



Association Member Engagement

Every association public affairs professional asks, “How do I get my members to engage more?” Here are some often-overlooked strategies to keep in mind when asking for member involvement and support:

1. **Keep your messaging simple.** Adjust your perspective and communications strategy to meet your members where they are. Remember that issues that directly affect your members’ bottom line result in more active engagement. By putting yourself in their shoes, you’ll be able to present information that they can more easily digest and use. Stay away from “D.C.-speak” and focus on what they need to know.
2. **Be judicious and deliberate in your communications.** You don’t want your members to ignore your messages because they are constantly being bombarded with information. Make sure your communications are thoughtful and reaching the right people. Develop a plan for coordinating public affairs messages with other association communications. Key strategies for successful implementation of a strong plan include:
 - Talking with your communications/marketing department to determine ways that public affairs messages might be worked into the communications calendar. Having this conversation will also help the communications team know what you’re planning. If you need that team’s assistance, this will help create buy-in and enable a swifter response.
 - Inviting a communications team member to sit in on any public affairs staff meetings to get a better idea of emerging and urgent issues. By including communications staff in public affairs discussions, they can help identify strategies for getting your messages out through existing channels or assist in developing new strategies.
 - Determining whether there are membership communications that can be used to cross-promote public affairs initiatives or successes. Find ways to use existing association communications rather than creating duplicate outreach.

Also, always make sure that you’re promoting positive and proactive messaging to your members. Don’t focus or dwell on the negative. Find new and exciting ways to communicate your message rather than repeating the same thing.

- Example: Put together a 30-second video with a catchy URL that redirects your members to your advocacy page, as well as a 1-800 number that connects members to the congressional switchboards so they can voice their position to legislators. Alternatively, encourage your members to submit their own videos about how their day-to-day activities affect the industry, economy or certain policy issues. Share these with other members and with legislators.

3. **Make personal engagement with your members a priority.** Keep the connection personal with influential or active members by simply checking in by phone or email or scheduling a regular conference call with them. Building personal relationships with your members increases the likelihood of their taking action when needed. This is especially helpful with individuals who serve in leadership positions within their respective organizations or key contacts for your grassroots/grasstops efforts. By developing these relationships, your members will be more likely to answer your call, read your email and take action.
4. **Don't engage your members only during the legislative process.** It's better to prepare and train them before you have urgent legislative needs or developments. Keep your members excited and engaged by interacting with them during legislative downtimes. Ask for their feedback on industry-wide topics, provide opportunities for feedback on your association's policy priorities and generate conversations about future trends. In addition, be sure to close the loop with them on any issues upon which they took action so they know how things ended up — or, if the issue is ongoing, so they won't be surprised when they're asked to take action in the future.

Be mindful that advocate burnout or issue fatigue can be common, so don't inundate your members with more than a handful of emails per month. When you do send out action alerts or mass emails, have them sent from an actual person — someone who is influential and well-known in your community. In addition, collect data to target your messages and engage members based on their specific interests with micro-targeted communications.

5. **Recognize active member involvement and engagement.** If members have gone above and beyond to support your public affairs efforts, recognize them. Not only is this a good way of thanking them, but it's also a strong motivator for other members to get involved. Think about how your members want to be recognized. Do you have a newsletter in which you can profile them? Is there a way to highlight them on your association's homepage? Or perhaps you can have a special reward presentation or wall of fame at your annual meeting. Determining how active members want to be recognized — whether it's with a gift or public acknowledgement — and finding ways to do it are important components of your member engagement plan.



What are some creative ways to engage your members?

- Hold a public affairs leadership training, thus creating friendly competition among members who want to be engaged by providing advocacy training and setting goals for recognition
- Host a site visit competition and profile members who welcome legislators to their offices or facilities
- Ask your members to testify at a hearing to be the public “face” of your industry
- Upload pictures of your grassroots advocates to Facebook, Pinterest, Twitter and other social networking sites
- Organize a bus tour to strengthen member relationship-building
- Design a themed campaign to recognize your most engaged activists each quarter
- Put on informational webinars with experts, members of Congress, legislative staff or association staff to talk about key legislative priorities or ways to get involved
- Develop peer-to-peer engagement programs as a way for members to encourage other members to be active
- Provide awards based on a point system, with points awarded for completion of certain advocacy activities. This rewards already active members in a fun and competitive way, giving them a tangible reward for helping build up the community. Also, highlight winners in your communications and fly them out to events and conferences to showcase their involvement.

Keeping your members engaged is a challenging yet vital task in helping to ensure success for your association’s initiatives. Making your members feel like a top priority through personal outreach and consistent updates throughout the process, recognizing them for their efforts and keeping your engagement fresh and creative will help you win member support.