Advocacy 101

**Advocacy vs Lobbying**

Advocacy: When nonprofit organizations/schools advocate on their own behalf; seek to affect some aspect of society, whether they appeal to individuals about their behavior, employers about their rules or government about its laws.

Lobbying: lobbying refers specifically to advocacy efforts that attempt to influence legislation

**Restrictions on 501(c)(3)s and colleges**

A nonprofit cannot:

* Endorse or directly campaign for a candidate, party or ballot initiative
* Contribute directory or in-kind to a candidate, party or ballot initiative
* Distribute materials aimed to influence the outcome of an election
* Individuals have the right to express their personal views but any title/organization affiliation should be excluded (some schools prohibit the use of title/organization)

**The basics: pre-meeting**

* Make an appointment with the scheduler. Tell them what you want to discuss and who will be attending. <http://www.legislature.ca.gov/legislators_and_districts/legislators_and_districts.html>
* Be prepared. Bring a one-pager, brochure or other information about how your center affects the district. Know your audience. Voting history, interests
* Be prepared to meet with staff if member is unavailable

**The basics: during meeting**

* Briefly explain the background of MESA (if they are not familiar with the program)
* Be assertive but polite and respectful
* Let the students tell their stories (legislators would rather hear from them!)
* Make a clear ASK of the member or staff
* Avoid acronyms and jargon (teacher or faculty instead of advisor)

**The basics: post meeting**

* Send a thank you note
* Confirm your ask, provide details to attend an event

**Best practices**

* Do your homework: how does MESA relate to the district, constituents, community and the member’s voting interests?
* Choose the best messenger for the effort
* Anticipate and be prepared to answer questions (if you don’t know, say so).