

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a Senate chamber, overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter. The chamber features a central wooden podium with the United States Senate seal, rows of blue leather chairs, and a wood-paneled wall with a central doorway and decorative sconces.

New Office Toolkit

Resources for Staff

Published April 2021

A Brief Note of Thanks

At Ballast Research, we are proud to be a leading research organization for federal, state, and international advocacy. Our team uses quantitative and qualitative insights to study how advocacy efforts can be more meaningful and productive, thereby helping to drive stronger and more sustainable collaboration between the public and private sectors.

We rely on policymakers, like you and your peers, to provide perspectives on the current advocacy landscape. Our research is confidential, and we use your input at an aggregate level to identify trends which are shared back with government affairs teams and policymakers.

As part of our commitment to improving public and private sector relations, we are thrilled to share a few resources with you that we hope will be of value during your time on the Hill. In this report, you will find data-driven insights about the advocacy landscape, including trends and best practices that have emerged during COVID-19. We have also included resources that might be helpful for your staff as they navigate working in Washington D.C. and, more specifically, the Hill.

We look forward to connecting with your office.

Sarah Devermann

Head of External Affairs, Ballast Research

Washington, D.C.

April 2021

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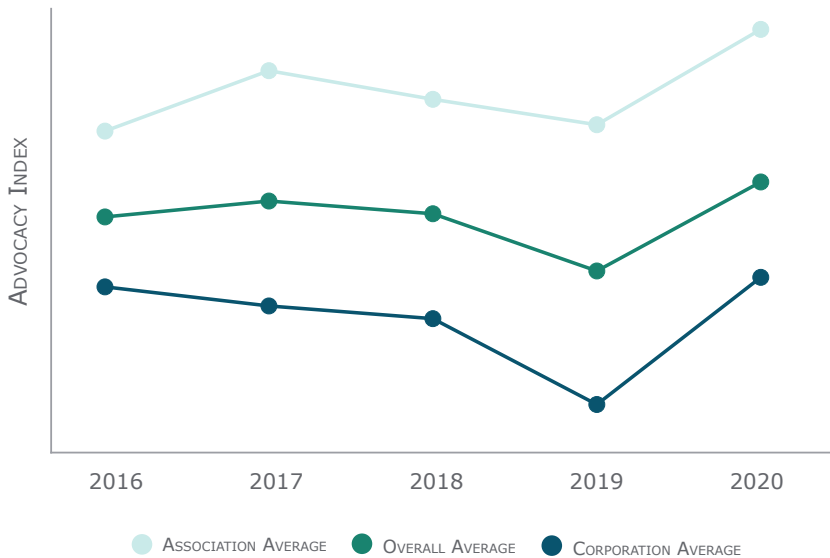
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**NAVIGATING THE CURRENT
ADVOCACY CLIMATE**

Recent Trends in Advocacy

We talk with over 1,200 policymakers a year to understand and identify trends in the advocacy space.

Policymaker Perceptions of Companies and Associations Sharply Increased in 2020



Policymaker perceptions of the private sector were on steady decline over the past four years. However, due to the private sector’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the reputation of both corporations and associations increased sharply in 2020.

For more information on advocacy trends in 2020, see our [2020 Washington Insights Review](#).

DC is Adjusting to Virtual Policymaking

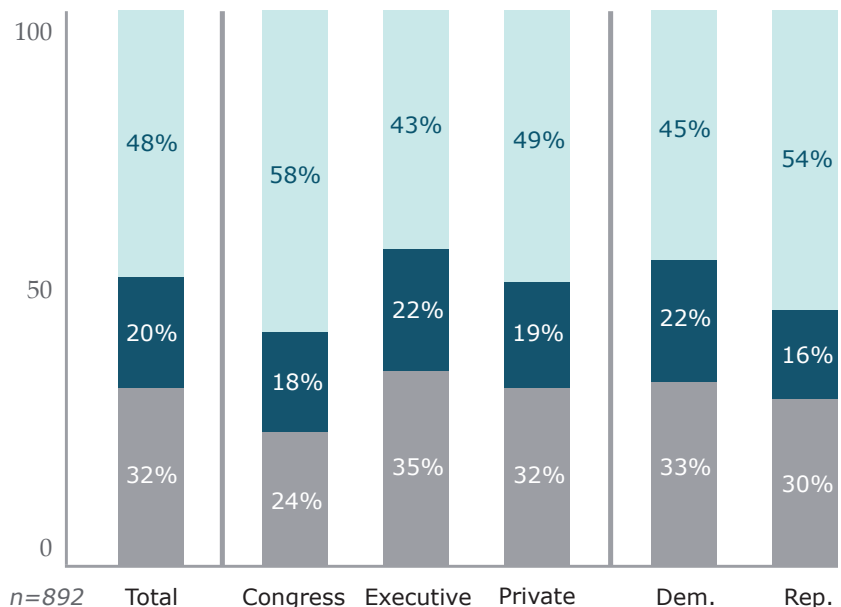
Freshman legislative offices are entering D.C. at a time when collaboration with the private sector is on the rise. Coming out of 2020, your team may see increased opportunities for partnership and relationship-building with the private sector. For more information on how COVID-19 has impacted advocate engagement, see our [Advocacy in the Age of Social Distancing](#) report.

48%

of respondents indicated increased engagement from private sector advocates in response to COVID-19.

- Increased
- Neither Increased nor Decreased
- Decreased

“To what extent has engagement between government and the business sector increased or decreased as a result of COVID-19?”



Attributes of Strong Advocacy From Your Peers

Policymakers value long-term relationships. They praise advocates who maintain steady relationships despite changes in the political landscape and dislike when advocates parachute in and out of D.C. based on the *issue of the day*. Advocates should look to build and maintain a steady presence with policymakers.

Attributes of Strong Advocacy



Long-Term Relationships

Policymakers appreciate working with people and organizations with whom they have developed relationships over time. The importance of putting in the long-term work of establishing relationships is one of the most consistent themes in our research every year.



Strategic Engagement

Policymakers appreciate organizations that make realistic requests. In our conversations, a number of policymakers pointed not only to organizations who were very clear about what they needed to survive and respond to the crisis, but also to industries and advocates that avoided making unrealistic requests.



Laying the Groundwork With Staff

Policymakers rely on subject matter experts and their staff to inform decisions. They appreciate it when advocates take the time to lay the groundwork with key staff members on critical issue areas. This way, when new issues arise the office has a preexisting understanding of important issues.

Policymakers Value Informed Constituent Data

"We always rely on constituent feedback and trade association information, but I think that's become more important. There are so many fires that we need to fight and getting the most accurate information directly from the individuals in the crisis has been helpful for us to sort through how bad it is on the ground."

-Legislative Aide, Senate

Advice for Policymakers From Peers

2020 brought a lot of changes to the advocacy environment. As our nation continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, it's more important than ever to ensure partnerships between the public and private sectors are sustainable and productive. Through conversations with leaders on the Hill, we've distilled three primary takeaways that are instrumental to effective engagement with advocates

1 Don't Be Afraid to Deliver Difficult Messages

"I think Hill staffers sometimes take their foot off the gas, don't tell advocates no, or don't want to deliver bad news because they want to try to be helpful."

-Chief of Staff, Legislative Branch

2 Practice Active Listening

"To me, a successful interaction on our end is when the advocate feels heard. Even if we can't change the policy, their input is always valued. That is the most important thing for us."

-Director, Executive Branch

3 Identify Common Goals

"We, as a government, never want to just be dictating to these companies what's happening. We want to be in a partnership with them on the assumption that we're all working toward the same goal, which is securing the health, wellbeing, and security of the United States."

-Director, Executive Branch

RESOURCES FOR STAFF

DC Networking Guide

Our research has shown that building a professional network is the top challenge for entry and mid-level Hill Staffers. These networks have a significant impact on individual and collective success on the Hill. Based on policymaker feedback, we've pulled together a few key insights that may be especially helpful for junior staffers in your Office.

For more, see our [Strategic Networking in D.C.](#) report.

Intentional Networking

The best networkers in DC actively manage their connections and intentionally prioritize relationships.

These networkers organize their connections and contact them systematically. Further, they track their interactions and integrate networking into their weekly routines, which makes it a habit rather than a chore.

DC has more networking events than anywhere in the world. Everyone gets 15 emails a day about different events and opportunities.

-Legislative Assistant, D

Key Aspects of a Strong Networking Process



Log Your Connections

Similar to how congressional offices track their constituents, intentional networkers track their connections. Create an Excel or Google Sheet to log interactions with your connections, and include a few notes to remind you of what you discussed with them.



Set Calendar Reminders

To automate your process, create recurring reminders in your calendar to contact connections.

Activate Your Current Network

To expand your network, ask your strongest connections to advocate for you and introduce you to their connections.



Template for Meetings with Advocates

We know a policymaker's time is incredibly valuable. We have heard from teams like yours that meetings with advocates, if not well organized, can be unproductive. To combat this, we created [a guide](#) to help policymakers navigate these meetings in ways that mitigate miscommunication and directly reflect your priorities.

Note-Taking Template

Ask your team to use this worksheet to take notes during conversations with advocates to ensure they capture the most important information.

Name of group:

Date of meeting:

1. Participants and point of contact:

2. Goal of meeting:

3. Advocate's ask (if there is one):

4. Topic or issue:

5. Impact on constituents or district:

6. What efforts has the advocate already made toward addressing this issue?

7. What other groups are also interested in this issue?

8. What are the opposing arguments?

9. Does the advocate have support from other members or groups? If so, who?

10. Next steps:

Top-of-Mind Priorities Cheat Sheet

Of interest to staff on both sides of the aisle, the Biden Administration has set its policy agenda, which focuses on four priorities: **COVID-19**, **racial equity**, **economic recovery**, and **climate**. For more information on how the Biden Administration's policy agenda is impacting advocacy, see our [A New Era of Advocacy](#) report.



COVID-19

Policymakers found the private sector's response to COVID-19 effective and want to hear more on how businesses have protected employees and customers from COVID-19.

42% of policymakers want to hear more from advocates on measures taken to care for employees during COVID-19.



Racial Equity

Following the widespread activism and engagement on racial equity in 2020, policymakers want businesses to implement long-term commitments to racial equity.

"George Floyd's murder was able to galvanize the entire country in a way that others haven't. There's now enough momentum that corporations can invest in those things without feeling like they might alienate board members or investors."

-Senior Staff, Civil Rights Nonprofit



Climate

Heightened bipartisan focus on the private sector's responsibility in regards to climate change means policymakers want businesses to set sustainability goals and track progress toward them.

"Climate change is really important to us and we're concerned about the trend. If we don't do something soon, the cost of food is going to rise exponentially, there's going to be mass migration, illnesses, wildfires, and a host of other issues."

-Legislative Fellow, House, D



Economic Recovery

Policymakers perceived PPP as an effective way to support small businesses financially, but they want to hear how the private sector supports small businesses through its own initiatives.

58% of policymakers perceived PPP as effective (i.e., the program provided financial relief to businesses that needed it most).

**LEARN MORE ABOUT THE
BALLAST POLICYMAKER HUB**

An Exclusive Invitation to the Ballast Policymaker Hub

Why Join The Ballast Policymaker Hub?

The Ballast Policymaker Hub provides data-driven insights and resources for those in the public sector, including:

- Career development resources and guidance
- Invitations to events led by seasoned policy and private sector leaders
- Research insights on advocacy efforts, based on feedback from senior policymakers
- Opportunity to participate in pioneering annual research

Participation is open to those currently on the Hill and to policy experts in the White House and Executive Branch agencies. There are no fees or time commitments.



Our Goal

The goal of the Ballast Policymaker Hub is to offer unique value and insights to policymakers, who are instrumental in our efforts to further public and private sector collaboration in the advocacy space.

"We, as a government, never want to just be dictating to these companies what's happening. We want to be in a partnership with them on the assumption that we're all working toward the same goal, which is securing the health, wellbeing, and security of the United States."

-Director, Executive Branch

Join the Policymaker Hub!

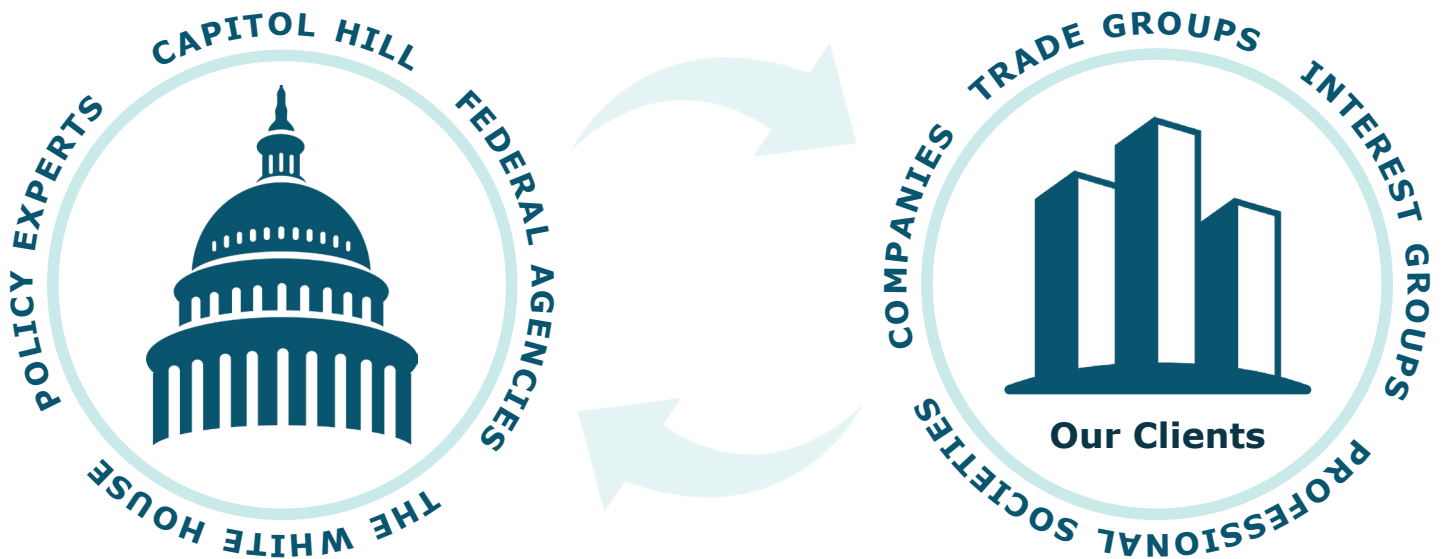
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About Ballast Research

Ballast Research provides feedback from policymakers directly to government relations professionals, helping advocates (1) make better use of policymakers' time and (2) provide resources and materials most useful to those in government.



Our Promise

Confidentiality: All participation in our research is confidential and not for attribution.

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“This deep-dive, customized research is invaluable for understanding what policymakers think of us and need from us. The insights are another important tool we use to inform our thinking on how to engage, and the data illuminates where we can do better.”

-Head of US Communications, Fortune 10 Company

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