



# **NATIONAL GEAR UP WEEK TOOLKIT**

This document was produced with GEAR UP funds awarded to the Nevada Department of Education by the U.S. Department of Education (grant award PR#P334S190009). However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.





# NATIONAL GEAR UP WEEK TOOLKIT

## PURPOSE

National GEAR UP Week is a chance to highlight GEAR UP's positive impact in your community. It's a time to engage all your stakeholders (local, state and federal elected officials, funders, partners and media), share accomplishments, and encourage involvement with your services to students and families.

## OBJECTIVES

Hold a GEAR UP Week at your school to kick off the year with activities that encourage a college-going culture in your school and community. Use these materials during National GEAR UP Week or any time that works for you. This toolkit has ideas designed to get the word out about GEAR UP and the importance of going to college.

Choose to do some or all of the activities or create your own traditions.

## STUDENT GRADE LEVEL

This toolkit is designed for GEAR UP Staff, Specialists, First Year College Advisors (FYCA) and College Coordinators serving GEAR UP students in grades 7-12, as well as first year post-secondary students.

## TARGET AUDIENCE FOR TOOLKIT

This toolkit is targeted to GEAR UP Staff, Specialists, FYCAs, and College Coordinators, school counselors, family engagement professionals (parent liaisons), college access professionals, middle and high school administrators, district-level educators who work with counseling and/or college access programs, and parent groups.

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The GEAR UP community across the nation is dedicated to student success, and generously shares information and resources among programs. This guide was created from wisdom and experience shared by many GEAR UP projects, but we'd particularly like to thank GEAR UP Washington State whose Financial Aid guide inspired us.



## National GEAR UP WEEK

### About GEAR UP Week

Join thousands of students, parents, teachers, partners, and college access professionals from across the nation to celebrate GEAR UP and the successes of your hard work and education.

National GEAR UP week is an opportunity for you to raise awareness in your school and community about the positive impact GEAR UP is having locally. It's a time to engage all your stakeholders – local, state, and federal elected officials; funders; partners; and media – to share your programs accomplishments and to get them more involved with your services to students and families.

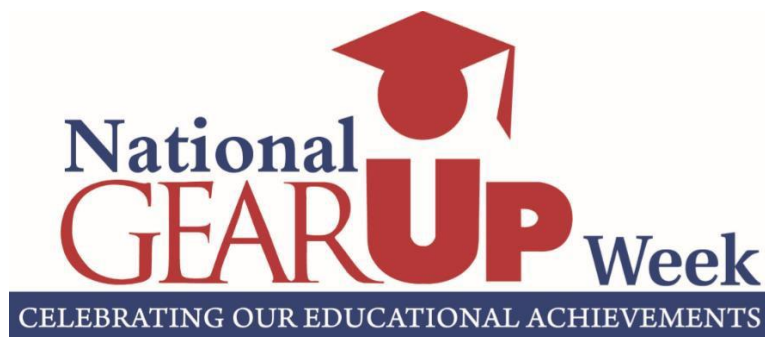
- Create awareness
- Activate partners
- Mobilize champions

Learn more about National GEAR UP Week with [National Council for Community and Education Partnerships \(NCCEP\)](#).

Let's commemorate your hard work and the progress our students are making towards achieving their life-long dream of going to college.

Hold a GEAR UP Week at your school and get students thinking about their plan after high school! Kick off the year with fun and exciting activities while promoting a college going culture in your school and community.

You can also use these ideas for future activities, after National GEAR UP Week. This toolkit includes ideas, instructions, posters, and more to promote and celebrate GEAR UP and its mission.





## Outreach and Media

### Public Policy

#### SHOWCASE LOCAL ISSUES & LEADERS

As they say, all politics is local. GEAR UP Week is a great time to highlight your local needs, efforts, and position your leaders in visible ways to address issues of college readiness. Get GEAR UP on your school board's agenda; host a forum between local K12 and high education leaders to discuss shared challenges and opportunities; invite your mayor to speak at your school events.

#### GET A CITY OR STATE PROCLAMATION

While there will be a national proclamation from the U.S. Congress and the Secretary of Education, get your local leaders involved and ask them to formally proclaim September 20-24 GEAR UP Week in your city. NDE will be responsible for the state proclamation from the Governor's office.

#### REACH OUT TO YOUR MEMBERS

Since your House and Senate members are the ones responsible for GEAR UP, we can't leave them out of the fun. Reach out and invite your members to speak at your rally or forum; have students write letters of appreciation; and encourage members to participate in your social media campaign.

### Build Awareness

#### COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Consider how your local and regional GEAR UP outreach and partnership work can be timed to coincide with National GEAR UP Week. Use the week to reach out to families through workshops, dinners, and weekend programs; engage the faith-based community to provide workshops after services; or create a forum for business leaders to discuss the importance of education.

#### SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT GEAR UP

It's imperative that the public understand why and how we do what we do. Create a poster for organizations and businesses to show their support; work with your public relations office in your district or institution to invite media coverage for your events; write an op-ed in your local paper; send out a press release.

#### GET PEOPLE TALKING

Too often we talk about education in abstract terms or in a national context. Help people understand the local conversation by sharing research on the local situation and host a "did you know?" campaign on social media; have your students create a documentary; and engage your public broadcasting to illustrate local stories.

### Celebrate at Your Schools

#### FOCUS ON STUDENT DREAMS

National GEAR UP Week is a great opportunity to ask students to articulate and share their college and career aspirations. This creates momentum for our work and provides formal and informal teachable moments. Create a dream wall where students post their dreams; host a balloon release; or create a dream chain in classrooms that create connections between students.



### LEVERAGE SCHOOL-WIDE ACTIVITIES

Have a big, annual, school-wide event planned. Implement it during GEAR UP Week and get extra bang for your buck. Host a college pep rally; have a college scavenger hunt; or host a college trivia competition. Get teachers and administrators telling their stories and sharing their experiences!

### EMPOWER THE STUDENT VOICE

Help students find the power in their stories. Create a school-wide #IHeartGEARUP #GEARUPWorks #MyGEARUPstory campaign on social media; create a video competition about why college matters; have students write letters to their future-selves about what they hope to achieve in school, college and beyond!



## What is GEAR UP

### What is GEAR UP?

Created by Congress in 1998, GEAR UP – Gaining Early Awareness for Undergraduate Programs – is a federal program funded by the U.S. Department of Education. The goal of this program is to significantly increase the number of low-income middle and high school students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

Since becoming law in 1998, GEAR UP has become a prolific program impacting over 12 million students in 49 states, Washington D.C., and the U.S. territories.

GEAR UP currently serves over 572,000 low-income students and families from 6<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grades in 43 states. It provides information for students and families about college entrance requirements, scholarship resources, academic preparation, mentoring, counseling, and financial aid.

### GEAR UP in Nevada

Nevada GEAR UP (NVGU) works with students in eleven middle schools within four Nevada School districts in order to accomplish these goals. GEAR UP School Specialists, First Year College Advisors, College Coordinator, and volunteer teachers provide students with direct services, including mentoring, tutoring, college visits, and financial aid counseling.

### Nevada State GEAR UP Key Messages

- We promote equal access to education and education excellence through concerted partnership efforts on behalf of low-income students.
- We encourage student enrollment in rigorous and challenging curricula and coursework in order to reduce the need for remedial coursework at the postsecondary level.
- We provide information about financial aid to students and their families.
- We improve the number of participating students who obtain a secondary school diploma and enter postsecondary education.
- We promote professional development in areas of teaching and learning.
- We build local and state efforts to encourage investment that will sustain GEAR UP activities and services beyond the federal grant period.
- We develop regional and national partnerships to build program capacity to serve low-income students academic, financial, and social support needs statewide.



## GEAR UP Specialists & Staff

### ADVOCACY 101

#### What is Advocacy?

Advocacy is traditionally defined as the act of supporting a cause or proposal. But really, advocacy is just telling a story about something that is important and celebrating successes, in this case, sharing how GEAR UP and college readiness programs have been good for your school and community.

#### Why should I Advocate?

Stakeholders and other potential organizations or individuals might not know about GEAR UP and how important it is to prepare students for college. Tell them – and then ask for their support, with publicity, funding, or volunteers.

#### Who should I tell my story to?

Everyone! The local media, local and state elected officials, current and potential partners in your community, potential funders, school administrators, your students, parents, and your community.

#### When should I tell my story?

All the time, anytime. For example, get the word out before major events or activities (so they will want to come and see for themselves!), after state report cards come out showing improved test scores, before the school board makes budget decisions or any other relevant occasion.

#### OK, I'm in! How should I do this?

We thought you'd never ask! First things first, you need to create your message. Then start talking – or emailing, or tweeting, or however you communicate.

..... Read on for more info!

#### It's all about relationships

Telling the GEAR UP story is the first step in building a relationship with stakeholders who you can ask for support. This means promoting an awareness of GEAR UP activities, convincing stakeholders in the benefits of the program, and finally, asking them to act in some way.

#### It's Mutually beneficial

Advocacy is a two-way street! When asking for stakeholder's support, be sure to let them know how GEAR UP is good for students, the economy, and their own interests. Consider how the school might help stakeholders meet their goals; it can and should be a win-win for both parties.

#### It starts locally

Get the Superintendent, school board, mayor and city council on board with GEAR UP and the importance of college readiness.

#### It's on-going, and long-term

Advocacy is not a one-time event. Rather, it's a continuous process of celebrating GEAR UP's successes with stakeholders in an effort to build and maintain relationships. Use our Event Checklist to remember to invite media and elected officials, take photos and get quotes to better help tell your story!





**No lobbying to members of Congress!**

GEAR UP Grantees are prohibited from using federal funds to engage in lobbying. That means you may not request increases in GEAR UP funding or discuss current funding levels. However, you may share the impact of your program with elected officials and thank them for their past support.



## College & Career Exploration

### Events (In-Person or Virtually)

#### Student/Family Workshop

Consider hosting online (if not in person) events or workshops. For example, invite a local employer to serve as a guest speaker or a host on a virtual employee panel to share about their job sector, specific work skills important to that career path, and what background was needed to pursue that path. These events could be pre-recorded or hosted live on YouTube, Zoom, Google Meets, Event Facebook, or Instagram Live.

Additionally, Nevada GEAR UP schools are expected to offer a minimum of three family workshops per year. The focus of these workshops is financial literacy, college preparation, and financial aid. Consider hosting on during National GEAR UP Week.

#### Virtual College Visits

Take advantage of virtual campus tours (many can be found through [Common App's Explore Colleges Profiles](#)) and scan colleges' websites and social media feeds to learn more about what each school has to offer.

Additional Resources include [Nevada GEAR UP](#) and [GEARUPNV on YouTube](#).

#### Virtual College & Career Learning

These activities from NCCEP's Career and College Clubs have been modified for students to complete on an individual basis.

- [The College Advantage](#). In this activity, you will learn about some of the advantages of a college education and can reflect on those advantages.
- [College Life](#). This activity will help you dream about your future in college and identify your preferred college lifestyle.
- [Dream Board](#). This activity helps you to visualize your future success and dream life. Share your dream boards on social media and tag @edpartnerships.
- [Financial Aid Fact or Fiction](#). This activity informs you about your financial aid options, and when and how to apply for college financial aid.

### Games

#### College Knowledge Games & Activities

Get your students, staff, and parents involved in this activity that can easily take place the whole week! Provide students with their own College Knowledge Passport. Think of this activity as a treasure hunt meets trivia. You will need to get your school staff on board – think of the teachers in this activity as the countries that students need to visit. Provide your staff with the list of College Knowledge Passport Questions/Statements (Consider assigning certain staff specific questions to avoid staff asking students the same trivia question).

Students take their passport and visit different school staff where they will be asked a College Knowledge Question. If the student gets the question right the school staff person signs the student's passport in the space provided. To get families involved, the game has 3 websites that students and families need to visit together. When the student and family have completed this, the



family member signs the student's College Knowledge Passport. Have students turn in their College Knowledge Passport at the end of the week to be eligible for a drawing to win a prize.

Resources: [College Knowledge Passport](#) and [Passport Questions/Statements](#)

### Door Wars

Students and teachers work together to decorate their homeroom or advisory classroom door in a college theme. The winning door(s) get a special classroom prize. Be sure to have enough supplies to outfit the needs of all teachers and students participating. Set a start date and an end date. Consider having different "Best Of" categories such as Out of State 4 Year, and 2 Year College. Consider inviting an elected official or local news reporter to help judge the doors and select the winners.

### Draw Your Way to College

Use this game to help students become familiar with college lingo. Divide students into teams. Teams should designate one person to draw per round. Each team member should have the opportunity to draw at least once. The designated "artist" picks a clue/term from the moderator (GEAR UP staff). The artist should draw that clue for his/her team without speaking or hand gestures. The teams who are not drawing are not allowed to guess and should refrain from yelling out hints. If the drawing team successfully guesses the clue within the time limit, they get a point. Briefly discuss the term afterward to ensure students understand the meaning and relevance of that term as it relates to college. Play continues with the next team and the same format is followed. At the end of the game, the team with the most points wins!

### GEAR UP Bingo

- A. People Bingo: Download a blank GEAR UP Bingo Card. Type the descriptions into a blank BINGO card (be sure to mix the descriptions around on each card) or have your students write the descriptions on their card themselves. To play, have students mingle and write the name of a classmate that fits a description on the card.
- B. College Logo Bingo: Write the name of each college on a ping pong ball. Provide each student with a College Logo Bingo Card. Ask questions from the College Logo Bingo Trivia Sheet. Give participants the opportunity to guess the answer but be sure all students know the correct answer before moving on.

Resources: [Blank Bingo Cards](#), [College Logo Bingo Cards](#), [College Logo Bingo Trivia Sheet](#), [College Logos](#)

### Reality Fair

Reality or life simulations are educational, interactive simulation events for high school students. They involve staff and often community members. Students are given scenarios that place them in the future after completion of a form of secondary education. The simulation gives students an opportunity to experience what life looks like on their own, with financial responsibilities.

### Resources to Make Your Own Game

- Word Searches and [Crosswords](#)
- Game-based learning platforms that students can access via web browsers
  - [Kahoot](#)
  - [Grimkit](#)



- [Quizlet](#)
- [Quiziz](#)

### Scavenger Hunt

Create a scavenger hunt throughout the school. Have GEAR UP students locate important college planning resources. Announce the winners at a pep rally at the end of the week. Variation: Hide Nevada GEAR UP logos with college facts printed on the back all over the school. Give a prize to the students who finds the most.

### SWAT College Readiness Game

Split into teams. Divide the whiteboard or poster paper into sections. Assign each team a section. Write college terms randomly on each side of the board or paper. Both teams should have the same words but in different locations. Teams should choose a team name and pick one player to start as the “swatter”. Put a piece of masking tape on the floor several feet away from the board/paper. All team members except the “swatter” must stay behind the tape line. Give a fly swatter to each team’s starting player. Ask a college knowledge question. The first to swat the correct answer wins a point. Discuss to reinforce understanding. Teams choose a new “swatter” and repeat play. Continue until all questions have been answered. The team with the most points at the end wins.

### College Spirit

#### #OneInAMillion Campaign

Answer a prompt below on a social media site and use #OneInAMillion in the post. Take a picture or selfie to use in your post. Sample Prompts:

- How have GEAR UP inspired you?
- What are your plans after you graduate high school?
- Who inspires you to be the best person you can be?
- What challenges did you overcome while in school?
- What about your future makes you excited?
- Why is getting an education important to you?
- Why is GEAR UP an important program to you and your family?
- How have GEAR UP changed your outlook on education?

Don’t want to use any of the above prompts? That’s okay! Come up with your own and share it with us!

Resource: [The One in A Million Flyer](#)

### GEAR UP in 1 Word

Using a piece of poster board or another large paper, as students and teachers to share what GEAR UP means to them in one word. Take a photo with students and share with the GEAR UP office and elected officials.

### GEAR UP or College Gear Day

Encourage students and teachers to wear their GEAR UP t-shirts, other college clothing, or college colors. Pass out shirts to new GEAR UP students. Have students decorate a small paper shirt with the college they want to attend and then tape it to the front of their locker.

Resource: [Cut Out Shirt Option 1](#) and [Cut Out Shirt Option 2](#)

### Dream Wall

Create a GEAR UP Dream Wall. Cover the wall of a school hallway with butcher paper, place a large National GEAR UP Week Logo in the center with “Our GEAR UP Dreams” written underneath. Have students write their academic, professional, and personal goals on the wall or on a cut out to stick to the wall.

*Go Further:* Setup a “College Dreams” Photo booth! Have dry erase boards that students can write their College Dream on and hold during the photo.

### Show & Tell

Have students reach out to a college of their choice and request materials. Open the materials as a class or group and share the received information. Also, have students fill out a [college fit worksheet](#) and share their findings with their classmates.

## Motivation

### Prep Rally

Invite a guest speaker from a local college (a First Year College Advisor or the College Coordinator would be great options), apprenticeship program, or the community to share their education journey and why education beyond high school is important.

### Community Success Stories

Host a “Community Success Stories” breakfast, coffee gathering, or potluck luncheon as a thank you for dedicated GEAR UP partners, volunteers, and parents. Consider inviting GEAR UP school administrators, teachers, parents, partners, and student leaders, as well as local businesses, a service club or chamber of commerce and individuals from non-GEAR UP schools to discuss college access and the success that GEAR UP has had in your school district!

Note: This would be a great opportunity to include or promote the Nevada GEAR UP Business Network.

### Get to Know GEAR UP/Teacher Time Profile

This activity is designed for school staff to learn more about GEAR UP and how their support and involvement can positively impact students. Invite staff and educate them on What GEAR UP is all about. Explain the different services that GEAR UP will provide to students and families and programs and activities that will be hosted by GEAR UP. Have teachers fill out a profile that they can hang outside their classroom for students to read. Consider sending out the Teacher Time Profile to teachers through e-mail but also have some printed for staff to look at and possibly fill out at the Get to Know GEAR UP staff event.

Resources: [Teacher Time Profile](#)

### Fail Forward

This activity is designed to help students embrace their failures, and use them to move forward, rather than to give up in defeat.

Provide large poster boards or banners and place them in the school hallways. Encourage fellow staff, students, family, and community members to write, share, and view failures they have experienced. This activity can be anonymous. Later at an assembly, host a panel that consists of faculty share their stories of failure and how they overcame it. For example:

- I lost a scholarship because I did not do well in school and didn't ask for help.
- I failed my Algebra class the first time I took it.
- I changed my major 4 times.
- I got rejected from my dream college.
- I didn't manage my money well and spent too much on credit cards when I was a freshman.
- I waited too long to fill out the FAFSA.

By sharing stories, you bring people together and begin a conversation that failure is an important part of growth and learning, especially for first-generation students.

Resources: [Freedom to Fail Forward](#)

### Additional Activity Ideas

- Watch a TED Talk.
- Bring in a guest speaker to talk with students, staff, and parents.
- Use daily trivia questions over the morning announcements. Students submit their answer to become eligible for a drawing to win a prize.
- Have teachers talk about their education and career journey during advisory to students.
- Hold a GEAR UP Family Orientation night with students, family, and staff.
- Invite college representatives to speak at orientation
- Set up a GEAR UP table in the commons during lunch and recruit students to sign up for upcoming campus field trips.
- Create a GEAR UP video presentation to explain what GEAR UP is. Announce what GEAR UP activities will take place throughout the week.
- Host a Community Advisory Committee meeting. Include community, professionals, staff, and parents to student-led small group discussions. Have students ask each member of the committee how GEAR UP helps them?
- Hold a College Panel. Invite alumni or school staff from the Nevada Colleges. Have students ask the panelists questions about their time in college.
- Host a Student Orientation Assembly as a kick-off assembly to discuss plans for the year. Get all the GEAR UP students together and build enthusiasm for the program.
- Create posters to decorate the commons/halls promoting different things related to higher education.
- Encourage students to interview faculty about their educational and career paths.
- Create a raffle for participating students to win college gear (hats, hoodies, t-shirts, etc.)
- Host a College Fair. Include military, 2-year, 4-year, and technical schools.
- Create an online scavenger hunt.



#### National GEAR UP Week Toolkit

- Share selfies in college gear or college colors! Host a trivia contest and award prizes.
- Highlight staff's education and career pathways through spotlights or profiles on social media.
- Place banners throughout the town or at in a frequented area.



## Telling Your GEAR UP Story

It is important to have a clear and consistent message when telling your GEAR UP story. No matter the audience, you can use the same stories, data and anecdotes. Follow these five steps using our Advocacy Worksheet to create an advocacy plan and a custom message about your school.

1. Familiarize yourself with GEAR UP's key messages.  
Hint: Just copy and paste!
2. List three key statistics/data points that demonstrate that GEAR UP works in your school.  
Hint: What is the evidence that GEAR UP works?
3. List three examples of GEAR UP at work in your school. These should be specific, true examples from a student, parent, staff, or partner.  
Hint: What are your premier events or programs that people should know about? Do you have a student who has overcome obstacles to achieve success?
4. List three things you want or need and could ask for from a stakeholder.  
Hint: Would you like volunteer? An appearance by an elected official? A newspaper story?
5. List three stakeholders you want to connect with to share the GEAR UP story.  
Hint: Be specific and if possible, include how you will connect them and what you will ask.





## Delivering Your Story

Now that you have the elements to tell your story, you'll need to have a powerful and concise delivery. Use this simple Formula:

**The Issue:** What are the issue(s) facing students or the community? State this clearly.

**The Solution + a Story:** How does GEAR UP address this issue? Provide a specific example statistics.

**The Ask:** How can this stakeholder support GEAR UP? How can the school support this stakeholder?

**Example:** Students who grow up in rural communities have limited exposure to the kinds of careers that may be available to them after completing a postsecondary program. GEAR UP addresses this issue by providing the resources and opportunities for students to participate in career exploration activities and job shadow programs. In fact, 75% of GEAR UP students completed a career exploration curriculum last year.

You can support GEAR UP in this effort by allowing your employees to use work time to volunteer in our classrooms and talk to students about their own careers and educational backgrounds. We can support you by publicizing your companies' culture of volunteerism to the students and families in our community.

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The average number of phone calls it takes to convince a member of Congress that an issue is important in their community.



There are many ways to communicate your GEAR UP story to stakeholders, including face-to-face meetings, phone calls, letters, e-mails, and social media like Facebook and Twitter. Use the method that is most appropriate for your audience – and that will generate attention! In general, the biggest impact will come from more personal contact including personal meetings and phone calls, but with limited time and resources, Twitter can be a great tool for building awareness and program support. Remember, advocacy is all about building relationships!

## Social Media

Social Media is a great way to stay connected with students. If you haven't already done so consider creating your own social media pages to remind students about upcoming GEAR UP events, deadlines, and activities you don't want to miss. In addition, be sure and share information NVGU posts on a weekly basis!

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Instagram](#)

## Tweet Congress

We encourage all GEAR UP supporters – particularly students, alumni, and program staff, to tweet messages to their elected officials. It's a straightforward 280 characters that can speak volumes.

Not sure what to say? Try something like:

- Did you know NV GEAR UP kids enroll in college at a rate of 43% higher than their low-income peers? #GEARUPWorks
- Thank you @PattyMurray for your support of GEAR UP! NV & the nation appreciate your dedication to students #GEARUPWorks
- Its official! @GovSisolak proclaims 9/20 - 9/24 Nevada GEAR UP Week! #GEARUP #NationalGEARUPWeek
- So exciting for two of our amazing #GEARUP students to get the chance to meet their representative @Catherine Cortez-Masto and share how #GEARUPWorks for them!

## Nevada's Members of Congress on Twitter

Sen. Catherine Cortez-Masto

Sen. Jacky Rosen

Representatives:

Dina Titus

Mark Amodei

Susie Lee

Steven Horsford

### Hashtags to Remember:

**#GEARUP**

**#NationalGEARUPWeek**

**#IheartGEARUP**

**#MyGEARUPstory**

For more on using social media, check out the Nevada GEAR UP handbook

Remember to tell community members, elected officials or Nevada State GEAR UP staff about any events you'll have and share photos to be featured on the website or on one of Nevada GEAR UP's social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube)!



## Tips & Resources for Key Audiences

### Elected Officials

Policymakers on both local and national levels want to represent the interests of their constituents. Tell your GEAR UP story so they will know that college readiness is an important issue in your community!

Check out [GovTrack](#) to find your elected representatives.

Also, check out [NVGU Tips for Communicating with Members of Congress](#) for:

- Tips on Contracting Elected Officials
- Tips for writing letters/emails to Members of Congress

### Media

Connecting with the local media about GEAR UP at your school is a keyway to engage with the community and share successes with a broad audience. It also helps to inspire students, parents and school personnel when they are featured in newspapers and magazines or on TV or radio shows.

### Partners & Funders

Community organizations and businesses, universities, and community colleges, as well as local, state and national foundations and funding agencies will be key in the sustainability of GEAR UP at you school. Seek out and build these relationships now.



## Marketing GEAR UP in Your Community

Connecting with the local media about GEAR UP at your school is a keyway to engage with the community and share successes with a broad audience. It also helps to inspire students, parents and school personnel when they are featured in newspapers and magazines or on TV or radio shows. Spread the word about Nevada GEAR UP!

“Traditional media” includes newspapers, magazines, TV and radio. There are specific ways (media alerts, press releases, and pitch letters) to contract them either before or after an event, or simply to be profiled in the local news. There are a few guidelines that apply to all of these:

### Know Your Message

1. Remember the 4 C's:
  - a. Consistency (have key talking points written down)
  - b. Candor (be open and sincere)
  - c. Credibility (repeat goals and benefits for the community)
  - d. Control (always provide a response; almost never say “no comment” as it assumes guilt or that you’re hiding something)
2. Every story needs a face – focus on specific students, parents, etc. who can reiterate your message
3. Gather data in advance – have information about GEAR UP and your school available

### Contacting Media Outlets

#### Media Alert (Template is available in the GEAR UP Handbook)

1. Before an event (ceremony, guest speaker, student-run event) takes place
2. The Basics: Who, What, Where, When, Why
3. Identify contact person for media, include phone numbers and e-mail
4. State news in headline
5. Provide additional details that might interest them such as guest speakers
6. Include directions if it's not a well-known location
7. Include boilerplate information about GEAR UP and your school
8. E-mail alert to appropriate news desk; be aware of deadlines!
9. Follow up with reporter to see if he/she is coming presentations, etc.

#### Press Release (Template is available in the GEAR UP Handbook)

1. After an event takes place
2. Identify contact person for media, include phone numbers and e-mail
3. Summarize story in headlines
4. Provide details of the event and relevant quotes
5. Include boilerplate information about GEAR UP and your school
6. E-mail to media
7. Have spokespeople available for media calls and line up students/parents who are available for interviews

#### Pitch Letter

1. Know the audience
2. Frame it as part of a larger, relevant issue
3. Address to a specific person, when possible
4. Have a compelling first line, followed by information as to how the story relates to their audience



5. Have story come from a recognizable name, when possible
6. Include contact information
7. Follow up with phone call or e-mail



## Resources





## OP-EDS

### Guidelines & Talking Points

An op-ed is an easy way to make a BIG impact. Editors publish every op-ed, but they do pay attention – especially to articles that are well-written and connected to a piece they just published. Here are a few helpful tips:

#### Writing Your Op-ed

- **Make it relevant**  
Relate your op-ed to an issue recently (within the last day or two) discussed in the publication to which you are writing. Many outlets are picking up on the defense cuts included in sequestration so this may be a time to bring the non-defense cuts to light.
- **Be concise**  
The first sentence should summarize your position. One of the biggest mistakes in an op-ed is using the first paragraph to build an argument. Most editors read 2-3 sentences before making a decision to go on. You don't need to include all of the talking points (see below) – just the ones relevant to the story.
- **Mind your word count**  
Check the op-ed guidelines for the paper you are targeting. If they give a word count, follow it. If they don't, 750 words are generally considered the maximum length.  
Many papers will not consider op-eds that exceed the word count.
- **Use YOUR voice**  
Have a student, alumni, parent, partner and/or staff “tell” their own story, in their own words, to illustrate the talking points.
- **Submitting Your Op-ed**  
Many newspapers have specific format requirements, so please check the paper's website before submitting
  - **Follow the guidelines**  
Follow the outlet's rules regarding op-eds and make sure to adhere to the guidelines on length. Spell everything correctly and pay close attention to grammar – articles are not usually edited, rather the outlets select well-written pieces that meet their guidelines.
  - **Email your op-ed to ensure timeliness**  
To do this, paste the op-ed text into the body of an email – DO NOT SEND AS AN ATTACHMENT. You may also fax it, but sending it electronically is generally the preferred way to receive op-eds.
  - **Follow up**  
Once you have submitted your op-ed, follow up with a call 24 hours later to find out if it will be printed.



**National  
Council for  
Community  
and  
Education  
Partnerships -  
Promoting  
educational  
partnerships  
and access to  
higher  
education**



- **Talking Points**

Op-eds should weave one or more of the following talking points into the personal story/perspective of the article-writer.

- ***GEAR UP is a competitive grant program of the U.S. Department of Education***  
GEAR UP increases the number of low-income, minority, and first-generation students who are prepared to enter and succeed in postsecondary education. It is a bipartisan, public-private educational partnership created by Congress in 1998.
- ***GEAR UP is community-based***  
GEAR UP provides six-year grants to states and partnerships to provide services at high-poverty middle and high schools. The program unites the entire community in a responsive, creative and research-based effort to get entire classrooms of low-income, minority and disadvantaged children and their families ready for higher education.
- ***GEAR UP leverages local resources***  
Because GEAR UP is built around public-private partnerships, it enlists the formidable resources of government, industry, business, labor, community groups and places of worship alike, in the cause of helping low-income students prepare, enter and succeed in college.
- ***GEAR UP is cohort-based***  
GEAR UP works with entire grade levels, and whole schools, supporting low-income students and their families, starting no later than the 7<sup>th</sup> grade (middle school), through high school and onward to fulfill their dreams of attaining a postsecondary education.
- ***GEAR UP is research-based***  
GEAR UP helps local school systems improve students' achievement by providing them with resources, training and expertise to use the most effective and evidence-based interventions.
- ***GEAR UP provides critical early college awareness and support activities***  
The program includes interventions such as tutoring, mentoring, rigorous academic preparation, financial education and college scholarship to improve access to higher education for low income, minority and disadvantaged first-generation students and their families.
- ***GEAR UP works***  
The program now serves more than 580,000 low-income, minority and disadvantaged students nationwide in 42 states, the District of Columbia, and three U.S. Territories.





**Sample Op-Ed**

We've drafted the following op-ed template to help guide you. Feel free to use this version or draft your own from scratch!

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
CONTACT: [YOUR NAME HERE]  
[DAY, DATE, AND TIME]  
TEL: [YOUR PHONE NUMBER HERE]

Special to [Name of Paper]: "Sequestration hurts our economic prosperity"  
By [YOUR NAME]

(750 words)

Sequestration threatens bipartisan, national priorities, which support economic growth and strengthen the safety and security of Americans in every state and community.

Congress needs to work together to find a balanced approach to deficit reduction that does not include further cuts to non-defense discretionary programs, such as GEAR UP.

Think about it: if America is to remain strong, secure, and competitive in the world, our students need training far more rigorous than that we experienced as children. A child in the third grade today will need advanced training in math, science, reading, and technology just to keep pace with children in Finland, India, and Japan. With the technological, scientific, and medical advances today, one can only imagine the demanding academic curriculum that awaits a child born five years from now.

No question about it: our students will have to set their sights high just to maintain the discipline needed to complete such rigorous program of learning. That's why Congress needs to protect and continue to support programs like GEAR UP or "Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs," which Congress created in 1998.

The key word is "Early." Unlike other efforts to improve academic achievement, GEAR UP begins working with students as early as middle school. GEAR UP doesn't just help the students for a year or two; it remains actively involved in their academic lives from middle school through the first year of college. The idea is to make low-income children aware of their potential – to open their eyes to opportunities and help them perform to their maximum ability.

GEAR UP doesn't work with just a few individual students. In a truly novel approach, the program focuses on entire classes of predominantly low-income children, many of them being first generation students. GEAR UP supports these children in and outside the classroom, getting parents, local business partners and community organizations involved in the children's education team.

This is a program that uses effective educational strategies and research-based program models. GEAR UP is gaining universal praise for its selectivity in building



upon strategies that have already proven themselves, and for its willingness to jettison those practices that haven't served students well.

One of the things that I like most about GEAR UP is that, for once, Washington has put its faith in parents and local school systems, not bureaucrats. With GEAR UP, local schools are given the flexibility to help each child perform to his or her fullest potential. Anybody who thinks students can be taught by remote control from Washington or [STATE CAPITAL] has been outside a classroom too long. Parents, teachers, guidance counselors and principals alike, desperately need for bureaucratic strings to be cut so our children can learn. This job has provided me with many opportunities to meet our local educators: the dedicated people who care about our students and who achieve miracles every day. What they need are adequate tools, not second-guessing from politicians and remote government agencies.

If children are to truly enhance their academic performance. However, it will take more than just parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and principals. This is a big job, and it takes a team to finish it: extended family, business and community groups, places of worship, virtually everybody who comes in contact with a youngster has to help set the framework, encourage him or her to aim high, and then be willing to help these students to achieve their dreams.

That's what is so unique about GEAR UP – it brings everyone to the table in the service of student achievement. GEAR UP recognizes that, if every child has the right to a quality education, none of us can afford to stand aside. Each one of us should get involved – no exceptions, no excuses. By bringing together community resources, families and educators, GEAR UP has the potential to make a real difference in the lives of our children. It really does so far more than 580 thousand youngsters all across America.

I encourage you to urge your Members of Congress to work together to find a balanced approach to deficit reduction that does not jeopardize the future prosperity of our country by cutting bipartisan, national priorities, which strengthen our communities and support economic growth. Progress such as GEAR UP really make a difference for low-income, minority and disadvantaged students in our communities, and each of us – elected officials, businesspeople, teachers, parents and community members – needs to “gear up” to provide our children a brighter future.

The author is the GEAR UP Director in [Your Grant Name Here] in [Your State Here].



## National GEAR UP Week Cheat Sheet

### Schools

#### FOCUS ON STUDENT DREAMS

National GEAR UP Week is a great opportunity to ask students to articulate and share their college and career aspirations. This creates momentum for our work and creates many formal and informal teachable moments. Create a **DREAM WALL** where students post their dreams; host a **BALLOON RELEASE**; or create a **DREAM CHAIN** in classrooms that create connections between students.

#### LEVERAGE SCHOOL-WIDE ACTIVITIES

Have a big, annual school-wide event planned? Implement it during GEAR UP Week and get extra bang for your buck. Host a **COLLEGE PEP RALLY**; have a college **SCAVENGER HUNT**; or host a **COLLEGE TRIVIA** competition. Get teachers and administrators telling their stories and sharing their experiences!

#### EMPOWER THE STUDENT VOICE

Help students find the power in their stories. Create a school-wide **#IHeartGEARUP CAMPAIGN** on social media; create a **VIDEO COMPETITION** about why college matters; have students write **LETTERS TO THEIR FUTURE-SELVES** about what they hope to achieve in school, college and beyond!

### Communities

#### ENGAGE THE COMMUNITY

Consider how your local and regional GEAR UP outreach and partnership work can be timed to coincide with National GEAR UP Week. Use the week to **REACH OUT TO FAMILIES** through workshops, dinners, and weekend programs; engage the **FAITH-BASED COMMUNITY** to provide workshops after service; or create a forum for **BUSINESS LEADERS** to discuss the importance of education.

#### SPREAD THE WORD ABOUT GEAR UP

It's imperative that the public understand the why and how we do what we do. Create a poster for **ORGANIZATIONS AND BUSINESSES** to show their support; work with your public relations office in your district or institution to **INVITE MEDIA COVERAGE** for your events; **WRITE AN OP-ED** in your local paper; send out a **PRESS RELEASE**.

#### GET PEOPLE TALKING

Too often we talk about education in abstract terms or in a national context. Help people get the local conversation by sharing research on the local situation and host a **DID YOU KNOW?** campaign on social media; have your students **CREATE A DOCUMENTARY**; and engage your **PUBLIC BROADCASTING** to illustrate local stories.

### Governments

#### SHOWCASE LOCAL ISSUES & LEADERS

As they say, all politics is local. GEAR UP Week is a great time to highlight your local needs, efforts, and position your leaders in visible ways to address issues of college readiness. Get GEAR UP on your **SCHOOLBOARD'S AGENDA**; host a forum between local **K12 & HIGHER EDUCATION** leaders to discuss shared challenges and opportunities; **INVITE YOUR MAYOR** to speak at your school events.

#### GET A CITY OR STATE PROCLAMATION

While there will be a national proclamation from the U.S. Congress and the Secretary of Education, get your local leaders involved and ask them to formally **PROCLAIM SEPTEMBER 23-29, 2018 GEARUPWEEK** in your city. Partner up with other GEAR UP programs in your state and get your governor to proclaim it statewide as well!

#### REACH OUT TO YOUR MEMBERS

Since your House and Senate members are the ones responsible for GEAR UP, we can't leave them out of the fun. Reach out and **INVITE YOUR MEMBERS TO SPEAK** at your rally or forum; have students **WRITE LETTERS OF APPRECIATION**; and encourage members to **PARTICIPATE IN YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA CAMPAIGN**.



**When is National GEAR UP Week?** \_\_\_\_\_ **Where Can I Find More Resources?** You can find toolkits, planning guides, and inspiration @ [www.edpartnerships.org](http://www.edpartnerships.org) **What Hashtags Should we be Using?** #GEARUPWorks / #IheartGEARUP/ #MyGEARUPstory

### GEAR UP Week Planning Sheet: Walk Through One Potential Activity

Goals (Your Desired Outcomes)	Audience (Who You Want to Affect)	Our Capacity (Your Known Assets, Partners, Strengths)
Activities (How You'll Achieve the Goal)	Milestones & Timeline (Key Requirements & When You'll Get It Done)	






## Planning Questions

1. **WHAT** Is our big, awesome, exciting main event for National GEAR UP Week?
2. What are our **TOP THREE GOALS** for this event?  
(Things like number of participants, number of media hits, participation by particular elected leaders, etc.)
3. **HOW** will we make National GEAR UP Week events happen? What are **KEY MILESTONES** or **TASKS**?  
(What sort of room do we need to get? Do we need helium?)
4. **WHO** are we inviting/encouraging/cajoling to participate?
5. What is our primary **MEDIA** outreach list? What are we going to send them and when?
6. **HOW** else are we going to publicize our event?
7. How will we **DOCUMENT** our event?  
(Who's taking the pictures and sending them to NCCEP?)



## ACTIVITIES

### Key

-  Student activity
-  Staff activity
-  All activity

### Family Night

Host a family event during GEAR UP week to get more information out about GEAR UP Nevada.

### School Announcements

Include fun facts about college in the daily announcements or on the school televisions.

### College Spirit Day



Have faculty, staff and students wear GEAR UP or college gear or colors. Have students write anything college-related on the sidewalks using chalk. Have college representatives available during lunch to talk to students.

**TIPS:** 1. If you have GEAR UP t-shirts, use this day to give them out.  
2. Have a college gear "drive," where community members can donate college clothing to be provided to students.

### Media Outreach



Inform local radio stations, television stations and newspapers about GEAR UP Week.

Highlight an event taking place at your school.

### Contact Your Leaders

**THANK YOU!**

Thank your Congressional delegates for supporting GEAR UP.

Get GEAR UP on your school board's agenda.

Host a forum for K-12 and higher education leaders.

Invite your mayor/governor to speak at a school event.

### "I Went to College" Signs

Have teachers, counselors and other school staff complete "I Went to College" signs and hang the signs next to their doors. Find a ready-to-use template [here](#).

### College Trivia

Give out college trivia sheets during lunch or advisory. Students with the most correct answers may receive a prize.

**TIPS:** 1. Make sure students do not have access to phones or computers!  
2. Keep the sheets to see what students typically know or don't know.

### College Pep Rally



Invite a guest speaker from a local college or the community to share their educational journey and why college is important. Reach out to past GEAR UP Nevada students and have them share their experiences with GEAR UP and college life.



## MORE ACTIVITIES

### Door Wars



Have students and teachers decorate their homeroom or advisory classroom doors with the college of their choice.

**TIPS:** 1. Consider additional prizes or bonus points. "Most Obscure College or University" or other categories can encourage students to choose colleges and universities unfamiliar to them.  
2. Ensure each group of decorators has access to necessary supplies, with the opportunity to print or make college logos and mascots.  
3. Contact local business that might be willing to donate prizes

### Community Partnerships



Send students out to businesses in the community to share information about the positive impact GEAR UP Nevada has on their lives. The Nevada GEAR UP Business Network Coordinator can assist you with this.

### Community Event



Bring together the school and community to learn more about GEAR UP and get involved to develop the college-going culture beyond the school walls.

Combine the event with parent teacher conferences or a school activity. Invite elected officials to talk about the importance of higher education.

### Dream Wall



Cover a classroom or hallway wall with paper and place a large GEAR UP Nevada logo in the center with "Our GEAR UP Dreams" underneath. Ask students to write their academic, professional, and personal goals on the wall.

Send a picture of your students next to the sign to your Congressional delegates.

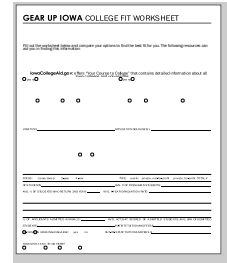
### Games



Prepare an interactive slide show and/or game board and split students into teams and enjoy a friendly quiz show.

Give out college application bingo cards during lunch or advisory.

### College Share-and-tell



Have students reach out to a college of their choice and request materials. Open the materials as a class or group and share the received information.

Also, have students fill out a [college fit worksheet](#) and share their findings with their classmates.



## COLLEGE TRIVIA

1. In what city is the main campus of Western Nevada College located?
2. What type of college can you attend to earn an Associate's Degree?
3. In what athletic conference do the Rebels (UNLV) and the Wolf Pack (UNR) Play?
4. Which Nevada community college has dorms?
5. What is the name of the standardized test you should take in order to get into a Nevada university?
6. How many Nevada System of Higher Education (NSHE) institutions are there?
7. College students go to class every day, 8 hours per day. True or False?
8. Name two things the "Cost of Attendance" includes.
9. What is the Governor Guinn Millennium Scholarship?
10. What is the average cost of books and supplies per year for a college student?
11. Who is your designated NV GEAR UP First year College Advisor (FYCA)?
12. What financial aid award must be paid back?
13. What do you call a monetary award that is not a part of FAFSA, and it does not have to be paid back?
14. What is the only state college in Nevada?
15. A letter written by a third party for a student applying for college admission to put in a "good word" for them is a \_\_\_\_\_.
16. The federal financial aid application a college student completes to receive grants, work study and/or student loans is called the \_\_\_\_\_.
17. Which NSHE institution has the most students?
18. Where is Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC) located?
19. What is the name of a financial aid offer a college student may be eligible for in which the college provides a job while attending?
20. What do the Rebels and the Wolf Pack battle for on the football field each year?





## COLLEGE TRIVIA ANSWER KEY

1. Carson City
2. Community College
3. Mountain West
4. Great Basin College (GBC)
5. ACT
6. 7
7. False
8. Tuition and Fees (Optional: housing, meal plan, parking)
9. A \$1,000 scholarship offered by the state of Nevada for students who meet the criteria
10. \$1,100
11. \*Dependent on school
12. Loan
13. Scholarship
14. Nevada State College (NSC)
15. A letter of recommendation/reference
16. FAFSA
17. College of Southern Nevada (CSN) has over 4,000 active students
18. Reno
19. Work Study
20. The Cannon



**STOP!**  
**WHAT IS YOUR**  
**COLLEGE AND**  
**CAREER PLAN?**

*Astronaut*

*Science Teacher*

*Electrical Engineer*

*Musician*

*Firefighter*

**I DREAM BIG.**

*Be in the WNBA*

*Pediatrician*

*Nurse*

*Zoologist*

*President of the United States*

*Chef*

*Artist*

*Diesel Mechanic*

*Ballerina*

*Defense Attorney*

Share your  
plan at  
[facebook.com/  
nvgearup](https://facebook.com/nvgearup)



**This guide was developed by Nevada State GEAR UP and is an adaptation of the Iowa GEAR UP and Oregon GEAR UP programs' advocacy toolkits, and the National Council for Community Education Partnerships NCCEP/GEAR UP Resource Guide and Effective Advocacy Toolkit.**

The contents of this publication was developed under a grant from the Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.