Advocating During COVID-19

With nearly the entire nation staying home, focus has been turned more than ever to our computers, social media, and other online communications. Advocacy efforts have historically focused on in-person meetings and events to drive education and support lawmakers. However, tactics have to shift drastically to meet the advocacy needs of the coronavirus era. Although many aspects of normal life have changed, the need for your voice in reaching your lawmakers has not.

Advocacy technology company Phone2Action has observed this sudden shift or “Advocacy Boom,” noting that “savvy organizations will remain involved, using text messaging, email, virtual events, and other digital tools to carry their message.” Their platform delivers messages directly to policymakers, giving users the ability to stay connected while apart during a time where the exchange of information is crucial. Millions of people have engaged and contacted their lawmakers, with over 2.36 million messages sent by nearly 1 million participants on Phone2Action’s platform.

Many trade associations and companies have been forced to cancel annual conferences and fly-ins, which typically serve as the prime opportunity to mobilize hundreds and thousands of constituents to meet with legislators and talk about issues and challenges they face. Many inside-the-beltway companies who facilitate those meetings have turned to “virtual fly-ins” where members from across the country can participate in legislative meetings over video conference or phone, often as effective as if they were in the Capitol.

In response to the restrictions presented by the COVID-19 outbreak, the National Association of Realtors has created a campaign of social media messages for their members to share with their representatives. The National Restaurant Association is providing language for advocates to use over email and Twitter to share personal stories of how the COVID-19 crisis has impacted their businesses and to thank lawmakers for passing the various stimulus packages. Social media efforts continue to grow in importance as a way for individuals to interact directly with congressional offices regardless of their location.

AALU/GAMA has taken a more personal and direct approach in advocacy to meet the current climate. Over the course of April, we have engaged with our membership to replicate Capitol Hill Club day virtually, with members participating in legislative meetings and conference calls with regulators and lawmakers. We have also provided political updates focused on the November elections and what the coronavirus might mean for the outcomes. At this time, our members have spoken with over 70 lawmakers and their staff regarding challenges facing the profession due to COVID-19, with many more are scheduled to take place in the coming weeks. This week, we sent an Action Alert for you to contact your Member of Congress to thank them for passing the small business loan programs. Congress is still working on a number of priorities and will eventually turn to ways to raise revenue. It is more important than ever to remind lawmakers of the importance of the work the financial security profession does to ensure your voices are heard and legislation reflects the needs of your clients.
In addition to adjusting advocacy programs to meet the current climate, many advocacy groups have also strengthened their online information resources to help their members navigate the crisis, much like AALU/GAMA’s COVID-19 Action Center. The Association of Clinical Research has developed a COVID-19 resource platform that includes guidance from regulators and updates from member companies on test availability and scientific developments. Likewise, the Credit Union National Association has implemented a state-by-state guide to provide updates from individual credit unions, including what unions are doing to help Americans with financial service offerings like loan modifications, fee waivers, and donations. The Distilled Spirits Council of the United States has launched an innovative map to track distilleries around the country who are producing hand sanitizer, including a portal to connect distillers with suppliers of sanitizer components. AALU/GAMA updates our COVID-19 Action Center daily, providing vital legislative, regulatory, and industry information.

AALU/GAMA will continue to be a thought leader in the advocacy space and evolve to meet whatever challenges face the profession and your clients. Stay tuned for messages from our team. If you have any questions or would like to get involved, reach out to Josh Caron (Caron@AALU.org) to find out more.