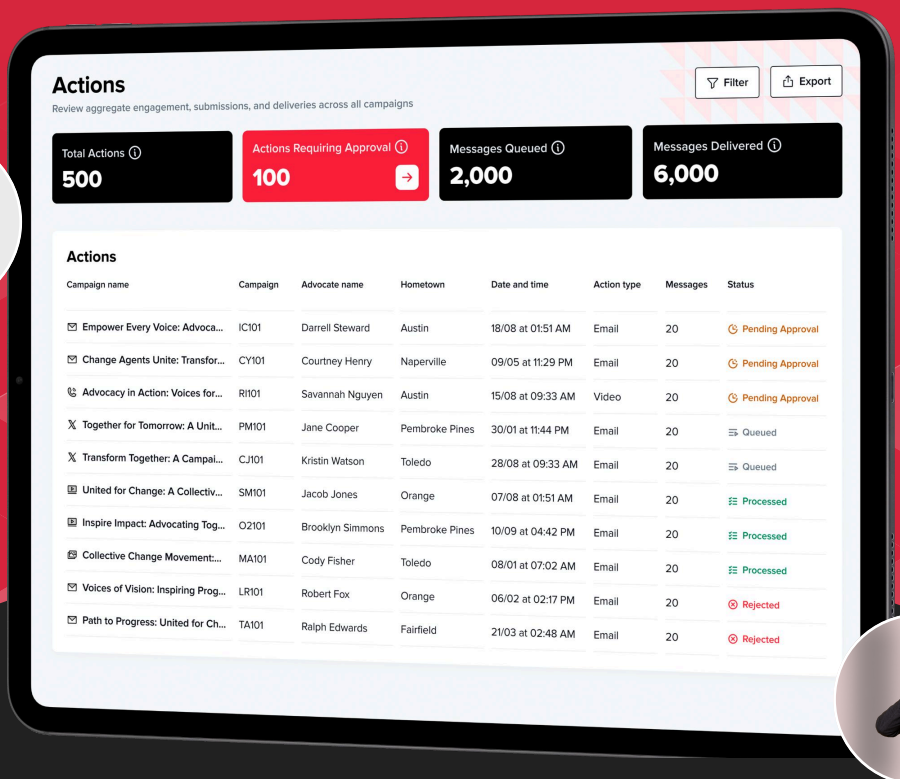
How Corporations Win Grassroots Advocacy Campaigns by Telling Authentic Stories

A Whitepaper on Mobilizing Executives, Employees, and Customers for Legislative and Regulatory Success






Oscar Wilkes - Senator


Blake Leslie - Representative


Tamara Dean - Senator

Total Target Connections
760
400 last 7 days
100



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Executive Summary

Corporate America spends billions of dollars each year on direct lobbying, political contributions, and public affairs communications, and yet many of the most consequential legislative and regulatory outcomes still turn on something money cannot buy: whether lawmakers hear from real constituents who have something real to say. Research from the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) has shown for more than a decade that in-person visits from constituents and individualized emails are the most influential forms of advocacy communication on an undecided lawmaker — far more influential than form emails, paid advertising, or even meetings with professional lobbyists. But the same research reveals a persistent gap: while 91 percent of congressional staff say that district-specific impact information would be helpful, only 9 percent report receiving it frequently. And while 79 percent say personal constituent stories would help, only 18 percent report receiving them regularly.

That gap is the single largest unexploited opportunity in modern corporate public affairs. This whitepaper is about how to close it.

The companies that have dominated their regulatory environments in recent years — DoorDash, DraftKings, Uber, Rivian, and others — have all discovered the same principle, even if they have implemented it differently: sustained victory at scale requires more than direct lobbying. It requires a standing network of authentic stakeholder advocates — executives, employees, and customers — who can be activated quickly, speak credibly to lawmakers in their own words, and mobilize again for the next fight. In the pages that follow, we examine how to build such a network, how to collect and curate authentic stories, how to mobilize stakeholders with different political orientations around shared policy goals, and how to convert grassroots pressure into direct legislative leverage.

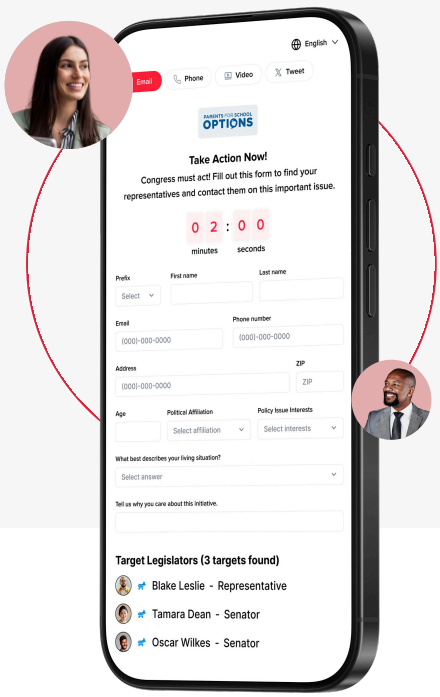




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We look closely at three extended case studies. DoorDash's DashRoots program has united more than 210,000 delivery professionals, merchants, and consumers across all 50 states, and has produced a remarkable string of recent legislative wins — from defeating a proposed delivery fee in Illinois to passing first-in-the-nation portable benefits legislation through the Wisconsin legislature. DraftKings's multi-year campaign to legalize mobile sports betting in New York, culminating in Governor Cuomo's April 2021 inclusion of mobile wagering in the state budget, offers a masterclass in combining grassroots customer pressure, grasstops executive engagement, and direct lobbying in Albany. And Rivian's 2026 breakthrough in Washington State — overturning a twelve-year dealer monopoly on direct EV sales — demonstrates how customer mobilization, paired with a credible alternative path to victory, can force entrenched incumbents to negotiate.

The whitepaper closes with a discussion of how CiviClick's grassroots advocacy software platform is helping companies like Rivian build and mobilize customer networks in key states, using technology that takes base form letters and empowers advocates to personalize them into authentic, story-driven communications that lawmakers actually read.



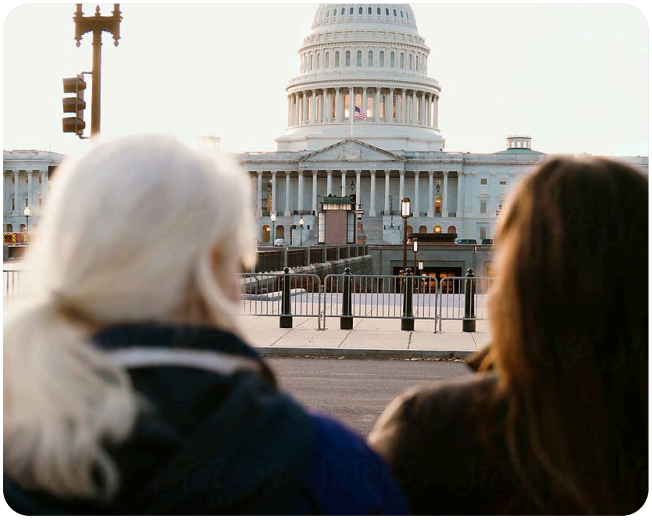
The central argument of this document is straightforward: the future of corporate public affairs belongs to organizations that treat their stakeholders not as an audience to be broadcast to, but as a standing civic asset to be cultivated, respected, and activated. The tools to do this well now exist. The research justifying the investment is unambiguous. What remains is execution.

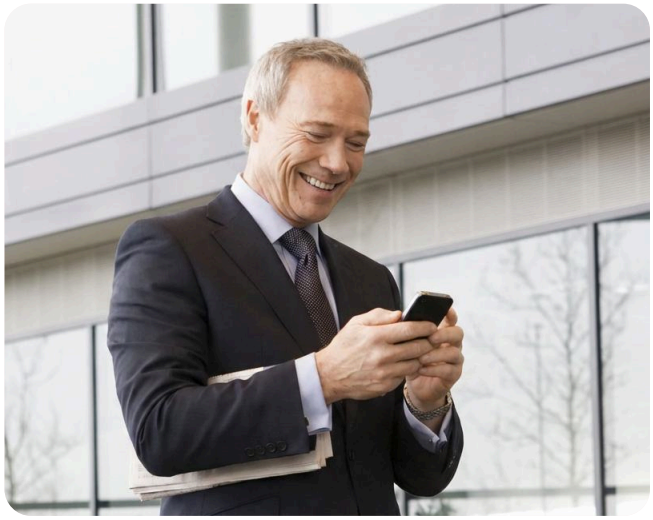
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Chapter I: The New Math of Policy Influence

For most of the twentieth century, the arithmetic of corporate political influence was reasonably simple. A company hired a capable Washington lobbyist, contributed to the campaigns of lawmakers with jurisdiction over its issues, joined the relevant trade association, and invested in a modest public relations effort when a particular bill demanded one. The lobbyist's rolodex was the asset. Relationships with chairs, ranking members, and key committee staff determined whether legislation moved, moved favorably, or died quietly in a drawer. Public opinion mattered at the margins, and constituent communication mattered most of all when it arrived in volumes large enough to suggest political risk back home.

That model still exists — Washington lobbyists, contribution bundles, trade associations, and friendly staff relationships remain essential pieces of any serious corporate public affairs program. But over the last two decades, the math has changed in ways that many companies have been slow to recognize. The rise of social media, the fragmentation of political coalitions, the increasing polarization of the electorate, the explosion of state-level regulatory activity, the collapse of traditional local journalism, and the widespread adoption of advocacy technology have all combined to produce a new landscape in which the lawmaker who matters most is increasingly not the lawmaker in a distant committee room, but the lawmaker in a state capitol or city council chamber who can be reached by an email from a real constituent in a real district.





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The research backing this shift is unambiguous. The Congressional Management Foundation, which has surveyed congressional staff for more than twenty years, consistently finds that direct constituent interaction outranks every other form of advocacy communication on the question of what influences an undecided lawmaker. In their landmark 2015 study Citizen-Centric Advocacy: The Untapped Power of Constituent Engagement, 94 percent of congressional staff said that in-person visits from constituents would have “some” or “a lot” of influence, and 92 percent said the same of individualized emails. Earlier CMF surveys produced nearly identical results, with 99 percent of staff in 2004 and 97 percent in 2010 naming in-person constituent visits as the most influential form of contact.

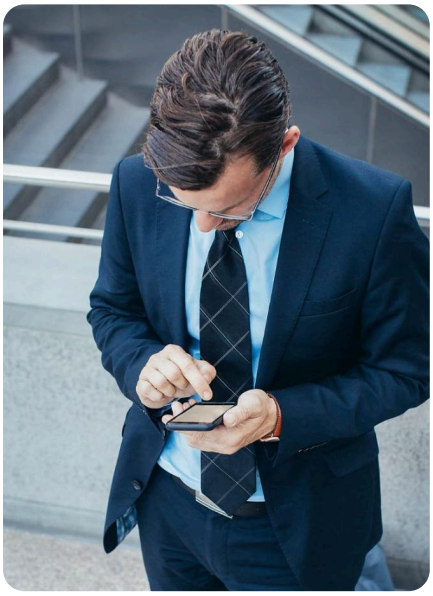
Form emails, by contrast, ranked near the bottom of the list of influential communications. A legislative correspondent in a congressional office can tell within seconds whether an incoming message is a copy-paste submission from an advocacy campaign or a real note from a real constituent. The technology that made it cheap to send a million identical emails simultaneously devalued that output. Volume signals something — it tells a member's staff that an issue has an organized constituency — but it no longer persuades on its own.



The Collapse of the Volume Heuristic

Understanding why volume has been devalued requires understanding how congressional and state legislative offices actually process incoming communication. A typical U.S. House office receives tens of thousands of pieces of constituent correspondence per year, and during major legislative debates, that volume can triple or quadruple in a single week. Staffers do not read every message. They code them by topic, position, and form-email status, producing a running tally that the legislative assistant responsible for that issue reviews alongside other sources of constituent sentiment.

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Form emails are identified quickly through content-matching software and often counted separately from individualized communications. An LA might report to a chief of staff: “We received 3,200 messages on this bill this week — 2,850 were form emails from the Industry Coalition, 290 were form emails from the Opposition Coalition, and 60 were individualized personal messages that we flagged for review.” Which of those numbers drives the policy conversation? The 60 individualized messages — especially if they come from constituents the member or staff recognize, or tell a story specific to the district — carry disproportionate weight. The 3,140 form emails signal organized activity but do not move the needle on their own.

State legislative offices, which typically operate with far smaller staffs, follow a compressed version of the same process. A state senator's legislative aide may handle correspondence for dozens of bills simultaneously. When a message lands that is clearly personal — written in the constituent's own words, tied to a specific local business, family situation, or workplace — it is often the only message on that topic that the senator personally sees. That is the communication that affects the vote.

What Lawmakers Actually Want

The CMF research drills into this question directly and produces some of the most important numbers in the field. When asked what would help them do their jobs better, 91 percent of congressional staff said that information about the impact of a bill on their specific district or state would be useful. Yet only 9 percent report receiving that information frequently. Similarly, 79 percent said that a personal story from a constituent related to the bill would be useful, but only 18 percent report receiving it frequently. On both dimensions, there is a massive supply-demand imbalance — lawmakers are starving for exactly the inputs that would most help them, and advocacy campaigns are mostly delivering something else.

This is the central operational insight for any modern corporate grassroots advocacy program: the scarce resource is not volume. It is authentic, local, story-driven communication tied to a specific legislative ask. Any campaign that can consistently deliver that has an enormous advantage over a campaign that simply generates form-email volume.

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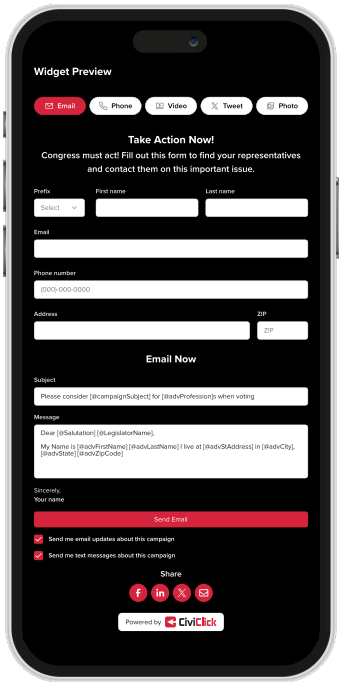
The State-Level Shift

Another piece of the new math is the migration of consequential policy decisions from Washington to state capitols. Federal legislative gridlock has pushed a remarkable amount of regulatory activity to the states. Data privacy, gig worker classification, artificial intelligence, ridesharing, mobile sports betting, cannabis, electric vehicle sales, delivery fees, short-term rentals, pharmaceutical pricing, insurance regulation — all of these issues are now being decided primarily at the state level, often with dramatically different outcomes in neighboring states.

> For corporate public affairs teams, this creates a structural challenge. Federal-level lobbying can be concentrated on a relatively small number of members and staff. State-level advocacy, by contrast, requires mobilizing constituents across dozens of capitals simultaneously, each with its own political culture, procedural rules, committee structures, and calendar. The only cost-effective way to maintain serious presence in that many theaters of operation is through a standing network of stakeholder advocates who can be activated as each fight emerges. A company that can mobilize 5,000 real customers in Austin, 3,000 in Sacramento, and 1,500 in Tallahassee within 48 hours of a bill being introduced has a capability that no amount of traditional lobbying can substitute for.

The Implications for Corporate Strategy

The strategic implication of all of this is that corporate public affairs is no longer a function that can be outsourced to contract lobbyists and activated only during crises. It must be built as a core capability, with investment in stakeholder identification, relationship cultivation, story collection, advocacy software, and year-round engagement that runs continuously between campaigns. The companies that have figured this out are the companies that are winning the legislative and regulatory fights that define their markets. The companies that have not figured it out are the ones that keep getting surprised — by a delivery tax, a driver classification bill, a dealer protection statute, or a new environmental regulation — and reaching for external vendors to build a campaign from scratch when the fight has already started.



The pages that follow examine how to build the capability correctly.

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Chapter II: Why Authentic Stories Outperform Volume

If direct constituent contact is the most influential form of advocacy communication, and if authenticity is what separates influential contact from ignorable contact, then the question becomes how to produce authentic communication at scale. The answer is stories — specific, local, human narratives that tie a lawmaker's abstract policy question to a concrete constituent experience. Stories are what lawmakers remember, what staff quote in memos, and what legislators reference on the floor when they explain why they voted the way they did.

The American Farm Bureau, which has built one of the most respected grassroots programs in American agricultural policy, trains its farmer-advocates using a three-part storytelling framework adapted from Pixar's screenwriting workshops: setup, complication, resolution. A wheat grower in Kansas testifying on an estate tax provision begins not with tax code arguments but with the specific story of the family farm — the grandfather who bought the first 160 acres, the expansion over three generations, the question of whether the fourth generation will be able to afford to keep farming after the current owner's death. The policy argument emerges from the story, not the other way around. In one well-documented case, a congressional staffer called a Farm Bureau member back months after a Capitol Hill meeting specifically because the staffer remembered the farmer's story and wanted to discuss a new bill in that context.





This is what authentic storytelling does that no amount of data-driven advocacy can replicate. It creates a memory, a mental hook, a specific image that the lawmaker and staff carry with them into future conversations on the topic. Statistics and policy papers are processed and filed. Stories are remembered.

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The Neuroscience of Persuasion

A large body of research in cognitive psychology supports what experienced advocates have always known intuitively: human beings are wired to process and retain information that comes in narrative form far more effectively than information that comes as abstract data. Narrative engages multiple brain regions simultaneously — sensory cortices light up when a story involves vivid description, motor cortices activate during action sequences, and emotional centers respond to character and stakes. A list of statistics engages essentially none of that machinery.

For advocacy purposes, this has a concrete implication: a campaign that produces 500 authentic stories from constituents, each tailored to a specific district and tied to a specific legislative ask, will almost always outperform a campaign that produces 50,000 identical form emails. The stories will be remembered. The form emails will be counted and filed. When the legislative correspondent's report lands on the member's desk, the stories are what get quoted.

What Makes a Story Authentic

The word “authentic” carries a lot of weight in modern advocacy discussions, and it is worth being precise about what it means. An authentic story in this context has several properties:





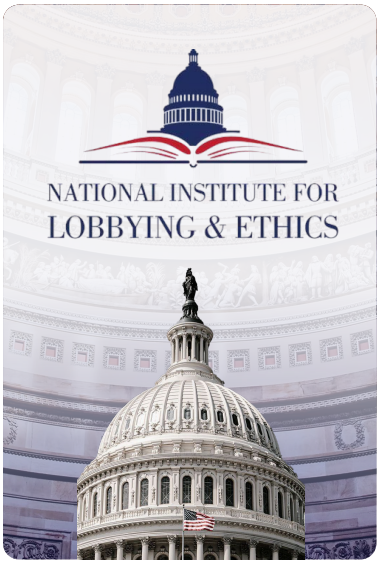
First, it comes from a real person with a real stake in the outcome. The person telling it is not a paid advocate, not a lobbyist, not an industry spokesperson, but a constituent whose life or livelihood is genuinely affected by the policy in question. Second, it is told in that person's own voice. The specific word choices, the particular way the narrative is framed, the details that the storyteller chooses to emphasize — all of these are the storyteller's, not a communications team's. Third, it contains specific, verifiable detail. Not “this bill would hurt small businesses,” but “I own a pizzeria on State Street in Springfield, I have nine employees, and a $1.50-per-order delivery fee would cost me about $8,000 a year.” Fourth, it is tied to a clear policy ask — a specific bill, a specific vote, a specific regulatory decision — so that the lawmaker knows what action is being requested.

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The absence of any of these four properties compromises the story's effectiveness. A story without a real storyteller is astroturf, which lawmakers and staff detect quickly and which damages a campaign's credibility when it is discovered. A story told in corporate-speak sounds false even when the underlying facts are true. A story without specific detail fails to create the mental hook that makes narratives memorable. And a story without a clear ask leaves the lawmaker unsure what to do with the information, which usually means doing nothing.

The Ethical Framework

> The National Institute for Lobbying and Ethics (NILE), through its Public Policy Certificate program and its Code of Ethics, has articulated the ethical standards that distinguish legitimate grassroots advocacy from manipulation. The first and most important principle is honesty: advocates and the campaigns that support them must provide factually correct, current, and accurate information. If a story is not true, it should not be told. If a constituent's views are being represented by proxy, that proxy relationship must be transparent. If a campaign is being coordinated by a corporate public affairs team, that coordination should be disclosed to anyone who asks.



Within those ethical boundaries, there is enormous room for corporate programs to help their stakeholders tell their stories more effectively. Training, story-coaching, template language that advocates customize, drafting assistance for executives with limited time — all of these are legitimate and valuable. What crosses the line is fabricating stories, attributing views to constituents who do not hold them, generating fake personas, or deploying AI-generated content that is passed off as human writing. The line is the line between amplifying authentic voice and manufacturing inauthentic voice, and campaigns that respect that line build durable credibility while campaigns that cross it often win a battle and lose a war.

The Signal-to-Noise Problem

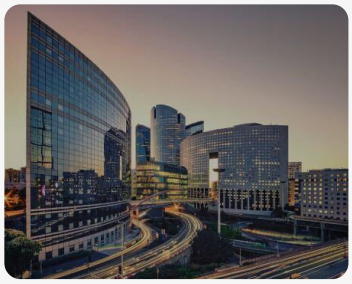
One reason authenticity has become such a valuable asset is that the overall volume of political communication has increased dramatically while the quality of most of it has declined. Congressional offices now receive vastly more email than they did twenty years ago, but a steadily growing share of that traffic is identifiable as form emails, bot-generated messages, or out-of-district communications. Offices have responded by developing ever more sophisticated filtering and prioritization systems.

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In that environment, the communications that rise to the top are communications that look and read differently than the rest of the stream. An individualized message from an identifiable constituent, written in that person's own voice, with specific local detail, addressed to a specific legislative ask, is exactly what the filtering systems are designed to surface and what the staff review. This is not a quirk of the current system; it is the intended outcome of the way congressional and state legislative offices have organized themselves to process constituent input. Campaigns that understand this and design their work around it get their communications into the part of the pipeline that actually affects votes. Campaigns that do not understand it continue to pour resources into the part of the pipeline that gets filtered out.

Chapter III: Building a Corporate Grassroots Network





Building a grassroots network inside a corporation is fundamentally different from building one inside an advocacy organization, a union, or a membership association. The members of a traditional advocacy group join because they share a cause. The stakeholders of a corporation — executives, employees, shareholders, customers — have commercial relationships with the company first, and political views that may or may not align with corporate policy objectives. The work of a grassroots program is to identify the genuine overlap between corporate interests and stakeholder interests, to build the trust necessary to activate stakeholders around that overlap, and to maintain that network as a standing resource rather than letting it decay between campaigns.

This is harder than it sounds, and the companies that do it well have usually been investing in the capability for years.

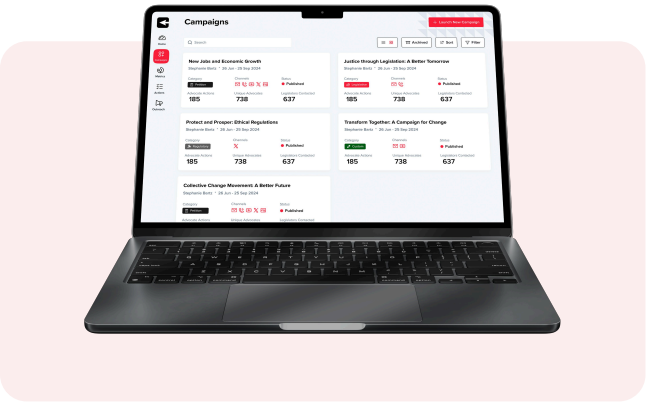
Mapping the Stakeholder Universe

The first step in building a corporate grassroots network is understanding the full landscape of people who have a stake in the company's policy outcomes. For most companies, this includes at least five distinct groups, each with its own motivations and its own level of willingness to engage.

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Executives and senior leadership are the most visible stakeholders and often the most strategically important. Their stories carry weight with lawmakers because they can speak to investment decisions, hiring plans, competitive dynamics, and strategic consequences of policy outcomes. They are also the most scheduled and the most media-trained, which means getting useful story content from them usually requires structured interviews rather than generic requests.

Employees are the largest and often the most underutilized stakeholder group. A mid-sized company might have 5,000 employees spread across dozens of states and hundreds of legislative districts. Each of those employees is a registered voter — or could be — with a local address, a local story, and a legitimate stake in the company's continued operation in that jurisdiction. Employees can speak to how policy outcomes affect their livelihoods, their team, their plant or office, and their community. But they often do not see themselves as political advocates and may hesitate to engage unless the company creates a clear, low-friction path and explicitly signals that participation is welcome.





Customers are the most numerous stakeholder group for most consumer-facing companies, and they are the group that platform businesses like Uber, DoorDash, and Airbnb have been most effective at mobilizing. Customers generally have strong emotional attachments to products and services they use regularly, which makes them receptive to advocacy asks when those asks align with preserving or improving their experience. The challenge with customers is that their engagement with the company is transactional and episodic, so reaching them with advocacy communications requires tapping into the primary product channel — the app, the website, the email list — in ways that must be carefully balanced against commercial considerations.

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Suppliers and business partners are often overlooked but can be powerful advocates. A regional distributor who depends on the company for a significant portion of revenue, or a small business that serves as a franchisee or reseller, has a concrete economic stake in the company's success and usually understands the local political landscape far better than the company's central public affairs team.

Retirees and alumni of the company, particularly for companies with long institutional histories, form a fifth group that many programs ignore entirely. A former plant manager who worked at the facility for thirty years and still lives in the community has both credibility and motivation to speak up when policy decisions affect the plant's future.

The Trust Foundation

Every effective grassroots network rests on a foundation of trust between the company and its stakeholders. Without that foundation, attempts to mobilize stakeholders feel like corporate impositions, and response rates collapse. With that foundation, even sensitive asks feel like legitimate invitations to civic participation.

The trust foundation is built over years of small signals. When a company offers employees paid time off to vote, it is saying something about how it values civic participation. When a company sponsors non-partisan voter registration drives, it is saying something about respect for democratic process. When a company runs an apolitical civic education program — teaching employees how legislation becomes law, how regulations are written, how local government works — it is saying something about its willingness to invest in an informed stakeholder base. None of these programs is an advocacy campaign, and none is intended to produce a specific legislative outcome. What they produce is the baseline trust that makes later advocacy programs credible.



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The opposite is also true. A company that only contacts employees about political issues when it needs their help, or that only mobilizes customers when regulations threaten the business model, finds that its calls go largely unanswered. Stakeholders are not stupid; they can tell the difference between a company that respects their civic agency and a company that treats them as a resource to be deployed.

Infrastructure Investments

> Behind every effective grassroots program is a set of infrastructure investments that often go unseen. At minimum, a serious program needs: a stakeholder database with accurate contact information, legislative district assignments, and engagement history; an advocacy software platform that allows multi-channel outreach and makes it easy for supporters to contact their specific lawmakers; a story-collection system that captures and tags narratives for later use; training content and coaching for advocates who want to engage more deeply; a communications team that can segment messages by stakeholder group, geography, and issue; and a management layer that tracks activity, measures influence, and reports on results.



Many companies try to build a grassroots program without this infrastructure and are then puzzled when their campaigns underperform. Running an advocacy campaign without proper technology is like running a sales organization without a CRM — it is technically possible, but the opportunity cost is enormous and the results are not competitive with organizations that have invested properly.

The Recurring-Engagement Problem

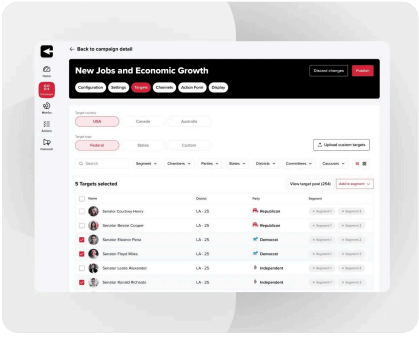
Perhaps the single biggest mistake that companies make in grassroots advocacy is treating it as an episodic activity rather than a recurring one. A legislative fight emerges, the company hires a vendor, the vendor spins up a campaign, advocates are mobilized, the fight ends, the vendor is dismissed, and the network decays. When the next fight arrives, the company has to start over — identifying stakeholders, building relationships, collecting stories, training advocates, and mobilizing a cold audience on a compressed timeline.

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The companies that win consistently over time do not do this. They invest in the capability continuously. They engage their stakeholder network between campaigns with civic education content, issue briefings, updates on legislative activity, and opportunities to meet with elected officials in non-crisis contexts. They celebrate wins publicly and acknowledge losses honestly. They treat the network the way a political campaign treats its donor list or a sales organization treats its top accounts — as a relationship that requires ongoing investment.

When the next legislative fight arrives, these companies do not need to build anything. They need only to activate what already exists.







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Chapter IV: Soliciting Stories from Each Stakeholder Group



The practical work of collecting authentic stories from a corporate stakeholder base is significantly harder than collecting them from, say, a patient advocacy community or a veterans organization. Patients and veterans typically come to the table with lived experiences they are already eager to share and already accustomed to framing in advocacy contexts. Corporate stakeholders — particularly executives and employees — are generally more cautious, worried about saying the wrong thing publicly, uncertain whether their employer actually wants them engaged, and skeptical that their individual story will matter.

Collecting stories from each major stakeholder group requires a tailored approach. The methods that work for executives do not work for hourly employees, and the methods that work for customers do not work for suppliers. The best grassroots advocacy programs develop distinct playbooks for each group and execute them in parallel.

Executives and Senior Leaders

Executive storytelling is the highest-leverage and most time-constrained element of a typical program. A CEO or senior vice president can deliver a story to a state legislator or member of Congress that no other stakeholder can match: a story about a strategic decision that was delayed because of regulatory uncertainty, a plant expansion that was moved to a different state, a hiring plan that was scaled back. Lawmakers pay attention to these stories because they carry clear political consequences — if a company is willing to tell the governor or legislative leadership that it is rethinking a major investment, that is news that matters.



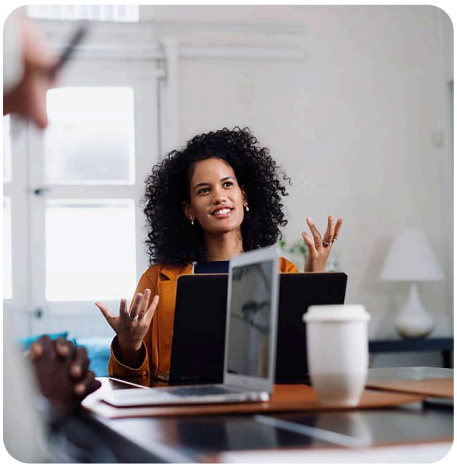
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Experienced grassroots advocacy teams maintain a running file of executive stories that can be deployed across multiple campaigns. A story about why the company chose to build a plant in Tennessee instead of Kentucky, for example, might originally be collected for a state tax policy fight, but it can be adapted for use in federal industrial policy debates, energy policy discussions, and workforce development conversations. Good stories are reusable; bad programs let them go to waste after a single use.

Mid-Level Managers and Professionals

Mid-level managers, professionals, and other salaried employees occupy an important middle position in most corporate stakeholder networks. They have enough context about the company's operations to speak credibly about policy impacts, enough professional writing ability to produce communications in their own voice without extensive coaching, and enough personal stake in the company's success to engage when asked. They are also far more numerous than senior executives and can be deployed at scale in state and local fights.

The best programs reach this group through a combination of structured outreach (company-wide emails announcing advocacy opportunities), voluntary opt-in (allowing employees to join the grassroots network of their own accord), and manager-level cultivation (encouraging mid-level managers to recruit their own teams). Story collection from this group often happens through short written prompts and follow-up conversations, conducted by a dedicated grassroots coordinator who knows which districts and issues matter.



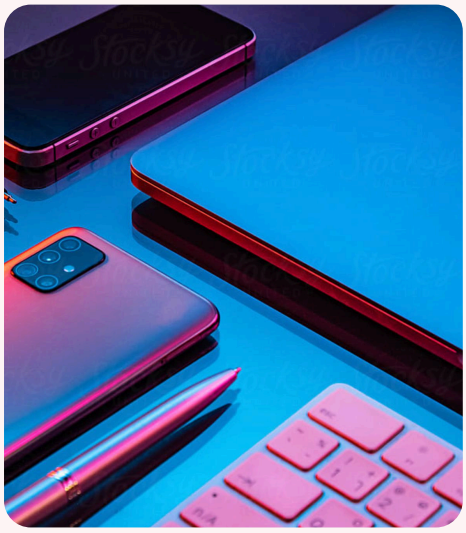
A critical element of working with salaried employees is the clear communication that participation is voluntary, that non-participation has no professional consequences, and that employees who disagree with the company's position on a particular issue are not expected to speak up or take action. This clarity is not just ethical; it is practically essential. Employees who feel coerced produce inauthentic stories, which damage campaigns when they are detected. Employees who participate voluntarily produce stories that ring true because they are true.

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Infrastructure Investments

Frontline employees — warehouse workers, delivery drivers, retail associates, manufacturing floor workers, customer service representatives — represent the single largest and most underutilized segment of most corporate stakeholder networks. These employees often have the most compelling stories to tell because their livelihoods are most directly affected by policy outcomes, and they typically live and vote in the districts where legislators are making decisions that affect their jobs.

Reaching this group requires overcoming several structural barriers. Many frontline workers do not use corporate email regularly, do not attend company-wide meetings, and have limited time during the workday for activities unrelated to their core job. Communications that reach salaried employees effectively may miss frontline workers entirely. The solution is usually a dedicated communications channel for this group — often a text-messaging system, a mobile-first app, or a flyer-and-poster campaign in break rooms — combined with advocacy software that makes participation possible from a personal smartphone in a few taps.



Story collection from frontline employees often works best through in-person events. Companies that host town halls, site visits by elected officials, or employee advocacy days have consistently found that these settings produce the richest narrative content — frontline workers who would never sit down and write a policy letter will happily tell their story to a representative in person, and those stories can be captured, documented, and redeployed with the worker's permission.

Customers and Consumers

Customer mobilization is the great frontier of corporate grassroots advocacy. A company with a consumer-facing app, website, or email list has a communication channel to potentially millions of people whose daily lives include the company's products and services. Uber, DoorDash, Airbnb, and other platform companies have used this channel with extraordinary effectiveness, turning their customer bases into political constituencies capable of flooding city council and state legislative offices with personalized messages within hours.

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The ethical and strategic considerations around customer mobilization are different from those that apply to employees. Customers generally have no ongoing relationship with the company's political positions; they are signing up to use a product, not to receive advocacy asks. Deploying the product channel for advocacy communications must be done carefully, with clear opt-out options, relevant framing, and restraint about frequency. A company that floods its app with political notifications will quickly see customer backlash.

At the same time, customers who do engage tend to produce remarkably effective advocacy communications. They speak from the consumer's perspective, which resonates differently with lawmakers than the employer's or employee's perspective. They often have stories that humanize abstract policy debates — the parent who uses DoorDash to get dinner on the table after a long day, the small business owner who relies on Uber for late-night meetings, the rural resident who uses Airbnb to offset mortgage costs during tourist season. These stories are exactly the kind of specific, local, narrative content that lawmakers find most persuasive.

The Mechanics of Story Collection

> Across all stakeholder groups, effective story collection depends on three operational elements. First, making the ask specific and concrete. “Share why this policy matters to you” produces generic responses; “Can you describe a specific customer, project, or team this bill would affect, and what it would mean for your work?” produces detailed narratives. Second, lowering the friction of submission. Every additional click, every required field, every moment of confusion about what is being requested reduces response rates. The best story-collection systems allow submission in under two minutes with no account creation required. Third, providing clear consent and control. Stakeholders need to understand where their story will appear, whether their name will be attached, whether their employer will be identified, and whether they can withdraw at any time. Real consent drives real participation.

The infrastructure for story collection should run continuously, not only during campaign crunch periods. Intake forms embedded in the company intranet, short-form video kiosks at annual sales meetings, periodic prompts through the existing employee communications channels, and story-capture modules built into advocacy software platforms all contribute to a living story bank that can be drawn on when needed. The goal is a tagged, searchable repository of narratives that a government affairs team can query by legislative district, job function, and issue area, so that when a specific lawmaker's vote is in play, the team can pull three or four relevant stories from constituents in that district within an hour.

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Chapter V: Bridging Political Divides

Every public affairs professional who has ever tried to mobilize a corporate stakeholder base has run into the same wall: the people who share a direct economic interest in a policy outcome often disagree vigorously about which political party, which elected official, or which ideological framing should carry the message. A pipeline company's field workforce may lean heavily Republican while its corporate headquarters staff in a coastal city skews Democratic. A technology company may have engineers who support aggressive antitrust enforcement and sales leaders who oppose it, even though both groups benefit from the same underlying tax treatment the company is lobbying to protect.

The instinct of many campaigns is to paper over these differences with vague, anodyne messaging that offends no one and persuades no one. The better approach is to segment — to recognize that different stakeholders can speak to different lawmakers in different voices, emphasizing different dimensions of a shared interest, without any of them being asked to say anything they do not actually believe.

Segmentation as Strategy



Consider a company pushing for a regulatory reform that is genuinely bipartisan in its economic logic but politically polarized in its framing. Republican-leaning employees in a red district can be mobilized with messaging about regulatory burden, small-business impact, and competitiveness. Democratic-leaning employees in a blue district can be mobilized with messaging about consumer choice, worker opportunity, and innovation. Both sets of messages are true. Both are authentic to the stakeholders delivering them. And both land with the specific lawmaker being contacted, because each constituent is speaking to values the lawmaker recognizes.

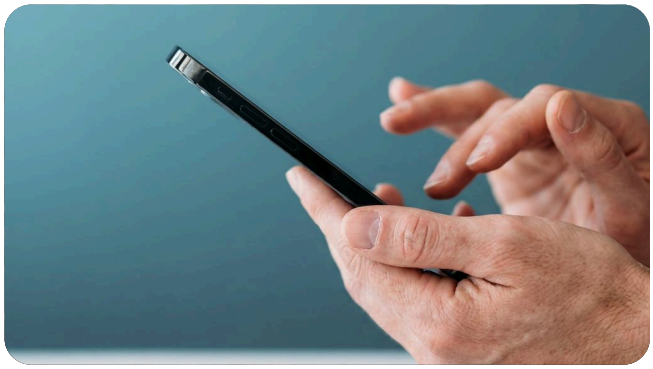
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This is not spin. It is the basic recognition that persuasion in a pluralistic political environment requires meeting people where they are. The Public Affairs Council, through its State of Corporate Public Affairs research and its PAC Benchmarking Reports, has documented the increasing sophistication of corporate digital advocacy programs in exactly this kind of bipartisan mobilization — structuring PACs to give to both parties, building grassroots networks that span ideological lines, and training government relations teams to tell the same story in different dialects without compromising the underlying facts.

The Ethical Guardrail

> The ethical guardrail, reinforced by NILE's principles, is that the underlying facts must remain constant across audiences. A company cannot tell Republicans that a bill will reduce regulation while telling Democrats it will increase worker protections if those framings contradict each other. But most policy outcomes genuinely serve multiple values simultaneously, and campaigns that surface those different dimensions honestly are doing their stakeholders and lawmakers a service.





Consider the DoorDash portable benefits campaign in Wisconsin. The substantive content of the bill — letting app-based workers access benefits like health insurance and paid time off through a portable account system — could be framed credibly in at least three different ways. For Republicans, it is a market-based solution that preserves worker independence and flexibility while expanding access to benefits without new mandates. For centrist Democrats, it is a modernization of the benefits system for a changing economy. For labor-oriented Democrats, it is a first step toward ensuring that gig workers have access to essential protections. All three framings are legitimate descriptions of what the policy does. Which one a particular advocate uses should depend on which one resonates with their own values and with the lawmaker they are contacting.

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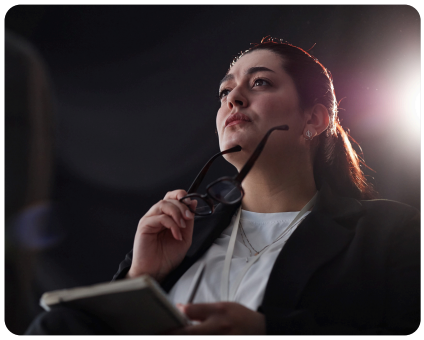
Infrastructure Investments

> Bipartisan grassroots advocacy also requires navigating the ongoing realignment of political coalitions. Issues that were reliably partisan ten years ago may be cross-cutting today. Labor union alliances that used to be stable are now fluid. Business-friendly Democrats and populist Republicans sometimes find themselves on the same side of regulatory debates in ways that would have been unthinkable in the past. Trade policy, antitrust, data privacy, pharmaceutical pricing, and energy policy all feature shifting coalitions that defy simple left-right characterization.

For corporate public affairs teams, this creates both opportunity and risk. Opportunity, because bipartisan coalitions on specific issues open paths to legislative success that would not exist on purely partisan issues. Risk, because the framings that work with one segment of an emerging coalition may alienate another. The answer is consistent: stakeholders should speak in their own voices, to lawmakers whose positions they can reasonably address, on dimensions of the issue they genuinely care about. The coordination work is in ensuring that the right stakeholders are activated for the right audiences, not in forcing everyone to say the same thing.







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Chapter VI: Case Study — DoorDash's DashRoots Program

Few corporate grassroots advocacy programs have matured as visibly or as successfully as DoorDash's DashRoots. Launched to give the company's three primary stakeholder groups — delivery professionals (“Dashers”), restaurant partners (“merchants”), and consumers — a platform for civic engagement on policies affecting app-based work and delivery, DashRoots has grown into a coalition of more than 210,000 members spanning all 50 states and four countries. It is a useful case study not just for its scale but for the architecture of its approach: how it identifies and respects the distinct interests of each stakeholder group, how it converts commercial relationships into civic participation, and how it has produced a string of recent legislative and regulatory wins in states with very different political cultures.

The Stakeholder Architecture



DashRoots is built around the recognition that DoorDash's policy environment involves three groups whose interests overlap substantially but are not identical. Dashers — the roughly half-million delivery professionals who use the DoorDash platform — care most about preserving their ability to work as independent contractors with flexible schedules, while gaining access to benefits traditionally tied to employment. DoorDash's own polling and research suggest that 87 percent of Dashers prefer to remain as independent contractors because most dash part-time and value the flexibility.

Merchants — the restaurants and other small businesses that use the DoorDash platform to reach customers — care most about preserving the economics of delivery partnerships and avoiding fee caps, delivery taxes, or other regulatory interventions that would reduce the value of the platform as a marketing and sales channel. DoorDash's research suggests that 83 percent of merchants agree that the platform has helped them reach new customers.

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Consumers, finally, care most about preserving affordable, convenient access to delivery services and avoiding regulatory burdens that would push costs higher or reduce service availability. DoorDash's research suggests that 86 percent of consumers feel good about supporting local merchants by using the platform.

DashRoots activates each of these three groups on issues where their interests align with DoorDash's policy objectives, while respecting the legitimate differences among them. A delivery fee proposal in Illinois, for example, affects all three groups — Dashers who might lose earnings, merchants who would absorb the cost pressure, and consumers who would ultimately pay higher prices — and mobilizing all three together produces a far more persuasive set of messages to lawmakers than any single group could generate alone.

The Illinois Delivery Fee Victory

> In May 2025, Illinois lawmakers proposed a $1.50 delivery fee as part of a broader transit funding package. The fee, applied on a per-order basis, would have added significant cost to every delivery transaction in the state, with predictable downstream effects: higher prices for consumers, reduced order volumes for merchants, and compressed earnings for Dashers.

DashRoots mobilized quickly. Within days of the proposal becoming public, thousands of Dashers and consumers had contacted their state legislators to raise concerns about the fee. The messaging was differentiated by stakeholder group: Dashers emphasized the impact on their earnings and the risk that the fee would reduce orders; consumers emphasized the impact on their household budgets and the regressive nature of a flat per-delivery fee that would hit lower-income households harder; merchants emphasized the impact on small restaurants that had come to rely on delivery as a critical revenue channel during and after the pandemic.

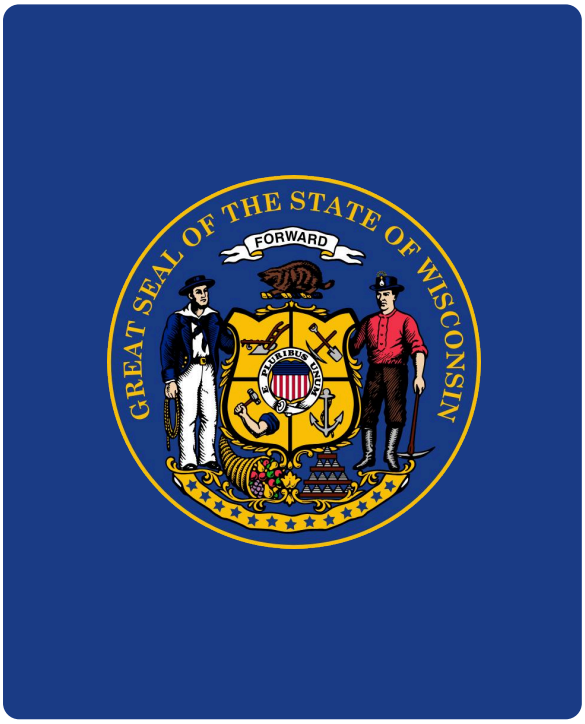




The result: Illinois lawmakers removed the proposed $1.50 delivery fee from the transit package. The stories told by real Dashers, real customers, and real restaurant owners — each speaking from their own perspective about how the fee would affect their lives — gave legislators the political cover they needed to walk the proposal back. The victory is a textbook example of what multi-stakeholder grassroots advocacy looks like when it works: three distinct groups, each with authentic interests, mobilized in parallel to produce a unified policy outcome.

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The Wisconsin Portable Benefits Campaign



In June 2025, the Wisconsin State Legislature passed Assembly Bill 269, landmark legislation creating a portable benefits system for app-based workers. Under the bill, delivery and ride-share drivers earning more than $750 in a calendar year would be eligible for a portable benefits account, funded by company contributions equal to 4 percent of the driver's quarterly earnings (minus tips). The benefits could be applied to health insurance, paid time off, retirement savings, occupational accident insurance, and other uses of the worker's choice. Critically, the benefits would travel with the worker rather than being tied to any single platform, enabling drivers who work on multiple apps to accumulate benefits across all of them.

The bill passed with bipartisan support — 56-36 in the Assembly and with similar margins in the Senate — making Wisconsin the first state to pass legislation combining independent contractor classification with a mandatory portable benefits framework for app-based workers. (Governor Evers subsequently vetoed the bill in August 2025, citing concerns about the independent contractor classification provisions; DashRoots and its allies have continued to advocate for the policy in Wisconsin and other states.)

The campaign itself is instructive. DashRoots Dashers in Wisconsin told their own stories in their own words about why they valued their independence, why they wanted access to benefits without sacrificing flexibility, and why they believed portable benefits represented a genuine solution to a real problem. A retired state employee who drove part-time said his DoorDash income provided “flexible income to help with rising costs” without tying him to a fixed schedule. A Milwaukee entrepreneur building an online wellness business said portable benefits would let her “plan for my future without giving up the freedom that makes this work possible in the first place.” A Minnesota Dasher named Sanaa urged her elected officials to support portable benefits legislation as a way to maintain independent contractor status while accessing benefits like healthcare and retirement savings.

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These are not talking points drafted by a communications team. They are real statements from real workers about real circumstances, and they were exactly the kind of input that Wisconsin legislators found persuasive when they voted the bill out of both chambers. The campaign also benefited from pilot data showing real-world outcomes: in a Pennsylvania portable benefits pilot, 4,400 delivery workers participated, and 90 percent of surveyed participants reported being more financially secure as a result.

A Pattern of Victories

The Illinois and Wisconsin campaigns are not isolated. The DashRoots site documents a running series of recent victories that illustrate the breadth of the program:

> In April 2025, nearly 40,000 Dashers sent more than 120,000 letters to Congress in support of the No Tax on Tips Act, which subsequently passed the House. In Louisiana, more than 4,400 messages from Dashers and customers helped defeat House Bill 9, which would have imposed a delivery tax. In Nebraska, Dashers, merchants, and customers together sent more than 31,000 letters opposing a proposed delivery tax, and won. In Indiana, DashRoots members sent more than 33,000 messages opposing another delivery tax bill, successfully convincing lawmakers to amend the legislation. In Rhode Island, Dashers and consumers sent more than 700 letters to protect affordable delivery access, and the state's 2026 budget passed without the proposed Retail Delivery Fee. In Los Angeles County, more than 800 consumers voiced concerns about a proposed requirement that DoorDash share customer personal information with merchants after orders, defeating the proposal.



Each of these wins involved a different legislative context, a different political coalition, and a different stakeholder mix. But the underlying approach was consistent: identify the policy issue, mobilize the affected stakeholders through clear and specific asks, give each group a platform to tell authentic stories, and deliver concentrated communication volume to the specific lawmakers whose votes mattered. The programmatic capability, once built, produces repeatable results.

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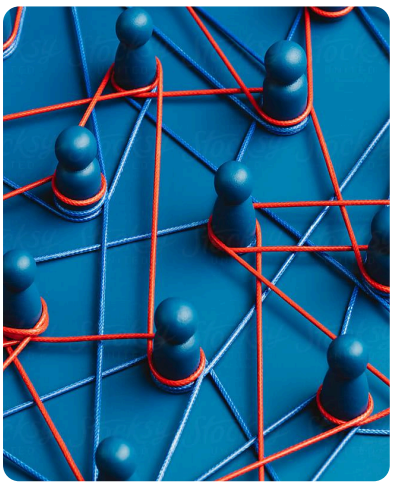
The Events and Relationship-Building Dimension

DashRoots is not just a mobilization program. It is a sustained relationship-building operation, with a calendar of in-person and virtual events designed to deepen engagement between the stakeholder network and its elected officials. The program hosts DashRoots Cohort Community Meetups in cities across the United States, bringing together Dashers and merchants for networking and community-building. It convenes DashRoots Roundtables in partnership with local businesses, featuring conversations among Dashers, merchants, elected officials, and legislative staff. And it organizes DashRoots Lobby Days, where members meet their elected officials from both sides of the aisle to share firsthand the experience of working on or with the DoorDash platform.

> This infrastructure matters enormously. The Congressional Management Foundation research is clear that relationships between lawmakers and advocates, built over time through repeated interaction, are far more influential than one-off contacts during a crisis. DashRoots members who meet their state senator in March, attend a roundtable in July, and then send a personalized message about a specific bill in September are not starting from zero when the message arrives. They are continuing a relationship. And that continuity is what converts episodic advocacy into durable influence.

What Other Companies Can Learn





The DashRoots model is reproducible — not in the specifics of food delivery, but in the architecture. The core elements are transferable to any company whose policy environment involves multiple stakeholder groups with overlapping but distinct interests. Identify the groups. Build communication channels appropriate to each. Develop advocacy asks tailored to each group's perspective and to the specific lawmakers being contacted. Invest in events and relationship-building alongside campaign-specific mobilization. Maintain the network between campaigns. Measure results and iterate.

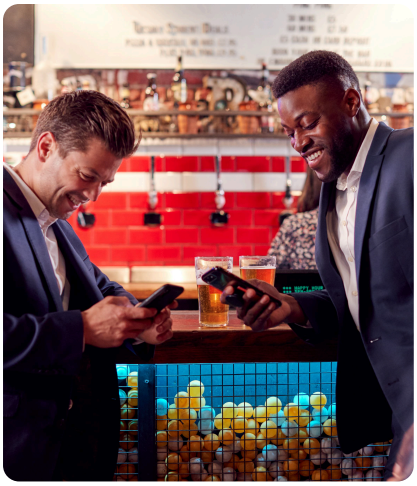
What distinguishes DashRoots from the generic corporate grassroots program is not any single innovation but the consistency and depth of investment over time. DoorDash did not build a 210,000-member network overnight. It built it through years of sustained effort, and now it has an asset that delivers meaningful legislative leverage in fight after fight, state after state.

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Chapter VII: DraftKings and the New York Mobile Sports Betting Victory

The legalization of mobile sports betting in New York State, authorized in April 2021 as part of the fiscal year 2022 state budget, stands as one of the most consequential state-level policy wins in the history of the American gaming industry. The decision opened what quickly became the single largest mobile sports betting market in the country: by the time the first mobile apps went live on January 8, 2022, New Yorkers were placing bets at a pace that would generate tens of billions of dollars in handle over the following three years and hundreds of millions of dollars in state tax revenue annually. For DraftKings — one of the four operators approved to launch on day one, alongside FanDuel, Caesars Sportsbook, and Rush Street Interactive — the New York legalization was not just a market opening. It was the culmination of a multi-year campaign that combined grassroots customer pressure, grasstops executive engagement, and sustained direct lobbying in Albany.

The Long Path to Albany



The New York mobile sports betting fight did not begin in 2021. It began in 2018, in the immediate aftermath of the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in Murphy v. NCAA, which struck down the federal ban on state sports betting and opened the door for states to legalize on their own terms. Many states moved quickly. New York did not. The state's path to mobile legalization took three full years and involved multiple failed attempts, a gubernatorial veto threat, a pandemic budget crisis, and sustained industry pressure across all three dimensions of corporate political influence.

Retail sports betting — wagering at brick-and-mortar casinos — had been authorized in New York since 2013 and became operational at upstate casinos in 2019. But retail sports betting was never going to produce the tax revenue or customer access that mobile betting could, for the obvious reason that most New Yorkers do not live near an upstate casino. For the operators, for state lawmakers hungry for revenue, and for professional sports teams interested in fan engagement and sportsbook partnerships, mobile was the prize.

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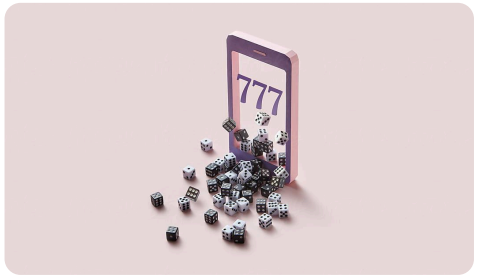
The political obstacle was significant. Governor Andrew Cuomo initially opposed mobile sports betting and effectively blocked discussion of the issue through 2019 and into 2020. Senator Joseph Addabbo, Jr. — chairman of the Senate's Racing, Gaming and Wagering Committee — pushed for legalization year after year, but without gubernatorial support, no bill was going to move. The COVID-19 pandemic changed the calculus. By late 2020, New York faced a budget crisis severe enough to put everything on the table, and Yankees president Randy Levine wrote an editorial for Empire Report pushing for mobile sports betting specifically as a way to cut into New York City's budget crisis. In January 2021, Cuomo reversed position and announced his support for legalization. The authorization was included in the state budget signed in April 2021, and mobile operators launched in January 2022.

Direct Lobbying in Albany

The direct lobbying dimension of the New York campaign was substantial and multi-layered. DraftKings, FanDuel, BetMGM, and other operators all maintained retained lobbyists in Albany throughout the 2019-2021 period, coordinating through industry coalitions and individually. Professional sports franchises with New York facilities — the Yankees, the Bills, the Sabres, Madison Square Garden (Knicks and Rangers), and others — engaged their own lobbying firms to advocate for legalization, viewing mobile sports betting as an important source of future fan engagement and sportsbook partnership revenue. Public disclosure data from the Joint Commission on Public Ethics showed that sports teams alone spent more than $200,000 on Albany lobbying tied to gaming issues during this period, and the three major U.S. sports leagues (MLB, NBA, NFL) paid more than $125,000 to lobby New York lawmakers on sports betting issues in 2021 alone.

The coordination across these actors was meaningful. A state senator considering mobile sports betting in 2020 or 2021 was hearing not just from DraftKings's retained lobbyist, but from the representatives of the Yankees and the Bills, from the MLB, from the NBA, from industry coalition staff, and from economic policy analysts who had been briefed by operators on the revenue potential. The accumulated signal from all of these sources was consistent: mobile sports betting was inevitable in large states, New York was leaving money on the table by waiting, and a well-designed regulatory framework would produce significant tax revenue while protecting consumers.





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The Grasstops Dimension

The grasstops dimension — engagement of senior executives with senior elected officials — was equally important. DraftKings CEO Jason Robins made multiple public appearances, legislative testimonies, and private meetings with New York policymakers during the 2019-2021 period, arguing consistently that New York was uniquely positioned to build the largest regulated sports betting market in the country and that delay was costing the state money and pushing consumers toward unregulated offshore books.

> The CEO-level presence mattered because it signaled the seriousness of the industry's commitment. A governor or legislative leader who is weighing a major policy change wants to know that the companies advocating for it will be there over the long term, will invest in the state, and will stand behind the operational consequences of their legislative asks. Having the CEO of a publicly traded Boston-based company come to Albany, testify to state lawmakers, meet with the governor's team, and commit to specific operational investments tied to legalization created a very different political environment than relying on retained lobbyists alone.

The Grassroots Dimension



Underneath the direct lobbying and grasstops engagement was a sustained grassroots advocacy effort directed at mobilizing New York bettors — many of whom were already DraftKings customers through the company's daily fantasy sports product, which had been legal and operational in the state since 2016 — to contact their state legislators in support of mobile sports betting legalization. Industry communications emphasized several consistent themes: that New Yorkers were already crossing into New Jersey to bet on sports (a genuine if sometimes overstated phenomenon), that the state was losing tax revenue to unregulated offshore books, that mobile sports betting would create jobs and economic activity within New York, and that a well-designed regulatory framework would include consumer protections unavailable in the unregulated market.

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The combination of these three pressure vectors — direct lobbying in Albany, grasstops engagement at the CEO level, and grassroots customer mobilization across the state — is what ultimately moved New York from a position of gubernatorial opposition to inclusion in the state budget. None of the three would have been sufficient on its own. Direct lobbying without constituent pressure would have been easy for Governor Cuomo to resist. Grassroots pressure without lobbyist coordination would have been diffuse and unfocused. Grasstops engagement without underlying political support from constituents and legislators would have been merely performative.

The Replicable Lesson

What DraftKings demonstrated in the New York campaign — and has reproduced, with varying results, in more than a dozen other states since — is the integrated multi-channel approach to corporate political influence. The direct lobbying channel handles the technical and relational work of moving legislation through committees and chambers. The grasstops channel provides the CEO-level commitment and strategic vision that high-level elected officials need to see. The grassroots channel provides the political cover and constituent pressure that lawmakers need to vote the way the company wants them to vote.



When all three channels operate in coordination, the cumulative leverage is enormous. When one is missing, the campaign typically underperforms. DraftKings's subsequent struggles in California — where the 2022 sports betting initiative failed despite a reported $610 million in industry spending — and Missouri — where Amendment 2 passed in 2024 only after $36 million in spending and significant opposition from teachers' unions — illustrate the limits of even well-funded campaigns when the grassroots dimension is weak or the coalitional work has not been done properly. The New York victory, by contrast, demonstrates what becomes possible when all three channels are operating together and reinforcing one another.

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Chapter VIII: Case Study — Uber's City-by-City Playbook

Uber's series of legalization battles from roughly 2013 through the early 2020s offers the clearest modern example of a company turning its customer base into a political constituency, and of the strategic value — and strategic limits — of customer mobilization as a core advocacy tactic. The company's methods have been analyzed extensively in the academic literature, most notably in a 2022 article in the Journal of Business Ethics that examined Uber's 2015 New York City campaign in detail as a case study in corporate political activity.

The de Blasio Confrontation



In the summer of 2015, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio proposed legislation that would cap the growth of for-hire vehicles in the city for a one-year study period. The proposal was politically delicate: de Blasio had received more than $500,000 in campaign contributions from the taxi industry, which had been aggressively lobbying to slow Uber's expansion, and the cap would have directly benefited yellow cab operators at the expense of Uber's rapidly growing New York business.

Uber responded with one of the most aggressive and innovative corporate political campaigns in recent memory. The company added a “de Blasio” option to the Uber app, visible to every user in New York City, which displayed fictionalized 25-minute wait times and text messages warning that “Officials have adopted rules that make it impossible for Uber to continue operating.” The app also included a one-tap mechanism for users to send pre-drafted messages to their city council members opposing the cap. Alongside the app-based mobilization, Uber spent heavily on television and radio advertising attacking the mayor's proposal, and hired a team of political operatives with direct experience in the Obama, Cuomo, and Bloomberg administrations to execute the campaign.

The result: tens of thousands of New Yorkers contacted city council members opposing the cap. The cap proposal was withdrawn within a week. De Blasio, facing a politically untenable alignment of media pressure, customer backlash, and opposition from Governor Cuomo and Comptroller Stringer, abandoned the legislative fight.

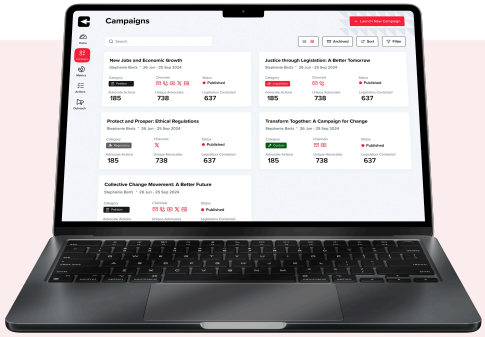
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Constituency Building as Political Activity

The academic analysis of the campaign, published in 2022 in the Journal of Business Ethics, characterized Uber's approach as “constituency building” — a form of indirect lobbying in which a company uses its consumer platform to identify, organize, and activate a political constituency from its customer base. The authors noted that Uber combined indirect lobbying through advertising channels, direct lobbying through traditional government relations, and constituency building through app-generated customer letters to produce a multi-channel political campaign that was difficult for the mayor's office to counter.



This approach was subsequently deployed in dozens of other cities and states. In California, Uber partnered with Mothers Against Drunk Driving to frame ridesharing as a public safety benefit and used app notifications to mobilize customers around AB 2293 in 2014. In Austin in 2016, the company rolled out similar tactics in a fight over fingerprint-based background checks for drivers — and lost, illustrating that the playbook is not infallible. In Broward County, Florida, the company created web pages urging residents to contact county commissioners and displayed messages to customers attempting to book rides in the area. In San Francisco, Airbnb used similar tactics to bring hosts to protests outside City Hall ahead of new regulations. In Santa Monica, Bird modified its scooter app after a criminal complaint to encourage users to flood local lawmakers with emails.





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The Limits of the Customer Channel

Uber's case also illustrates the structural limits of customer-only grassroots programs. Uber's drivers, classified as independent contractors, had fundamentally different political interests than the company itself — interests that ultimately manifested in organized opposition through groups like the New York Taxi Workers Alliance, Rideshare Drivers United, the Illinois Drivers Alliance, and the Chicago Gig Alliance. The company won many of the legalization fights by playing the constituency it could persuade — customers — while managing, sometimes poorly, the constituency whose interests diverged from its own. Over time, driver organizing produced counter-victories that limited Uber's ability to rely on customer mobilization alone: New York City's 2018 cap-and-pay-floor legislation, California's 2025 rideshare unionization law, and Illinois's 2025 agreement enabling statewide driver bargaining all reflected the growing political weight of driver voices.

> The structural lesson for corporate public affairs teams is that customers, employees, and executives form three distinct advocacy pools, each with different motivations, different levels of willingness to engage, and sometimes different policy preferences on the same bill. A customer who loves a product may not care about the company's tax position. An employee who depends on the company may disagree with the CEO on an industry-wide regulatory question. And a worker whose classification is in question may actively oppose the company's preferred policy outcome. Successful campaigns identify where interests actually align across these groups and mobilize each stakeholder pool on the specific dimension of the issue that matters to them. DoorDash's DashRoots model, with its explicit three-stakeholder architecture, can be understood partly as a response to the lessons learned from earlier platform-industry fights where customer-only strategies produced wins that were later eroded by driver or worker organizing.







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Chapter IX: Integrating Corporate Social Responsibility with Civic Engagement

One of the most effective ways to build a sustainable grassroots advocacy program is to connect civic engagement to a company's broader corporate social responsibility platform. Employees are generally more willing to participate in workplace activities that feel like contributions to their communities than in activities that feel like lobbying for the boss. The Public Affairs Council's research on corporate social impact, conducted through the Foundation for Public Affairs, has shown that companies that integrate employee civic participation into their broader employee engagement strategy tend to have higher participation rates when they do launch specific advocacy campaigns.

The Trust Dividend

The integration works because it establishes a baseline of trust between the company and its stakeholder base. Employees who have experienced their employer supporting their civic participation — through paid time off for voting, non-partisan voter registration drives, jury duty policies, civic education programs, and community service opportunities — are significantly more likely to believe that a later ask to contact a lawmaker about a specific issue is a legitimate invitation to civic engagement rather than a coercive political demand.



This trust dividend is particularly valuable for corporate advocacy programs because the participation asks they make are, by their nature, suspect. An employee who receives a message from the company asking them to contact their state senator about a bill affecting the company's regulatory environment has every reason to wonder whether the message is a genuine civic invitation or a veiled expectation. Baseline trust, built over years through apolitical civic engagement, is what makes the ask feel legitimate rather than coercive.

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Civic Engagement as Employee Engagement

The DSMN8 Employee Advocacy Benchmark Study, conducted with more than 250 program leaders across multiple industries, found that 34 percent of respondents identified increased employee engagement as the single largest benefit of their employee advocacy programs — ahead of marketing outcomes, brand awareness, and recruitment benefits. The finding is consistent with a broader body of research showing that employees who feel their employer supports their civic and community engagement report higher job satisfaction, stronger emotional commitment to the organization, and lower turnover intention.

> For corporate public affairs teams, this research has practical implications. It suggests that investments in civic engagement infrastructure — the apolitical foundation that makes later advocacy participation possible — produce returns beyond the advocacy program itself. They improve employee engagement metrics, reduce turnover costs, and contribute to the overall health of the corporate culture. The advocacy program is one application of the infrastructure, but not the only one.
>
> For that to work at scale, companies need advocacy software that makes participation genuinely frictionless: pre-filled contact information, editable draft messages, mobile-first interfaces, and clear visibility into which campaigns the employee has already engaged with. The software infrastructure is not separable from the civic engagement infrastructure; they reinforce each other.

Matching Engagement to Issues

Not every corporate policy issue is suitable for broad stakeholder engagement. Some issues are too technical, too narrow, or too politically charged to justify the reputational risk of mobilizing employees or customers. Others are so fundamental to the company's operations that mobilization is essential. The calibration is a strategic decision, and the best public affairs teams develop clear internal criteria for when to activate the grassroots network and when to rely on direct lobbying alone.

A useful framework asks three questions about any proposed mobilization: Is there a genuine, material impact of the policy on stakeholders' lives, jobs, or interests? Is the company's position on the policy one that stakeholders could plausibly support on their own terms? And is the mobilization tied to a specific, actionable ask — a vote, a hearing, a comment period — where constituent communication can plausibly make a difference? When the answer to all three is yes, mobilization is justified. When any of the three is no, direct lobbying and traditional communications are usually a better fit.

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Chapter X: Overcoming Participation Obstacles

Even with authentic stories, bipartisan segmentation, and a strong civic engagement foundation, most corporate grassroots campaigns still fail to convert stakeholders from passive support to active participation. The reasons are well documented: people are busy, they doubt their individual action will matter, they are not sure how to contact a lawmaker effectively, and they worry about saying something wrong. Understanding these barriers and designing programs that systematically overcome them is one of the most important and most overlooked dimensions of modern advocacy work.

“My Voice Doesn't Matter”

The single most common reason that stakeholders cite for not participating in advocacy campaigns is the belief that their individual action will not make a difference. A July 2016 Rasmussen survey found that only 11 percent of voters believed Members of Congress listened to the constituents they represent. Ironically, the Congressional Management Foundation research shows this belief to be substantially wrong: 94 percent of congressional staff reported that in-person issue visits from constituents would have some or a lot of influence on an undecided lawmaker, and 92 percent said the same of individualized email messages. Even in large federal offices, relatively small numbers of personalized contacts on a specific issue can tip the balance of staff recommendations.

Effective advocacy programs address this objection directly, with data. The best programs communicate explicitly to advocates that their action matters, that individual messages are read and counted, and that relatively modest mobilization volumes — dozens of personalized messages on a specific bill — can move a legislative position. They share success stories from past campaigns, naming specific bills that were amended or defeated because of stakeholder communication. They provide feedback on the volume and impact of advocate actions after each campaign, so that advocates see the connection between their participation and the outcome.



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“I Don't Know What to Say”

The second most common barrier is uncertainty about the content of communication. A stakeholder who wants to support the company's position may simply not know how to write a persuasive letter to a state legislator — what to include, what to leave out, how to structure the argument, what tone to adopt. Without guidance, many potential advocates simply do not participate.

The best advocacy software platforms solve this problem by providing template language that stakeholders can customize rather than copy. The template serves as scaffolding — a starting point that shows the advocate what the communication should look like and what elements it should include — while encouraging personalization that transforms the form letter into a genuine individualized message. Done well, this approach produces communications that are unmistakably individualized while still carrying consistent core messages.

The key design principle is that the template should feel like scaffolding, not a straitjacket. Advocates should be able to rewrite the message entirely if they want to, add personal details freely, delete sections that do not feel authentic to them, and adjust the tone to match their own voice. Templates that allow only minor edits produce minor variations of form letters; templates that invite substantial personalization produce genuine individualized messages at scale.

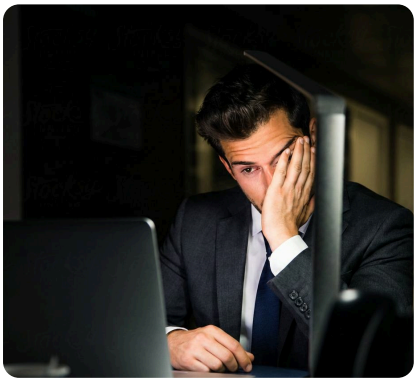
“I Don't Have Time”

The third barrier is straightforwardly practical: people are busy. A stakeholder who supports the company's position in principle may not have the ten or fifteen minutes it takes to navigate to a lawmaker's website, find the right contact form, compose a message, and submit it. Traditional advocacy infrastructure is full of friction that drives participation rates down.

Modern advocacy software is built specifically to eliminate this friction. One-click campaigns that pre-fill contact information (by geolocating the advocate to identify their specific lawmakers), provide editable draft messages, and allow submission in under two minutes — with mobile-first interfaces that work well on a phone during a commute or a lunch break — dramatically increase participation rates compared to older web-form-based approaches. Short-form video testimonials that take two minutes to record, using the advocate's own phone, produce authentic narrative content that can be repurposed across multiple campaigns.

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“I'm Worried About Saying Something Wrong”



The fourth barrier is the concern — particularly strong among employees — that participating in political advocacy could have negative consequences. Will the company be upset if the employee softens the company's messaging or personalizes it too much? Will participation be visible to managers in ways that could affect performance reviews? Will taking a political position, even a professionally neutral one, create reputational risk in the employee's own professional circles?

The answers to these questions are organizational, not technological. Companies that run serious advocacy programs develop clear policies that make participation voluntary, non-coercive, and professionally neutral. They communicate explicitly that participation will not affect performance reviews, that employees are free to decline any particular campaign, and that employees who disagree with the company's position on a specific issue are welcome to say so or to simply not participate. They provide anonymous participation options where appropriate. They train managers not to pressure direct reports into advocacy participation. And they make these policies visible, so that employees know the rules of engagement before they are asked to participate.

The Feedback Loop

The final and most important move in overcoming participation obstacles is follow-up. Stakeholders who take action need to know what happened — whether the bill passed, how their lawmaker voted, what the campaign does next. The Congressional Management Foundation's research on constituent engagement consistently finds that feedback loops build trust, and trust builds the long-term relationships that keep a grassroots advocacy network active across multiple campaigns rather than collapsing after each fight.

A stakeholder who hears back is a stakeholder who shows up next time. A stakeholder who participates and then hears nothing begins to suspect that participation was theater. The feedback loop is not optional; it is the difference between a durable network and a one-time campaign. The best programs invest in post-campaign communications that are as thoughtful and well-designed as the pre-campaign mobilization materials, and they treat each completed campaign as a relationship-building opportunity for the next.

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Chapter XI: How CiviClick Is Powering the Next Generation of Corporate Advocacy

The infrastructure described throughout this whitepaper — the story banks, the mobilization tools, the multi-stakeholder segmentation, the friction-reduced participation interfaces, the feedback loops, the relationship-building events — does not build itself. It requires a technology backbone that can execute across channels, at scale, with the flexibility to adapt to each company's unique stakeholder base and policy environment. CiviClick provides that backbone.

CiviClick is an AI-powered grassroots and digital advocacy software platform built specifically for corporations, public affairs firms, and advocacy organizations that need to mobilize stakeholders for legislative and regulatory outcomes. The platform combines stakeholder database management, multi-channel outreach, advocacy software for legislator contact, story collection and tagging, campaign analytics, and the kind of personalization tools that turn base form letters into authentic individualized messages. It is used by public affairs teams across industries to build the kind of programs that win.

The Rivian Washington State Campaign

A good illustration of what modern corporate advocacy can look like when the technology backbone is in place is Rivian's successful 2026 effort to gain direct-sales rights in Washington State. For more than a decade, Washington law had restricted direct-to-consumer vehicle sales to Tesla alone, under a 2014 exemption that was never extended to other electric vehicle manufacturers. Rivian operated four service centers and a Seattle showroom in the state but could not complete sales through them — Washington customers had to complete transactions online or travel out of state to purchase a Rivian vehicle. Lucid Motors faced the same restriction.



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The political path to a direct-sales law in Washington was historically blocked by the Washington State Auto Dealers Association, which had lobbied successfully for years against extending the Tesla exemption. Traditional legislative advocacy alone had not moved the issue. Rivian's approach combined multiple tools: a ballot initiative filing through the Washington Coalition for Consumer Choice and Innovation, which created a credible alternative path to victory; direct engagement with the dealer association to negotiate a legislative compromise; and — critically — grassroots mobilization of Washington consumers and Rivian customers to demonstrate genuine public support for the policy change.

Rivian's internal polling showed that nearly 70 percent of Washington residents supported allowing manufacturers to sell vehicles directly to consumers. That number, translated into political pressure through customer mobilization, changed the calculus for the dealer association. Faced with the prospect of a ballot initiative that would be expensive to fight and that they were likely to lose on the merits of public opinion, the Washington State Auto Dealers Association agreed to support a narrower legislative compromise that granted direct-sales rights specifically to Rivian and Lucid.



Senate Bill 6354 passed the Washington State Senate 47 to 2 and the House 84 to 9 — margins that suggest the legislative outcome was never really in doubt once the dealer association shifted position. Governor Bob Ferguson signed the bill in March 2026, ending the twelve-year Tesla-only direct-sales exemption and opening the Washington market to Rivian and Lucid just as Rivian prepared to launch its lower-priced R2 model.

The Role of Customer Storytelling

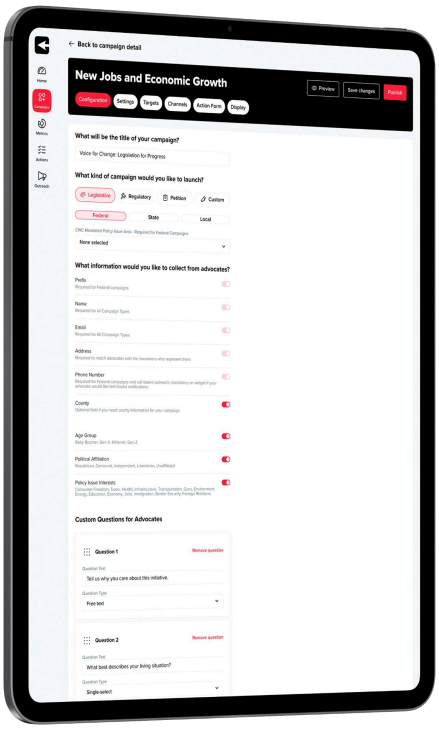
Throughout the Washington campaign, the customer story channel was critical. Washington consumers who wanted a Rivian but had been unable to purchase one in the state wrote personal, detailed, often passionate messages to their legislators explaining why the direct-sales restriction was an unjustified imposition on their consumer choice. Some had traveled to Oregon or California to purchase their vehicles; others had completed online purchases and had the cars delivered without the option of test drives or in-person showroom visits. Each story was different, each was specific to the constituent's own experience, and each added a dimension of authenticity to the campaign that no amount of paid advertising or lobbyist testimony could have matched.

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The technology infrastructure that made this mobilization possible is exactly the kind of infrastructure that CiviClick provides: a platform that takes base form letters and empowers advocates to personalize them into unique stories, combines template scaffolding with deep customization, routes messages to the correct specific legislators based on advocate location, and tracks participation and outcomes for campaign management and feedback communications. The combination of stakeholder identification, story collection, personalized message generation, and multi-channel delivery is what transforms a generic letter-writing campaign into a genuine authentic advocacy movement.

Beyond Rivian

The Washington campaign is one example of what the CiviClick platform enables. The same infrastructure is being used across industries and policy domains: by public affairs firms running campaigns for lobbying clients, by advocacy coalitions coordinating multi-stakeholder mobilizations, by corporate government relations teams building standing stakeholder networks for long-term legislative and regulatory engagement, and by emerging companies that need to establish political capability quickly in the face of hostile regulatory environments.



The common thread is the recognition that modern corporate advocacy requires modern advocacy software. The old model — direct lobbying supported by episodic vendor-run campaigns during crises — cannot produce the level of sustained influence that consequential policy fights now require. The new model — a standing stakeholder network, activated through purpose-built technology, telling authentic stories to specific lawmakers on specific issues, backed by sustained relationship investment — produces repeatable, defensible victories across multiple fights in multiple states over multiple years.

CiviClick exists to help companies build that capability. The platform is not a replacement for lobbyists, communications teams, or PAC managers; it is the technology backbone that makes all of their work more effective by connecting it to an engaged, authentic stakeholder base that can be mobilized quickly and credibly when policy fights emerge.

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Conclusion

The companies that dominate their regulatory environments over the long run — whether they are fighting for food delivery market access, sports betting legalization, EV direct sales, or any of the thousands of other policy outcomes that shape American business — are the companies that treat their stakeholders as a standing civic asset, not a tool to be reached for in emergencies. They solicit real stories. They honor the political diversity of the people telling them. They connect civic engagement to a broader mission. They invest in the technology infrastructure that makes participation possible at scale. And they invest in grassroots advocacy as a year-round capability rather than a one-time campaign.

The research is unambiguous about why this approach works. The Congressional Management Foundation's data on congressional staff attitudes has shown consistently for two decades that individualized constituent communication is the most influential form of advocacy, that personal stories tied to district-specific impact are what lawmakers actually want to receive, and that the campaigns delivering those inputs at scale have an enormous advantage over campaigns that rely on volume alone. The National Institute for Lobbying and Ethics has articulated the ethical framework that distinguishes legitimate grassroots mobilization from manipulation. The Public Affairs Council's benchmarking research has documented the increasing sophistication of corporate programs that segment messages by stakeholder group and political orientation without compromising factual accuracy. Together, these sources point to a coherent model of corporate political engagement that is built around authenticity, sustained relationship-building, and technology-enabled mobilization.

The case studies reviewed in this whitepaper — DoorDash's DashRoots program, DraftKings's multi-year New York mobile sports betting campaign, Uber's city-by-city ridesharing legalization effort, and Rivian's Washington State direct-sales breakthrough — illustrate how the model works in practice across very different industries and policy environments. The specific tactics differ. The underlying architecture does not. Identify the stakeholder groups whose interests align with your policy objectives. Build the infrastructure to communicate with them continuously. Collect their authentic stories. Train them to tell those stories effectively. Mobilize them with specific, actionable asks tied to specific legislative moments. And maintain the network between campaigns so that it is ready when the next fight arrives.

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CiviClick was built to help companies execute this model. Our grassroots advocacy software platform provides the stakeholder database, the multi-channel outreach, the story collection tools, the personalized letter generation, the legislator routing, and the analytics that modern corporate advocacy requires. More importantly, our team brings the strategic expertise to help public affairs professionals design programs that work — that respect their stakeholders, that produce authentic stories rather than manufactured volume, that segment messages appropriately across political audiences, and that deliver the kind of sustained pressure that moves legislators and regulators.

The future of corporate public affairs belongs to organizations that treat their stakeholders not as an audience to be broadcast to, but as a standing civic asset to be cultivated, respected, and activated. The tools to do this well now exist. The research justifying the investment is unambiguous. What remains is execution — and the recognition that the companies investing today are building capabilities that will determine who wins the legislative and regulatory fights of the next decade.

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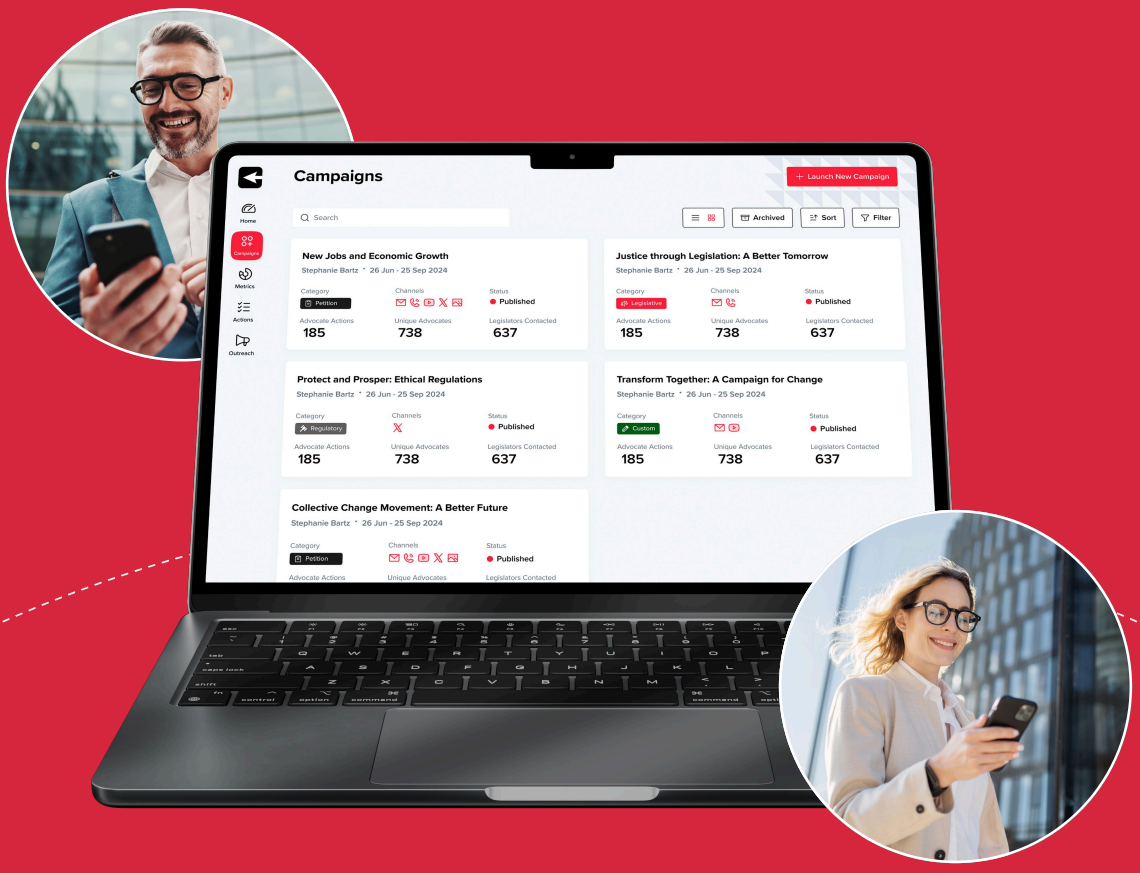
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