



WHITE PAPER

Tips to Kickstart your State Advocacy Efforts

ELECTRIⁱ
INTERNATIONAL
Research and Education for the Electrical Construction Industry

EXPLORATION PHASE



1. Ask other associations you trust about their state advocacy program (e.g. other NECA Chapters, SMACNA, MCAA, TAUC, other union construction groups with GCs & subs, etc.).

- Do they have a contract lobbyist in your state capital and/or an in-house lobbyist or government affairs professional within their Chapter?
- Are there any coalitions among subcontractor groups that contract with a lobbyist, generally or on a specific issue?
- What policy issues are they working on at the state level?
- Would it be helpful for your NECA Chapter to get involved with their coalition on a particular issue? This is a good way to observe how advocacy operations function in your state and begin to learn the key players and political process.

2. Create a list of legislative issues that your NECA Chapter would consider supporting. Below is a list of common legislative topics in many states:

- Contract terms — indemnity, prompt pay, mechanics lien
- Workforce development — apprenticeships, funding, primary/secondary education requirements
- Worker misclassification
- Prevailing Wage
- Right to Work/Unionization
- Project Labor Agreements (PLAs)
- Contractor/Journeyman Licensing
- Code Approval Processes (NEC, for example)
- Unemployment Compensation/Workers Comp
- Energy policies — traditional, clean/renewable, Smart Cities
- Economic Development — especially in industries that are important to your contractors
- Infrastructure spending and priorities (e.g. electrical grid, broadband/5G infrastructure, transportation and other infrastructure)

3. Discuss with your Board and/or general membership their interest in getting involved in state advocacy.

- Find out which of your members are already engaged. They might:
 - be participating in local political parties and campaigns
 - have been elected to local positions like municipal or county commissioners/councils/boards
 - already contribute to political campaigns and/or attend political fundraisers
 - know legislators personally—either before or after being elected
 - have a contract lobbyist for their company
- Identify any particularly strong existing relationships with state legislators. Look for:
 - Former NECA contractors/IBEW members
 - Backgrounds in the construction industry
 - Backgrounds in building trades unions
 - Existing relationships with NECA members in their district
 - Conversely, also take note of any legislators who are particularly opposed to some/all of your priorities
- Assess the level of interest of your Board or membership in being engaged directly (e.g. participating in meetings with legislators, contributing to political campaigns, testifying at legislative hearings, etc.)
- Discuss which issues are most important/urgent and that you want to prioritize right away.

4. Depending on your relationship with your labor partners, consider engaging with them and finding out which policies they are working on.

- IBEW may be more politically engaged and recognizable in your area. You will need to build your visibility among legislators and state agencies.
- It is often helpful to be able to approach legislators with issues that both labor and management jointly support—this has excellent optics politically, so if any collaboration is possible, it can be beneficial to both sides.
- Does your LMCC or another NECA Chapter's LMCC retain a lobbyist in your state?
 - If so, you can check in with the lobbyist to see what issues they are working on.
 - Since LMCC money is funding the lobbyist, the issues they work should be beneficial for labor and management.

ACTIVATION PHASE



1. Once you decide to start a state advocacy program and determine what issues you and your membership want to work on, consider:

- Deciding who in your Chapter will be responsible for managing your government affairs efforts.
- Establishing a government affairs committee—a small, representative group of your members who are excited about getting involved and are willing to be your primary resource and sounding board for legislative issues (e.g. Board members, contractor CEOs, accredited reps, experienced VPs, future leaders, etc.)
- Retaining a contract lobbyist — either generally or on a particular issue.
- Starting a state-level political action committee — consult your lobbyist and/or legal counsel (specializing in campaign finance) about the laws and procedures in your state.

2. Ways to Engage Legislators:

- If you are in a more labor-friendly state, using your ties to IBEW can help you gain clout and visibility. Be sure to make the connection that you are the business owners who employ the IBEW electricians.
- Whether or not you are in a labor-friendly state, you will always have the benefit of being business owners who prioritize worker safety and providing family-sustaining wages for your employees. All three of those phrases are buzzwords that will be attractive to legislators in most cases.
- Highlighting your apprenticeship program is also a big draw for legislators, so be sure to highlight that they are:
 - Jointly administered by labor and management
 - Privately funded (not reliant on tax funding)
 - Free/low-cost to apprentices (compared to for-profit trade schools, traditional college education, etc.) — especially if your program incorporates an Associates or other college degree program
 - An important alternative to traditional college education, especially with such a massive manpower shortage and a rapidly aging skilled workforce
- Host events
 - District office meetings
 - NECA Chapter office meetings

- Job site tours
- Contractor HQ tours
- JATC tours
- Invite legislators to NECA events — as a keynote speaker, panelist, or special guest
- Eventually, state capital lobby days with your membership
- Campaign events/fundraisers — check campaign finance laws for details before engaging
- Sign up to provide written or oral testimony at relevant bill or committee hearings.
- Encourage contractors to email or call their local legislators with a personalized ask centered around the same issue. This is most effective right before the vote on the issue at hand.

3. **Most of your engagement with legislators, especially in the initial stages, will be based around education before it is about advocacy.**

- Most legislators will not know anything about electrical construction. This is normal. If you find one that does already know the industry, make a connection with them quickly.
- A big part of your job as an advocate is telling your story—explaining to legislators who your members are, what they do, where they are working, and what issues are important to them.
- Ideally, you will introduce NECA and build a relationship with these legislators before you need to ask them to vote yes/no or cosponsor any legislation that is important to you.