

STATE BUDGET CASE STUDY: CONNECTICUT

ACCOMPLISHMENT

Last year, the Connecticut legislature appropriated \$100,000 for afterschool programs thanks to strong support of a key representative. These funds were sustained in the budget this year. Thanks to network and partner efforts to increase funds in the budget for afterschool, \$1 million in additional funds are still pending.

BACKGROUND

A \$100,000 increase in 2004 was entirely a political success. One legislator decided that afterschool was her issue for the year and worked almost single-handedly for the appropriation, which was added to the appropriations bill at the end of the budget process. However, the legislation did not include any guidance on how the money was to be spent. Funds were ultimately divided among three communities. The legislator's community received \$50,000 and communities of two other supportive legislators each received \$25,000.

This year, the network sought an additional \$7 million in funding for afterschool programs. The Education Committee included \$5 million to be administered by the Department of Education, but the bill died in the Appropriations Committee. One million of the funding was added during the final days of the session in the back-of-the-budget language, as a transfer between departments of unexpended funds, but was spent before any of it could be used for after school. Several legislators are angry that the funding is not available and are trying to help remedy the situation. There is a possibility that the funding will be secured for this year, or the network may use this setback to generate support for even more funding next year. The \$100,000 line item for afterschool programs was passed again for this year and next; towns may have to respond to an RFP to receive funding.

NETWORK INVOLVEMENT AND ACTIVITIES

The network employed a number of strategies, particularly the use of key legislative champions, to push for additional funds. Network partners were critical players, from reaching out to their legislators to leading network strategy. The Connecticut Commission for Children, a quasi-governmental body that supports the legislature, has been a vital supporter. The Commission's legislative liaison essentially acts as the network's lobbyist, strategy advisor and purveyor of insider information.

Some legislator education did need to take place. Sometimes legislators do not fully understand the need for, lack of affordability of, or limited resources to support afterschool programs. To communicate with legislators, the network created a two-page fact sheet and secured partners to participate in lobby days, letter writing and site visits. For example, network leaders arranged for roughly 20 diverse afterschool stakeholders to submit testimony or testify before the Education Committee. Small group meetings between legislators and their constituents, also organized by the network, personalized and localized the issue for the legislators. Hearing from their own constituents gave them a visual image (i.e., the afterschool program is held in a school they know).

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FUTURE

The current strategy is an ongoing and long-term. The network will continue to work with key champions in an effort to secure funding this year for afterschool programs. Once additional funds are secured, the network will provide behind-the-scenes support to the Department of Education in implementing the new funding.

The network is simultaneously starting to lay the groundwork for next year's budget. Leaders will not only work to influence current legislators, but they are also targeting candidates for the legislature so that new members will enter office with a promise to support afterschool programs. In addition, next month's planned Connecticut Leadership Roundtable on Afterschool will educate legislators, philanthropists and the business community in a half-day event.

LESSONS LEARNED

Michelle Doucette Cunningham had several lessons to share based on past budget successes and network involvement.

1. *Everything is local.* Encourage supporters to call and meet with their legislators at each stage of the process. Working to secure support for a bill serves multiple purposes: generating support for additional resources and giving people a reason to connect with their legislators. Securing volunteers to testify and asking partners to call their legislators is very important. It does not take many calls to get a legislator to take notice. One legislator explained that four or five calls will get attention, and twenty calls may very well motivate action. You don't have to move mountains.
2. *Personal connections are important.* Learn to leverage your relationships. The legislator may not take your call, but he will take the call of the president of a community foundation. This is also a way to broaden support without asking for money (for example, by asking the mayor or superintendent to call his/her legislator), but could lead to resources down the line.
3. *You never know when you will have the opportunity to engage a legislator.* Michelle has spent days sitting, listening to testimony when only 5% of it related to afterschool, only to later run into the committee chairman in the elevator on the way out the door, which resulted in a meeting to discuss afterschool funding.
4. *Help partners get to know their legislators.* The network provides advocates with a face book of all the legislators for lobby day. That way people know exactly what their legislator looks like, and if they see him/her in the hallway or at lunch, they will recognize and can approach him/her.
5. *It is important to manage the expectations of all network partners.* They need to be educated about the budget process – the theory and the reality – and understand that this is a long-term strategy that requires they keep up their advocacy efforts.
6. *Find the right champions who will both support and work for a bill's passage.* Simply sponsoring a bill does not mean a legislator will work hard to ensure it passes. Ask legislators, "Will you cosponsor this bill and work for its passage?" Don't forget the second part of the question! Bipartisan support is also important. The network secured sponsorship from a Republican and a Democrat. Even though those two legislators may

not work closely all the time, it is important that the bill is bipartisan. Representative The initial champion also convinced other legislators and the Speaker of the House to become supporters. Personal characteristics and perception also play a role in finding the right champions. You want those who care about the issue, not those who need to repair a tarnished image or are viewed as ineffective.

7. *Trust your champions and do what they tell you needs to be done.* However, do not wait for them to call you as they are busy people. You should contact them to keep abreast of what needs to be done (e.g., who should testify at a hearing; whose support is critical to secure, etc.) and use their advice. Backroom budgeting – where the real decisions get made – is largely done without the network’s direct involvement. Use your champion to help determine if the network’s help is needed at this stage.

NETWORK DETAILS

State Network: Connecticut After School Network

Lead Fiscal Agent: Connecticut State Department of Education and the Connecticut School-Age Child Care Alliance

Key contact: Michelle Doucette Cunningham; 860-794-4978; mdc@csaca.org

Key partners involved in effort: State Representative champions, the State of Connecticut Commission on Children