Communicating with Congress Successfully
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AGENDA

1. Refresher on why your advocacy matters
2. Review of how Congress works
3. Rundown of Advocacy Tools and Communication Tips
4. Reminder: All Politics are Local!
Refresher on Why Your Advocacy Matters
WHY YOUR ADVOCACY MATTERS

• Legislators care about what constituents think, and YOU are the experts in your industry with important expertise to share

• Legislators can be more helpful if they are armed with information; be a resource for them on industry issues

• Successful advocacy requires strong relationships with legislators.
CONGRESS WANTS TO HEAR FROM THEIR CONSTITUENTS

“Congress cares what constituents think.”
- Public Opinion

“Staying in touch with constituents.”
- Member of Congress Opinion

Source: Congressional Management Foundation
Why? Communicating with Congress is a Crowded Space

- Rise in citizen and corporate advocacy

- By some estimates, Congress receives well over 100 million letters and emails a year. (Doesn’t include phone calls or social media posts!)

- There are over 2,700 national associations with DC offices, 600 advocacy groups and 4,500 business PACs...

- Last Congress 15,000 bills were introduced, but only 344 laws were enacted
Congress has Limited Resources

The size of the congressional support staff has declined over time.

Number of Staff

Year


Total Combined Staff of CRS, GAO, & CBO
What’s the solution?

• Use diverse advocacy tools and communicate effectively to have your message stand out from the crowd.

• Be prepared to be patient and persistent.
Review of How Congress Works
The Structure of Congress

- 435 Representatives and 100 Senators
- Senators elected to 6-year terms and Representatives are elected to 2-year terms
- Each body sets their own rules for operating within the confines of the US Constitution
- Each Member of Congress has a full-time staff, committee assignments and access to resources like the Congressional Research Service
Making a Bill into a Public Law

1. Requires both the House and Senate to pass the bill and resolve any differences
2. The President must sign the legislation into law or veto
3. After passage, most implementation starts at the agency level and smaller technical issues are sorted out by executive branch appointees

Avenues for advocacy throughout this process.
Committees of the House and Senate

• The House and Senate do not have the same committee or subcommittee structure
• 16 Permanent Committees in the Senate and 20 in the House of Representatives
• Key Healthcare Committees:
  • Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee
  • Senate Finance Committee
  • House Ways and Means Committee
  • House Energy and Commerce Committee
  • House Education and Labor Committee
• Process: Hearing, Markup Session, Clean Bill, Report Out
• **Avenues for advocacy**: hearings, technical language suggestions, markup, and meetings with subcommittee or committee leadership

The Legislative Process
A Quick Review

How a Bill Becomes a Law

1. Introduced, Clerk Assigned Member
2. Drafted
3. Committee Hearing
4. Sub Committee and Full Committee Mark Up
5. Reported Out
6. Calendared
7. Floor Reading Debate Amendments
8. Full Vote

Senate

9. Engrossed Bill
10. Conference Committee Vote by Houses
11. Signed by President
12. Enrolled Bill to President
13. Veto
14. 2/3 Vote Congress Override
15. Law

House of Representatives
Key Takeaways

1. Members of Congress want to hear your voice, learn about the issues affecting your profession and want to be helpful

2. The process can be confusing, archaic and slow, but you do not need to be a Congressional procedure expert to be effective

3. Every step in the legislative process is an opportunity for you to advocate

4. Look for help and reach out to the experts at your association

5. Never give up, there is always an avenue for advocacy
Tip 1: Remember the Golden Rules of Advocacy

a. Build Relationships

b. Establish Yourself as a Trusted Source

c. Communicate Your Policy Message Effectively
a. Building Strong Relationships

• Understand who you are interacting with
  ➢ Does this person/entity have the power to take action on my issue?
  ➢ What is important to this person, and does it align with what is important to me?

• Build relationships right
  ➢ Find a way to make a personal connection
  ➢ Be authentic and transparent
  ➢ Make sure the relationship is two-way
  ➢ Follow-up!
b. Establishing Yourself as a Trusted Source

• Do your research.

• Maintain a reputable presence online.

• Contribute to your community or cause.

• Share your professional status & expertise

➢ Consider this 2019 Public Affairs Council survey of Congress:
c. Communicate Your Policy Message Effectively

- Show AND tell
- Use a combination of facts and storytelling
Tip 2: Utilize Multiple Advocacy Tools

1.) In-person or virtual meetings
   • Offices, site-visits, town halls, council meetings

2.) Emails/letter writing campaigns

5.) Social media campaigns

6.) Media
   • op-eds, Letter to the Editors, local radio or TV

7.) Legislative Days
   (Gathering a group of advocates to visit legislatives offices at the same time to share the same message)

8.) Events
If your Member/Senator has not already arrived at a firm decision on an issue, how much influence might the following advocacy strategies directed to the Washington office have on his/her decision?

- In-Person Issue Visits from Constituents: 94%
- Contact from Constituents' Reps: 94%
- Individualized Email Messages: 92%
- Individualized Postal Letters: 88%
- Local Editorial Referencing Issue Pending: 87%
- Comments During Telephone Town Hall: 87%
- Phone Calls: 84%
- Letter to the Editor Referencing Your Boss: 84%
- Visit From a Lobbyist: 83%
- Form Email Messages: 56%

- A Lot of Positive Influence
- Some Positive Influence

Congressional Management Foundation Survey
Making the most out of your meeting
Key 1: Know who’s who:

- **Chief of Staff (CoS):** Typically runs the office, manages the staff, and serves as the primary advisor.
- **Press Secretary/Communications Director:** Manages the member’s media relations and public communications.
- **Executive Assistant/Scheduler:** Manages the member’s official schedule and travel.
- **Legislative Director (LD):** Supervises the legislative staff and operations of the office.
- **Legislative Assistant (LA):** Handles legislative/policy issues in a select number of issue areas.
- **Legislative Correspondent (LC):** Drafts responses to all constituent generated legislative mail and supports work of LAs in tracking legislation.
Key 2: Know the format for an effective Meeting

• Introduce yourself
  o Don’t assume they know who you are or what you do.
  o Introduce them to your association, your industry and to you.

• Be professional
  o Be on time for your meetings.

• Be flexible
  o You may be on time but the Member may be delayed due to votes. Roll with it.
  o Standing in the hall for meetings is not uncommon. Sometimes it is the only space available.
Key 3: Set the tone

• Be brief, but make your case
  o Start positive. Stay positive.
  o Demonstrate knowledge of the member’s positions, committees, etc.
  o Connect issues to the district, if possible.
  o Be passionate and be succinct

• Be prepared
  o Assign roles: have a spokesperson, a storyteller and a question answerer.
  o Get comfortable with the talking points.
  o Don’t feel like you need to know the answer to every question

• Use storytelling
Key 4: Relationships again!

• Engage with congressional staff
  o You may be scheduled to meet with a staffer, or you may have to meet with one at the last minute.
  o Staffers are valuable resources for keeping your issue in front of legislators.

• Build a long-term relationship
  o Make a memorable connection (talk about the district, if possible).
  o Say “thank you” – in whatever way you can.

• Follow-up!!
Follow-Up Tips

- Writing a thank you to the lawmaker and their staff
- Take a virtual picture or post on social media about your meeting
- Inform your organization about the meeting
- Email with the legislative staffer and connect them to your organization’s lobbyist
- Subscribe to the lawmaker’s newsletter, Facebook, and Twitter accounts
- Make a note in your calendar to follow up in two weeks
Site Visits (Virtual or in-person)

Long-term site visits have a big impact
- Make it memorable (tools of trade, etc.)
- Map out what you want to show, who will talk about it

Considerations
- Invitation/scheduling process
- Choosing the right site
- Making sure all involved are prepped on issues,
- Compliance, etc
Figure 3 | Changes In Frequency of Remote Communications Practices

Compared to the months prior to the COVID-19 crisis, has your Senator/Representative done more of, less of, or about the same number of the following activities in the past two months?

- Video conferences with constituents: 65%
- Telephone conference calls with constituents: 57%
- Telephone town hall meetings: 47%
- Online/video town hall meetings: 44%
- Updating the Member’s/Senator’s website: 37%

(n=100-110)
Note: "Don’t Know/Does Not Apply" responses were excluded.
Tips for virtual meetings

1. Choose simple, practical tech
   • Having bright, direct light and clear sound can make your presentation stand out
   • Seconds count more in virtual- don’t be late!

2. Prepare & practice:
   • Using the tech
   • Create a schedule & assign spokespeople
   • Always have a constituent in the group

3. Be even more thoughtful about your messaging
   • Be compassionate (relationship building)
   • Be concise and clear; consider visuals
   • MAKE THE ASK
Using social media to communicate with Congress
PERCENT OF MEMBERS WHO POSTED ON OFFICIAL TWITTER, FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM & YOUTUBE ACCOUNTS IN 2018

95% of Senate

97% of House

70% of Senate

50% of House

100% of Senate

99% of House

93% of Senate

84% of House

Source: Quorum Analytics
Use social media to:

• Research members of Congress
• Build relationships
• Supplement other advocacy efforts
Social media tips

1. Know the mechanics
   • Use tags & hashtags!
   • Don’t start a tweet with @
   • Remember character limits on Twitter v Facebook & Instagram
   • Remember that Tweets can’t be edited once posted

2. Decide the purpose of your post
   • Relationship building
   • Education
   • Request

3. Be positive & maintain a reputable presence online

4. Be visual

5. Use storytelling
Dr Joel Schlessinger
@DrSchlessinger

On Capitol Hill lobbying for lower drug prices via transparency for Pharmacy Benefits Managers with Sen Deb Fischer S 637! Thanks for representing NE so well! Anything we can do to lower drug prices is a good deal @senatordebfischer #aadaonthehill #lovelyskin #drjoelschlessinger

Suzanne Olbricht
@SuzanneOlbricht

Thank you @chelliepingree for working hard for Maine CD1. We discussed access and cost of medications today. With @MDKev for #AADAontheHill. #aadmember
Remember: All Politics Are Local
Local Advocacy Matters

• State / local legislation and regulation often has greater influence on lives and business

• State / local issues move at a much faster pace

• It’s more likely to have a connection and be able to build a relationship with a state / local policymakers
Local Advocacy Avenues

Pro-tip: Local governance authority varies from location to location, as do names. Research the best target for your issue. [https://www.usa.gov/local-governments](https://www.usa.gov/local-governments)

1.) Cities/municipalities
   - Mayors
   - City Councils
   - Boards
   - Regulations
   - **Ballots**

2.) Counties
   - Boards, commissions, councils
   - Regulations
Local Advocacy Matters: Case Study

**Tobacco 21**

- In 2005, Needham, Massachusetts became the 1st city to pass legislation raising the tobacco age to 21.

- Eventually, over 530 cities & counties passed Tobacco 21 legislation...including New York City in 2013

- In 2015, Hawaii became the first state to pass Tobacco 21

- As of 2018, 6 states had passed Tobacco 21

- In 2019, that number jumped to 19

- On December 20, 2019, federal legislation was signed into law raising the minimum legal sales age from 18 to 21 nationwide.
Advocacy is about policies, not politics

- Policies impact daily life
- Advocacy is happening all the time, whether you take part in it or not.

People often say, with pride, 'I'm not interested in politics.' They might as well say, 'I'm not interested in my standard of living, my health, my job, my rights, my freedoms, my future or any future... If we mean to keep any control over our world and lives, we must be interested in politics.

- Martha Gellhorn -
Thank you!!

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