

# "LOBBYING THROUGH THE PANDEMIC – IS DIGITAL ADVOCACY THE NEW NORM?"



The Public Affairs Council's European office conducted a pop survey between July and September 2020 to learn how European public affairs and communication executives see the new reality that has emerged since the COVID-19 pandemic.

We collected responses from over 50 organizations and what we learned is that digital advocacy is here to stay. European public affairs teams were quick to adopt digital tools, but traditional tools remain widely used. Respondents believe they've managed the crisis well so far. There are, however, challenges that won't go away anytime soon, including adapting to corporate budget cuts and to policymakers' focus on the response to the pandemic.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS:

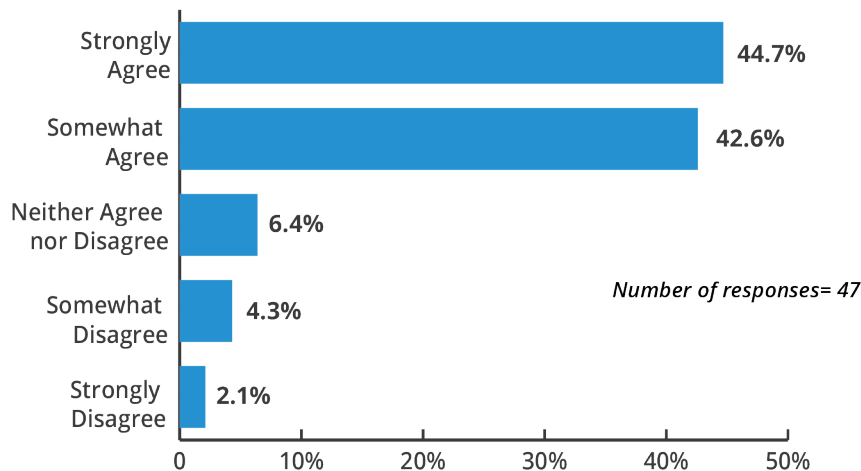
- **Digital tools prevail:** the COVID-19 pandemic brought about a change in the way public affairs professionals expect to conduct their activities in the future. Digital tools for communication and lobbying were already an emerging trend, which has accelerated in recent months. This trend will likely continue shaping the lobbying landscape, as well as how organizations interact with their external stakeholders.
- **Don't discard traditional tools just yet:** digital platforms provide alternatives for engaging with policymakers and their staff, but traditional and direct engagement, such as phone calls and emails, remain key and are effective instruments in the lobbyist's toolkit. These tactics won't (and shouldn't) disappear anytime soon.
- **Successful adaptation and the challenges ahead:** there is overwhelming consensus that organizations have been so far successful in managing the fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic. But challenges remain. Budget cuts are expected (and for some, they're already a reality) and most respondents expect the pandemic response to dominate EU policymakers' attention for the rest of this year.

## SURVEY INSIGHTS:

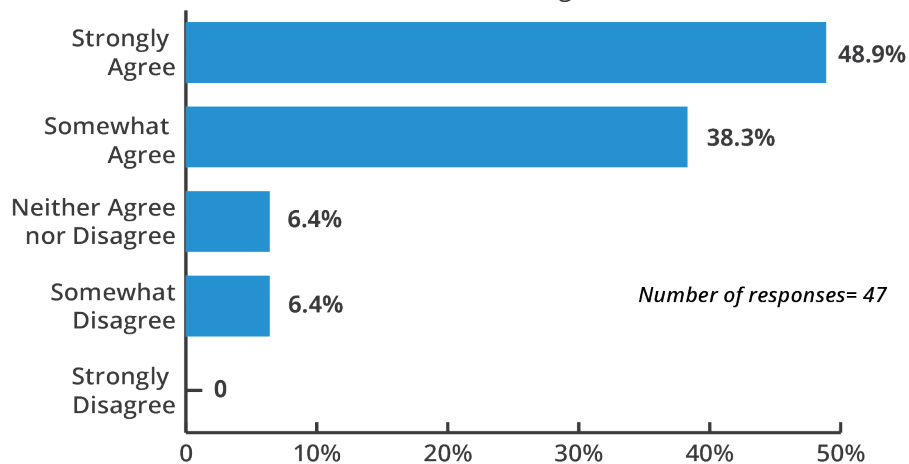
### INSIGHT 1: MOST PUBLIC AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS BELIEVE THAT THE NEW WAY LOBBYISTS COMMUNICATE AND ENGAGE WITH POLICYMAKERS IS HERE TO STAY:

- **87%** “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” with the idea that it will become increasingly common to schedule video conferences with European Union policymakers and their staff rather than meet with them in person
- **74%** “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” that meeting with EU policymakers in person for the remainder of 2020 will remain difficult
- **87%** “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree” that the COVID-19 related restrictions brought about a decline in traditional lobbying and communication and an increase in the use of digital tools

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “It will become increasingly common to schedule video conferences with European Union policymakers and their staff rather than meet them in person.”



To what extent do you agree with the following statement: “The COVID-19 related restrictions brought about a decline in traditional lobbying and communication and an increase in the use of digital tools.”



## INSIGHT 2: DIGITAL TOOLS ADDRESSED THE COMMUNICATION NEEDS IN TIMES OF CONFINEMENT, BOTH FOR EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND INTERNAL COORDINATION. BUT DON'T DISCARD TRADITIONAL FORMS OF LOBBYING JUST YET.

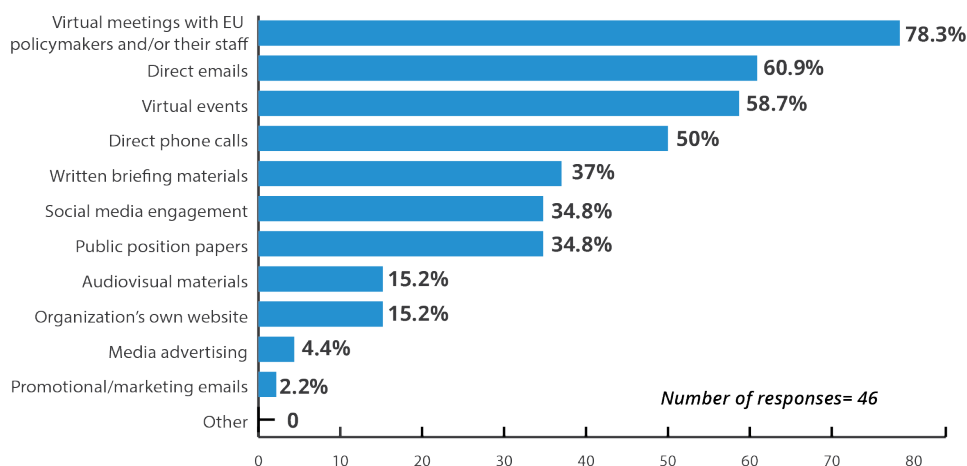
Among the tools most successfully used by public affairs professionals during and after the lockdown are:  
Digital tools:

- Virtual meetings with policymakers and their staff (78%)
- Virtual events (59%)
- Social media engagement (35%)

But also, more traditional forms of engagement:

- Direct phone calls (50%)
- Direct emails (61%)

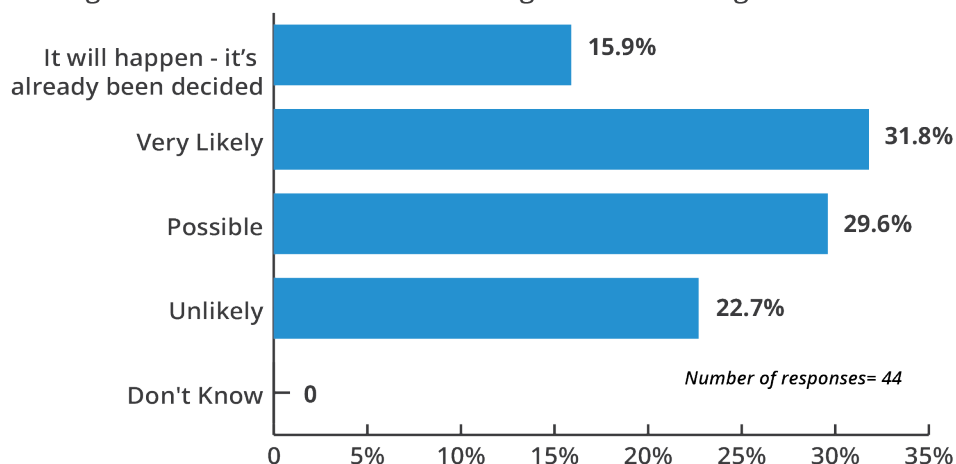
**What external advocacy tool do you consider to have been most successful for your organization during the lockdown? (check up to 5 most successful tools):**



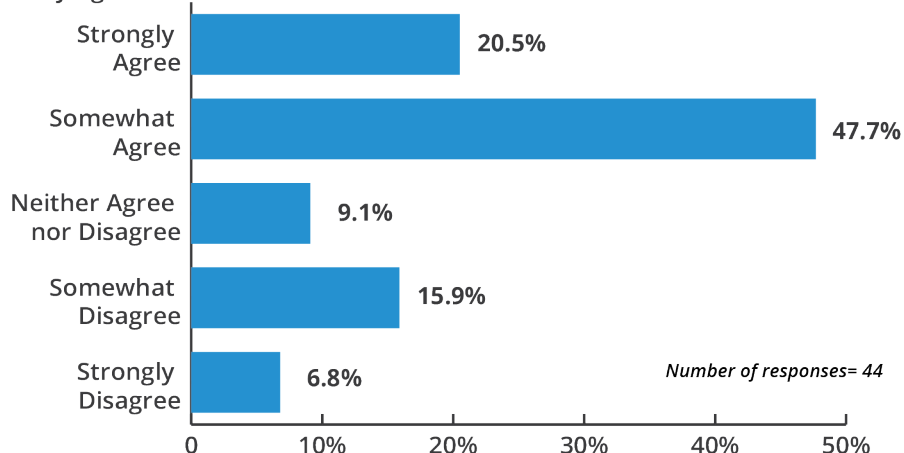
## INSIGHT 3: AN OVERWHELMING MAJORITY OF PARTICIPANTS (97%) BELIEVE THEIR ORGANIZATION HAS HANDLED THE CRISIS WELL SO FAR. BUT CHALLENGES REMAIN:

- **16%** of participants say their organization already has or will face budget cuts, while a further 61% see that as a very likely or possible future scenario;
- **67%** of participants believe the response to the pandemic is the single most important issue determining how policymakers will be influenced by their organization's lobbying efforts.

How would you assess the likelihood of your department's funding being reduced in 2020 as a result of organizational budget cuts?



To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "For the rest of this year, the impact of COVID-19 will be the single most important issue determining how EU policymakers will be influenced by my organization's lobbying efforts."



## METHODOLOGY:

These results have been collected through the responses of 52 Europe-based participating organizations to an online pop survey conducted between 23 July and 6 September 2020.

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