

Sample Advocacy Plan Outline:

Creating an Equitable Public University Funding Formula in Illinois

Goal: Address challenges, combat misinformation, and build momentum around the creation of an equitable public university funding formula to pass the initiative during the Illinois General Assembly's 2026 legislative session (assuming that SB 13/HB 1581 do not pass in the fall 2025 veto session). Emphasize collaboration with local partners, policymakers, and advocacy organizations to ensure the formula advances equity across Illinois' public universities while negating false perceptions of institutional losses in funding.

Stakeholders:

- Key **policymakers** include Illinois [State Senators](#) Kimberly Lightford, Michael Halpin, Dale Fowler, and Terry Bryant [State Representatives](#) Katie Stuart and Daniel Swanson; all of whom serve on General Assembly Higher Education Committees.
- Legislative engagement will be complemented by **advocacy organizations** like Women Employed and Advance Illinois.
- Leaders from Illinois **public universities** must be central partners to ensure shared messaging.
- The **Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE)** will be critical; shifting its stance from neutrality to active support would represent a significant turning point in building legislative support.
- All above stakeholders are members of the **Illinois Commission on Equitable Public University Funding**; others should be identified by referral throughout.

Tactics:

1. Legislative Engagement and Education: The fellowship team will collaborate with legislative stakeholders to identify unsupportive members of the General Assembly and conduct meetings with those identified to build support for the funding formula. Each meeting will feature university leaders, students, and other stakeholders who can offer compelling testimony on the inequities of the current system. Developed alongside Advance Illinois and Women Employed, a concise policy brief will provide legislators with clear data points, fiscal models, and narratives to inform their positions.
2. Shifting IBHE's Stance: Due to their influence in the state, working directly with the Illinois Board of Higher Education to move them from neutrality to explicit support will be critical. This will include conducting meetings with IBHE's Executive Director,

Board Chair, and other board members, presenting to the Board at an upcoming public meeting, and highlighting the formula's long-term alignment with IBHE's mission.

3. Public and Coalition Mobilization: A coordinated public awareness campaign emphasizing that all universities stand to benefit from the formula will be launched by the fellowship team, even if some institutions receive proportionally less new funding. The campaign will include contacting regional news organizations, op-eds in local newspapers, and unified language and social media toolkits shared with stakeholders. This generates awareness, grassroots momentum, and increased public support.

Timeline:

- December 2025-January 2026: Convene stakeholders, develop messaging materials, and draft policy briefs. Begin introductory meetings with legislators.
- February 2026: Launch public campaign. Conduct targeted outreach to IBHE.
- March 2026: Secure public endorsements from advocacy groups. Host roundtables with legislators, faculty, and students to amplify testimony.
- April 2026: Coordinate advocacy days in Springfield and sustain contact with key legislators. Elevate IBHE as a public supporter through press releases and/or formal statements.
- May 2026: Publish an impact report highlighting changes in legislative support, increased endorsement by advocacy organizations, and detail movement of the initiative through the legislative process.

Risks & Mitigation

1. Perception of Institutional Losses: Some messaging may imply that universities will lose funding. While no institution will lose state dollars, some will receive smaller increases. Advocates will emphasize that this legislation ensures adequacy and equity statewide. Every public statement and policy brief must reinforce a narrative of no losses and shared gains.
2. IBHE Resistance or Inaction: If the IBHE remains neutral, the effort risks appearing divisive. Deploy a dual strategy of internal engagement and increased external public support to mitigate this risk. Direct meetings will focus on alignment with IBHE's mission, while stakeholders issue public endorsements, increasing external pressure.