

State Advocacy Toolkit

“A Legislative Committee can be an invaluable and rewarding endeavor for the members of your ACOG District or Section. It can help you expand and diversify your leadership group, increase the experience of existing leadership, and inform, engage and activate your members.”

- **Dr. Kristin Lyerly**, Legislative Chair, ACOG District VI (Illinois, Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North & South Dakota, Wisconsin)

This Toolkit was updated in 2021 to reflect current best practices and challenges in state advocacy. Part of a year-long modernization effort undertaken by a workgroup of District Legislative Chairs — Rachel Casey, MD, FACOG, Jennifer Chin, MD, FACOG and Kristin Lyerly, MD, MPH, FACOG, — and ACOG’s State Government Affairs staff, this update is intended to sustain and grow ACOG’s influence in the state capitols

Assembling and Using a Legislative Committee (AKA, Team)

TOOLKIT OBJECTIVE

To assist ACOG state Legislative Chairs to assemble a legislative committee/team and deploy it to advance legislative goals.

CONTENTS

Getting Started

- ▶ Assembling Your Team
- ▶ Key Functions

Getting Going

- ▶ Implementation Checklist
- ▶ Success Stories

Grab & Go: Other Helpful Resources

- ▶ Setting Your Legislative Agenda Workbook
- ▶ The ACOG State Legislative Chair Toolkit
- ▶ The ACOG Regional District Legislative Chair Toolkit

BENEFITS OF A LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

- ▶ Enables you to approach each legislative session with a plan.
- ▶ Gives you an early warning of legislation that impacts ob-gyns and women’s health.
- ▶ Positions you to deal with legislative issues in a proactive, not reactive, manner.
- ▶ Triggers state legislators’ awareness that your ACOG team is a credible resource for women’s health issues.
- ▶ Elevates your profile with other medical societies and women’s health advocacy groups in your state.
- ▶ Helps you engage with government agencies in your state that interpret, implement and enforce laws passed by the legislature.

GETTING STARTED

Congratulations! You're starting a new team or taking up the reins from an outgoing Legislative Chair. A Legislative Committee positions you to take the next steps to greater, more sustained and successful legislative advocacy in your state.



Assembling Your Team

Your Advisory Council is your partner – they can provide you with guidance and support. Make sure you're coordinating with them as you engage and grow your Legislative Team.

Team Chair

You have leeway in designating a Legislative Chair; consider the following:

- ▶ The Legislative Chair is typically designated by the Advisory Council. In some states, the Vice Chair also serves as Legislative Chair. If it's not the Vice Chair or another officer, it's important that the Legislative Chair be represented on the Advisory Council.
- ▶ Ideally, this is a long-term appointment (greater than 2 years), as it takes time to learn the legislative process and hone advocacy skills.
- ▶ The individual should have some advocacy experience and be comfortable meeting with legislators.
- ▶ Consider appointing Co-chairs, one of whom would be a JF or YP. A past Section Chair may also be interested in staying involved. Appointments can be for alternating or coequal terms. A Co-chair can be tasked with discreet functions; for example, planning a lobby day at your state capitol.

Team Members

When recruiting and selecting members, consider the following:

- ▶ Members could be designated by the Legislative Chair, the Advisory Council, or both. You could also consider an open selection process, which may yield more enthusiastic and experienced candidates.
- ▶ Ideally, one or two members should reside in or near the state capital; close proximity makes it easier to meet with legislators and testify on short notice. Members should commit to meeting at least three to four times a year, and on short notice, while the state legislature is in session.
- ▶ Members should attend relevant regional and national ACOG meetings.
- ▶ The rotation and designation of new members should be clearly defined. Keep in mind that it takes time to learn the legislative process and hone advocacy skills. Less experienced members (including Junior Fellows, Young Physicians, and those newer to advocacy) will benefit from mentorship and can provide fresh eyes and new ideas to members with longer tenure.

- ▶ Member continuity and longevity will be critical to the success and long-term viability of your committee.
- ▶ Cultivating a team of members with different areas of expertise, diverse relationships with legislators, robust alliances with coalition partners, and diversity in practice sites and political composition will give your committee the bullpen that you need to match ob-gyn spokespersons with specific issue areas.
- ▶ Consider representation across career stages by including young Physicians, Junior Fellows, and medical students in your committee.

An inclusive approach to leadership opportunities strengthens advocacy: ACOG Is committed to promoting diversity and inclusion in leadership at all levels, including supporting policies, procedures, and the development of professional cultures where people of color are supported and promoted and that create an equitable and inclusive organizational culture.

Key Functions

A State Legislative Committee plays a hands-on role in monitoring and lobbying bills. The Committee also supports the Legislative Chair in their day-to-day implementation of the legislative agenda while the state legislature is in session. These functions, more easily achieved by an engaged team than a lone Chair, are identified below.

1. Reviews bills for potential impact and position, recommends the annual legislative agenda and priorities to the Advisory Council, and keeps leadership and members apprised of progress.
2. Checks in regularly with the State Legislative Team in the ACOG national office to attain guidance on ACOG's policy positions, discuss key legislative developments, coordinate rapid response assistance, and share benchmarks.
3. Coordinates activities at the state capitol, including testimony and attendance at press conferences and other visibility events.
4. Recruits and builds your states' ACOG member grassroots action alert network.
5. Seeks the support of other groups for your legislative priorities; for example: AAP, AAFP, ACNM, PPFA, perinatal quality collaborative, March of Dimes, ACLU, and local coalitions of women's health and maternal and child health groups.
6. Oversees planning and implementation of an annual lobby day at your state capitol.
7. Helps the Legislative Chair assess whether hiring a lobbyist would help advance your legislative goals; participates in the lobbyist interview process; and works hand-in-hand with the chosen lobbyist.
8. Designates a committee member to be your liaison to the State Medical Society's Legislative Council; maintains regular contact with ob-gyns who are members and serve on the State Medical Society's Legislative Council or are in leadership roles.
9. Recommends individual state lawmakers for special recognition for their support of your legislative goals.

10. Identifies state legislators, Governors, and others running for state office for Ob-GYN PAC contributions and endorsements.
11. Assists the Legislative Chair in the submission of your state advocacy efforts for national recognition under ACOG's annual State Legislative Awards Program.
12. Steers the team through transitions of members and leaders, which may include creating comprehensive succession plans when needed.
13. Seeks opportunities to mentor and cultivate new, diverse and less experienced team members.

Bear in mind that many legislative efforts take time. It takes time to educate legislators, build relationships and coalitions, cultivate strong allies, and implement an advocacy program that works effectively. It also takes time to pass legislation. Passage of a bill during the same session in which it is first introduced is more the exception than the rule.

GETTING GOING



Implementation Checklist

- ▶ **Who's on your team?**
 - Are JFs and YPs represented?
 - How often do you meet?
 - Are you recruiting and involving diverse members?
 - How smooth are your leadership transitions?
 - Consider having two members as Co-Legislative Chairs

- ▶ **What kind of support will your team require to be successful?**
 - Check-in with the ACOG State Legislative staff at the National Office.
 - Are you partnering with other groups in your state to achieve your legislative goals?
 - Are you engaging with your State Medical Society? Do you have members who are active in both organizations?
 - Do you employ a lobbyist? If not, do you know how to assess whether you need a lobbyist and how to initiate the hiring process?

- ▶ **Have you set your legislative agenda?**
 - Please consult the "Setting Your Legislative Agenda" workbook. (will link to workbook)

► **Putting your legislative agenda into action**

- Should you initiate your own bill, support someone else's bill, or work to defeat a bill?
- Is the current political climate favorable for your agenda? Who are your allies? Opponents?
- What activities need to be accomplished at various stages before, during, and after the legislative session; for example, what issue(s) will you focus on at your annual lobby day?
- Can you join a coalition with other groups to advance a common, priority issue?
- Are you able to mobilize ACOG members behind your agenda and keep them informed of legislative developments?
- What short-term or partial victories can you win as steps toward a long-term goal?
- When legislators are back home in their districts, how will you engage with them?
- Are you evaluating your legislative agenda after each legislative session?
- Your legislative agenda should be viewed as a work in progress; expect to modify it during the legislative session.

SUCCESS STORIES

Legislative Committees have grown ACOG's advocacy efforts and lessened the advocacy burden on individual ACOG members across the country. Here are a few experiences, shared by your colleagues:

"Through a multi-year process, ACOG Washington was able to collaborate with many other local organizations to pass the Protecting Pregnant Patients Act, which prohibits hospitals from interfering with the care provided to a pregnant patient whose health or life is in danger. This was only possible due to strong partnerships with the ACLU of Washington, Cedar River Clinics (a local independent abortion clinic), Planned Parenthood of Greater Washington and North Idaho, NARAL Pro-Choice Washington, Legal Voice, and Planned Parenthood Alliance Advocates. Through careful strategy, strong testimony from providers and patients, and perseverance, SSB 5140 was finally signed by the governor in 2021."

- **Dr. Jennifer Chin**, District VIII Junior Fellow Legislative Chair