

# STUDENT-LED ADVOCACY GUIDE

RESOURCES FOR ORGANIZATIONS  
SEEKING TO ENGAGE STUDENTS IN  
POLICY & ADVOCACY WORK

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# About the Active Advocacy Coalition

The Active Advocacy Coalition (AAC) is a state-wide coalition of students advocating for student-centered policy. There's a specific interest and focus on engaging and training up low-income, first-generation, students of color and students that are undocumented. The Coalition is entering its fifth year and has engaged students across the state of Missouri. The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis' Education Policy Internship program serves as the brain trust of the AAC. The Policy Internship is in its seventh year of operation and now engages over two dozen students in higher education, health, and finance policy.

Participants in the internship programs are thinking about how systems and policies impact access to higher education, healthcare, and financial well-being. The goal of the AAC and the internship programs is to ensure students that are primarily left out of these types of discussions are not only included in them, but able to lead them.

# About this Guide

Dear Reader:

This curriculum was written by two former interns who were a part of the inaugural policy internship class, Karissa Anderson, who now leads the program and Karina Arango, who has moved on to further her studies but still provides her critical guidance. We share this curriculum not because it's perfect or complete, but because it's important.

Since the start of this program in 2013, we have been constantly met with admiration and adulation for doing something that seems common sense: following the lead of students in setting an advocacy agenda and supporting rather than supplanting student leadership. It did not seem like “rocket science” to us, and we know that sharing the work will serve to strengthen it by the additions and improvements others offer.

Ours is not an exercise in student government or necessarily a training ground for would-be career politicians. Most of the young people with whom we have worked began their involvement in advocacy fired up about issues that affected them but little awareness of or confidence in their own agency or change-making.

This curriculum, paired with passionate facilitators and the support of other students, changes the way students come to see themselves and their own power in the midst of systems that perpetuate inequity. By the close of each year, we've been inspired to see students better positioned to step up, speak out, and take the lead.

We hope you join us!

The Active Advocacy Team



# Overview & Approach

## Overview

This guide is designed to help college access organizations build out a mechanism for student-led advocacy. It includes tips, tools, and lessons from our experience in building out this program.

This guide provides tools to:

- Educate participants about advocacy and its methods;
- Build basic skills in advocacy;
- Develop and increase the use of data to inform policy makers; and,
- Engage in the democratic process by creating an advocacy campaign strategy.

## Approach

The curriculum begins at and is built upon the experiences of students in interacting with power and policy. Participants learn history, context, and apply critical systems thinking to understand how and why policy came to be. By beginning with lived experiences, participants

need not question their own expertise. Once advocates come to see that their experiences are not isolated or unique, but were often created or affected by systems they did not see, they can not “un-see” this reality. This process is an experiential educational model, rooted in social justice education, adult learning, and intersectionality. Emerging adults are able to start from a position of strength (lived experience, understanding of context, and freedom to critique) that differs from much of their prior educational experiences. The approach is dynamic, in which projects and agendas develop within the process and all of the learning occurs in interactive and collaborative settings.

“The approach really comes from the quote: ‘Nothing about me without me.’”

-Former Education Policy Intern

# A Note on Facilitators

A program such as this requires very careful selection of facilitator. It is not enough to choose someone who “looks like” the participants. It is not enough to bow to years of experience or specific content expertise. The facilitator’s role is not to control or to produce. By definition, the facilitator creates space for the learning and leadership of others.

Facilitators must believe in the power and capability of the group to establish its own purpose and determine its own outcome. Facilitation requires attention to and orchestration of meaningful interactions. This curriculum is dependent upon an open, honest discussion in a safe and respectful space, and the facilitator tends to that safety and respect at all times.

Adopting intentionally varied strategies, the facilitator guides the participants in examining issues and generates a course of action for the particular group. The facilitator leads the group by supporting them in two ways: asking questions and listening. When the facilitator models the productive behaviors of radical listening, maintaining personal safety, honoring different perspectives, sharing, trusting, risk-taking, and disclosing, participants will mirror those behaviors.

The primary functions of an effective facilitator are asking questions and listening. They do not give answers, assume people’s needs or provide their own solutions. Ultimately, the facilitator wants to generate a space where the participant can be “whole” advocates. This means creating safe space for the whole of a person: existence, thoughts, experiences, and knowledge. Each participant adds brilliance to the room. Effective facilitators engage with that brilliance and equip participants with the tools to create lasting change through advocacy.

# Why Student-Led?

For too long, policies have been developed without the full consideration of people whose lives are directly affected. Participants will change that by learning how to engage in effective advocacy with people who have first-hand experience in the content. Without the involvement of those directly affected by the policies and their allies, the policy agenda will continue to be narrow and exclusive. It's hard to imagine a time when the skills of advocacy and the importance of leadership by and among those disenfranchised economically was greater than the current era.

# Module One: Orientation

## Objective

The orientation is when you introduce participants to the program and the organization. An effective practice includes having a two-day orientation and using the first day to begin to build community among participants and the second for the more technical aspects of the program. A strong orientation is the key to developing a strong group.

## Building Community Agreements

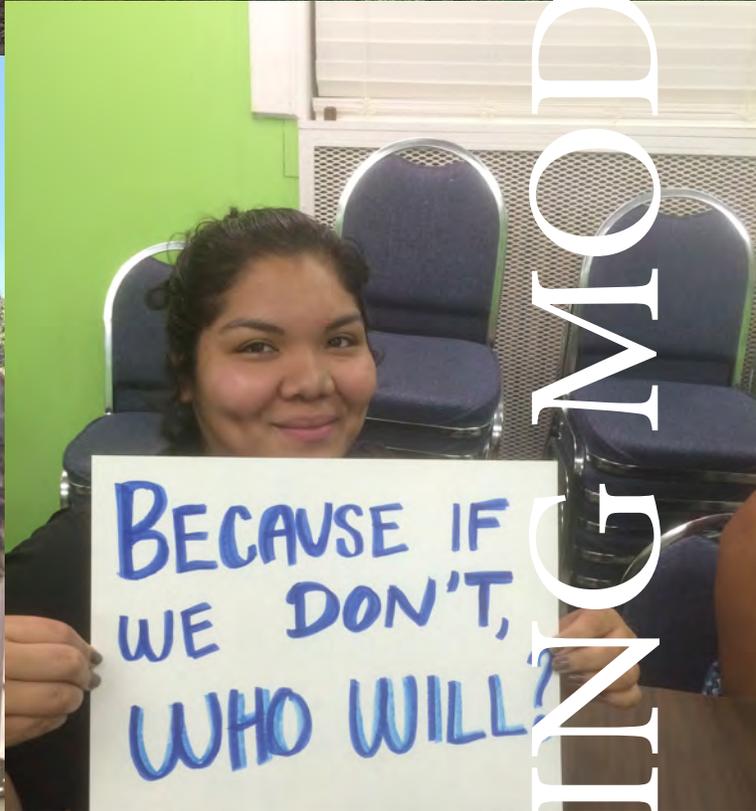
Community Agreements are critical in getting your program off to the right start and keeping things on track. They govern the community being built among participants and create a sense of accountability among all involved. Establishing community agreements as a group is far more democratic than having the facilitator create group “rules” or “norms”. Also, participants are far more likely to adhere to agreements they helped craft.

## Note to Facilitator

This is the facilitators time to really mirror an example of the expected level of engagement.

Trainers are highly encouraged to set up the space in a way that provides safe learning for all participants. Some tips to consider when setting up the room include:

- Play music as participants arrive
- Provide name tags
- Set up tables in a “U-shape” to encourage discussion
- Find out if there are any learning accommodations for participants prior to the first meeting
- Provide a meal or snacks



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# Module Two: Change-making Processes & Power-mapping

## Objective

This module is designed to give participants a basic understanding of the federal, state, and institutional change-making process. The intent of this module is to:

- Define advocacy and the role it plays in improving the well-being of the community
- Create an understanding of the change-making process
- Identify opportunities throughout the process where participants can use their voice and advocate on issues they care about

## Media

*[Schoolhouse Rock- How a Bill Becomes a Law](#)*

## Suggested Reading(s)

*[USA.gov How Laws Are Made and How to Research Them](#)*

## Activities

- Determine an issue and write one way you can influence the process
- Look up the decision-makers representing your community
- Research a law and learn about its journey from being a bill to becoming a law

## Note to Facilitator

Emphasize that change takes time but that advocacy does make a difference in the decision-making process. Persistence is key.

# Module Three: Legislative Meetings & Messaging

## Objective

Building off of the last module, participants will generate strategies on how to best engage with decision-makers and other stakeholders. Participants will also learn tips and resources for amplifying their stance and effective communication skills when speaking with decision-makers in different settings. The intent of this module is to:

- Identify best practices when communicating with decision-makers and the public
- Increase participants' comfort level in using communication tactics (i.e. presentations, writing opinion pieces, giving a speech)
- Enhance storytelling, debate, and negotiation skills

## Media

- *The Danger of a Single Story by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*
- *Not all Scholarships are Created Equal” by Karissa Anderson & Christopher Walter, Jr.*

## Activities

- Legislative meeting role play
- In-district meetings with friendly legislators
- Story of Self, Us, & Now by Marshall Ganz

## Note to Facilitator

This is an excellent way to engage staff, partners, and board members in the work. Assign interns a legislator or decision-maker to research and craft their message for and use staff and board members as actors. Call attention to the importance of working as a team, this is where the community building participants have been doing comes into play.

# Module Four: Policy Research

## Objective

Public policies that seek to address challenges will only work if the choices made by decision-makers are informed by the best available information. This is why research is essential. This module will explore how participants can conduct policy research and determine the best sources available. The intent of the module is to:

- Provide participants with frameworks to help direct and organize knowledge gathering
- Develop qualitative and quantitative analytical skills
- Access databases through universities, organizations, government agencies, and think tanks
- Learn to deliver information concisely and advocate for evidence-informed policy decisions

## Suggested Reading(s)

- *10 Things to Know About how to Influence Policy with Research by Overseas Development Institute*

## Note to Facilitator

Conducting research is key to advancing advocacy work. The goal of this module is to make sure participants are able to question and scrutinize “facts” that they are presented with. Ask participants the following questions:

- Think about issues seen in their work and ask what would they like to change, support, or raise awareness about?
- How do you approach conducting research to influence policy?
- What are some local resources, groups or associations who they might be able to partner with to guide them when conducting research?
- How can you assess the strength of a research report or article?
- Is the information current and complete?
- Is there more to the story? If so, how do we make sure our policymakers have the whole story?

# Module Five: Building Anti-Bias & Anti-Racist Systems

## Objective

Anti-bias, anti-racist (ABAR) education aims to equip participants with skills to build systems that support our increasingly (but always) diverse society and gives students and others the tools to stand firm against prejudice, stereotyping, bias, and institutional ‘isms’. The intent of this module is to:

- Explore the social and political history and context of racism, classism, citizenship, and other identity-based discrimination, especially as it relates to college access
- Become aware of the various, overt and covert ways in which power and privilege manifests within systems
- Understand how various “isms” go beyond personal prejudice and are embedded in all of our systems
- Identify ways to begin to dismantle bias and racist systems

## Activities

Contract with a local anti-racist organization to facilitate an ABAR workshop.

## Note to Facilitator

No matter the disposition of the facilitator or organization, it is critical that an outside organization or consultant conduct this session. This is an area of specific expertise beyond any one individual. The risk of not having an expert at the helm is further causing harm to people who have already directly experienced forms of oppression and causing people who may have unknowingly participated in racist and biased systems to shut down.





# Module Six: Meeting Facilitation

## Objective

Ultimately, this module serves as a way to prepare participants to lead effective meetings. The intent of the module is to:

- Define best practices for effective meetings
- Prepare participants to lead team meetings
- Learn how to create safe and empowering spaces

## Suggested Reading(s)

- *Conducting Effective Meetings by Community Toolbox*
- *How to Run Effective Meetings by Slack*

## Activities

- Role play a bad meeting
- Task participants with drafting a meeting or training agenda
- Consider sending participants to a workshop on facilitation
- Engage senior or more experienced participants to facilitate meetings

## Note to Facilitator

The ultimate goal of this curriculum is to equip students with the skills and tools necessary to engage in leadership; this module is that preparation coming into fruition. Stress the importance of good meetings, timeliness, and participants stepping into their own power, even if they're nervous.

# Module Seven: Story Banking

## Objective

Stories are an invaluable resource not only when doing advocacy work, but also to engage others in advocacy work. In this module, students will learn how to ethically story bank, use stories to further an advocacy agenda, and then prepare to hold their own story banking session. The intent of this module is to:

- Learn best practices for ethically banking stories
- Distinguish between ethical and unethical usage of stories
- Understand and review past story-telling campaigns
- Enhance their own story-telling capabilities

## Suggested Reading(s)

- *Story-banking: A Bank That Always Builds Interest by Network for Good*
- *How to Create a Successful Story Bank Program by Families USA*
- *The Ethics of Storytelling or How Not to Exploit People*

## Activities

Workshop on when and how to gather stories and how to effectively and appropriately use them.

## Note to Facilitator

There is an emphasis here on ethical story-banking. Ethical story-banking challenges organizations to use client stories in a way that honors and does not exploit them. This means that we focus on what students want to share, reinforcing that they're the authors of their own story, and build a process for continuous consent to the use of their story.

# Module Eight: Understanding & Working with Media

## Objective

At times ideology is more important than evidence, so much so that Oxford Dictionaries made “post-truth” its 2016 Word of the Year. As such, it is important that participants are able to understand how the media we consume impacts our opinions and views, and then systems. The intent of this module is to:

- Learn how to fact-check information that’s spread online
- Understand the impact that media messages has on advocacy work
- Learn how and when to use the media (social, traditional, otherwise) as a tool

## Media

- [Best Practices in Propaganda Education by Media Education Lab](#)
- [Recognizing Propaganda by Media Education Lab](#)
- [MediaLit Moments Activities by the Consortium for Media Literacy](#)

## Activities

- Identify real or fake Public Service Announcements
- Analyze political cartoons and propaganda

## Note to Facilitator

The goal of this workshop is to combine critical thinking, media consumption, and visual learning. As facilitator, you are responsible for walking participants through various media channels and providing context for how those channels influence us all. Facilitators should encourage participants to think critically about both consuming and creating media.

# Module Nine: Digital Advocacy & Organizing

## Objective

In this module, participants will learn how to use the power of digital media to inspire, mobilize, and organize their fellow students. This workshop focuses on the impact of technology on grassroots advocacy and explore how to use social media and other online tools to expand our reach. The intent of this module is to:

- Identify strategies for effective digital advocacy
- Determine the proper tools for inspiring action online
- Understand how digital advocacy and organizing coincide with other forms of advocacy

## Reading(s)

- *Using Social Media for Digital Advocacy by the Community Toolbox*

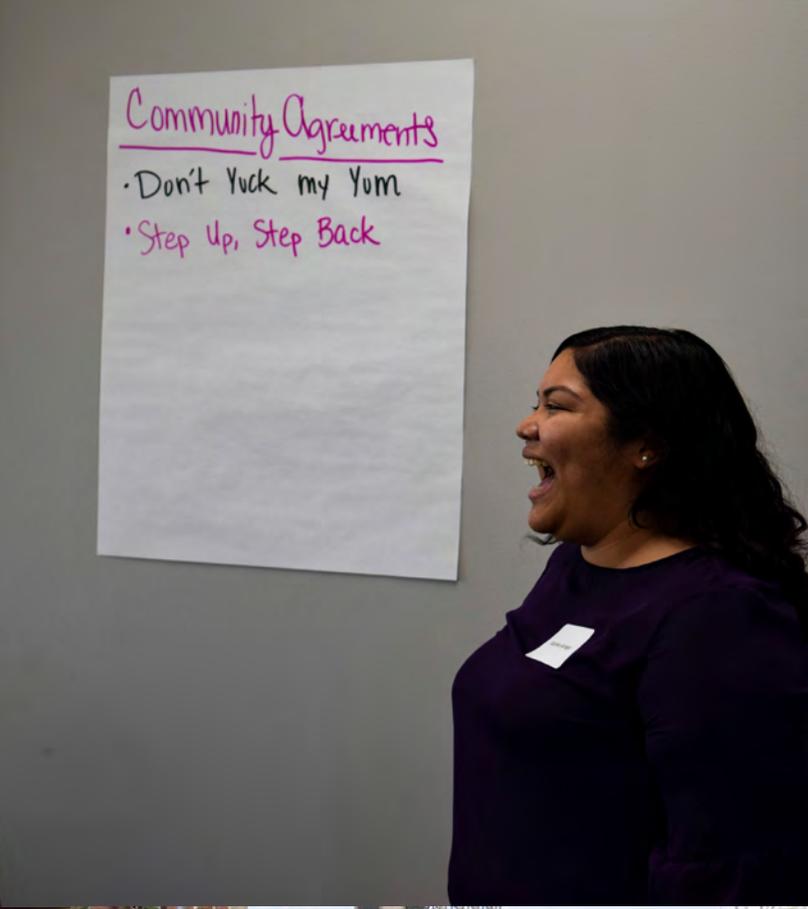
## Activities

- Analyze past digital advocacy campaigns
- Develop a mock digital advocacy campaign

## Note to Facilitator

This module is a great opportunity for participants to be really creative in their approach to advocacy work. As the facilitator, providing participants with examples of other social media or media campaigns the organization has done can be very helpful. Encourage participants to think of how a digital campaign might include social media, email, newsletters, and other forms of digital media.





# Module Ten: Resumes & Headshots

## Objective

As participants are near the end of the program, it is important to assist with incorporating their internship into the rest of their professional experiences. The intent of the module is to:

- Provide students with information on crafting an effective resume
- Make sure participants have a headshot that they feel great about

## Activities

Engage an outside consultant or internal HR personnel to help participants add their internship experience to their resume and photographer to assist with capturing headshots

## Note to Facilitator

The facilitators role for this workshop is to inform participants that headshots have various uses and they should come dressed or styled however they feel most comfortable. It's important to not impose our own standards for professional dress onto others. However, it is important to give participants information necessary to decide for themselves.

# Additional Thoughts & Notes

The above modules are those that make for the core of The Scholarship Foundation of St. Louis' advocacy curriculum. Below are additional topics and suggestions to consider while building a student-led advocacy program.

- Content Area Guests - These guests are members of the community who have an expertise on subjects related to the program. Previous guests The Foundation has hosted include: City Treasurer, local professionals and other higher education leaders, race scholars, immigration experts, etc.
- Mental Health and Self-Care - The Foundation has taken the liberty to include methods of self-care and have intentional discussion with participants about mental healthcare. During the 2019-2020 program year, there will be professionals and resources available during and directly after workshops on what could be difficult subjects.
- Engage board members, funders, and staff members in the sessions with interns. Their perspectives will forever be changed.

# Acknowledgements

Thank you to the many students that have stood with the Active Advocacy Coalition. Special thanks to The Trellis Foundation for making the AAC a reality. We are thankful to work in collaboration with college access providers, foundations, and other partners that support student-led advocacy. Thanks to The Deaconess and Incarnate Word Foundations, and The National College Access Network. We extend deep appreciation to Rev. Dr. Starsky Wilson and Laura Winter for providing endless counsel and supporting the power of students.



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