



Civic Engagement & Advocacy Blog

What is Grassroots Advocacy & Why Should I Know About It?

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With roots that run deep and strong within our heritage, grassroots advocacy is one of the most common forms of lobbying in our nation. Indeed, when the founding fathers wrote the Constitution they recognized that the right of citizens to petition our government was paramount to the success of our Democracy.



But, what is it? What does it mean to be a grassroots advocate?

In simplest terms, grassroots advocates raise the level of awareness regarding certain causes and issues at either the local, state, or federal levels. The purpose of these efforts is so that you, the grassroots advocate, can influence public perception, regulations, or public policy such as legislation. Unlike "direct lobbying," grassroots advocacy relies almost entirely on the general public and not professional lobbyists to contact legislators and other government officials regarding specific issues.

In the modern era, grassroots advocacy has become an increasingly popular way for companies and associations to harness the thoughts and ideas of their employees and members in order to create change within the public policy sphere of influence. Indeed, it has proven quite effective and it is not uncommon for these groups to mobilize hundreds of thousands, or even millions of members when issues arise.

Quite frankly, grassroots advocacy tactics continue to evolve and have proven effective at influencing public policy this past decade.

Groups such as Moveon.org, AARP, the NRA, and veterans' service organizations such as VFW have all used grassroots advocacy to influence legislative efforts at both the state and federal level. By using mass mailings, email, and more recently, social media such as Facebook and Twitter (among others) these groups can mobilize large portions of their membership base very quickly. This means that it is quite feasible to say that from the time issues arise to the time grassroots advocacy efforts are mobilized and put into effect can literally be as short as a few minutes. As a matter of comparison to the effectiveness of grassroots advocacy efforts, at its very basic level the Arab Spring (in the Middle East region of the world) last year was a massive grassroots advocacy effort.

By now, you're asking yourself how to harness the power of your membership so that they can participate in the legislative process and assist your company or organization.

This varies by industry, but the foundations of any grassroots advocacy program are the same:

1. **Communication.** Every avalanche starts with one little snowflake, the more people you can get your message to the better off your company/organization will be. By utilizing snail mail, email, social media, and radio/television advertisements you can get the message out to anyone who is interested.
2. **Imminence of action.** This is important because not only do you need to get the message out to interested individuals, you have to convince them to take action. By pressing the matters in which pending issues affect them, you will be more likely to persuade them to take action.
3. **Method of action.** The simpler the better. Asking your members to make a phone call, send an email, or sign a standardized form letter are the most common ways that organizations achieve membership participation in grassroots advocacy efforts. These take only moments for members to complete and can deluge legislators and policy makers with information that lets them know that people are interested in what they are doing.
4. **Follow-up.** This is often overlooked, but it is crucial to any grassroots effort. Not only do you need to ask your members to act, but you need to let them know what the effect of their labor has been. Sometimes, this will be obvious, but that is not something you can rely upon. By following up and letting your members know the fruits of their efforts, you will be building a bond with them that will be even stronger the next time you need to enlist their efforts.

Without a doubt, grassroots involvement in the political process is at an all-time high and it shows no signs of tapering off.

Even with the currently hostile political climate, more people than ever want their voices heard. Indeed, it would be folly for any company or organization seeking to make a real legislative impact not to take advantage of this trend because it is a golden opportunity to put your members out there as movers and shakers in your respective industry.

In fact, all of these factors and reasons are the foundation of Votility's program offerings. Our programs are designed to keep you up to date on the legislation and issues affecting your industry, and the lives and businesses of your members, with a minimum of effort. We also give you the tools to engage your membership quickly and efficiently so that you are always on top of the game.