly to workforce results.

Step 3: Offer Flexible Advocacy Options

Not every employer can engage in the same way—and that's okay. The goal is to meet them where they are. Reinforce that every level of participation matters and helps policymakers see the workforce impact of adult education.

Levels of Engagement:

- **Direct Advocacy Collaboration**—Participate in legislative meetings at the local, state, or federal level (in-person or virtually) or sign a joint letter to legislators.
- **Community Advocacy**—Attend and/or participate in a graduation ceremony or briefing on the importance of adult education.
- **Joint Awareness Efforts**—Co-author a newsletter, blog post, or press release.
- **Story Sharing**—Provide a quote, paragraph, short video, or social media post.

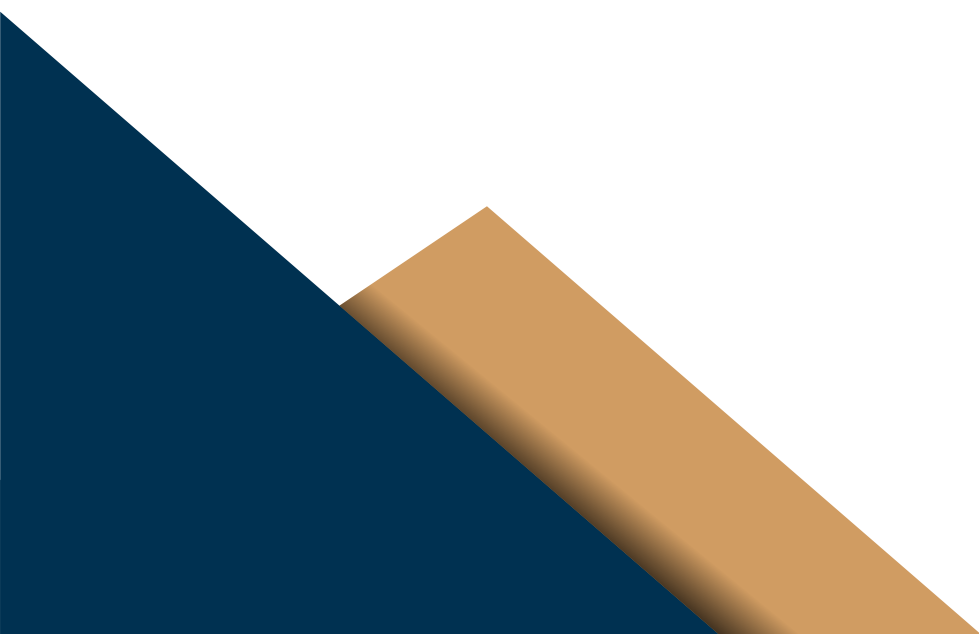
Help workforce partners tailor an advocacy approach that matches their comfort and capacity. Have a conversation with them first. Understand how they currently engage in advocacy to gauge their capacity and openness. Then discuss the menu of options and find alignment. Reinforce that you will help them along the way, and they do not have to do it all alone!



Step 4: Plan and Execute Together

Once an employer commits, guide them through the advocacy process and set them up for success.

Steps to Take:

- Share COABE [talking points](#) and [policy priorities](#).
 - Share statistics and real stories—from your program or COABE’s [Educate & Elevate map locator tool](#).
 - Use the Story Planning Worksheet on page 4 to structure their message.
 - Conduct short practice sessions or role-plays before any in-person or virtual meetings, calls, or events.
 - Keep communication open. Follow up after each activity to thank partners, gather feedback, and maintain momentum for future collaboration. Continue to update workforce partners on advocacy outcomes and invite them to future opportunities.
 - Highlight and amplify employer involvement through newsletters, social media, blogs, and COABE campaigns (be sure to email us at advocacy@coabe.org). This not only celebrates your partners but also inspires other employers to get involved.
 - Use the Reflection Worksheet on pages 5-6 to capture what worked well, what challenges emerged, and what could be refined for next time.
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STORY PLANNING WORKSHEET

Purpose:

Help employers and program staff craft clear, compelling stories that highlight the impact of adult education on workforce, learners, and communities. Use this worksheet for written stories, videos, or social media posts.

Tips for Storytelling:

- Keep messages short, specific, and memorable.
- Focus on results and outcomes rather than abstract concepts.
- Always tie the story back to impact on the workforce, learners, and community.
- Use numbers, examples, or anecdotes whenever possible—these resonate with policymakers.

Questions to Consider:

- How has adult education supported your workforce? (Example: “Employees who completed the GED program increased productivity by 15%.”)
- Any specific employee success stories or examples? What outcomes have you seen for employees or your organization? (Include names if approved, roles, and measurable outcomes.)
- How does adult education benefit your organization beyond workforce skills? (Example: improved retention, employee engagement, workplace culture, safety.)
- How does adult education benefit the broader community? (Example: community programs, economic growth, partnerships with local schools.)

REFLECTION WORKSHEET

Purpose:

Encourage program staff and employer partners to reflect on their advocacy experiences, identify successes, and determine areas for improvement. This promotes continuous learning and stronger future engagement.

1. Event / Activity Overview

- Date of Activity / Event: _____
- Type of Engagement: ☐ Story Sharing ☐ Awareness Campaign ☐ Community Advocacy ☐ Direct Legislative Engagement
- Employer(s) Involved: _____
- Program Staff Involved: _____

2. Goals & Outcomes

- What were the goals of this activity?
- Were the goals achieved?
☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
- Key outcomes or successes:

3. Story & Message Effectiveness

- Was the story or message clear and compelling?
☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No
- What feedback did you receive from the audience, policymakers, or media?
- What could be improved in story delivery or content?

4. Employer Engagement

- Did the employer feel prepared and confident?
☐ Yes ☐ Partially ☐ No

- How well did the employer contribute to the activity's success?
- What additional support or resources could have helped them?

5. **Lessons Learned**

- What worked well in this activity?
- What challenges were encountered and how were they addressed?
- Any new strategies to try in future activities?

6. **Next Steps**

- Follow-up actions for employer(s) or program staff:
- Ideas for moving employer partners to higher engagement levels:

Additional notes:

Tips for Success

- Complete this worksheet as soon as possible after each activity to capture accurate reflections.
- Share insights with the program team to inform future advocacy planning.
- Track trends over time to identify best practices and recurring challenges.