

TED Advocacy

Useful resources to help support advocacy work



Federal Appropriations Process for Special Education Funding and Faculty Involvement

The federal appropriations process, which includes funding for special education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), is complex and often unpredictable. For decades, the process has deviated from standard practices due to partisan gridlock, government shutdowns, and a reliance on continuing resolutions (CRs) to keep the government running. In fact, there hasn't been a fully typical appropriations cycle since the Clinton administration. These disruptions create uncertainty for critical programs like IDEA. This brief outlines the key stages of the process and offers tips for faculty advocacy.

Advocacy Brief
Spring 2025

The Federal Appropriations Process for Special Education

February



President's Budget Request

- The process starts with the President's annual budget request, which proposes funding levels for programs like IDEA. While this is just a starting point, it sets the stage for negotiations in Congress.

Advocacy Tip

- Use this time to contact your representatives, sharing data and stories about the importance of fully funding special education programs.

Subcommittee Markups

- The Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee reviews budget proposals and sets funding levels. This stage is critical for shaping IDEA funding.

Advocacy Tip

- Submit testimony or advocacy letters to subcommittee members. Highlight the real-world impact of underfunded special education programs to make your case.

Final Votes and Continuing Resolutions

- After review by the full Appropriations Committee, the bill goes to the House and Senate for approval, followed by final reconciliation between chambers. However, in many years, Congress fails to finalize appropriations on time, leading to a continuing resolution. A CR temporarily extends funding at existing levels, leaving programs like IDEA in limbo without the adjustments needed to address rising costs or increasing demands.

Advocacy Tip

- When a CR is likely, faculty should stress the need for Congress to prioritize education funding to avoid delays or cuts that can harm students with disabilities.

May & June



June - September



Specific Roles for Higher Education Faculty in Special Education Advocacy

Given the political context, faculty must be strategic in their advocacy efforts. Here's how higher education faculty involved in special education can take on different roles:

Advocating for IDEA Funding

Faculty can emphasize how underfunding affects teacher preparation and student outcomes. Share specific examples and data to back up your advocacy.

Advocating for Special Education Research

Highlight the innovations and success stories made possible by federal funding, and stress the need for continued support.

Advocacy in the classroom

Faculty can help prepare the next generation of policy advocates by teaching courses and leading discussion on the history and importance of advocating in our field.

Policy Impact

Use your expertise to shape conversations about the future of IDEA funding through briefs, testimonies, or public forums.



Conclusion



The federal funding process for special education is a marathon, not a sprint. With the appropriations process often stalled or disrupted by continuing resolutions, faculty advocacy is more critical than ever. By engaging at every stage and sharing stories about the real-world impact of IDEA funding, faculty can help secure the resources students with disabilities need to thrive.