



# WASHINGTON INSIGHTS REVIEW

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## THE NEW ADVOCACY ENVIRONMENT

- Anatomy of a Crisis
- Top Challenges Policymakers Faced in 2020
- A Roadmap for Advocacy in 2021
- Case Studies of Strong Advocacy: NRECA and 3M
- An Exclusive Invite to the Ballast Policymaker Hub

**BASED ON 2020 RESEARCH INSIGHTS**

PUBLISHED JANUARY 2021

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

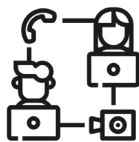


## HISTORIC IMPROVEMENT IN POLICYMAKER PERCEPTIONS OF COMPANIES AND ASSOCIATIONS

Policymaker perceptions of companies and associations, in terms of their reputation and helpfulness, improved dramatically in 2020 according to Ballast's quantitative survey of more than 1,200 policymakers.

### **Policymakers laud private organizations that directly aided in the crisis response, including:**

- Health and retail organizations enabling essential workers to provide necessary products and services
- Manufacturers shifting production to ventilators and protective equipment
- Research institutions and pharmaceutical companies conducting vaccine development
- Financial institutions executing Paycheck Protection Program loans
- Technology firms supporting remote work and learning



## NEW ADVOCACY ENVIRONMENT PRESENTS CHALLENGES TO EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP

- Limited in-person meeting presents a barrier to developing and nurturing relationships
- New-to-D.C. advocates reaching out through new channels results in messy advocacy
- A growing gap between advocates with strong existing relationships and those without

## ROADMAP FOR ADVOCACY IN 2021

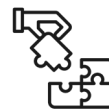


### DEVELOP A TRANSITION PLAN

Policymakers want long-term relationships; they don't like it when advocates parachute in and out of D.C.

#### Advice for Advocates

- Maintain (or develop) a steady presence in D.C. Now is not the time to pull back on policymaker engagement.
- Develop a transition plan for the first 100 days of the administration.



### MAKE IT EASY FOR POLICYMAKERS

Like everyone else, policymakers are struggling with remote work and balancing personal and professional responsibilities.

#### Advice for Advocates

- Make it easy for policymakers. The bar for clear, succinct communications is higher in the current environment as is the need for credible data and compelling narratives.



### LEVERAGE THE REACH OF TECHNOLOGY TO BRING CONSTITUENT VOICES TO D.C.

Now more than ever, policymakers want to hear from the voices of constituents and local experts.

#### Advice for Advocates

- Leverage the reach of technology

# A BRIEF NOTE OF THANKS

The publication of this research comes at a time of great divide and anticipation in our country. With COVID-19 cases at an all time high, unparalleled unrest in our nation's capital, and an inauguration on the horizon, it's important to both reflect on the events of the past year and prepare for the work of the year ahead.

As our nation continues to respond to a public health crisis, and confronts division and mistrust, we believe our mission at Ballast - to forge stronger, more productive partnerships between senior policymakers and the private sector - is more vital than ever.

Our 2020 Washington Insights Review centers on the impact of COVID-19 on advocacy in D.C. Grounded in thousands of surveys and nearly 400 conversations with policymakers, we provide a roadmap, looking forward, for advocates to make better use of scarce policymaker time and to engage more effectively.

Our work would not be possible without the generous contributions of policymakers themselves. A heartfelt thank you to the thousands of policymakers who took the time to provide their invaluable perspectives during this tumultuous year. As always, we sincerely appreciate your ongoing support of our research.

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**Michael Griffin**  
Chief Research Officer  
Washington, D.C.  
January 2021

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

2020 RESEARCH AT-A-GLANCE . . . . . PAGE 5

ANATOMY OF A CRISIS . . . . . PAGE 6

TOP CHALLENGES POLICYMAKERS FACED IN 2020 . . . . . PAGE 11

A ROADMAP FOR ADVOCATES IN 2021 . . . . . PAGE 15

CASE STUDIES OF STRONG ADVOCACY: NRECA AND 3M . . . . . PAGE 20

ABOUT BALLAST RESEARCH . . . . . PAGE 23

AN EXCLUSIVE INVITE: THE BALLAST POLICYMAKER HUB . . . . . PAGE 24

*“Early in the year, there was a lot of collaboration. There was a sense that everybody was on the same team. The country was in trouble. We were in a crisis. There was less of the traditional kind of back-and-forth lobbying campaigns trying to influence legislation. There wasn’t time, frankly... And then, as time went on, there was more kind of traditional advocacy going on that was like, okay, this is either in the Democrat proposal or the Republican Senate proposal. We like it. We don’t like it. Advocacy shifted to more transactional, pragmatic, less collaborative and altruistic, over the course of the year.”*

-Senior Legislative Staff, U.S. House of Representatives

# 2020 RESEARCH AT-A-GLANCE

Our quantitative and qualitative research is focused on senior policymakers across Washington. Despite the chaos of the 2020 policy environment, leaders across the public and private sector took the time to provide invaluable perspectives on advocacy over the course of the year.



## CAPITOL HILL

*Chief of Staff, Committee Staff,  
Legislative Director*

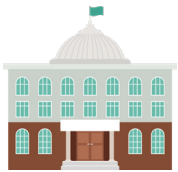
## OUR PARTICIPANTS

380

Conversations With Policymakers

1,341

Quantitative Study Participants



## FEDERAL AGENCIES

*Deputy Secretary, Chief of Staff,  
Policy Advisor*

## OUR APPROACH

Our non-partisan approach enables us to gain the perspectives of policymakers on both sides of the aisle.

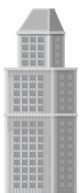


## THE WHITE HOUSE

*Special Assistant, Policy Advisor*

## OUR PROMISE

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



## POLICY EXPERTS

*Senior Fellow, Economic Advisor,  
Senior VP*

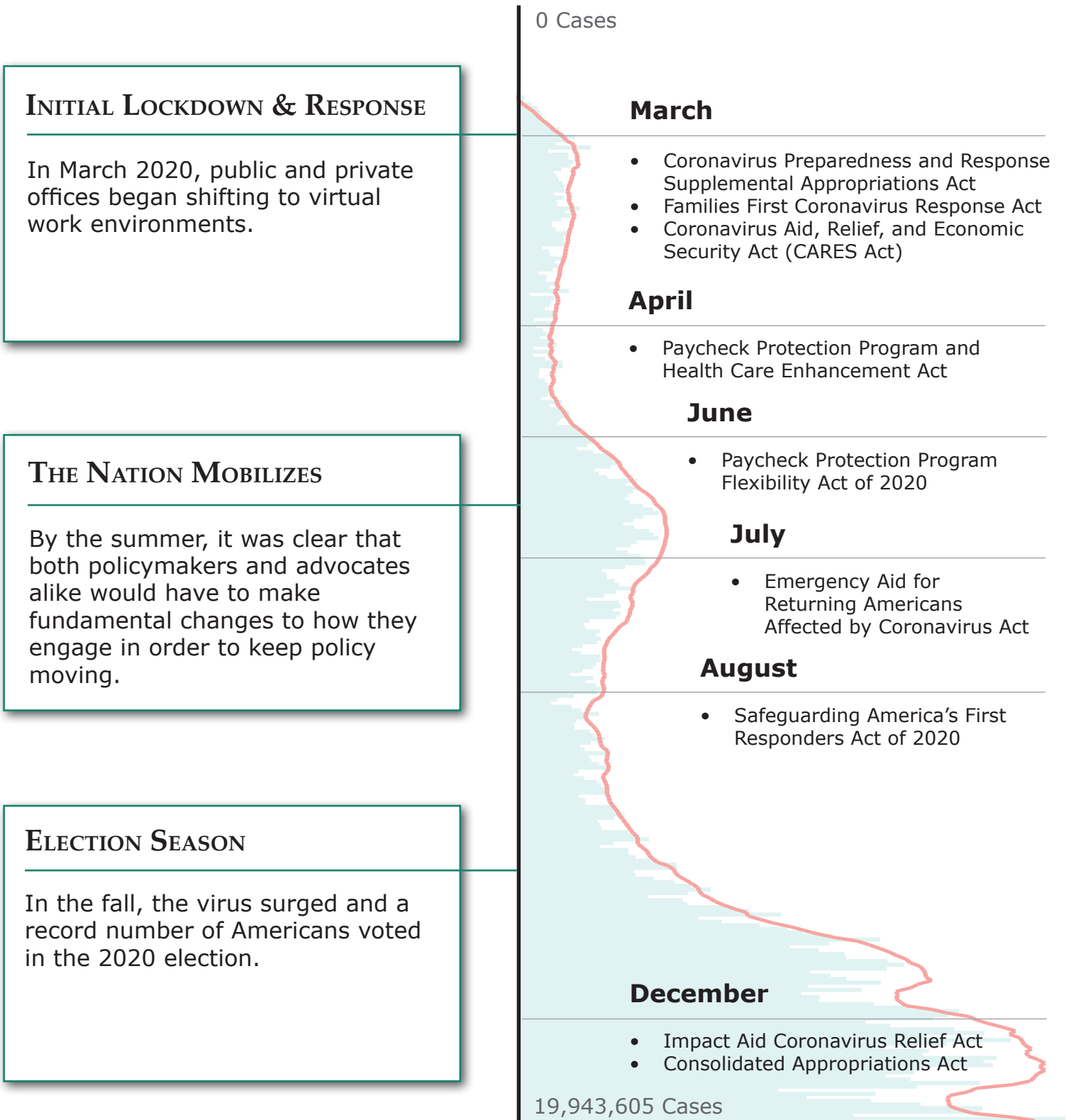
## ANATOMY OF A CRISIS

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- Historic Improvement in Policymaker Perceptions of Companies and Associations
  - Private Sector Response Seen as Effective
  - Organizations and Industries that Stand Out

# ANATOMY OF A CRISIS

When COVID-19 infiltrated the United States, policymakers sprang into action. Surging cases, demonstrated by the graph below, drove legislation throughout 2020. As we move into 2021, policymakers continue to pass legislation while widespread vaccine distribution is underway.

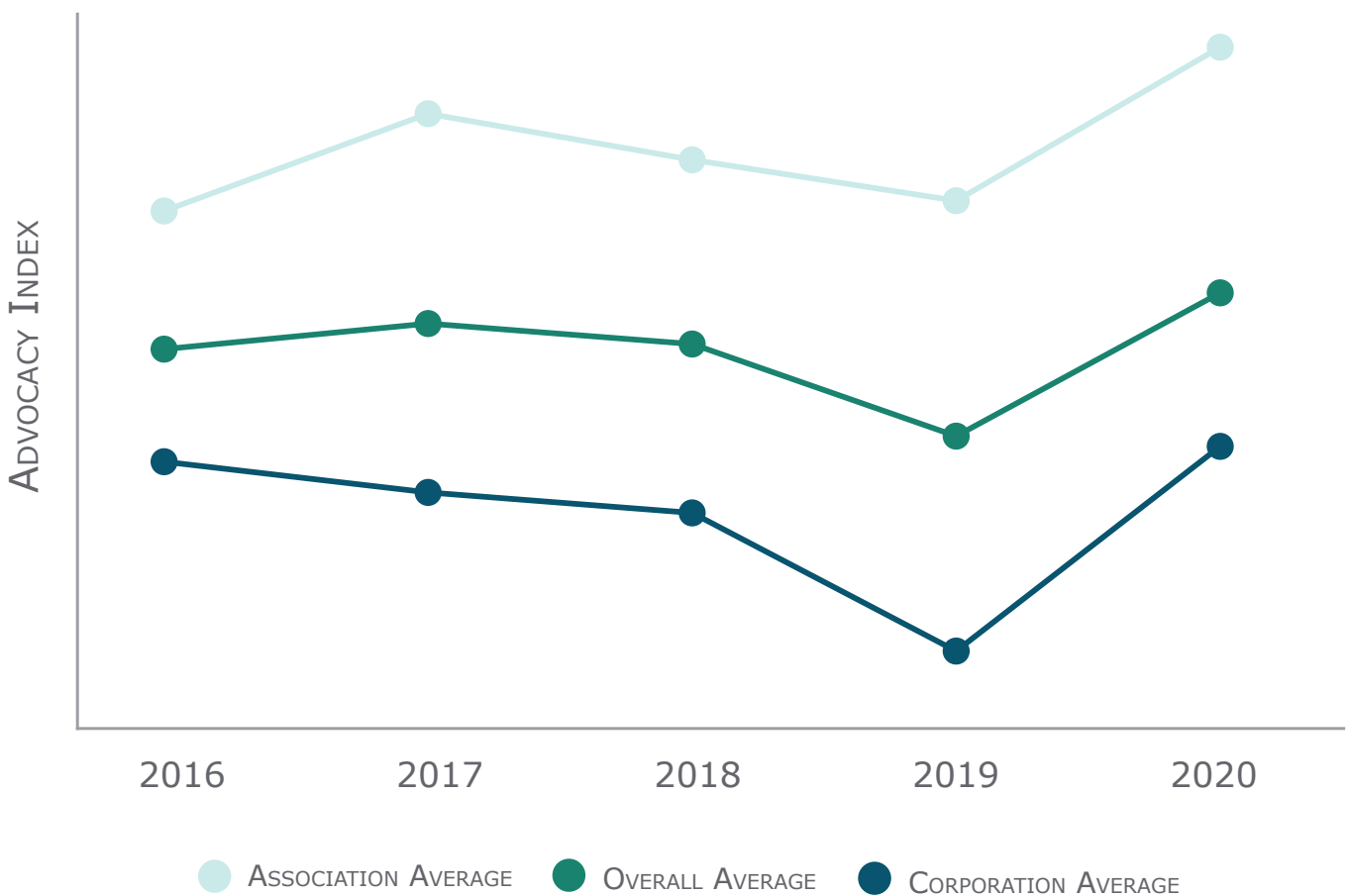


Graph Depicts Daily Trends in Number of COVID-19 Cases in the United States Reported to CDC

# HISTORIC IMPROVEMENT IN POLICYMAKER PERCEPTIONS OF COMPANIES AND ASSOCIATIONS

Every year we conduct a quantitative study of policymakers' perceptions of the private sector. In particular, we ask how helpful they find the advocacy they see from companies and associations. The graphic below shows Ballast's advocacy index of policymaker perceptions, which improved significantly this year.

## POLICYMAKER PERCEPTIONS OF COMPANIES AND ASSOCIATIONS



Policymaker perceptions of companies and associations surged amidst the COVID-19 crisis, presenting a unique opportunity to strengthen relationships as advocates and policymakers look toward a new era for advocacy.

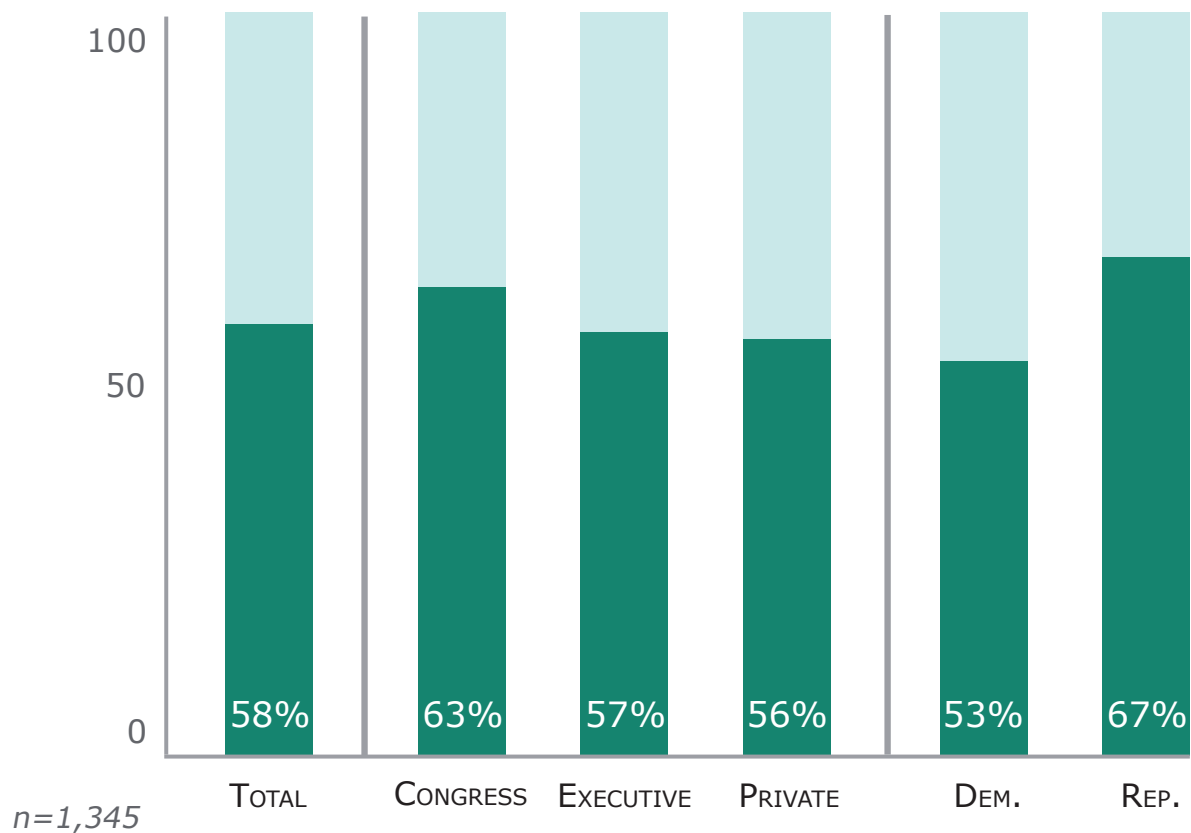


# PRIVATE SECTOR RESPONSE SEEN AS EFFECTIVE

Policymakers across workplace and party tended to view the private sector's response to COVID-19 challenges in a positive light.

## EFFECTIVENESS OF PRIVATE SECTOR RESPONSES TO COVID-19

% OF POLICYMAKERS DESCRIBING RESPONSE AS "EFFECTIVE" OR "VERY EFFECTIVE"



*"There's countless examples of companies that have kind of changed their production line to make PPE, and masks, and things like that. We have a lot of these in our state that I could list off. And different businesses are launching takeout services....Here in D.C. we've got Founding Farmers. Their restaurants converted into grocery stores in order to kind of deal with the early downturn in people coming to eat out. There's been a lot of really impressive flexibility on the part of some businesses."*

-Policy Advisor, Senate

# ORGANIZATIONS AND INDUSTRIES THAT STAND OUT

A number of private sector organizations stepped up to help combat the adverse effects of the pandemic. Policymakers mentioned the following organizations in response to the question, ***"Which companies and/or associations have been the most helpful to you on issues related to COVID-19?"***

## MANUFACTURING

*A number of manufacturers used their large-scale production capacity to produce PPE and ventilators.*



## TECHNOLOGY

*Technology companies worked quickly to enable widespread virtual engagement.*



## HEALTH

*Health organizations and associations represented members working tirelessly on the front lines.*



## OTHER ASSOCIATIONS

*A number of associations provided helpful guidance and resources centered around responding to COVID-19.*



## TOP CHALLENGES POLICYMAKERS FACED IN 2020

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- Limited In-Person Relationship Building
  - Messy Advocacy
  - A Widening Gap in Advocacy

# LIMITED IN-PERSON RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

In a town built on relationships, policymakers and advocates alike cite the lack of face-to-face interactions as the biggest challenge they face in regards to advocacy.



*“Honestly for me, the most effective advocates are the ones who are able to build relationships over time or who have existing relationships. **And there’s a new challenge there with everybody teleworking.**”*

-Counsel, Congressional Committee



*“Lobbying is an interpersonal profession based on relationships and interpersonal skills, and **it’s very hard to do on the telephone.**”*

-Strategic Advisor, Private Sector



*“I’m a visual person, and hearing someone’s voice is not going to help my memory in the future, and I think that **a huge part of our job are relationships.** And so, if I’ve met you and talked to you before, I want to be able to remember that, and **it’s much harder for me to do that just on a voice alone.**”*

-Senior Staff, Congressional Committee



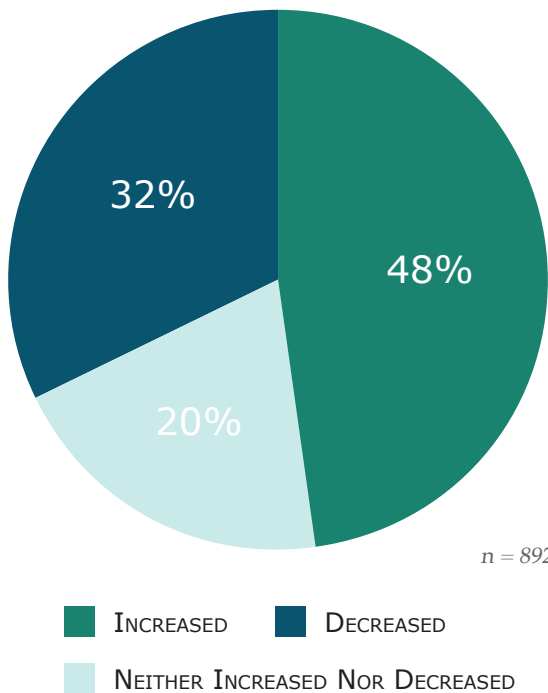
*“The **single biggest adverse impact** on me in doing my job is **not being able to meet personally with the people.**”*

-Senior Director, Corporation

# MESSY ADVOCACY

Many policymakers, particularly on the Hill, have seen a surge in engagement centered around COVID-19 legislation. This surge in engagement, often involving new actors reaching out through untested channels, has led to messy advocacy. At the same time, a significant minority of policymakers, especially those in committee offices and the agencies less directly involved in COVID-19 responses, report a significant drop-off in engagement.

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



## MANY ARE INUNDATED WITH REQUESTS

*"Just the sheer volume of requests we've gotten has jumped exponentially. And there are groups that maybe they would come by once a year, twice a year, and now they're bothering you every other week to sign up for another something for their industry because they're trying to keep everything afloat."*

-Senior Policymaker, House

## OTHERS SEE A DROP OFF

*"I would say there's been a drop-off in engagement. I wouldn't call advocates non-responsive, but just the general engagement has been a bit less regular than it was pre-COVID. And I think there's a lot of reasons for that on both sides... I think everyone's taking care of their own house first before they start partnering with the public sector on different issues."*

-Senior Advisor, Federal Agency

## 3 DRIVERS OF MESSY ADVOCACY

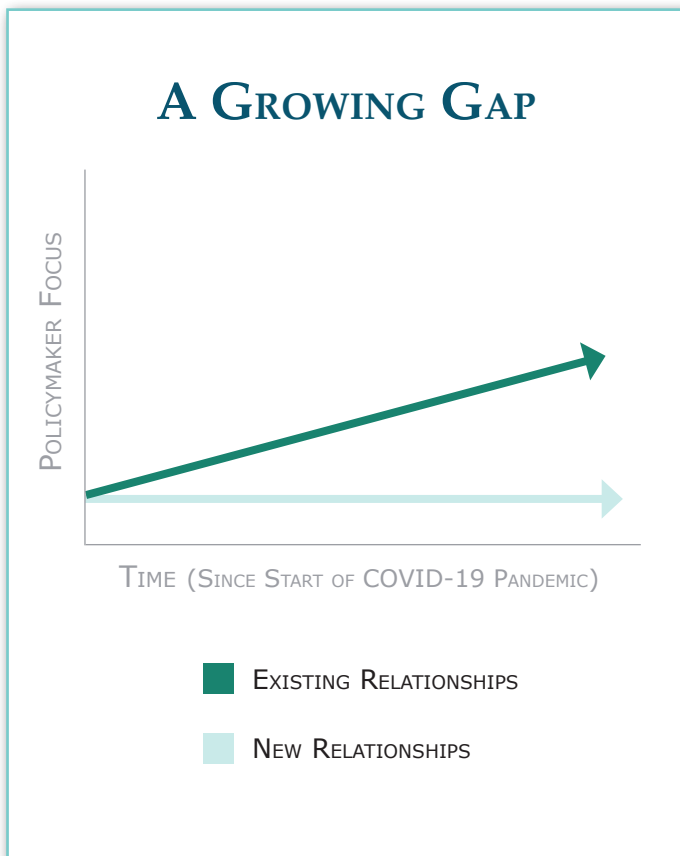
**SURGING  
ENGAGEMENT**

**NEW  
ACTORS**

**UNTESTED  
CHANNELS**

# A WIDENING GAP IN ADVOCACY

Due to the urgency of the COVID-19 crisis, and barriers to establishing new relationships, policymakers have been turning to trusted advocates for advice, thereby growing the gap between advocates with established relationships and those without.



*“What I found helpful from organizations engaging with us during the pandemic was if they were known to us and a trusted source prior to the pandemic. For example, I had worked with Center for American Progress several times, so I trust their information.”*

-Legislative Assistant, House

*“In this situation we’re all in, it’s not as easy to say, ‘Hey, let’s just schedule a random meeting with XYZ office.’ So all of us have been focused on, ‘Hey, do you know somebody in this office? Who do you know? Who’s covering this committee for leadership? Who do you know on the committee? It’s a lot more hyper-focused on the preexisting relationships you already have on the hill.”*

-Director, Government Affairs

## WHO IS GETTING LOST?

*“It’s certainly a great benefit to those organizations who already have preexisting relationships. I think building those relationships from the ground up must be a huge problem. Obviously, advocates who already had those relationships are doing better because frankly, they’ll just call me and “What’s going on or can we meet?” And so I do worry about who is getting lost. Folks that are trying to represent people who traditionally don’t have as loud a voice in the halls of Congress, I mean, this is just going to get incredibly difficult for them.”*

-Legislative Director, House

## A ROADMAP FOR ADVOCATES IN 2021

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- Develop a Transition Plan
- Make it Easy For Policymakers
- Leverage the Reach of Technology to Bring Constituent Voices to D.C.
- Tips for a Successful Webinar

# DEVELOP A TRANSITION PLAN

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. Over the next few months, advocates should develop a transition plan to engage with the new Congress and the incoming administration.

## WHAT POLICYMAKERS VALUE



### 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.

## ADVICE FOR ADVOCATES



Develop a transition plan for the first 100 days of the new administration. Maintain (or develop) a steady presence in D.C. Now is not the time to pull back on policymaker engagement.



# MAKE IT EASY FOR POLICYMAKERS

Like everyone else, policymakers are struggling with remote work and balancing personal and professional responsibilities. In the current environment, the bar is higher for clear, succinct engagement, as is the need for credible data and compelling narratives.

## WHAT POLICYMAKERS VALUE

### CLEAR ASKS, ACTIONABLE FORMATS

Policymakers value succinct communications that lead with clear requests and/or proposed solutions. Don't bury the lede or hide the punchline. Especially during periods of heightened workload, executive-level summaries and briefs that save policymakers time are appreciated.

*"It was helpful to hear from advocates precisely what their needs and problems are. People that came with ready-made solutions were more likely to get favorable responses."*

-Staff Member, House

### COMPELLING DATA AND NARRATIVES

As much as policymakers want the one-sentence takeaway or concise brief, they also value credible, constituent-level data, and compelling narratives in support of recommendations and requests.

*"I want to see data that shows they're doing something... We can tell which companies are actually trying to help on a specific issue or just using it as a line to get what they want. And then once you do that, I'm not inclined to talk to them again."*

-Legislative Fellow, House

### ADDRESSING BOTH SIDES OF ISSUES

Help policymakers understand both sides of the issue. Policymakers value advocates who can articulate their own position but also explain and address other sides of the issue.

*"What I find helpful is understanding what are the countering positions. If advocates only explain one side of an issue, you're going to have to go and research and find the counter position yourself. I think a good lobbyist says, 'Hey, this is the counterpoint. And this is why we think our position is best.' To me, that's a more complete presentation. A very clear bottom line and what are the counter positions and having a discussion on that."*

-Congressmember

## ADVICE FOR ADVOCATES



Make it easy for policymakers to consume and evaluate your communications, especially during this period of remote work and heightened activity related to the COVID-19 legislation. Consider auditing or reviewing your own communications from the past few months for clarity, actionability, and time required to read.

# LEVERAGE THE REACH OF TECHNOLOGY TO BRING CONSTITUENT VOICES TO D.C.

## WHAT POLICYMAKERS VALUE: CREDIBLE DISTRICT-LEVEL DATA

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Policymakers have long emphasized the importance of hearing from constituents in order to make impactful policy decisions. Now, policymakers see an opportunity for technology to improve grassroots engagement and bring ground-level data to D.C. in a new and exciting way.

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*"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



*"We had a virtual townhall meeting with their membership and heard from all their members in a very visceral way, and what their experiences were, and the diversity and range of impacts."*

-Chief of Staff, Senate

## ADVICE FOR ADVOCATES

### LEVERAGE TECHNOLOGY TO BRING CONSTITUENT VOICES TO D.C.

*"The most helpful thing about virtual advocacy is you don't have to worry about the logistics of setting up a physical meeting place. As long as anybody has cell service then you just do it whenever, wherever everybody is."*



VIRTUAL FLY-INS



WEBINARS



VIRTUAL TOWN HALLS

# TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL WEBINAR

Webinars have been helpful and appreciated during social distancing, but advocates should be thoughtful about their approach.

## ✓ FRONT-END KEY TAKEAWAYS

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Webinars should identify key takeaways quickly and offer a clear value-add. In the event that an attendee leaves early, this will ensure that they still received the main points of your message.

*“Often I’ll sign up for something and pay attention for 10 or 15 minutes and then lose interest.”*

-Senior Staffer, Congressional Committee

## ✓ TARGET WIDE AUDIENCES

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For more targeted advocacy, reach out to staff members directly who specialize in your issue area. Use webinars as a platform to engage larger, more diverse audiences.

*“I have seen a couple webinars and they have been probably one of the better ways that groups can reach a wide audience during all of this. For staff-level meetings and things like that, I still have found that the best initial contact that a group can make is just through email.”*

-Legislative Aide, House

## ✓ PROVIDE A ONE-PAGE SUMMARY

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After the webinar, circulate a one-page summary highlighting the top takeaways to all who signed up to attend. This way, those who were unable to join still receive value from engaging with you and have material to reference.

*“Really it’s just whenever communication is short, simple, and to the point. A lot of them just kind of go on and on, and it becomes difficult to realize what they’re trying to ask or bring up... **A one pager definitely helps.**”*

-Legislative Assistant, House

CASE STUDIES OF STRONG ADVOCACY:  
NRECA AND 3M

# CASE-IN-POINT: NRECA AND 3M STAND OUT AS EFFECTIVE PARTNERS



## BREADTH OF RELATIONSHIPS

*"They do a good job working with me even though I don't represent a rural area at all. I've got to give them credit, they have good outreach to me... I would say they have a very great- they have a superb outreach to me even though I don't represent the rural area, so my hat's off to them."*

-Congressmember

## SOLUTION-ORIENTED, WELL-TIMED OUTREACH

*"NRECA's approach is, 'Here's the problem, here's why you care, and here's the legislative solution or the engagement solution that we're asking for.' They have been excellent at just a narrowly-focused, relevant, timely engagement. It's not flashy, it's not technologically advanced, but it's effective because they're very clear on what they want. They're very clear on how we can help. And they make sure to do it at a time when we still have the capability of helping."*

-Staff Member, Congressional Committee



## COMPELLING DISTRICT-SPECIFIC DATA

*"3M was very good at connecting the state operations to the issues. They had operations in, gosh, I would say four or five different locations in the state. And when they came in to meet, they were able to provide data that was specific. One of the people I met from their 3M Federal and State Government Affairs provided basic data in terms of their impact on the state and their number of employees and the nature of the work that was done in each of their operations in the state. So that kind of information is extremely helpful."*

-Chief of Staff, House

## COVID-19 RESPONSE

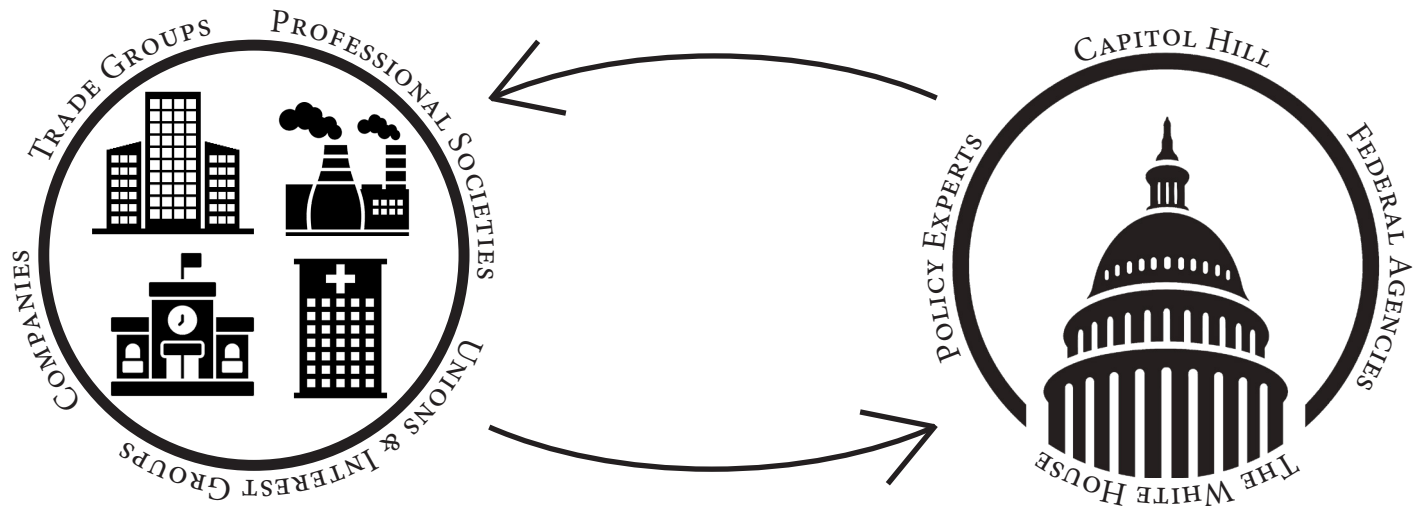
*"To me, 3M's collaboration with the DoD on mask production is what America should be doing. This is the type of thing that you take the government authority, government funding, and private sector. This is how you're supposed to tackle issues in this country. To me, I think it should be a model."*

-Staff Director, Congressional Committee

ABOUT BALLAST RESEARCH  
AN EXCLUSIVE INVITATION TO THE BALLAST POLICYMAKER HUB

# 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 CLIENTS

Our clients are Fortune 500 companies, trade associations, and nonprofits looking to forge more productive partnerships with those in government. Each of our clients understands the value of policymakers' time and works with us to optimize every interaction. The result is more productive, mutually beneficial, and efficient engagement between policymakers and advocates.

*"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

## OUR PROMISE

### CONFIDENTIALITY!

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

# AN EXCLUSIVE INVITATION TO THE BALLAST POLICYMAKER HUB

## WHY JOIN THE BALLAST POLICYMAKER HUB?

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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

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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

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**JOIN THE POLICYMAKER HUB!**

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[WWW.BALLASTRESEARCH.COM/POLICYMAKER-HUB](http://WWW.BALLASTRESEARCH.COM/POLICYMAKER-HUB)



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RESEARCH

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