

# DREAM ACT

## *Advocacy Toolkit*





TEACHING, INTERPRETING AND CHANGING LAW SINCE 1979

The Immigrant Legal Resource Center is a California-based national training and resource center that offers low-cost, quality services in the form of consultations, trainings and publications. Established in 1979, the ILRC's commitment to high standards in the field of immigration is demonstrated by its numerous publications and trainings, its work on precedent-setting cases in the U.S. Supreme Court and Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. The ILRC legal staff also advises nonprofit agencies and private attorneys, offering expert telephone consultation and other work on issues relating to immigration and crimes through a contract service. The ILRC continues its commitment to the immigrant community by offering its manuals and publications to attorneys, paralegals, legal service workers, criminal defense attorneys, social workers, and community-based advocates, and by sponsoring continuing legal education services for members of the California Bar Association. Over the years, the ILRC has evolved beyond the traditional definition of a resource center. Partnerships with grassroots organization have led to leadership training, social change organizing, and other community-based work focused on increasing the civic capacity of newcomers to address the laws and policies that affect their daily lives.

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# ***ABOUT THE DREAM ACT***

The DREAM Act is a bipartisan bill, which if passed, will create an opportunity for certain undocumented students to get onto a path of legalization. The bill is also known as the Development, Relief, and Education for Alien Minors Act in the U.S. Senate and the American Dream Act in the House of Representatives.

Under the DREAM Act, a student will qualify for a 6-year conditional permanent resident status if he or she:

1. Arrived in the U.S. under the age of 16;
2. Lived in the U.S. for at least 5 years before the date of the enactment of the DREAM Act; and
3. Completed high school or earned a GED

The student would be able to convert to a permanent resident status if during the following 6 years, they either complete 2 years at a 2-year or 4-year college or serve in the armed forces for 2 years or more.

Students would not qualify for this relief if they have committed certain crimes, are a security risk, or are inadmissible or removable on certain other grounds.

# ANSWERS TO COMMONLY ASKED QUESTIONS

## **What is the legal reality for a DREAM Act beneficiary?**

Under the current laws, the DREAM Act students:

- Are under threat of being deported at any given moment
- Do not have a legal right to work
- Can not enlist and serve in the military
- Are not eligible to get any state or federal form of identification

## **Cannot legally drive a vehicle?**

In most states they are not eligible to pay in-state tuition even though they resided in the state since childhood

## **How many DREAM Act students are there?**

According to the National Immigration Law Center, there are about 65,000 U.S.-raised students graduating from high school each year who would qualify for the DREAM Act's benefits. The Migrant Policy Institute estimates that there will be approximately 279,000 of young persons who would likely meet the necessary requirements to enjoy all of the benefits under the DREAM Act, including the adjustment to permanent legal status.

## **Can't these young people legalize some other way?**

If these young people could, they would have legalized themselves by now. Most of them do not have any way of getting on a path of legalization due to the immigration laws and regulations in place.

## **Is this a form of amnesty?**

Amnesty is a popular word used by news media and opponents of immigration and has many meanings. If by amnesty you mean providing a blanket benefit to all undocumented individuals, then the DREAM Act is not a form of amnesty. The DREAM Act is not an amnesty because it benefits a narrow group of individuals who will

either be college students or persons serving in the armed forces.

## **Will the enactment of the bill encourage more people to come here illegally and benefit under it?**

This bill will not encourage more people to enter the country illegally because it benefits only those who were present in the country for at least 5 years before its passage. Therefore, anyone who enters the country after the passage of the bill can not benefit under it because they will not meet the 5 years of residency requirement.

## **What is a conditional permanent residency status?**

Conditional permanent resident status would be similar to lawful permanent resident status, except that it would be awarded for a limited duration—6 years under normal circumstances—instead of indefinitely. (Taken from NILC)

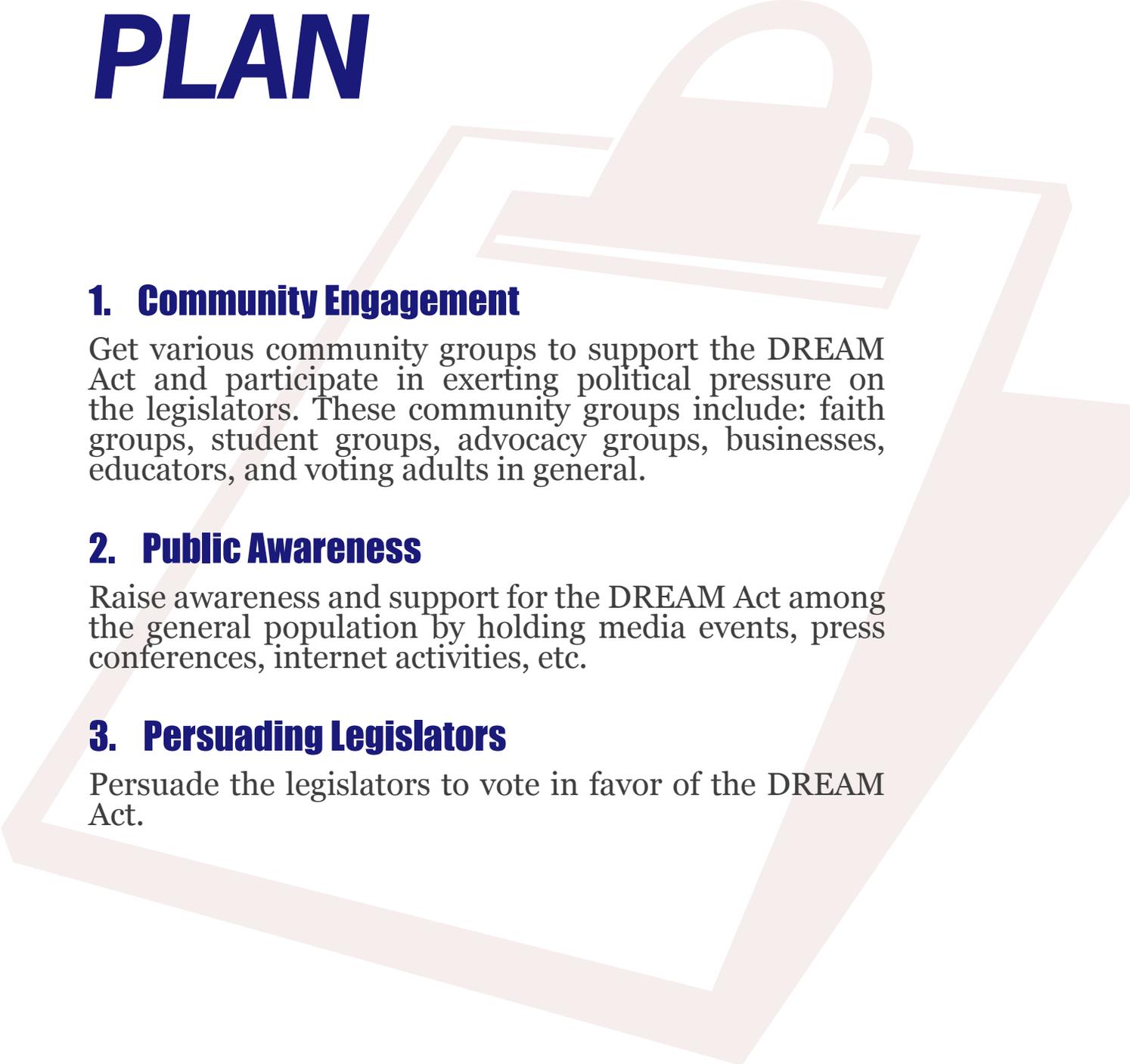
## **Will the DREAM Act students automatically qualify for federal financial aid?**

Students, as conditional permanent residents, generally would not qualify for Pell Grants or certain other federal financial aid grants. They would qualify for federal work study and student loans. Additionally, the states would not be restricted from offering financial assistance to these students.

## **Does the DREAM Act benefit our society as a whole, and if so, how?**

The DREAM Act will increase the prosperity of our nation because it will enable thousands of individuals to join its workforce and fully integrate into our society. The DREAM Act will provide a fiscal dividend because of the increased taxes beneficiaries will pay. Additionally, it will add to our nation's diversity — one of its greatest assets.

# **MASTER PLAN**



## **1. Community Engagement**

Get various community groups to support the DREAM Act and participate in exerting political pressure on the legislators. These community groups include: faith groups, student groups, advocacy groups, businesses, educators, and voting adults in general.

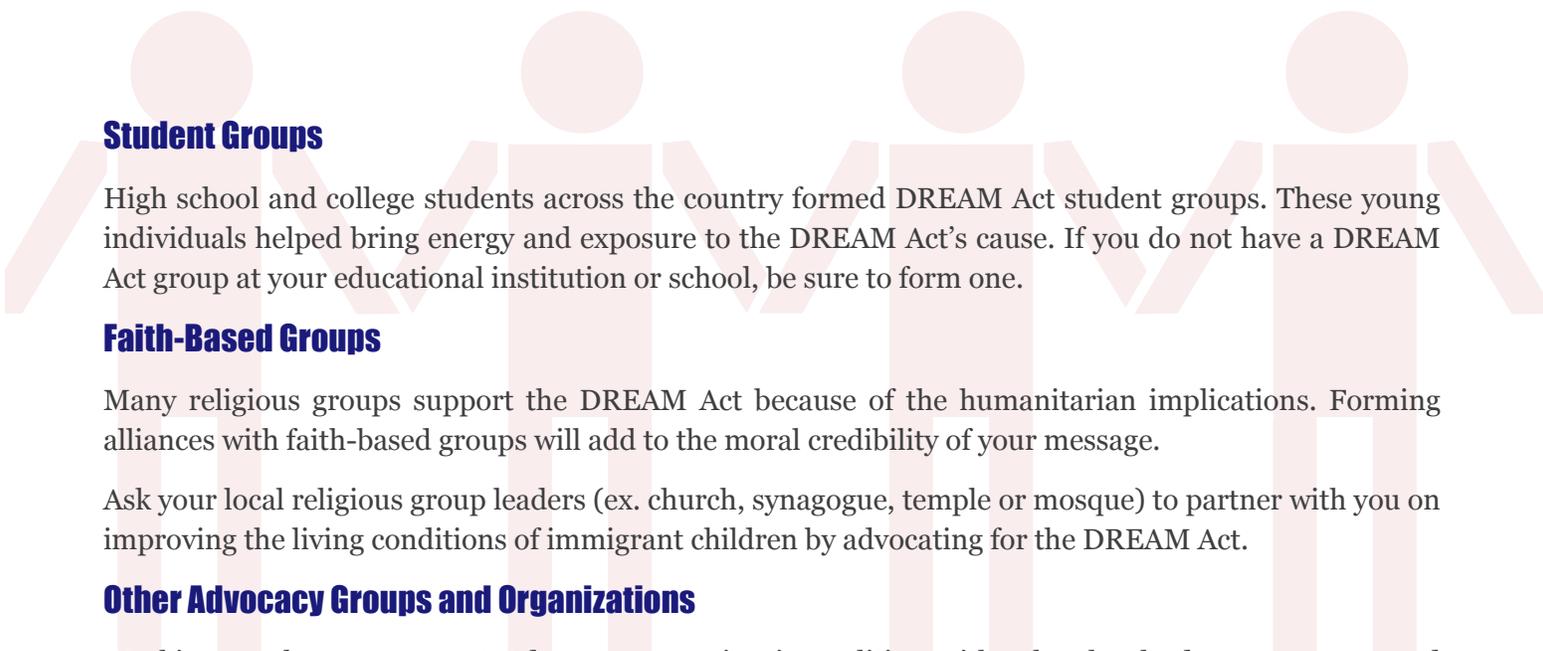
## **2. Public Awareness**

Raise awareness and support for the DREAM Act among the general population by holding media events, press conferences, internet activities, etc.

## **3. Persuading Legislators**

Persuade the legislators to vote in favor of the DREAM Act.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



## **Student Groups**

High school and college students across the country formed DREAM Act student groups. These young individuals helped bring energy and exposure to the DREAM Act's cause. If you do not have a DREAM Act group at your educational institution or school, be sure to form one.

## **Faith-Based Groups**

Many religious groups support the DREAM Act because of the humanitarian implications. Forming alliances with faith-based groups will add to the moral credibility of your message.

Ask your local religious group leaders (ex. church, synagogue, temple or mosque) to partner with you on improving the living conditions of immigrant children by advocating for the DREAM Act.

## **Other Advocacy Groups and Organizations**

Working on the DREAM Act Advocacy campaign in coalition with other local advocacy groups and organizations can help your work be more effective. It is important to work together with community groups who traditionally supported the DREAM Act and with groups which may not have supported the DREAM Act in the past but now are willing to. You can even form alliances with groups and organizations that agree with you on only one issue—the DREAM Act.

## **Business Groups**

Businesses want to have a large choice in skilled and talented workforce. Business owners support the DREAM Act because it will increase the number of qualified workers in the market by granting thousands of young people a right to work.

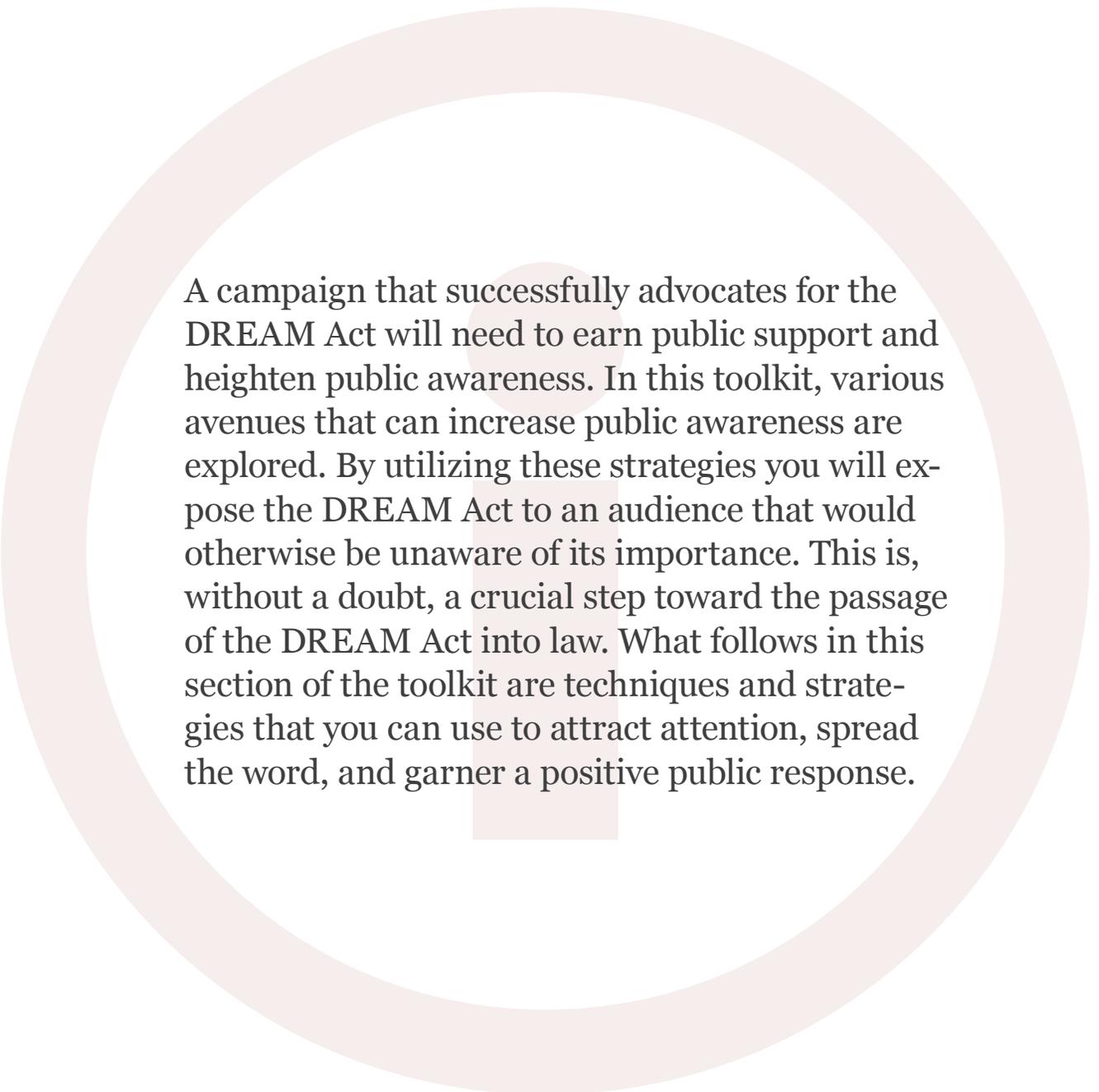
## **Educators**

Reach out to teachers and school administrators and invite them to get involved in advocating for the DREAM Act. Many of them will gladly participate because they personally know and work with young DREAM Act students. You can also contact local chapters of teachers' union or association.

## **Friends, Family, and Individuals Eligible to Vote**

Often your friends and family will be eager to help you disseminate your message amongst the people they know. Take the time to tell them about the DREAM Act and ask them to help raise awareness about this issue.

# ***PUBLIC AWARENESS***



A campaign that successfully advocates for the DREAM Act will need to earn public support and heighten public awareness. In this toolkit, various avenues that can increase public awareness are explored. By utilizing these strategies you will expose the DREAM Act to an audience that would otherwise be unaware of its importance. This is, without a doubt, a crucial step toward the passage of the DREAM Act into law. What follows in this section of the toolkit are techniques and strategies that you can use to attract attention, spread the word, and garner a positive public response.

# E-ADVOCACY

## Social Networking Sites

Social networking sites such as MySpace.com, Facebook.com, and Yahoo! Groups are great for organizing people and providing a central channel for announcements, planning, events and other methods of communication.

MySpace Impact ( [www.myspace.com/impact](http://www.myspace.com/impact) and [www.myspace.com/aplaceforimpact](http://www.myspace.com/aplaceforimpact) ) is made specifically for non-profit and other groups to connect, communicate, and cooperate with others. Go to [www.myspace.com/aplaceforimpact](http://www.myspace.com/aplaceforimpact) to see how you can sign up your group.

Join or create a DREAM Act advocacy group on Facebook and invite all your friends and their friends to join. Post regular announcements to keep your group members up to date, and use it to plan and organize events and conferences.

## Blogs and Youtube

You should consider creating and maintaining a blog or a Youtube channel focusing on DREAM Act issues. Blogs and short Youtube videos are an innovative way to deliver information. You can use the services of free blog sites like [blogspot.com](http://blogspot.com) and [wordpress.com](http://wordpress.com).

## “Social News” Sites (Digg, Reddit)

“Social news” websites such as [Digg.com](http://Digg.com) and [Reddit.com](http://Reddit.com) are website in which users submit links to news stories and other content that they think

to be interesting. After the initial link submission, other users on the site get to vote the story “up” or “down.” The submission with the most number of votes goes to the top of the page and become highly visible and popular.

Important issues such as the DREAM Act will surely gather attention. But just as with press conferences, you must choose wisely which stories are interesting or urgent enough to be submitted.

Keep the public updated on the DREAM Act issues by periodically submitting news articles, legislators’ press releases, or executive statements. Digg and Reddit users are highly supportive of policies similar DREAM Act’s due to their demographics (young and diverse people with college degrees). Therefore, do not hesitate to use catchy headlines or captions to your submitted links.

The World Wide Web is a great tool for instant dissemination of your message at little or no cost. However, because it is so easy to post information on the web, you should be especially careful and responsible about the content you post. Be sure that it is not simply a tirade and is actually helpful to your cause and the individuals you are trying to help. Also, avoid posting material that is offensive to the audiences you are trying to persuade.

### TIP 1:

For maximum exposure try to interconnect the content you post on different internet forums. For example, embed your Youtube video on your blog and Facebook page, put a link to your blog and Facebook page in your Youtube video description.

TIP 2: It may be worth it to submit a news release on the internet or information published after the press conference (please see page 12) on [Digg.com](http://Digg.com) or [Reddit.com](http://Reddit.com).

# WORKING WITH THE MEDIA

## WHY IS THE MEDIA IMPORTANT?

A large segments of our population relies on the media as the source of news and information. Therefore newspapers, radio, and network TV stations serve as great tools for getting your message across to a large number of people in a short period of time.

A high media profile for the DREAM Act will require pushing positive immigration-related stories, going on local radio shows and writing letters to the editor to your local newspapers.

Pay attention to the local media and find out who covers immigration issues. Develop good relationships with your local journalists. Invite them to events and make yourself available for interviews.

## HOW DO I GAIN MEDIA ATTENTION?

First, you have to learn how to effectively pitch your story.

Take the time to turn your message into a newsworthy and exciting 90 second sound bite, which you can say to a reporter.

It should include the Who, What, Where, When, and Why.

Be able to explain to the reporter why your story is newsworthy. Show them that it is dramatic, controversial, timely, and significant or that it impacts a lot of people who use the media outlet.

It is important to capture a reporter's interest from the outset because they have limited time to listen to you. Therefore, always pitch your story first and then ask any other questions you may have.

# PRESS RELEASE

A press release is a written form of communication that puts reporters on notice about your event. It is meant to encourage and persuade journalist to cover your story.

It should be sent out a day before or the morning of the event.

It must have all the information necessary to write a story – the WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHEN, and HOW.

Its content can be subjective, so be sure to write the press release as a news story that YOU want to see published in the media.

## HOW TO SEND IT:

You should contact only one reporter per media outlet.

Always follow up with a phone call after you sent your release. If your release announces an event, call on the morning of the event.

Have a copy of the release available with you for faxing or emailing when you call.

If you release announces an event, send it to the “daybooks” which lists all the events schedule to take place in a particular region each day. Media outlets check the daybook at the beginning of every day.

## Dateline

Contains the release date and the city from which the release was sent.

## Headline

Is meant to grab the reporter’s attention and summarize the news

Is the most important factor in helping the reporter decide whether to select your story.

Try to keep it short and exciting.

Headline could be up to four lines long.

You can also use an subhead if absolutely necessary.

Introduction – first paragraph

Gives basic answers to the questions of who, what, when, where and why.

Spend most of your time on writing the headline and the first paragraph.

## Body

Use upsides-down pyramid style of news writing – begin with the most important points first.

Offers more statistics, background, or other relevant details.

Include a colorful quote from a spokesperson.

Write a short summary of your organization in the last paragraph.

State “Photo Opportunity” if there is one and send a copy of the release to the photo desk.

## Layout

There is a distinct layout style that journalists prefer to see in a press release. Please refer to a sample release letter on page 24 to learn more about the layout.

You should print the release form on the organization’s letterhead.

# INTERVIEWS

## At the Interview

Make your responses short — the media wants sound bite answers ( ex. sound bite on network TV is 7.2 seconds).

Become comfortable with 3 sound bites and have them written down.

Always bridge your responses back to your message.

Repetition is critical to connect with your target audience. By repeating the main points of your message several times in an interview, makes it less likely that it will be edited out and helps the audience retain the important information.

Do not respond to hypothetical questions. Address only the facts.

Know the counter arguments and be prepared to respond to them.

If the journalist stopped recording your statements, the interview is not over yet. Everything you say to a journalist is on the record.

If you need more time to think about your response to a question, you can ask for the question to be repeated or pause to think before answering.

If you do not know the answer to a question, do not hesitate to return your main message. It is okay to say that you do not know the answer because no one is expected to have all answers at all times. If this is an interview for a print media, tell the reporter you will get back to him or her with the answer and be sure to call the reporter back.

If the reporter neglected to ask something important, tell him or her that you have more to add.

## After the Interview:

Review the recording of the interview.

Analyze what you could have done better.

If a reporter did a good job, send him or her a thank-you note. Be sure to write the reporter that you are available for future interviews. Suggest other possible story ideas.

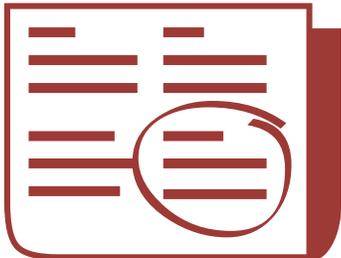
If there are mistakes made in the final article or story, send a letter outlining the problem and follow up with a phone call. If the reporter does not respond, contact the news editor.

### **ARGUMENT 1: The DREAM Act allows our nation to recoup the investments it made when it funded the education of the DREAM Act students during the 12 years they were in primary and secondary schools.**

Our nation has invested a great amount of wealth and resources in raising and educating the DREAM Act students. Currently, undocumented children have a legal right to attend public schools starting at the elementary level continuing all the way till senior year of high school.

The DREAM Act requires the DREAM Act students to either complete 2 years at a 2-year or 4-year college or serve for 2 or more year in the armed forces. As a result, they will work in civilian and military sectors, paying taxes, and become contributing members of our society.

# LETTER TO THE EDITOR



Letter to the editor (LTE) is a written response to one of the issues or recent events covered by the media outlet. LTEs are widely read, so it is a useful way of getting your message read by the media outlet’s subscribers. They are also more likely to be published than op-eds are.

You can mail or email LTEs.

Write a response as quickly as you can.

A letter should be short—not exceeding 200 words in total.

Write in short paragraphs. Do not use more than 3 sentences per paragraph.

LTEs can be shortened by the editors so a shorter letter gives you more control of what gets printed or read.

Be careful not to write often. Write about once every three months.

Avoid personal attacks.

Include your name, address and phone number at the top of the letter. Your phone number for verification purposes.

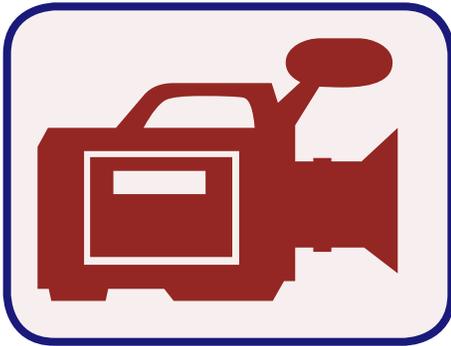
Follow up with a phone call to see if your letter was received.

Your goal is to increase the number of people who support the DREAM Act. Consider recruiting others in your community to help you achieve that goal.

## **ARGUMENT 2: The education requirements of the DREAM Act reduce the dropout rates among the DREAM Act students.**

According to the Migration Policy Institute (MPI), school completion rates have historically been low among the DREAM Act beneficiaries. For example, in 2000, only 40 percent of undocumented Hispanic males between the ages 18-24, who arrived to the U.S. before age 16, had completed high school or obtained a GED. And there is a strong possibility that the school completion rates would increase dramatically the passage of the DREAM Act an incentive for undocumented students to complete high school and continue onto college.

# MEDIA EVENTS



Media events are any events you hold that are worthy of media coverage. Many kinds of events can fall under that category. Before you alert the media about your event, be sure that it is indeed newsworthy and that its coverage will not indirectly harm any of the individuals you are trying to help.

## Press Conference

A press conference (or a news conference) is an event to which journalists are invited to hear the newsmaker's statements, and ask questions of the newsmaker. Several people can make statements at one press conference.

One of the advantages of holding a press conference is the opportunity it affords to answer all of the questions from the media in one sitting.

You can ask journalists to attend an event held by you or your organization. Creativity and newsworthiness are key to getting coverage. Below are some suggestions for creating a successful media event:

## Community Service Event

Organize an exciting and fun event that serves a local community. This will help you achieve two things: get media coverage of the DREAM Act and establish a relationship with the people in the community that your event takes place.

Be sure to make the name of your cause and your group visible during the event. For example, you can wear a pin or a T-shirt that shows that you are a DREAM Act advocate.

Keep things positive and don't be camera shy!

You can invite people in your school or community to come together for a few hours to write personal letters to legislators in support of the DREAM Act.

Collecting and sending signed high school graduation caps which belong to the DREAM Act students to the legislators offices.

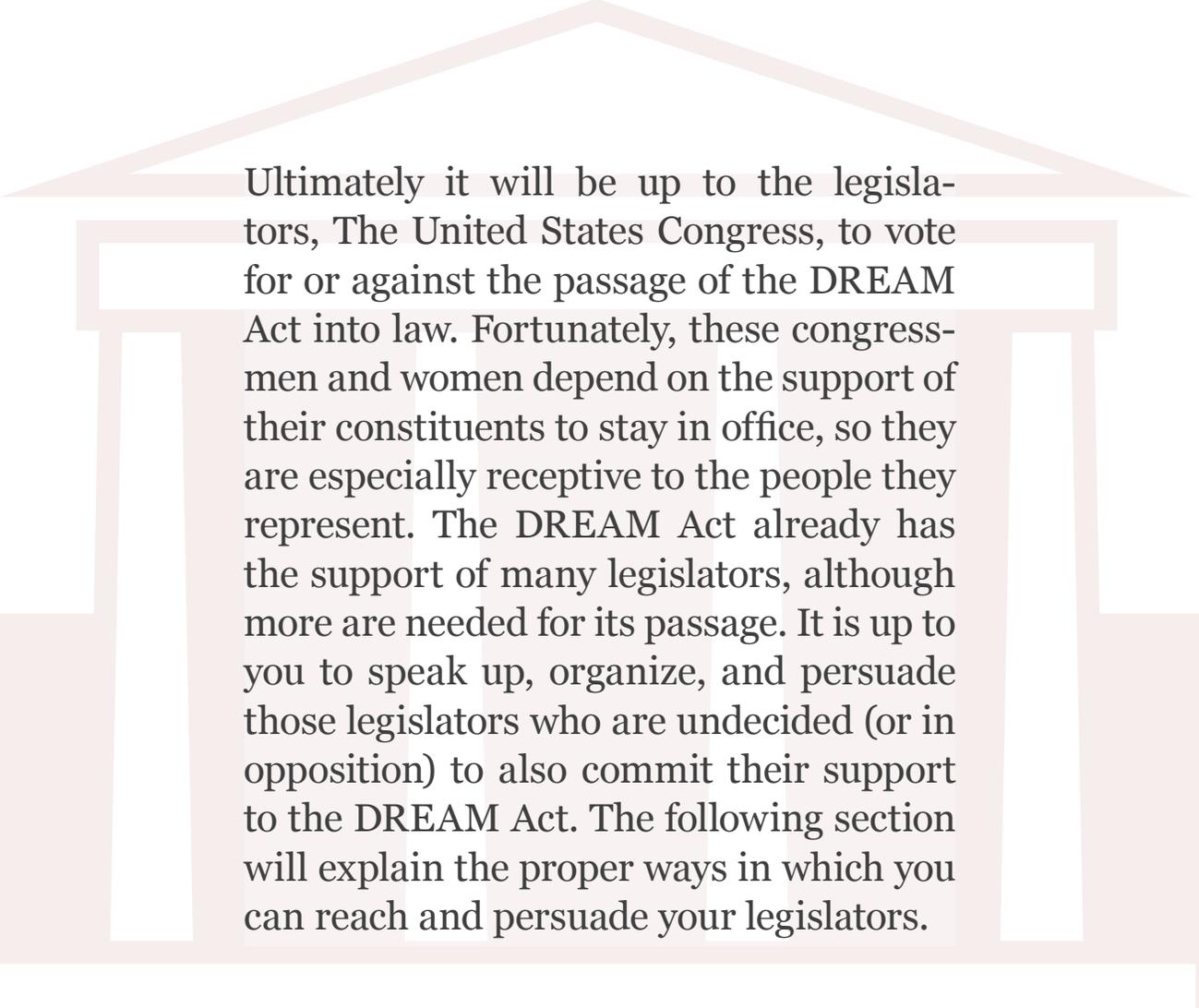
Holding a movie screening dealing with immigration or DREAM Act students in a local church, school, or library. You can hold a group discussion after the screening.

Hosting a talent show or food fair that highlights the beauty and diversity of immigrant cultures.

### Some examples of community service events:

- Food drive
- Voter registration
- Fund Raising Auction
- Fund Raising Marathon
- Petition Writing Event

# **PERSUADING LEGISLATORS**



Ultimately it will be up to the legislators, The United States Congress, to vote for or against the passage of the DREAM Act into law. Fortunately, these congressmen and women depend on the support of their constituents to stay in office, so they are especially receptive to the people they represent. The DREAM Act already has the support of many legislators, although more are needed for its passage. It is up to you to speak up, organize, and persuade those legislators who are undecided (or in opposition) to also commit their support to the DREAM Act. The following section will explain the proper ways in which you can reach and persuade your legislators.

# WRITING TO LEGISLATORS

## Personal letters or faxes

A personal letter is an individualized letter that each person supporting the DREAM Act writes to the legislator. In it the writer urges the legislator to support the DREAM Act. Personal letter is the most effective way to correspond with a legislator. A well written letter will indicate to the legislator that the author is politically active and sincerely cares about the issue.

## E-mail correspondence

You can send a letter by e-mail. Although it is a faster method of communication, it is not as effective as mailing it because it could be easily overlooked or deleted.

## Form Letter

A form letter contains a generic language that is written in favor of the DREAM Act and is signed by the sender. Form letters tend to be less effective than personal letters because, aside from the sender's signature, each letter has the same exact

language. Legislators are less compelled to respond to form letters because they show lack of effort on the part of the sender. If you do decide to participate in a form letter campaign, make sure to spend an extra minute to write a personal note at the end. For example, you can briefly restate your position and ask for a written response.

## Petition Letters

A petition consists of one well written letter which is endorsed by several parties. It may contain individual signatures as well as endorsements from organizations. Endorsements from politically active organizations are especially helpful. Sometimes less is more, when it comes to petitions, thus a legislator may get a better understanding of the position when the letter is endorse only by few organizations and/or notable individuals. For example, a petition with endorsements from the Catholic Church, the ACLU, and Al Gore can be more effective than 150 signatures from random individuals.

### Tips on How to Write an Effective Letter

- **Write the letter while the issue is still current.**
- **The letter should be 1 page long and should cover 1 topic per letter.**
- **Be specific and include the bill number, basic information about the bill and its impact on you and others in legislator's district.**
- **Be sure to type your letter and include your name and return address.**
- **Write a thank you letter, if your legislator supports your cause. Legislators rarely receive letters of appreciation, so yours will stand out.**
- **Do not become a pest by writing more often than is necessary to get your message across. The legislative offices keep track of who writes letters and how often. Being seen as someone who writes too often will dilute your message.**

# PHONE CALLS

Calling a legislator could be relatively effective, especially when the bill is moving quickly through the legislative process.

## TIPS ON HOW TO MAKE AN EFFECTIVE CALL

- Call your representative first before calling other legislators.
- Be willing to give your name and contact information because legislators often respond to phone inquiries by mail.
- Briefly introduce yourself and the group you represent.
- Clearly and concisely state your position on the DREAM Act.

**ARGUMENT 3: The DREAM Act will increase the prosperity of our nation because it will enable thousands of individuals to join its workforce and pay taxes.**

Currently, our nation is facing one of the toughest economic periods in recent decades. The national debt is at an all time high, the ratio of the retirees to working individuals is increasing. There is a shortage of high skilled workers. The DREAM Act will transform individuals, who grew up in the U.S., into contributing members of the society. In turn, they will work or help defend out country, pay taxes, and add to the diversity of our nation.

**ARGUMENT 4: The DREAM Act offers the opportunity for a generation of talented young people who have grown up in this country to achieve their dreams.**

In many cities and towns across this nation the DREAM Act students live side by side with their “documented” American friends: together they learn the same lessons while sharing the same classrooms, listen to the same music and laugh at the same jokes, and above all they all share a belief in the American dream. The DREAM Act presents an opportunity for a generation of talented young people, who were raised on American values, to fully integrate into our society and achieve their American dream.

# MEETING WITH A LEGISLATOR

Ultimately the legislators in Congress will be responsible for making the DREAM Act a law. Therefore, a face-to-face meeting with your legislator at his or her local or D.C. offices is instrumental to getting the DREAM Act passed. During your meeting, try to accomplish the following 3 things:

- Gain the legislator’s support for the DREAM Act
- Convince the legislator to become the spokesperson for the DREAM Act,
- Begin a long-lasting relationship with the legislator.

## 1. Initial Planning & Research

Conduct research about your legislator. Educate yourself about their committee membership, voting history, and their statements to the media.

Decide who will attend the meeting. It is more likely that you will meet with the legislator and not his or her staffer if a small group of people is attending the meeting. Be sure to select individuals who will actually contribute to your message. For example, having a priest from the community, a DREAM Act student, or a coalition of leaders could help you have a more effective meeting.

Remember that 15 to 20 minutes is usually the longest meeting you can expect.

**Generally, your presentation should consist of 5 parts:**

1. Brief introductions and explanation of your visit’s purpose.
2. Presentation of 3 to 4 arguments in favor of the DREAM Act.
3. A testimonial by a DREAM Act student and his or her citizen friend.
4. The “Ask” — in this part you specifically ask your legislator to support the DREAM Act and become the spokesperson for it.
5. Setting up a follow-up meeting with the legislator. If the legislator is not willing to schedule a follow up meeting request to be updated by another form of communication such as mail or telephone.

## 2. Call The legislator's office to arrange the meeting

Members of Congress are usually in the nation's capitol on Tuesdays through Thursdays and in their home district or state offices on Fridays through Mondays as well as during the recess periods.

For the Washington D.C. offices of a Senator, call the Senate Congressional Switchboard at (202) 224-3121 and request to be connected with the office of your Senator.

For your Representative's office, call the House Congressional Switchboard at (202) 225-3121.

Request to speak to a scheduler who is in charge of making appointments for the legislator.

Introduce yourself and the group you represent. Briefly explain the purpose of the meeting, the desired time for the meeting (remember to be

flexible), and a list of people who will be attending the meeting.

Ask for the name and contact information of the staffer who deals with immigration issues. Be aware that you may be meeting with that staffer instead of the legislator. Meeting with a legislator's staff can be just as effective as meeting with the legislator.

In the event that you are asked for a written request, get the name and the address of the requesting staffer. Promptly send the letter and follow-up with a phone call. You can refer to a sample request letter on page 23.

In the event that you are told that the schedule is full and the legislator cannot meet with you, request to meet a staffer who is knowledgeable about immigration issues.

## 3. Preparation for the Meeting

Create a typed agenda for the meeting, including the key arguments you will be making. Make copies for everyone attending the meeting (including the legislator).

Carefully review your message.

You should prepare 3 to 4 key reasons why the legislator should support the DREAM Act.

Prepare printed materials to give to your elected official including your request to support the DREAM Act.

Know the counter-arguments and the weaknesses in your arguments and be ready to respectfully respond if they come up.

If you will be attending with a coalition, meet ahead of time. Everyone must agree BEFORE the meeting on your group's central message. Resolve any differences BEFORE the meeting.

If you will be attending with a group, be sure to involve every person attending. Assign a role for everyone and plan who will discuss what and the order in which they will present.

Practice for the meeting.

Confirm the appointment one week before the meeting and the morning of the meeting.

## 4. During the Meeting

Be on time!

Introduce yourself and explain what you do in the community and why this issue is personally important to you.

Give a copy of the agenda, the list of your requests, and any other relevant information.

Be sure to show that you are local. Legislators pay particular attention to constituents.

Acknowledge your legislator for any of his or her previous actions you support. He or she will appreciate your recognition.

Stick to your agenda and assigned roles.

When presenting each issue, do not assume that your legislator has any prior knowledge of the subject.

Explain issues using simple terms.

Explain how an issue directly affects your community or the group you represent. If possible, include someone in your delegation who is directly affected by the issue.

Indicate what you would like your legislator to do. Be sure to ask for your legislator's support

for the DREAM Act. If your legislator already is very supportive, ask him or her to cosponsor the relevant bill and/or take a leadership role in moving the bill through the process, getting additional cosponsors, or other ways.

If the legislator or his or her aides are unwilling to make a commitment, set a date for a follow up meeting. Ask them what else they want you to bring with you in order to help them make a commitment.

If you do not know the answer to a question, say so, and promise to get back with the answer. Be sure to follow up with your answer as quickly as possible after the meeting.

Be sure you give your legislators the opportunity to ask questions or state their opinions.

Keep the communication positive. Remember, you are meeting to develop a relationship and inform your representative or the staff person.

Do not disagree or debate among yourselves in front of your elected official.

Carefully record any questions, objections or concerns.

## 5. After the Meeting

Send a note thanking the legislator or staff person for taking the time to meet with you. Briefly summarize the main points of the meeting.

Remember to follow up with responses to any questions the legislator or staffer asked that you could not answer at the time as well as any materials they requested.

Do not think of the meeting as an isolated event. Although you may not have a face-to-face meeting

again for some time, invite your elected officials to speak at an event or meeting. Think of other ways to maintain the relationship that has begun to develop.

Report back. These reports are invaluable in developing legislative strategies and tracking members' positions on issues important to the pro-immigration community.

# COUNTER ARGUMENTS TO STATEMENTS AGAINST THE DREAM ACT

**The DREAM Act is a form of amnesty that will encourage more people to enter the country illegally.**

COUNTER: If by amnesty you mean providing a blanket benefit to all undocumented individuals, then the DREAM Act is not a form of Amnesty. The DREAM Act is not an amnesty because it benefits a narrow group of individuals who will either be college students or persons serving in the armed forces.

At first, the DREAM Act will grant qualified students a 6-year conditional permanent resident. A qualified student must have all of the following:

- Arrived in the U.S. at age 15 or younger;
- Lived in the U.S. for at least 5 years before the date of the enactment of the DREAM Act; and
- Completed high school or earned a GED.
- Is a person of good moral character

After 6 years, these students would be able to convert to permanent residents if they either completed 2 years at a 2-year or 4-year college or served in the armed forces for 2 years or more.

**The DREAM Act will benefit students who entered the country after the enactment of the DREAM Act.**

COUNTER: This is not correct. The DREAM Act benefits only those students who have continuously resided in the United States for 5 years

immediately prior to the DREAM Act's passage. This means that if, for example, the DREAM Act is passed in January 1, 2009, anyone who enters the country after January 1, 2004 will not be able to benefit under the DREAM Act.

**The DREAM Act students will be able to petition for their families and almost instantly bring them to this country.**

COUNTER: Under immigration laws, it would be decades before any family members could join DREAM beneficiaries. The only possible exception would be spouses who are not undocumented. And even spouses would have to endure a separation of at least 5 years before coming to the U.S. (taken from letter to the president with ILRC as one of the signatories)

**Soon after the enactment, the DREAM beneficiaries will be eligible to receive special welfare benefits.**

COUNTER: The DREAM Act does not provide for any special benefits. The same rules—including a 5 year bar on federal means-tested benefits—would apply to DREAM Act beneficiaries as to all other permanent residents. Additionally, by virtue of their college education very few DREAM Act beneficiaries would require government benefits. In fact, the DREAM Act will provide a fiscal dividend because of the increased taxes beneficiaries will pay.

# **ORGANIZING TO ADVOCATE FOR THE DREAM ACT TO THE WHITE HOUSE**

## **WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO OBTAIN STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE DREAM ACT FROM THE PRESIDENT?**

We have a historic opportunity in the next year and a half to organize to bring about enactment of the DREAM Act. Only Congress can pass the DREAM and the President's constitutional responsibility will be to sign the legislation. The President will sign the DREAM Act if Congress passes it without any further advocacy because he promised his support for this legislation during the campaign.

Why then is it important to obtain the White House's commitment to make the DREAM Act one of the President's top legislative priorities in 2009? Presidents, especially during periods when they have broad public support, as President Obama does as of the spring of 2009, can influence Congress to make specific legislation a priority, and can also influence individual senators and Representatives from his party to support that legislation. We need the President's support to influence Congress, especially the Senate, to move quickly on the DREAM Act once it is introduced. In addition, as of March, 2009 we have about 58 or 59 senators who probably support the DREAM Act. We need to obtain solid commitments from at least 62 senators to assure that we will have the 60 votes necessary to defeat a likely filibuster. There were eight current senators in the President's party (Democrat) who voted against the DREAM Act in 2007. At least two of the newly elected Democratic senators are not yet committed to the DREAM Act. Although organizing and advocacy from the senators' states is the most direct way to influence them, personal requests from the President is also very important, especially in states where organized groups who strongly support the DREAM Act have little or no presence.

## **HOW CAN WE ADVOCATE WITH THE WHITE HOUSE TO OBTAIN STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE DREAM ACT?**

Usually there are only two things that will influence a President or any politician to make particular legislation a priority – organized people or organized money. We do not have much money which groups can provide in the future as campaign donations, so we have to rely on organized people. Ultimately, organized people are important

because they represent thousands of votes of their groups. Two demographic groups of potential voters are particularly important to the White House in terms of advancing their interests in the reelection of the President in 2012: Immigrants and students (young people).

**In this context some of the ways that DREAM Act students and supporters can advocate with the White House to make the DREAM Act a legislative priority include:**

National petition and letter-writing campaigns, focusing on states where Latino (and to a lesser extent Asian) voters played a key role in providing the voting margins so that President Obama was able to win that state: Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, Florida, and to a lesser extent Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Indiana. Other states with large immigrant populations, such as California, Illinois, and New Jersey, are also important even though the elections were not close in those states. Please go to [www.dreamactivist.org](http://www.dreamactivist.org), the official website of United We DREAM (UWD) to find an on-line petition. People can also collect signatures “the old fashioned way” on hard copy petitions, which include the signer’s zip code.

1. National telephone call-in campaigns to the White House once the DREAM Act has been formally introduced into Congress. The White House number is (202) 456 1414. Callers should say something like, “We urge the President to support the DREAM Act, S. # (the number of the bill).”
2. Obtaining commitments from congresspersons to advocate directly with the White House to make the DREAM Act a priority. This can be one of the “asks” in legislative visits which are discussed elsewhere in this toolkit.
3. Organize to get resolutions from cities (and other local governmental entities) which direct the city officials to advocate directly with the White House, including its office on intergovernmental relations to support the DREAM Act. Cecilia Munoz is Director of Intergovernmental Affairs at the White House. She can only involve herself in issues where state and local governments make a request. We should initiate a campaign to get city councils, school boards, etc to pass resolutions supporting the DREAM Act, and specifically asking President Obama to make the DREAM Act a legislative priority. This will make a meaningful contribution to organizing for DREAM. Please see the draft of the sample resolution which was passed by the city council in Maywood, California in February, 2009.

## Sample Meeting Request Letter:

May 28th, 2007  
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20510  
Fax: (202) 224-8525

Dear Representative Nancy Pelosi:

On behalf of Youth Changing a Nation, the national youth council of the Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM), we are writing to request a meeting with Representative Nancy Pelosi on Wednesday May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007 sometime between 11 am and 2pm.

The Fair Immigration Reform Movement (FIRM), a project of the Center for Community Change (CCC), is led by low-income immigrant and non-immigrant grassroots community organizations working for immigration reform and immigrant rights. The coalition consists of organizing networks, statewide immigrant rights coalitions, and faith-based and low-income groups, and works in partnership with national organizations.

We would like to meet with you in your district office during the May Congressional Recess to discuss the DREAM Act and other issues related to higher education. These constituents will include two DREAM students, one staff, and a representative from the business, education or faith community.

As you already know, The American DREAM Act HR 1275 was introduced in the House \_\_\_\_\_ This bill will allow bright dedicated young people to give something back to the United States. For far too long, undocumented immigrant youth have been left with few options. The American DREAM Act creates a pathway to citizenship for young people brought to this country as children through no fault of their own.

Please contact me, Name, email, (202) 281-5211 to confirm the appointment or if you have any questions regarding availability. We thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,

# FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

## CONTACT:

Contact Person  
Company Name  
Voice Phone Number  
FAX Number  
Email Address  
Website URL

## XYZ Announces Support for DREAM Act

This headline is one of the most important components of the press release as this needs to “grab the attention” of the editor. It should be in bold type and a font that is larger than the body text. Preferred type fonts are Arial, Times New Roman, or Verdana. Keep the headline to 80-125 characters maximum. Capitalize every word with the exception of “a”, “the” “an” or any word that is three characters or less.

<City>, <State>, <Date> - Your first paragraph of the release should be written in a clear and concise manner. The opening sentence contains the most important information; keep it to 25 words or less. Never take for granted that the reader has read your headline. It needs contain information that will “entice” the reader. Remember, your story must be newsworthy and factual; don’t make it a sales pitch or it will end up in the trash.

Answer the questions “who”, “what”, “when”, “where”, “why” and “how”. Your text should include pertinent information about your product, service or event. If writing about a product, make sure to include details on when the product is available, where it can be purchased and the cost. If you’re writing about an event, include the date, location of the event and any other pertinent information. You should include a quote from someone that is a credible source of information; include their title or position with the company, and why they are considered a credible source. Always include information on any awards they have won, articles they’ve published or interviews they have given.

Keep your sentences and paragraphs short; a paragraph should be no more than 3-4 sentences. Your release should be between 500 to 800 words, written in a word processing program, and spell checked for errors. Don’t forget to proofread for grammatical errors. The mood of the release should be factual, not hyped; don’t use a sales pitch as it will ruin your credibility with the reader.

The last paragraph before the company information should read: For additional information on (put in the subject of this release), contact “name” or visit [www.yoururl.com](http://www.yoururl.com). If you offer a sample, copy or demo, put the information in here. You can also include details on product availability, trademark acknowledgment, etc. in this area of the release.

**ABOUT <COMPANY>** - Include a brief description of your company along with the products and services it provides.

- END -

*At the end of the release, you need to indicate that the release is ended. This lets the journalists know they have received the entire release. Type “End” on the first line after your text is completed. If your release goes over one page, type “MORE” at the bottom of the first page.*