Procedures for CUWMA Advocacy Letters

The Issue
The Consortium is often asked to write its own position statement or advocacy letter or is asked to endorse a letter written by another organization to a local or regional government regarding proposed legislation or regulation. Present policy requires that the issue in question affect more than one member institution, and that the federal universities are ineligible to advocate or lobby. Present policy also requires there be unanimity among affected member institutions for the Consortium to do so. Recently, several proposals have differential effects making unanimity difficult at best. We propose that the Consortium have the flexibility to weigh in on such issues making clear which member institutions are being represented if necessary.

Background
From the beginning of its political and policy advocacy work, the Consortium has had a practice of not weighing in on an issue unless there is unanimity among the members as to the position being proposed. Recently, both the DC City Council and various state legislatures have introduced bills and resolutions and/or the respective jurisdictions have promulgated draft regulations that affect CUWMA member institutions differentially. For example, some proposals specifically target certain sectors (e.g., only community colleges only those institutions in a particular jurisdiction, only those institutions above a certain threshold number of employees, etc.), or certain institutions have more complicated relationships in play due to direct appropriations. In these cases, even if a majority of members support taking a particular position, the Consortium sits the issue out. Although that practice had little consequence in the past, such non-action is no longer viewed as benign but rather an indication that the Consortium does not care or have a substantive opinion on the issue. We are concerned that this newer interpretation could damage the Consortium's ability to engage in further conversation on an issue later in the process.

Revised Proposed Procedure
To address this growing concern, we propose the following process:

1. All institutions eligible to engage in advocacy on the issue will be polled to establish whether a majority believe the Consortium support (or do not object to) advocating a particular position on the issue. For purposes of this polling, a nonresponse from an institution will be interpreted as not opposing taking a position. Additionally, this polling will usually occur only once per issue.

2. Establish which member institutions are affected by the issue or are not affected but wish to participate in the dialogue, and attempt to arrive at a consensus advocacy position that reflects their interests to be advocated. This group will constitute the core working group for the duration of the need for advocacy on the issue.
3. If consensus is achieved, complete the writing of the advocacy document and submit under the name of the Consortium. If a consensus position is not achieved, the Consortium will not weigh in as an organization on the matter.

4. The procedures and processes described here in no way limit any individual Consortium member from advocating on the issue.

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