



Leading with Impact:

**Using Economic Impact Analysis
to Strengthen Your Advocacy**

A Practical Guide for Government Relations, Public
Policy, and Advocacy Professionals.

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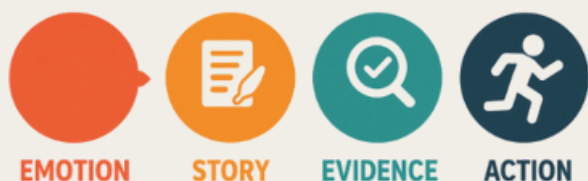
Module 1

WHY PROOF MATTERS



In today's policy environment, emotion and storytelling alone no longer move the needle. Policymakers operate in a landscape saturated with opinions, so the true differentiator is data. Economic impact analysis (EIA) elevates advocacy from narrative to evidence, grounding your message in quantifiable outcomes that lawmakers can use. This transforms your priorities into defensible, credible positions that are far harder to dismiss.

That said, the narrative still matters. Storytelling creates context, frames relevance, and humanizes the impact. When paired with credible data, your narrative becomes a compelling case for action.



A critical challenge for many government affairs teams is the reliance on one-size-fits-all economic impact numbers. Broad statewide figures may sound impressive, but they rarely resonate with congressional representatives, state

officials, or county leaders who are accountable to a specific constituency. Effective advocacy requires a sharper lens that meets policymakers where they are and reflects the realities of the communities they serve.

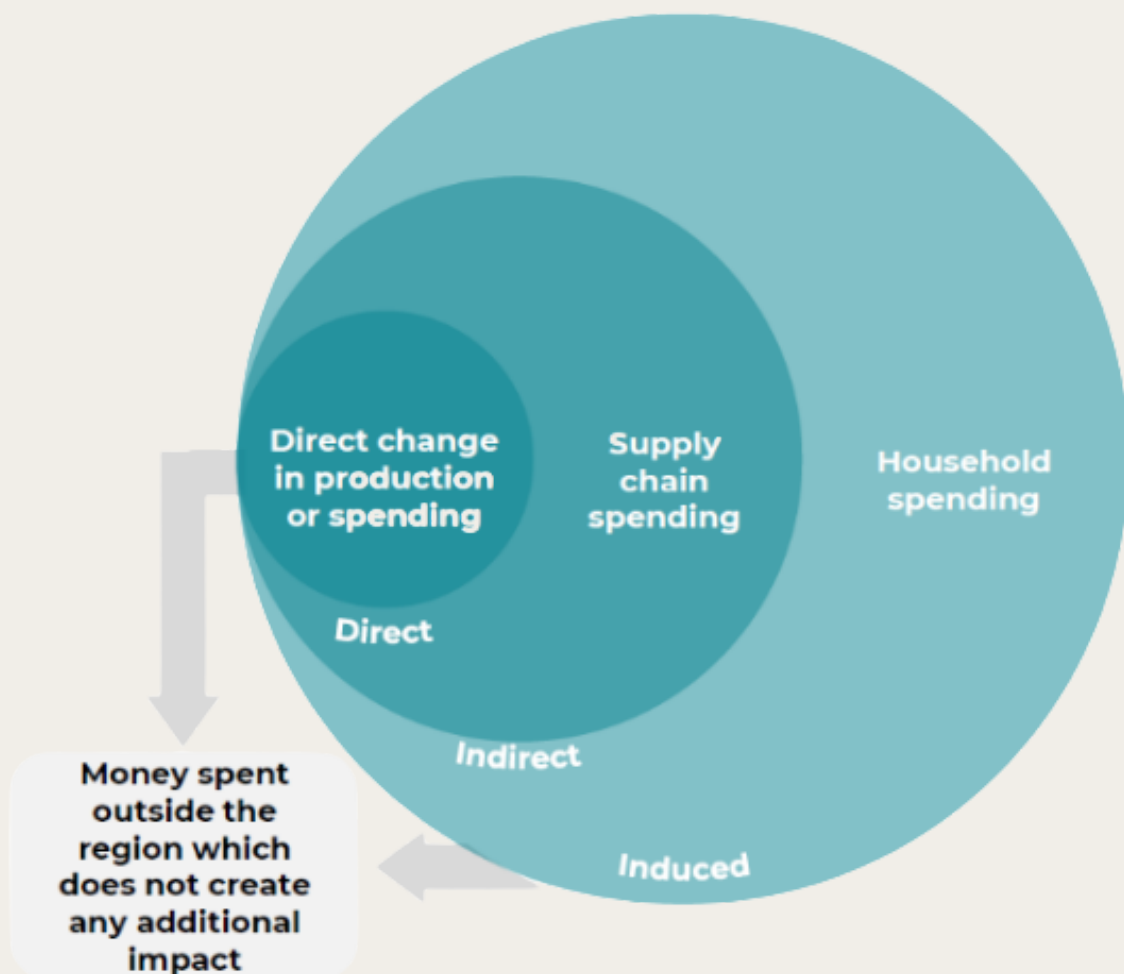
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Module 2

ECONOMIC IMPACT 101: THE FOUNDATION OF QUANTIFIED INFLUENCE

Economic impact analysis measures how spending, investment, or activity ripples through an economy. Direct impacts represent immediate spending or employment generated by a project or program (many organizations stop here, missing two thirds of their impact). Indirect impacts capture supply-chain effects as local businesses respond to new demand. Induced impacts account for household spending by employees supported by the project.

Unlike ROI or cost-benefit studies, EIA focuses on how money moves through communities, highlighting total jobs supported, wages paid, and output generated.



Key Takeaway: Policymakers respond to tangible outcomes—jobs, wages, taxes.

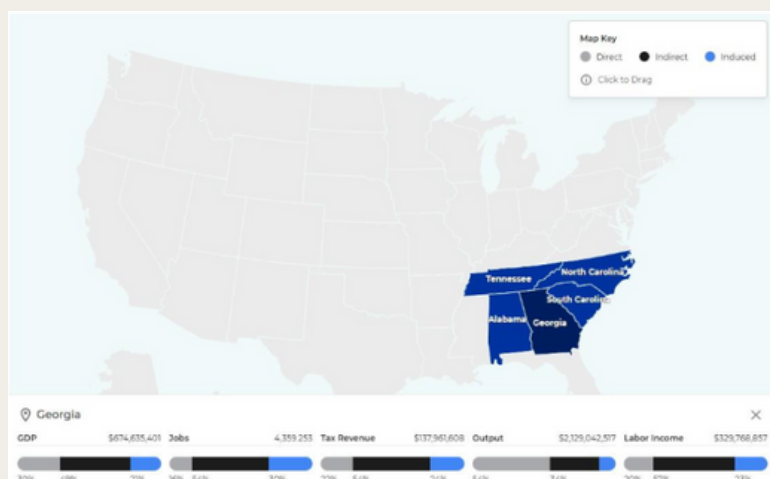
Module 3

THE IMPORTANCE OF GEOGRAPHIC SPECIFICITY

Policymakers don't govern abstract economies, they represent specific communities. That's why broad statewide numbers, while useful for high-level framing, rarely create the level of urgency or relevance needed to influence decision-makers. Effective advocacy demands geographic precision.

When you meet with a representative from North Carolina's 8th District, the conversation changes the moment you can demonstrate exactly how your operations support jobs, GDP, labor income, and tax revenue within that district. Generic statewide impacts may sound impressive, but they don't answer the question every elected official is ultimately accountable for: "What does this mean for my constituents?"

Geographic detail also helps clarify the full footprint of your organization. Economic impact extends well beyond your direct operations. Your vendors, suppliers, and service providers generate ripple effects across local economies as they respond to your demand. Those workers, in turn, spend their earnings at local businesses. These layers, indirect and induced effects, illustrate how your presence supports economic activity across multiple communities, not just the location of your headquarters or primary facility.



High-performing government affairs teams build their analysis workflows to operate at two speeds:

- *Rapid, district-specific snapshots for day-to-day meetings and stakeholder touchpoints.*
- *Comprehensive, multi-layered reports for major policy moments, hearings, and strategic engagements.*

This dual capability converts broad corporate messaging into localized economic stories that resonate with policymakers, strengthen credibility across districts, and accelerate traction in legislative conversations.

In short, geographic specificity is a strategic advantage. It aligns your advocacy with the realities policymakers manage every day and ensures your message lands exactly where it matters most.

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Module 4

THE ADVOCATE'S CHALLENGE: COMPETING FOR CREDIBILITY

Advocacy today is a crowded marketplace of claims. Organizations across every sector assert their role in job creation, investment, and community benefit. Lawmakers hear these messages on a constant loop. The challenge isn't that policymakers doubt impact exists; it's that most messages arrive sounding interchangeable.

What separates serious advocacy efforts from background noise is the ability to demonstrate why a claim should be trusted. Effective advocates build credibility intentionally, moving from narrative to evidence through a structured progression: storytelling → logic → quantified proof.

CREDIBILITY LADDER



Storytelling: Creating Initial Connection

A clear, human-centered narrative remains essential. Storytelling helps policymakers understand the context of your work and the people or communities affected by it. It establishes relevance, but on its own, it cannot sustain attention in an environment where every organization has a compelling story.

Logic: Clarify Economic Outcomes

Once a narrative establishes interest, advocates must articulate the operational logic behind their claims. This means clarifying how organizational activities translate into broader community or economic outcomes. Logical framing demonstrates discipline, transparency, and a grounded understanding of the mechanisms that drive impact.

Quantified Proof: Delivering Verifiable Credibility

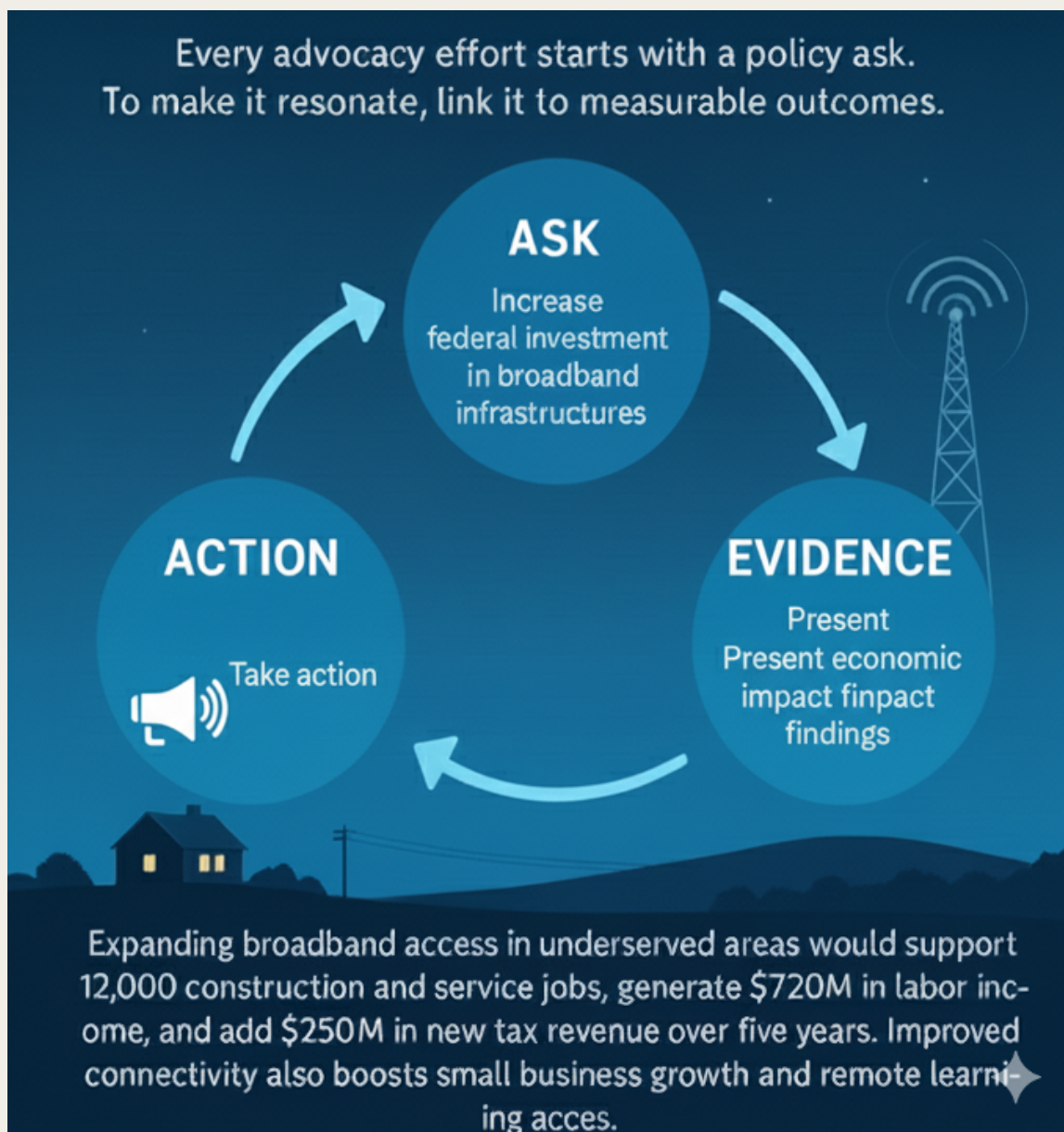
The top tier of the credibility ladder is measurable evidence. Quantified economic impact transforms assertions into decision-grade inputs. It provides lawmakers with numbers they can cite, defend, and rely on when evaluating policy tradeoffs. This is where advocacy shifts from persuasion to influence, where claims become verifiable contributions.



TURNING POLICY GOALS INTO MEASURABLE NARRATIVES

ASK → EVIDENCE → ACTION

Advocacy begins by articulating a focused, outcome-oriented policy ask. In the below example, a rural EDC is asking for increased federal funding for broadband infrastructure expansion into underserved areas. But the ask alone isn't enough. To resonate, it must be paired with evidence that quantifies what the investment delivers.



Evidence: Show the Economic and Community Payoff

The impact analysis provides a proof point. By modeling the downstream effects of broadband expansion, construction activity, service-sector demand, labor income, tax revenue, and household-level benefits, advocates can convert a policy request into a measurable value proposition.

For example:

- 12,000 jobs supported, including construction, engineering, and service roles
- \$720M in labor income generated, strengthening household stability and local spending
- Increased access for small businesses, remote workers, students, and healthcare users

These figures transform broadband expansion from a general infrastructure priority into a strategic economic growth lever.

Action: Deliver the Narrative Where Decisions Are Made

Share the economic impact findings with policymakers, legislative staff, economic development leaders, chambers of commerce, and community organizations. Position the analysis as a decision-support tool that demonstrates how broadband investment:

- Strengthens local and regional economies through job creation and higher wages
- Enhances workforce participation, particularly in rural and underserved areas
- Improves business continuity and competitiveness for small enterprises
- Expands access to education, healthcare, and remote learning, closing structural gaps

By presenting quantified outcomes alongside the policy, advocates create a narrative that is both compelling and defensible, balancing emotion, logic, and data in a way that accelerates policymaker alignment.

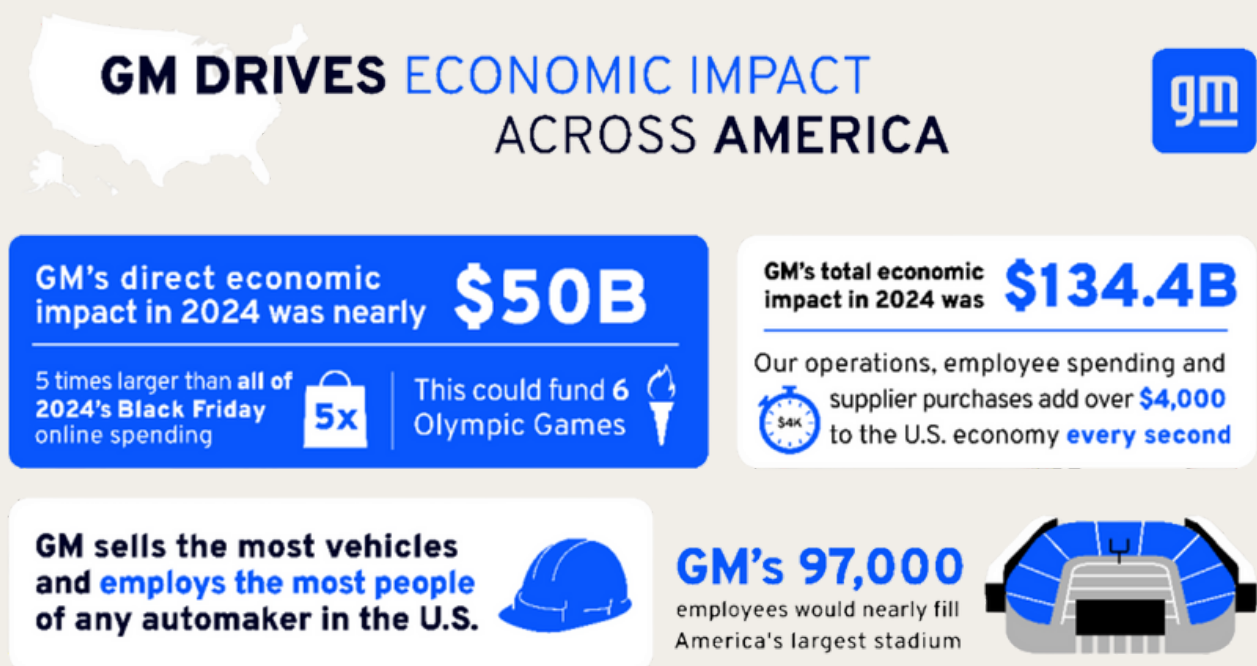




Module 6

CASE STUDIES: ADVOCACY POWERED BY ECONOMIC IMPACT

Case 1 - General Motors: Economic Impact Across America



August 2025 study by General Motors' Global Economics & Industry Analysis Team using IMPLAN and 2024 internal General Motors expenditure data. References are for illustrative purposes only and do not imply affiliation or endorsement by any third party.

The report highlights General Motors as a foundational driver of the U.S. economy, underscoring a scale of impact that extends well beyond manufacturing. In 2024 alone, GM contributed nearly \$50 billion directly to U.S. GDP, more than 25% of the entire auto industry's contribution, and supported one in every ten American autoworkers. When accounting for supplier activity and employee spending, GM's total economic footprint reached \$134 billion, reinforcing its role as a critical engine of national economic activity.

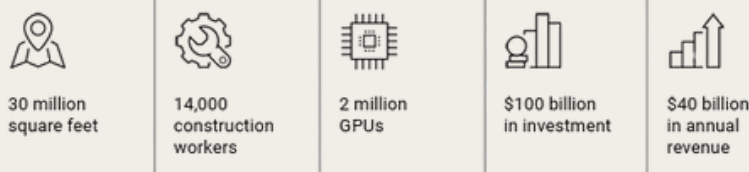
The analysis also emphasizes GM's long-term investment thesis in the United States. Since 2020, the company has invested \$60 billion domestically, strengthening manufacturing capacity, advancing workforce development, and reinforcing job security across communities. Targeted investments, including \$242 million in skilled trades apprenticeships and significant capital deployed at facilities like Parma Metal Center, translate into durable economic stability for employees, their families, and surrounding regions.



Finally, the report positions GM as deeply embedded in the fabric of everyday American life. With more than 85% of the U.S. population living within 10 miles of a GM dealership and millions relying on GM vehicles daily, the company's impact is both national in scale and local in execution. As GM enters a new chapter with its Detroit headquarters, the message is clear: sustained investment, community integration, and long-term economic leadership remain core to the company's strategy moving forward.

Case 2 - OpenAI: Economic Returns on US Investment in Democratic AI

For the economic impacts of construction of one SGW data center:



For the annual economic impacts of operations for a single SGW data center:



⁹ OpenAI internal analysis

¹⁰ OpenAI internal analysis

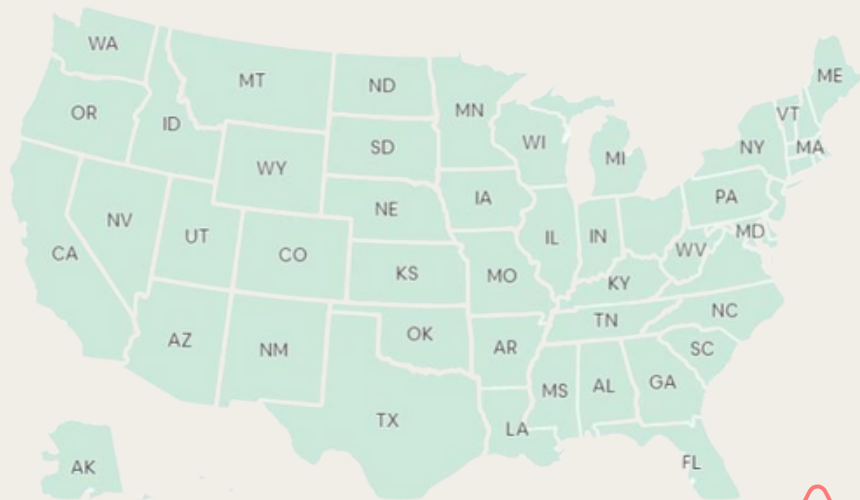
The OpenAI report shows that large-scale AI data centers generate significant economic activity for the regions where they are built. These projects support thousands of jobs during construction and create long-term, high-skill roles in operations, engineering, and energy management. In addition to direct employment, data center investments drive indirect and induced impacts across construction, utilities, professional services, and local businesses.

Once operational, AI data centers contribute billions of dollars to regional GDP by anchoring high-value economic activity and strengthening local supply chains. As long-term infrastructure assets, they help attract complementary industries, support workforce development, and deliver sustained economic benefits that extend well beyond the initial build phase.

Case 3 - Airbnb: Public Policy

See Airbnb's economic impact in each state

🔍 Select state



IMPLAN calculation process was used to estimate the economic impact of Airbnb in the US for 2023



Guests on Airbnb generated \$80B in local spending.

In 2023, guests on Airbnb reported they spent an estimated \$210 per day during their trip and approximately 40 percent of their spending was in the neighborhood of their listing. In total, guests who traveled on Airbnb generated more than \$80 billion in visitor spending last year by supporting local small businesses, restaurants, transportation and other establishments.

Guest spending also generated more than \$24 billion in taxes, including more than \$2.2 billion in tourism related taxes collected and remitted by Airbnb on behalf of Hosts. Since 2014, Airbnb has worked with cities and towns around the world to help Hosts pay their fair share of tourism taxes and support a vital source of funding for local governments.





Module 7

COLLECTING INTERNAL DATA FOR ECONOMIC IMPACT ANALYSIS

For large corporations with global operations and complex supply chains, the power of your economic impact analysis depends entirely on the quality, scope, and organization of your internal data inputs. This section outlines the core data categories, internal systems, and departments to engage when building a robust dataset.

Key Data Categories

To run a comprehensive impact model, collect data across five pillars:

1. Employment & Payroll

- Total headcount (full-time, part-time, and contractors).
- Annual labor income (wages, salaries, and benefits).
- Location of employees by site, region, or country.
- Contact: HR Analytics, Workforce Planning, or People Operations.

2. Operations & Expenditures

- Annual operating expenses by category (materials, logistics, services, utilities).
- Facility-level spending and capital maintenance projects.
- Contact: Plant Controllers, FP&A, or Corporate Finance.

3. Supply Chain & Procurement

- Vendors spend by region, sector, or NAICS/industry code.
- Tier 1 and Tier 2 supplier list with total annual spend.
- Local vs. international sourcing ratios.
- Contact: Procurement, Supply Chain, or Strategic Sourcing teams.

4. Capital Projects & Investment

- Major capital expenditures (R&D, facilities, equipment).
- Location and timing of investment spend.
- Contact: Finance, Corporate Development, or Engineering PMOs.



5. Taxes & Community Contributions

- Corporate income, property, payroll, and sales taxes by jurisdiction.
- Charitable giving, local sponsorships, and community investment.
- Contact: Tax Department, Government Affairs, or CSR/ESG team.

Recommended Internal Data Sources

- ERP / Finance Systems (SAP, Oracle, NetSuite) for spend and capital data.
- HRIS Systems (Workday, SuccessFactors, ADP) for employment and payroll metrics.
- Procurement Platforms (Ariba, Coupa, Jaggaer) for supplier and vendor data.
- Sustainability Platforms (OneTrust, Sphera, ESG dashboards) for emissions/resource metrics.
- Investor Relations / ESG Reports for validated and public disclosures.

Global Data Normalization Tips

- Convert all currencies to a common standard (USD recommended).
- Tag spending and headcount by region.
- Classify suppliers consistently (NAICS or ISIC codes).
- Retain granularity, avoid over-aggregating across regions or sectors.

Common Pitfalls

- Using budgeted data instead of actual spend data.
- Aggregating too broadly across regions, diluting local details.
- Excluding contract labor or indirect supply relationships.

Data Collection Template

Find the Data Collection Template [linked here](#) as a resource.





Module 8

DEFENDING YOUR IMPACT STUDY

Every credible study invites scrutiny. Be transparent about your data sources and assumptions to reinforce trust and authority.

Policymakers, legislative staff, auditors, journalists, and opposing stakeholders are trained to probe assumptions, challenge methodologies, and test the validity of economic claims. This isn't hostility, it's governance. Anticipate this scrutiny and see it as a chance to strengthen their case, not a risk.

This chapter outlines how to prepare, present, and protect your analysis so it holds up under questioning and reinforces, rather than undermines, your credibility.

IMPLAN strengthens this transparency by serving as a credible third-party platform with standardized methods, documented data inputs, and a replicable modeling framework that stakeholders can independently understand and evaluate.

Transparency Is the Foundation of Trust

The most common mistake advocates make when defending an impact study is overconfidence. Overselling results or obscuring assumptions may feel like protection, but it often has the opposite effect. Policymakers don't expect perfection. They expect clarity.

Defensible studies are built on transparency:

- Clearly defined scopes and geographies
- Explicit assumptions
- Documented data sources
- Consistent methodology

When these elements are visible, questions become manageable. When they're hidden, even valid findings can appear suspect.

A useful rule of thumb: If someone asked you to recreate the study six months from now, could you do it with the documentation you've retained?



Know the Questions Before They're Asked

Experienced advocates prepare for scrutiny long before a meeting begins. Certain questions surface repeatedly, regardless of issue area or jurisdiction. Anticipating them allows you to respond confidently and concisely, without derailing the conversation.

Common questions include:

- What geography does this cover, and why?
- What data did you use, and from what time period?
- Are these direct jobs or total jobs supported?
- How does this differ from economic output or ROI?
- What would change if the policy weren't enacted?

The strongest responses don't overwhelm with detail. They reinforce that the analysis was intentionally designed to match the policy context and decision at hand.

Be Precise With Economic Language

One of the fastest ways to lose credibility is by blurring economic terms. Policymakers and staff may not be economists, but many have been trained to spot vague or inflated claims.

Clear distinctions matter:

- Jobs supported versus jobs created
- Annual impacts versus multi-year impacts
- Output versus labor income versus value added
- Modeled estimates versus observed results

Precision strengthens your case. It signals discipline, professionalism, and respect for the decision-making process.

Address Assumptions Directly (Not Defensively)

Every economic model relies on assumptions. Attempting to minimize or hide them raises red flags. Addressing them calmly builds trust.



When assumptions are questioned:

- Explain why they were chosen
- Clarify whether they are conservative, standard, or scenario-based
- Emphasize consistency with accepted economic modeling practices

Well-prepared advocates often find that openly discussing assumptions increases confidence in the results rather than diminishing them.

Separate the Analysis From the Ask

A defensible impact study stands on its own, even when people disagree with the policy implications.

This separation is critical:

- The analysis explains what happens economically
- The policy ask explains what should be done

Reaffirm the role of the analysis as a decision-support tool. This distinction protects the integrity of the data and prevents it from being dismissed as advocacy math.

Use Sensitivity and Scenarios Strategically

Do not rely on a single number. Prepare ranges, scenarios, or comparisons that show how outcomes change under different conditions.

This approach:

- Demonstrates analytical maturity
- Reduces risk of being boxed into a single estimate
- Helps policymakers understand tradeoffs rather than fixate on precision

Scenario-based framing is especially effective in uncertain policy environments, where flexibility and foresight matter more than point estimates.

Treat Scrutiny as an Asset, Not a Threat

When your analysis is questioned (and you can answer clearly) you earn something more valuable than agreement: trust.



Over time, organizations that consistently deliver transparent, defensible economic impact analysis develop a reputation for reliability. Their numbers are cited more often. Their perspectives are sought earlier. Their policy asks face less friction.

They become known not just for advocating, but for informing.

A strong impact study doesn't avoid scrutiny, but withstands it. By designing your analysis for transparency, precision, and repeatability, you turn questions into validation and skepticism into credibility.



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