

The Nonprofit Handbook for Digital Advocacy

A step-by-step guide to reaching your legislative goals



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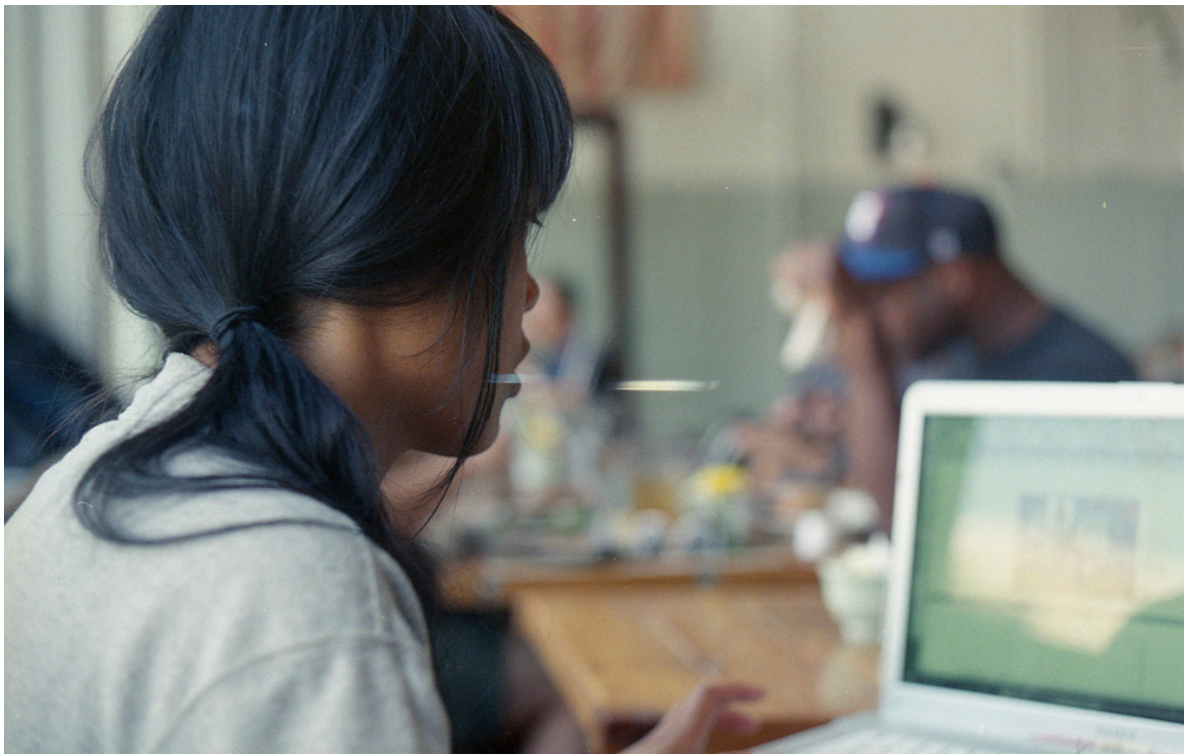
The Nonprofit Advocacy Landscape

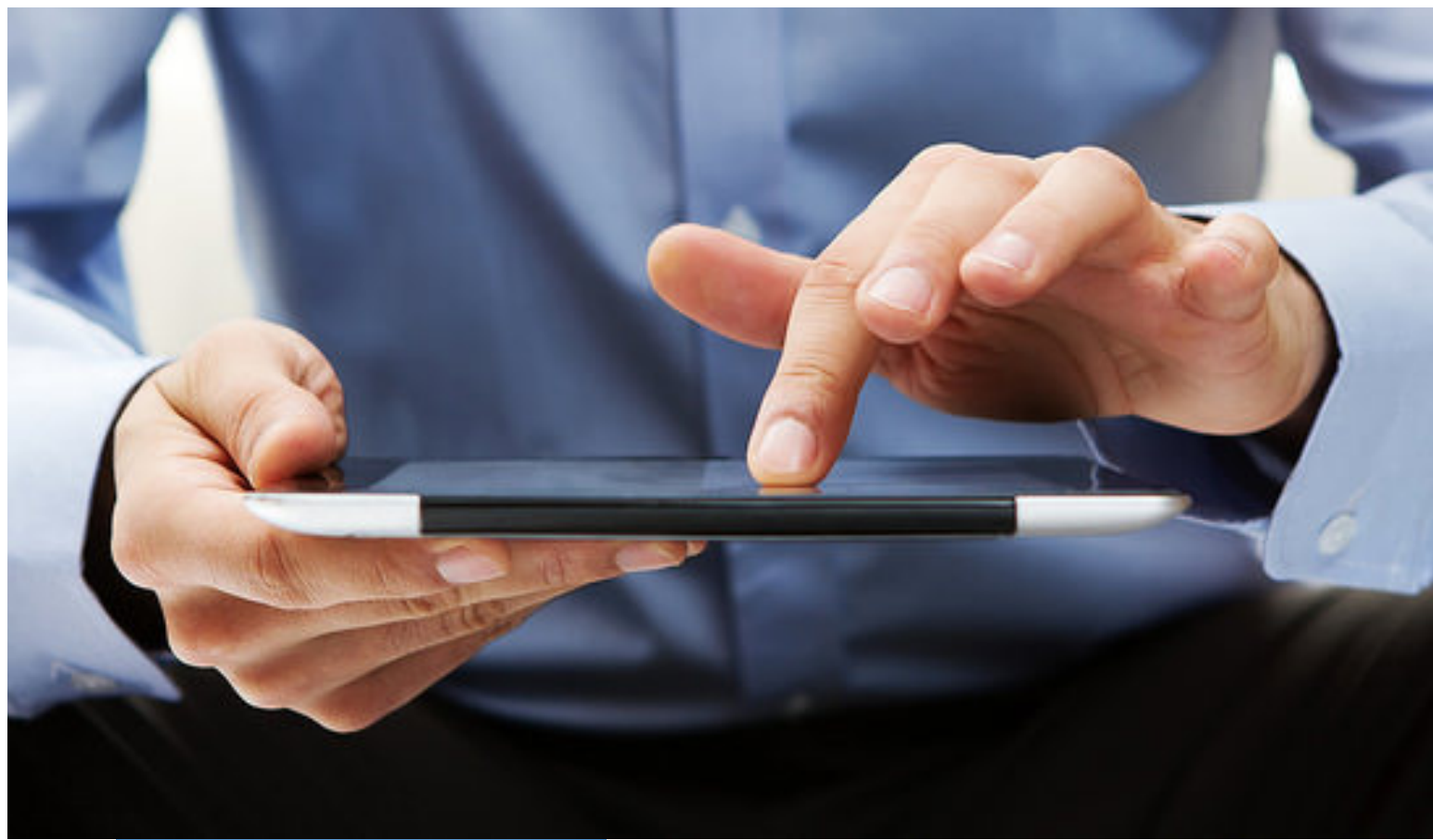
Organizations and associations serve the public good and fulfill many civic purposes. Often, these groups exist for issue advocacy and/or the goal of advancing a focused mission within an industry. Citizens join and support these nonprofits, frequently paying annual dues, to be a member of a community of like-minded individuals. Often, policy advocacy comes hand-in-hand with an association's strategic plan, and can be leveraged as a public relations and operations tool. Our handbook discusses political advocacy in relation to member engagement, and provides helpful tips to achieve and maintain a successful digital advocacy plan.

Digital advocacy may form a nonprofit's government relations plan in totality or serve as a part of a wider strategy. As technology continues to become democratized and disrupt traditional lobbying, the digital realm of advocacy is crucial to creating awareness and informing stakeholders, motivating action and influencing decision-makers.



"The secret to change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new."
-Socrates





Tips to Engage your Membership:

Encourage members to spread the word. Excited, engaged members and supporters are more likely to talk about how they have become involved in advocacy pushes, share the word on social media, and talk about the issues at hand with their own networks. Engaged members spreading your message may subsequently attract new supporters and members, organically growing your base and strengthening your organization.

Technology Has Changed Advocacy

Online resources, smartphones and applications, and emerging social media channels are all influencing how citizens and organizations relate to their legislators and participate in politics. Recently, the government affairs space has been inundated with new technologies, both in the hands of constituents, and the elected officials themselves, transforming the landscape of government relations. In terms of nonprofit advocacy, these innovative technology tools are providing meaningful and effective channels for associations and other advocacy groups to amplify their voice in the legislative space. As technology trends continue to evolve and change, it's important for leaders of nonprofit organizations to integrate these valuable digital tools into their programs.

Why Your Organization Should Participate in Digital Advocacy

Integrating online tools should be the cornerstone of developing a digital advocacy strategy. Equip your organization or association with the right software to enhance your advocacy efforts and increase the effectiveness of your outreach. To begin, modern communications tools are allowing constituents to seamlessly reach policymakers in a matter of seconds. People, membership, and supporters, can truly become agents of change in a few seconds. Let's take a look at some facts:

According to a 2014 Gallup survey, the average American works over 45 hours a week. The hustle and bustle of everyday life, combined with a full-time schedule, leaves little extra room to dedicate to voluntary advocacy or activism. Luckily, new technology is helping bridge the gap between legislators and their constituents by making advocacy simple and effective for the time-strapped citizen. Associations and organizations can harness this technology and help encourage and inspire their base to take action by driving civic engagement.



The Pros of Digital



Digital advocacy tools are also valuable to grow *membership and supporter lists, easily and without any extra legwork*. Utilizing a software solution to organize and manage contacts removes the hassle of organizing names and addresses on various spreadsheets. Do you know anyone who manually updates their membership lists on Excel or antiquated spreadsheets?

Advocacy software platforms allow an organization to easily cultivate and maintain up-to-date records for all members in one platform. Digital advocacy platforms simplify the process to empower supporters in becoming advocates for an organization's cause. These online platforms allow organizations to easily engage their members through social media, networking sites, and emails. How many times have you run across a website's "Take Action" center only to find a huge block of text describing the steps you need to take to participate? *Digital Calls to Action make advocacy easy for both the organization and for supporters.*

“People often say that, in a democracy, decisions are made by a majority of the people. Of course, that is not true. Decisions are made by a majority of those who make themselves heard...”

- Rep. Walter H. Judd

Step One

Create an Advocacy Statement

The first step in implementing any type of digital advocacy strategy or software system is to create an advocacy mission statement. This policy-driven statement must align with the organization's long-term strategic goals and supplement the group's current activities.

Advocacy can be presented as a form of strategic public relations- building the association's brand and driving awareness about its mission. Unlike many non-profit 501(c)3 organizations and charity organizations, professional associations and other 501(c)6 groups frequently struggle with crafting a compelling advocacy message that extends beyond the reach of their membership- and that is okay.



The power of association advocacy lies in the unified voice of the *membership*, not always from grassroots support. Even if governmental advocacy is not an explicit component of the association's daily agenda, reminding members of the association's general policy mission is important on a

year-round basis. This can be as simple as providing a small text box in the association's monthly newsletter, adding a bullet point somewhere on the association's website and occasionally posting to social media. The desired legislative results should be reflective of your mission statement, so make it clear and concise. Action Alerts should also clearly articulate the ultimate goals of certain policy change.

Step Two

Engage Membership for Stronger Advocacy

Engagement is more than communication. Engagement inspires, encourages and mobilizes. Without the active support of the membership, advocacy loses its citizen-driven power. An association that successfully implements and executes a membership-oriented advocacy strategy will have a stronger and more powerful connection with its members. Engagement benefits everyone involved: a thriving association and a satisfied member who feels a sense of belonging with a meaningful connection to the association. Members who care about an issue and believe in the mission of your organization will be more than happy to advocate when legislative action is needed.

Tips to Engage your Membership:

Communicate often, but not too often. Take advantage of all that social media has to offer and communicate with your membership/supporters as frequently as you can through your various accounts. However, when it comes to e-newsletters and emails, think strategically about releasing communications. Be aware that frequent communications may cause some members to unsubscribe. Consider integrating offline and online membership correspondence for a more complete communication approach.

Engaging your membership will pay big dividends when it come to future advocacy campaigns. The Congressional Management Foundation found that: "Internet users who contacted Congress were motivated to do so because they cared deeply about an issue (91%). Even a majority (88%) of those who contacted Congress as a result of a third party request indicated this was part of their reason for doing so."¹

1. <http://www.congressfoundation.org/component/content/article/253>

Step Three

Use Legislative Results as a Tool for Engagement

Create a legislative timeline. Know when your state's legislative session is occurring, and map out key pieces of legislation you are hoping to influence. Strategically engage your contacts in light of upcoming legislative moves. During the legislative session, keeping track of the membership's involvement in advocacy is crucial. Anytime that a bill is passed or killed in favor of your association's policy stance, immediately let your members know that their role in contacting their legislators was part of real change.

Members need to know that they are valuable and their contributions led to a certain result, and in doing so, engagement will skyrocket. (Sidebar: at Muster, we've seen engagement rates so high, nearly every single member contacted their elected official and the association was successful in passing its bill!).



"Political mobilization is seldom spontaneous"
-Jack Walker

Tips to Engage your Membership:



Create a sense of community

Think about the common bond between your membership and/or supporter base. Are they all working in the same profession? Do they all live in the same state? Find connections between those who support your organization, and use those connections to create a sense of solidarity among your members and supporters.

Strengthening your relationship with your supporters goes beyond the direct association-contact connection. It's helpful to create a sense of community among your members by helping them feel unified (think: "we" are in this together!). When the legislative sessions roll around, your membership will feel like they are acting as a part of a greater unit, acting on behalf of an issue that affects their own community.

Step Four

Let Your Constituents Know They Are Appreciated

During the holiday season at the end of each year, a leading supermarket chain thanks its top repeat customers by giving small gifts in recognition of the value that they bring to the food store. This simple gesture solidifies the connection that customers feel toward the store, and increases the likelihood that the customers will continue to be frequent shoppers. In this same manner, reaching out and sincerely thanking your top advocates, as though they were shoppers with a customer loyalty card, will serve your organization in the long run.

We put together a short list of easy and effective ways to genuinely thank your top advocates:

1. Reach out and thank your advocates by letting them know the number of members who also took a legislative action. Advocates like knowing they are part of a movement, and affecting change.
2. Send a nice, personalized email. Genuinely appreciating the efforts of your top advocates requires a personal touch.
3. Send a personalized letter by US mail.
4. Depending on your budget, sending a small gift basket or a tin of cookies to your advocate's mailing address will certainly not go unnoticed.
5. Create an advocate spotlight section in a newsletter your organization sends out. With their permission, you can make your advocate feel appreciated by thanking them in a membership-wide newsletter.



A Note About Analytics

A good digital advocacy program will allow you to track all analytics of all actions taken by the membership. Analytics are absolutely key to quantifying and assessing the success of a campaign. Analytics are paramount to understanding civic engagement on a small scale, and provide an organization with a concrete ability to gauge their supporters' level of activism. These are two of the most important statistics that will help you gauge the success of your campaigns:

- The **open rate** is a percentage that illustrates how many (successfully delivered) campaigns were opened by your members.
- The **click-through rate** illustrates the percentage of successfully delivered campaigns that registered a click.
- The average **open-rate** for emails falls somewhere around 20 percent. Email **click-through rate** is much lower, averaging between 3-5 percent and varying greatly by industry.

When was the last time you reached out to your most active members and thanked them for their active participation in advocacy efforts? Recognizing and thanking your "Five Star" advocates is a win-win strategy. Not only does shining a light on your most active advocates strengthen your relationship with them, but it also increases the likelihood that they will continue to serve as the top advocates of your cause.

“ If the statistics are boring, you’ve got the wrong numbers ”

- Edward Tufte

Conclusion

In sum, digital advocacy is reinventing the capacity for associations to participate in policymaking. Technology provides easy and automatic ways for nonprofits to attract, engage, and retain its members by involving them in pursuit of its' goals.

About Muster

Muster is an advocacy platform that enables professional associations and nonprofits to engage their membership in the legislative process.

To Learn More about us, visit us at www.Muster.com

Or

Email us at knowledge@muster.com

"Never be afraid to raise your voice for honesty and truth and compassion against injustice and lying and greed. If people all over the world...would do this, it would change the earth."

- William Faulkner

