



MI-ACE WOMEN'S NETWORK PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE

**Public Policy on your
Campus:
A Start-up Guide for
Institutional Representatives**

MI-ACE PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES

As the Voice for Women in Michigan Higher Education, it has been a long-standing practice of the MI-ACE Women's Network to ask members to prioritize public policy issues that align with its mission.

Here are the three priorities which were voted upon by members and approved by the MI-ACE Executive Board for adoption in 2022-2025

MI-ACE Women's Network Public Policy Priorities may be found here:
<https://www.gvsu.edu/miace/2022-25-public-policy-priorities-50.htm>

2022-2025 MI-ACE PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES

MI-ACE Women's Network supports gender equity and equality. Also, the Network understands that local, state, and national public policies will set the tone for institutional change.

- Pay Equity for women at all levels of positions
 - Equal access at entry positions
 - Equal pay to fill existing wage gaps
- Work/Life Integration
 - Expand family leave policies
 - Access to affordable childcare
 - Paid family leave
- Funding and access for efforts to understand and respond to mental health challenges and prevent violence that affects campus communities, particularly in underserved areas.

Advocate for:

- Mental health education, services, and best practices to prevent and address anxiety, depression, suicide, and substance abuse
- Gun violence protection laws that safeguard communities, including higher education campuses
- Reinforced gun violence prevention and response training for law enforcement, faculty, staff, and students

The Michigan American Council on Education (MI-ACE) Women's Network Public Policy Committee drafts new MI-ACE Public Policy Priorities every 3 years based on the national American Council on Education (ACE) identified focus, research and expertise of the Public Policy Committee members, membership surveys, input from Institutional Representatives (IRs), input received at the annual conferences, and consultation with the MI-ACE Executive Board. The MI-ACE Public Policy Priorities are presented to and approved by the Executive Board and shared with member institutions, with the intent that IRs carry and steward the priorities to their campus presidents, provosts, and/or legislative affairs staff for awareness and discussion.

The IR is the primary conduit, and advocate, for the MI-ACE Public Policy Priorities on their campus and serves an essential role in sharing the priorities with campus leadership. They are the link between the MI-ACE Executive Board and their own campuses. Policy priorities will vary campus to campus and across cohort institutions. MI-ACE does not--and really cannot--serve as a centralized advocate speaking for all MI higher education institutions as this is work very specific to each campus. MI-ACE depends on IRs, therefore, to help amplify its Public Policy Priorities in an appropriate way for their campus. The MI-ACE Public Policy Committee is in place to keep IRs informed about policy issues and about ways in which they can carry out this work to best serve their own campus network.

There are indeed a variety of ways in which an IR can develop this role and fulfill this intention while respecting the work of and the possible constraints of the offices or people engaged in legislative work on their campuses.

This guide is intended to help the IR better understand this role and be prepared to reach out to and work with the appropriate individuals on their own campus.

WHAT IS PUBLIC POLICY?

Public Policy is action taken by a legislative body (state, city/township, county, or federal) to work on behalf of the citizens it serves. These actions come in the form of guidelines and laws. Public policy can influence decisions such as which laws are passed, where funding goes, and who gets how much. In addition, it is a collective effort that allows institutions, governments, and even regular citizens to have their voices heard. Policies are historically designed to offer a solution to a problem, such as rights for reproductive freedom, voting, guns, labor, and taxes. Public policy governs us and is an essential element in the function of our society.

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC POLICY ON YOUR CAMPUS

There are as many ways that institutions manage public policy as there are institutions in Michigan! It would be unwieldy to describe precisely how public policy is addressed on each MI campus, but we can provide a general understanding about how this work is pursued in higher education, what an IR can expect from the office(s) which are involved on their campus, and how an IR can best fulfill their role in this arena.

The people working in legislative affairs and public policy on your campus have dedicated their time to building relationships with campus leadership and with legislators, legislative staff, outside lobbying firms, and/or policy organizations in order to effectively advocate for your institution on a variety of issues.

They maintain a close working relationship with your campus president and board regarding Public Policy initiatives.

They also often work with an outside lobbying firm to facilitate these relationships. Indeed, all 15 public institutions in Michigan partner very closely with a lobbying firm, and several private institutions and community colleges will contract with a firm as needed in specific instances. Public Policy work is more visible and has a larger role at large, public universities than at private institutions, where direct policy work may be less of a priority. All institutions do focus consistently on legislative actions and negotiations related to higher education funding.

Most institutions also work closely with consortial groups involved in policy, such as the Michigan Association of State Universities (MASU), the Michigan Community College Association (MCCA), Michigan Independent Colleges and University (MICU), or the Michigan Colleges Alliance (MCA). These organizations may align on policy priorities across their members to increase leverage with the legislators. So, institutions will have their own individual priorities, often coming from a Board, the Executive Office, Deans, or faculty, staff or student councils, as well as possible collaborative priorities being pursued across cohort institutions.

ALWAYS KEEP IN MIND. . .

As you consider ways in which you might address policy awareness, engagement, or even action on your campus keep in mind that the people who work most directly in legislative affairs are your best partners in such work. Their work is centered on relationship building and they will most likely be open to and interested in developing a relationship with you.

Staff who work in legislative affairs have the expertise and the valuable information and insights to help guide your engagement. They can help you access resources and develop programming. They can point you in the right direction or keep you from pursuing known dead ends, saving you a lot of time and potential frustration.

As an IR, it will be important to seek understanding of how this work is structured on your campus and on what policy goals your institution is focused. Establishing your own relationship with your campus legislative advocates will make your work more effective, more accepted, and more connected.

HOW TO DO PUBLIC POLICY ON YOUR CAMPUS

The best way to start engagement with public policy is to reach out at the beginning of your term as an IR--or when your campus network begins establishing its goals--to learn more about the policy work on your campus. An early meeting with the appropriate people will help set the stage for effective coordination and collaboration.

Although there are significant differences in how public policy is structured on campuses across Michigan, the way in which an IR can connect follows some simple steps regardless of institution.



STEP 1: FIND THE RIGHT PEOPLE TO TALK TO ON YOUR CAMPUS

The most important first step in your role is to find the right office and the right people to talk with about public policy on your campus. Many institutions, particularly our larger, public institutions, have a dedicated office and/or dedicated staff for Governmental Affairs or Legislative Affairs, not uncommonly with staff focused on the state legislature and staff focused on local governmental entities.

Governmental Affairs departments most typically report directly to a Provost, President, or the Board. At smaller institutions, private institutions, or community colleges there may not be a dedicated person for this role; legislative work may be combined with other community or external affairs roles or be found in a communications office. And at some private institutions and community colleges, policy or legislative relationships are managed directly by the President, often alongside the school's General Counsel and/or Board.

If you do not see a governmental affairs, legislative affairs, public affairs, external relations, or similar designation on an organization chart at your institution, ask your President's office for a referral. Remember, MI-ACE membership and IR appointments go through the President's office, so the President's assistant will be familiar with MI-ACE and with your appointment as an IR. Making such a request, therefore, should not seem unexpected or inappropriate.



STEP 2

SET A MEETING TO LEARN ABOUT THE WORK OF PUBLIC POLICY ON YOUR CAMPUS

After you have identified the correct office or person to contact about public policy, reach out through an email to introduce yourself, your role as an IR, and your interest in learning more about how public policy and government relations is approached at your institution.

At the end of this guide, a sample email is provided which you can adapt for the introduction.

A primary goal of this meeting is to begin building a relationship which will help the office and help you.

Governmental Affairs or Legislative Affairs personnel are likely familiar with MI-ACE because of its presence in Higher Education initiatives at the state level, but they may not be familiar with the IR role on your campus. Conversely, the person you are reaching out to may be familiar in a general way with MI-ACE or IR activities on campus, but they might not be familiar with the public policy aspect of the IR role. This is why an introductory email is suggested rather than simply contacting an office to make an appointment.

Once you know who to contact, you will know the correct context for your introduction and request for a meeting.

Note, these are very busy offices which often operate on the legislative calendar rather than the academic calendar. You may not get an “immediate” meeting date, or you may get a suggested time that conflicts with breaks, exams, or other campus dates. Keep this in mind, as it is good to not start out feeling frustrated or put off.



STEP 3

ENGAGE APPROPRIATELY WITH THE PUBLIC POLICY OFFICE

As discussed earlier, the people working in legislative affairs and public policy on your campus have dedicated their time to building relationships in legislative offices and often with external groups to effectively advocate for your institution.

What is most important from their perspective is that these relationships be understood and respected. Any work that we do as IRs in this arena needs to fit into and be fully coordinated with the office/person who does public policy at your institution. It is always best to coordinate and to share your goals and proposed programming.

With this in mind, your initial introduction and meeting has 3 main goals:

- Describe the IR role
- Learn more about the role and function of the office
- Establish what a working relationship will look like

Having established a strong foundation, you will be well positioned to advance the MI-ACE Public Policy Priorities on your campus and to help your governmental affairs office maintain its primary role as an advocate for the institution in the public sphere.

THE IR ROLE

IRs are not going to public affairs personnel to announce an agenda, to push for specific policies, or to present a platform. Rather, the IR is a conduit between MI-ACE, the campus network, and the public affairs office. It is important in this role for IRs to introduce themselves as collaborators, campus representatives focused on communicating and informing both the campus network and the institution about policy priorities. This does not mean that an IR backs away from advocacy or activism, but that an IR ensures that they are engaging the campus network on issues in a way that does not step on any of the work or relationships established through ongoing governmental affairs work.

The IR is a partner; be clear about your role but let the office lead on how they would like to see the relationship managed.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE OFFICE: ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Once you are confident that the office has familiarity with MI-ACE and the IR role on campus, focus your meeting on learning from the person you are speaking with. Find out if they have worked with MI-ACE or campus IRs previously; ask them to describe, as much as is possible, how they do their work, what their process is like, what they engage with the most. Learn how public policy issues come to them, who on campus is already involved in these conversations or in advocacy. You can even ask if they can share what some of their current priorities are. It is important to understand the nature of the work and the way in which the office's contacts and relationships serve the institution.

Learn as much as you can so that you can determine the opportunities for engagement and the best forms of advocacy on your campus.

Note that the MI-ACE Public Policy Priorities may not match your institution's or your own network's priorities; they may even be in conflict. This is where you need to assess your plan and the best way to fulfill your role in concert with the campus office.

ESTABLISH YOUR WORKING RELATIONSHIP

Let your contact know that you are looking to establish or to continue a working relationship with them and their office and talk about what this would look like. Ask them how they would like to see such a collaboration unfold. They may need more information about the kinds of activities you organize for the campus network, such as speakers, book discussions, campus actions, or the like.

If you are planning something that you know relates to public policy, reach out to the office/person before doing anything else. If you have any doubts about whether something you are thinking about touches on Public Policy or legislative relations, establish that you can contact the office/person for clarification.

Assure your contact that you would plan to present a programming idea, its purpose, and its audience before reaching out to any potential presenters--particularly legislators--or affiliated entities. Find out if there is already work being done on the issue that you need to know about or an existing relationship that you could possibly leverage for your event. Alternatively, the office may have a reason to ask you to hold off or to re-focus due to work in which they are currently engaged. The office may have an even better idea of a speaker or program idea based on their contacts or their work and can help you plan an even stronger event. The office may ask to directly participate in the actual program to provide them with more visibility.

Having established a good relationship with the office makes these ongoing conversations welcome and productive.

The office overseeing public policy is one of the most important departments on campus for advocating for your institution and IRs need to be sensitive to this, while simultaneously pursuing one's on-campus IR role.

*Governmental Affairs administrators across Michigan told us that what they most appreciate is “**no surprises.**” Surprises can significantly interfere with the work of these offices. Respect their work and their relationships and the IR role becomes much easier.*

A working partnership with a governmental affairs office or staff gives an IR additional resources, helpful guidance, and another layer of institutional support. It gives the office an additional way to connect with or communicate to the campus network and to foster understanding of their advocacy for the institution. Public Policy does not and should not be pursued in a vacuum. Let the relationship evolve and let your governmental affairs professionals lead the way.

Recognizing and understanding this essential connection between work that you may already be doing and the institutional-level work that may be occurring “behind the scenes,” helps to make MI-ACE and your campus stronger partners in the efforts to build and sustain supportive higher education environments.

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THE
BOTTOM

PUBLIC POLICY IS MORE THAN EQUAL PAY DAY: WHAT TOUCHES YOUR CAMPUS?

Many IRs engage with Equal Pay Day as a policy initiative and there are several creative ways in which they bring the issues related to equal pay to the attention of their campuses. However, many IRs do not realize that they are actually engaged in conversations about and programming related to a variety of public policy issues which they may not recognize as such. The good news is, therefore, that you are very likely more familiar with public policy than you may realize.

For example, does your network discuss issues of parental leave or childcare? Work-life balance? Mental health support for faculty, staff, and/or students? Campus safety? A need for increased access to professional development or mentoring? The increasing presence of comfort animals or companion pets in campus spaces?

These are all public policy issues, which can be discussed with your legislative affairs contact(s). Learn if your institution is working on anything related to the issues your network is passionate about or what may be happening in our state legislature on such issues.

Your legislative affairs contact can talk with you about the efficacy of building awareness around such issues--and possibly even planning a direct action-- through common IR/network programming such as speakers, book or film discussions, panel presentations, or creative pop-up displays or events.

And did you know that in Michigan, you (or your network) can write a bill, seek a sponsor, and see legislation introduced in our state legislature? Perhaps partner with a women's student group on a project of this kind. Remember, however, start with your governmental affairs contact to learn more about this process and its feasibility on your campus. Some institutions already work with their student government and/or faculty council on such initiatives, so the ground may already be prepared for you!

THE LANGUAGE OF PUBLIC POLICY

Like all professional areas, Public Policy has its own language and becoming familiar with some key terms and concepts will help make this work more accessible. Here are some terms to get you started. Additional resources to help with this role will be provided on the Public Policy page of [the MI-ACE website](#).

Agenda Setting: The items in government which will be debated and discussed. The Media plays a powerful role in agenda setting but so can lobbying groups, special interests, and citizens.

Appropriation: A legislative act formally specifying an amount of money for an agency to spend.

Equal Protection Clause: Part of the Fourteenth Amendment, which states that states must give all citizens the equal protection of the law.

Grassroots Activism: Efforts to influence the government by mobilizing large numbers of people. Often mobilization is around a specific issue in the country or a community.

Opinion Leader: A person whose opinion can shape the opinions of many others. Examples are Jeff Bezos, Dr. Fauci, Bill Gates.

Voting Behavior: A term used to describe the motives and factors that shape voters' choices.

SAMPLE INTRODUCTORY EMAIL

Dear _____,

As the current Institutional Representative (IR) for the Michigan American Council on Education (MI-ACE) Women's Network on our campus, I would like to arrange a time to meet to discuss the work that you [your office] does in legislative affairs and public policy. One of my primary roles as an IR is to work with you [your office] to better understand public policy as it impacts our campus as well as to introduce and facilitate dialogue on both the current MI-ACE Women's Network Public Policy Priorities and institutional policy priorities.

I welcome the opportunity to learn more about legislative affairs at [institution] and talking about how our campus network may best participate in educating about, informing about, and/or supporting campus priorities.

More information about the MI-ACE Public Policy Committee is provided here:
<https://www.gvsu.edu/miace/public-policy-agenda-11.htm>

I will reach out to your office in the next few days to schedule a convenient time to meet and look forward to talking with you. If I have reached you in error, I appreciate being directed to the correct person or office for our work.

Thank you,

MI-ACE WOMEN'S NETWORK PUBLIC POLICY COMMITTEE

For More Information:

MI-ACE Public Policy:

<https://www.gvsu.edu/miace/public-policy-agenda-11.htm>

MI-ACE Public Policy Priorities:

<https://www.gvsu.edu/miace/2022-25-public-policy-priorities-50.htm>

WATCH FOR OUR UPDATES IN THE MI-ACE IR NEWSLETTER:

Ideas for events or campus network actions
Spotlight on what member institutions are doing

Annual Conference sessions on Public Policy
IR Lunch-and Learn events