

COVID-19 Impact: Accelerating the Future of Government Affairs

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Introduction

- The coronavirus did not change the future of government affairs; rather, it accelerated it. Seemingly overnight, we are operating under a new reality, where the focus of the government affairs function has evolved across a variety of dimensions.

Performance Dimension	From Traditional Focus...		...To Emerging Focus
Influence/reach	Inside the Beltway (Capitol Hill, federal agencies)	➔	Local, national (statehouses), global
Format of engagement	Face-to-face interactions	➔	Virtual, digital communications
Scope of dialogue	One-to-one	➔	One-to-many, many-to-many
Agenda autonomy/control	Autonomous government affairs function	➔	Interdependencies, internal partnerships
Primary emphasis	Lobbying activities (audience of one)	➔	Public affairs (brand management)
Performance metrics	Legislative/regulatory outcomes alone	➔	Capacity-building, stakeholder perceptions

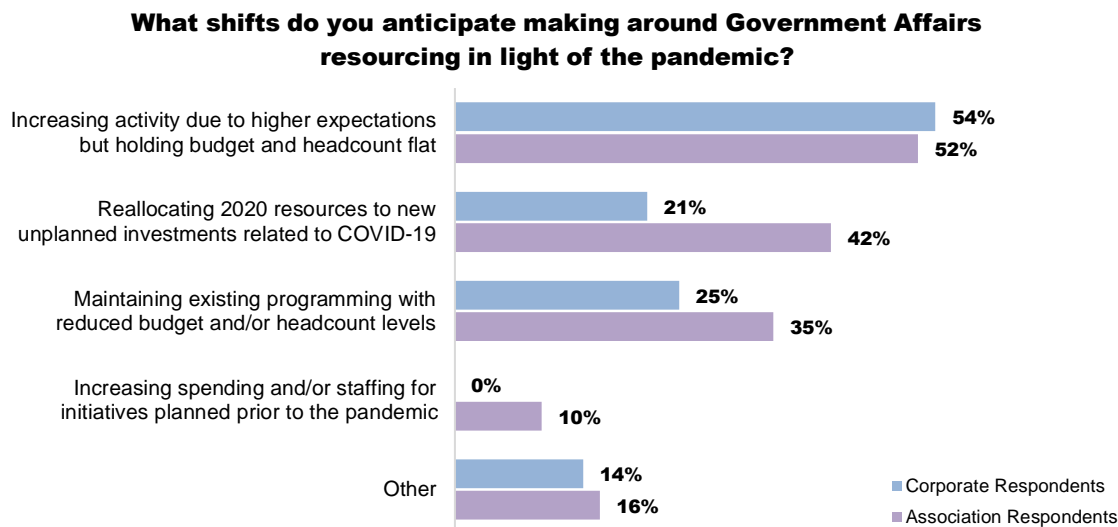
- Meanwhile, government affairs' jobs to be done—and issue portfolio—continue to expand, requiring fast education on subjects beyond policy professionals' established areas of expertise.
- What's more, the dynamics brought on by COVID-19 mean government affairs must adapt—and quickly—even as their larger organizations face economic disruptions that threaten their survival.
- With all the changes, trends and threats, National Journal wondered how government affairs is coping. So we asked. Through a survey and a series of roundtables, we collected input from more than 100 government affairs executives. And they had much to say. About financial pressures. Measuring value. Expanding and building new relationships. The November elections. Not to mention remote work and work-life balance.
- Their insights are contained in this wide-ranging report that touches on nearly every aspect of the government affairs function. It is true that COVID-19 has changed government affairs forever. We hope that this report will help you embrace the accelerated future now that it is here.

Methodology

- This National Journal memo offers insight into government affairs' response to COVID-19. Findings are based on primary research conducted via an online survey and commentary shared through a series of virtual roundtable discussions. The government affairs executives providing feedback represent corporate government affairs offices and membership-based advocacy organizations, such as business and trade associations, professional associations and interest groups. For ease of comparison, survey results are split by "corporations" and "associations" where the latter reflects a range of membership-based organizations.
- The survey was fielded between April 27, 2020 and May 13, 2020, collecting data from heads of office at 28 corporations and 31 associations. The results highlight major points of difference between corporations and associations in their organizational response to the novel coronavirus.
- Roundtable discussions were held with 42 individuals between April 28, 2020 and May 28, 2020. Designed for information-sharing, each session included four to nine participants and the same set of questions were posed to each group. In addition to separate roundtables for heads of office from corporations and associations, additional sessions were held with PAC Directors, as well as leaders from law and lobbying firms, to provide additional context for government affairs responses to COVID-19. Quotes contained within this report have been lightly edited for clarity.
- This research would not have been possible without the perspectives offered by the 101 government affairs professionals that participated in the survey and roundtable discussions. As always, National Journal remains grateful for their continued support and insight.

Financial Impact – More with Less

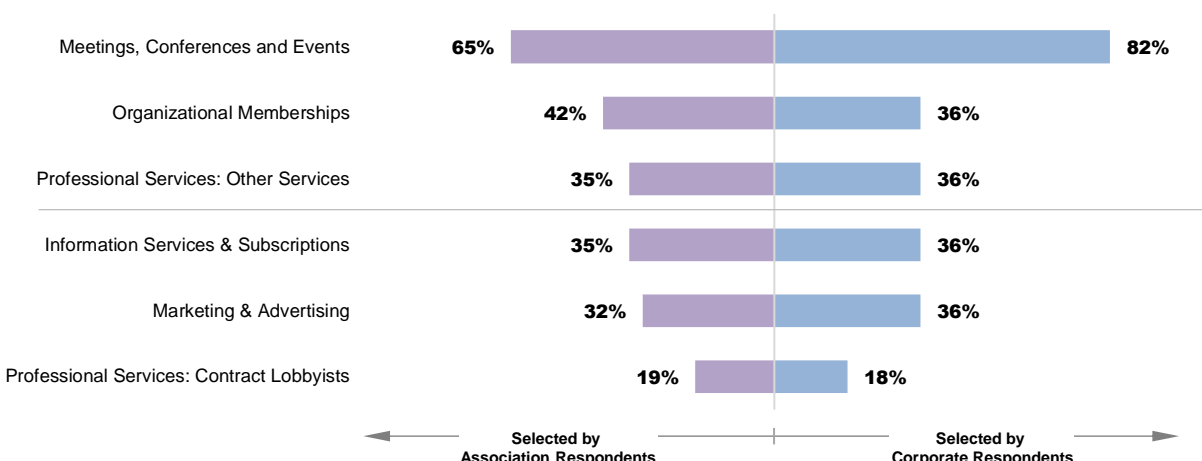
- As organizations dealt with urgent public health and emerging financial crises at the pandemic's outset, many government affairs departments encountered resourcing disruptions. Planned expenses were postponed, **yet half of those surveyed anticipate increasing activity due to heightened expectations while holding spending and staffing levels flat**. Others anticipate increasing activity while dealing with reduced spending and staffing levels.



“Internal priorities—like redoing the website, that is not a cheap or quick process—that is all on hold until at least next year. We had been looking to expand and grow our government affairs team—that is on hold as well. We are going to have to figure out how to do the same amount, if not more, work, with the same amount of people.” – Vice President of Government and Public Affairs

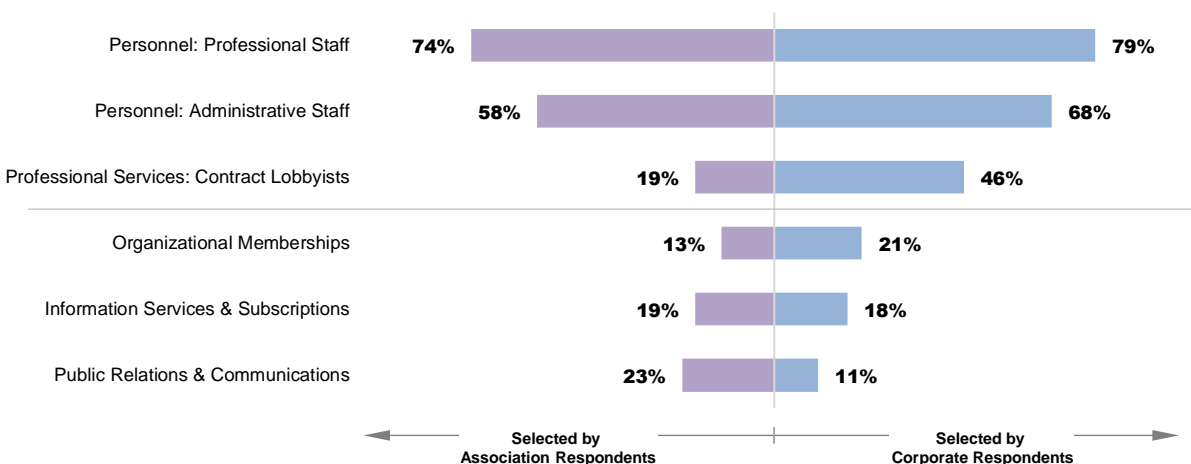
- From a *budget reduction* standpoint, the vast majority of government affairs leaders look first at cutting back on meetings, conferences and events, a natural instinct given social distancing guidelines. But other priorities are less clear—with four budget categories tying for “second place” in budget cuts suggesting divergent opinions on what might truly be considered discretionary spending.

Budget Reduction Priorities: If required to reduce your budget in light of the pandemic, which of the following would you consider cutting first?



- Among the budget items heads of office were *most reluctant to cut*, professional and administrative staff top the list, but there is less unanimity beyond people-related expenditures. Forty-six percent of corporate government affairs offices were reluctant to eliminate contract lobbyists, compared to 19% of their association peers. Meanwhile, twice as many associations were loath to cut public relations and communications expenses compared to their corporate peers, at 23% versus 11%.

Budget Reduction Priorities: If required to reduce your budget in light of the pandemic, which of the following would you be reluctant to cut?



- ***With so much unknown about recovery timelines and future disruptions, all organizations will need to introduce more flexible resourcing.*** To that end, law and lobbying firms report that their clients have been subject to layoffs and furloughs, leading to terminations or reduced retainers. But the impact on law and lobbying firms is mixed. As organizations find themselves wading into unfamiliar rules and regulations, some firms are actually seeing an uptick in business, with new clients seeking support.

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- At a more granular level, COVID-19 created vastly different resourcing impacts on government affairs functions and the organizations within which they operate. Though many corporate offices faced cost reduction mandates, a handful gained access to more resources than before the pandemic.

“We have more resources available than ever. Our C-level team acknowledges we need resources in order to navigate the regulations that will stem from this. The crisis has provided a lot of exposure for our group to the chairman and the C-suite to the work of government affairs.” – *Vice President, Global Government Relations*

- Association executives expressed greater concern for both short-term and long-term financial stability, with the pandemic forcing many to cancel annual conferences and trade shows. Despite cost savings associated with cancelled in-person events—or shifts to (less pricey) virtual formats—these activities often represent the principal revenue driver for associations, and a tangible expression of membership value.

“Like other associations, all our major revenue was tied to our once-per-year event, which has been canceled. While we’re planning to adjust certain meetings to virtual, it’s not clear how that’s going to shake out with the volume of attendees we had previously been anticipating.” – *Senior Vice President, Government and Public Affairs*

“With so many meetings cancelled, we’re trying to avoid losing deposits, trying to manage all of our contracts, moving our summer in-person events to digital. The challenge we are having is that we’re starting to have cash flow issues. Meeting revenue is a major contributor to revenue and cash flow. This is nothing that we have historically had to deal with.” – *Senior Vice President, Advocacy and Policy*

- In the absence of conferences and events, associations in particular are re-centering their value on advocacy and most visibly, highlighting gains made under the CARES Act.

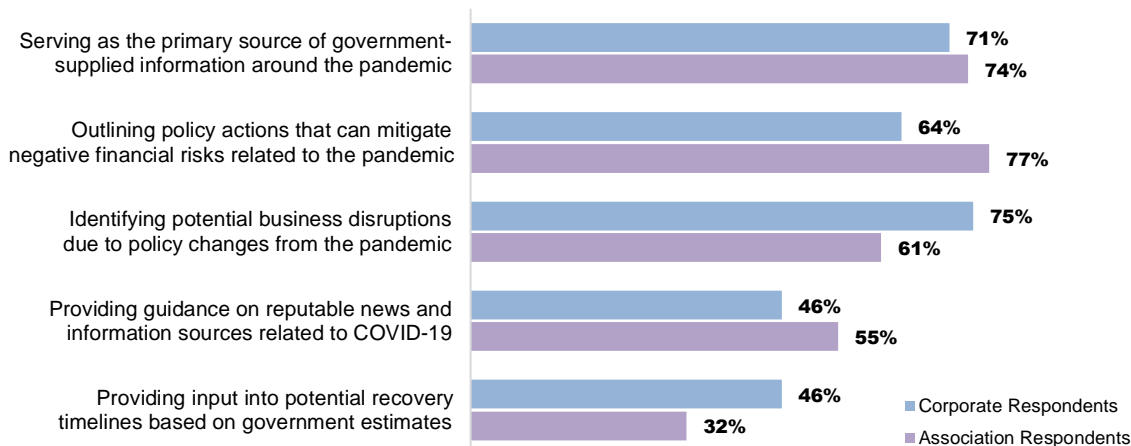
“Advocacy has become the most important thing our organization does. We are the ER in the hospital... We are looking long term at some serious economic ramifications for our organization and advocacy will be one of the last things we hold on to.” – *Director, Government Relations*

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- Whether organizations can sustain the momentum generated during the early weeks of the pandemic—where everyone focused on triage—remains to be seen. ***Given the items topping the list for potential budget cuts, government affairs offices should consider ways in which they might demonstrate (or otherwise communicate) the value created by investments in targeted budget categories.*** To support future budgeting exercises, government affairs executives should begin maintaining a list of performance metrics (capturing a range of government affairs activity) and consider cataloging stories that explain how government affairs investments lead to operational success.

Demonstrating and Communicating Value

- Despite resourcing uncertainties, government affairs organizations are rising to the challenge of heightened expectations. Though heads of office often struggle to quantify the value of the function—especially in dollar terms—there is little doubt that it plays a critical role in COVID-19 response and recovery.

In which of the following ways is Government Affairs contributing to your organization's response to the COVID-19 pandemic?



- ***Internally, the situation creates significant visibility among organizational leadership, as well as business unit and functional peers.***

“The value proposition has always been a struggle, we always knew we needed to get out there and get engaged but it is so hard to put a metric on that. Now, the entire organization has a line of sight into what government affairs does and what our value proposition is.” – *Senior Manager, Government Affairs*

“Across the association, we are just getting a lot of credit for the work being done right now. There is a good recognition for what we do and what we are providing to the organization right now.” – *Director, Political Affairs*

- The role of government affairs is well-recognized within membership associations, where advancing an industry, trade or profession is the ultimate goal. But within corporations, internal stakeholders don’t necessarily share the same level of understanding. Corporate C-suite executives may be gaining a greater appreciation for the importance of government affairs in the current environment, but some require rapid education on the nature of the function and existing capabilities.

“At the beginning of the crisis, it felt like everyone was asking for the near impossible... It is hard to get the C-suite to understand how hard it is to communicate with government bodies during these situations.” – *Senior Vice President, Government Relations, Technology Services Company*

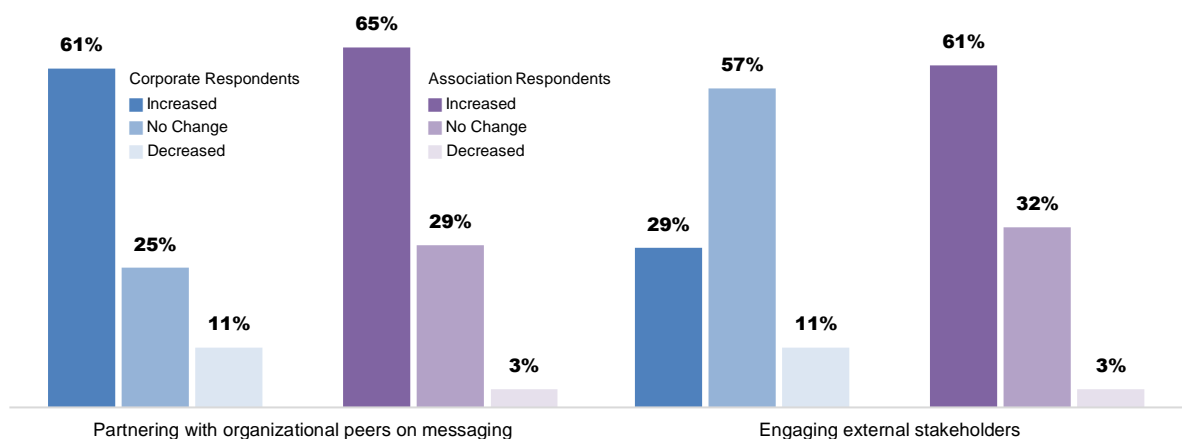
“All of a sudden we are supposed to magically have relationships with 50 governors and candidates? Is our language in the bill? Who knows!” – *Senior Vice President, Government Relations, Industrials Company*

- Amid newfound visibility for the work of government affairs, heads of office observe that internal stakeholder expectations have shifted as the crisis evolved. Initial attention on the continuity of existing business operations morphed into a focus on the organization’s role in pandemic response and broader economic recovery measures.

“At the beginning, it was all about tracking shutdowns, and our business leaders were asking for miracles—they wanted government affairs to ensure they could all still operate in locations around the world. Now that has transitioned and evolved, it is more about what we can do with our resources to support the recovery.” – *Vice President, Global Government Relations and Public Policy*

- ***Roughly three-in-five corporate and association heads of office (61% and 65%, respectively) increased internal collaboration on messaging since the start of the pandemic.*** Having expanded the audience for government affairs work, many hope to maintain interest among these new stakeholders beyond the current crisis.

Engagement Orientation: Are you doing more or less of the following activities as compared to before the onset of the pandemic?



“We do a daily report, a trade report and now a third COVID report—we’ll hopefully be able to keep that third update, it really is like a marketing email now. It is giving us great exposure, I don’t want to give up the direct connection. I’ll likely change the direction to be more of a Washington Update, which we already did, but now maybe it will have more eyeballs on it, since people have been trained to read those updates.” – *Senior Director, Government Affairs*

- ***Beyond internal audiences, 29% of corporations and 61% of associations report increased engagement with external stakeholders since the onset of COVID-19.***

Ramping up communications in a digital environment is particularly important for associations, especially when membership’s value driver shifts from in-person meetings, conferences, and events to advocacy. In the early days of the pandemic, most provided daily updates before transitioning to a weekly cadence—at a minimum—supplemented with other communications, such as webinars and town halls.

“On top of everything else, we have to *stop and communicate* what we are doing for members. It involves a whole lot of creation of resources to explain what we are working on. It has turned into 80 hour weeks. The members all care, they all want to know what’s going on, they are very much proud of the work, and they’re putting that all out onto social media.” – *Director, Government Relations*

- Not only are associations ramping up distribution of member communications—pushing out updates on COVID-19, policy actions, organizational activities—many are leveraging virtual channels to connect members with each other. For individuals who feel their livelihoods are threatened, or for those trying to keep their businesses afloat, member interactions provide a sense of support and an opportunity to share best practices.

“Pre-COVID we were doing a ton of public relations work trying to promote our efforts. Now we are in crisis response mode. Over four-to-five weeks we focused on the economic impact on [our community of healthcare providers], working with the government to inject cash into the [community]. We do a lot of group therapy, we have town halls. We have to help our members get reassured that this is going to be okay.” – *Senior Vice President, Advocacy and Policy*

- COVID-19 has compelled all government affairs executives to engage new internal and external audiences and experiment with new vehicles for communication. Now that the strategic role for the function has been established, government affairs executives should explore how they can continue to offer short-term operational guidance to leadership and continue to tell the story of government affairs’ contribution to long-term (industry or profession) protection and growth. Establishing an ongoing, regular cadence to build on this narrative can help sustain the function through future disruptions.

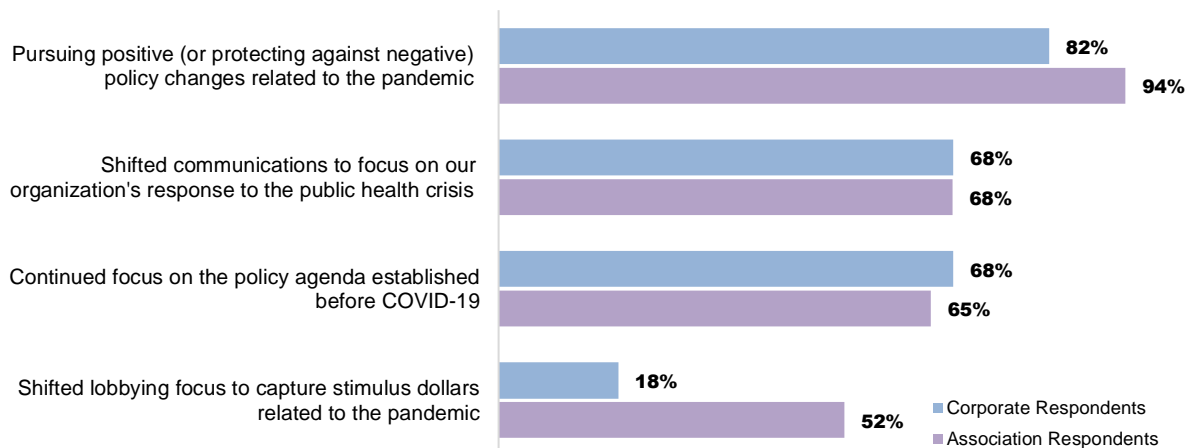
Jobs-to-be-Done/Issue Portfolio Expansion

- The novel coronavirus didn't shift priorities for government affairs, it added to them. ***While two-in-three heads of office report a continued focus on the policy agenda established before COVID-19, nearly 90% are pursuing positive—or protecting against negative—policy changes related to the pandemic.*** Like so many of their executive peers, today's government affairs professionals feel stretched, tackling new responsibilities and an expanding portfolio of issues, delivering on twice as much work.

“Demands on my time have just gone through the roof. I have never worked harder in my life... albeit in my pajama pants.” – *Director, Political Affairs, Trade Association*

“It has been all hands on deck. Our [PAC] team has taken on a lot more public relations responsibilities, producing talking points that are digestible by Member of Congress, the news media, and so on. We're putting out little fires everywhere every day.” – *Director, Political Engagement, Insurance Company*

How has Government Affairs' external messaging and/or lobbying priorities changed since the onset of the pandemic?



- While they are often experts in specific subject areas, many government affairs professionals find themselves needing to get up-to-speed quickly on a host of new topics. For many heads of office, managing pre-existing legislative priorities and new pandemic-related issues feels like managing two 40-hour-a-week jobs.

“Some of the issues we were really actively working on have been put on hold, which is a bright side, since COVID has entirely taken over. That being said, we have a lot of overlapping issues between COVID and prior priorities. We are now *running* and chewing gum.” – *Director of Federal Government Affairs*

“I am learning so much about random issues—paid medical leave, tax issues, operational issues... There was pre-COVID and now we will need to adjust our policy priorities to post-COVID. It is going to be all COVID for the next 18 months at least.” – *Director, Political Affairs*

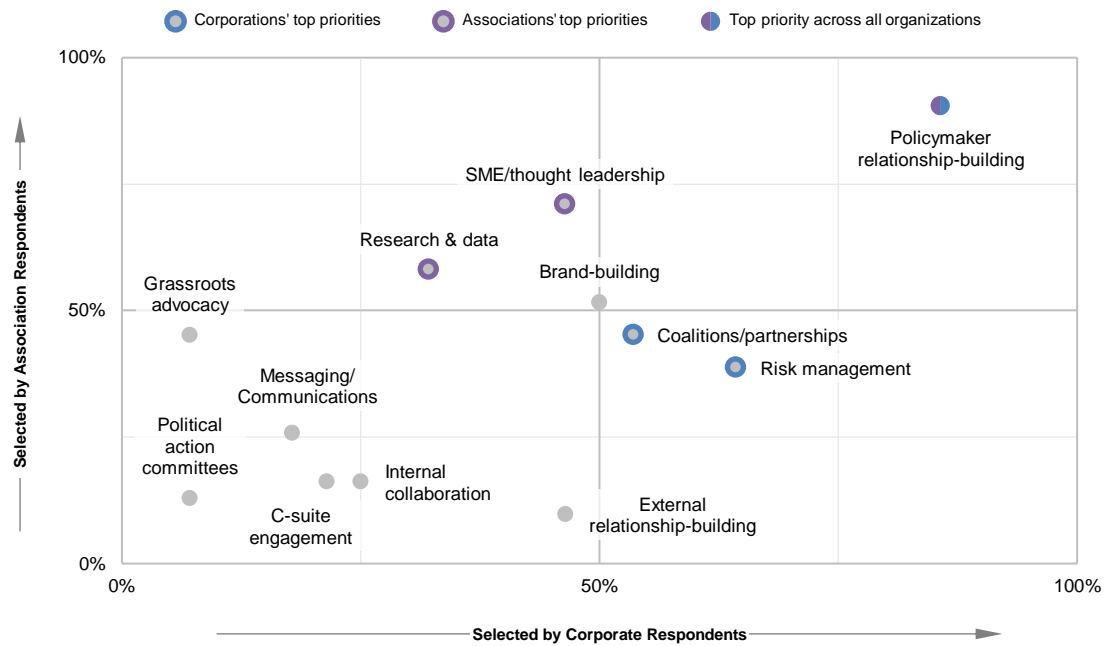
- In addition to keeping on top of existing and new issue priorities, corporate government affairs executives are being asked to weigh in more heavily on scenario planning and predictive analysis—not just tracking of legislative activity, but linking new legislation to business outcomes.

“I’m still doing a daily report for the C-suite, predicting the future, updating constantly changing legislation, state re-openings and so on.” – *Senior Vice President, Government Relations*

“We are being asked to do a lot of analysis—we have a dozen product lines—we’re being asked to analyze what each piece of legislation means for each product line. Where are our opportunities, which states should we focus on? They’re asking for *so much* on the intricacies of our product lines and the new legislation.” – *Vice President, Global Government Relations*

- Of course, relationship-building remains the cornerstone of effective government affairs functions. When heads of office were asked about the element of their advocacy work most important to department success, this was the top-most priority and the only one universally agreed upon by all respondents. ***Ninety-percent of corporate government affairs executives and 89% of their association peers cited building relationships with policymakers and their top staff as most important to their success.***
- Among corporate heads of office, secondary and tertiary priorities included identifying risks to the organization or industry as they emerge (64%), and the strength and diversity of coalitions or partnerships they build (54%). Alternatively, for association leaders secondary and tertiary drivers included the perception of expertise on a given policy issue (71%) and producing data and research that informs policy development (54%). Across all organizations, government affairs executives cited the strength of their organization’s reputation within the policy community as the next highest priority.

In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which of the following elements of your advocacy work are most important to your department's success?



Engagement with Government Stakeholders

- While association executives are more skeptical, most corporate heads of office believe that actions during the pandemic will have a positive long-term impact on relationships with government stakeholders. Beyond the goodwill gained with specific lawmakers, most anticipate a closer partnership between corporate America and the policymaking community.

“Relationships will change due to how companies acted during the pandemic, and what we did with them—working on campaigns, traveling with members, going in-district. That leads to a closer relationship with that person. When you work closely with government officials, you get credit for that down the line. We should be able to find that we are developing closer relationships, and those may benefit us in the future.” – *Vice President, Global Government Relations*

“In the short term, over the next couple years, companies are going to have to explain what they did to help their customers, employees, community as well as whatever issue you’re working on. You’ll have to position that as part of economic recovery, and you could try to do that for every issue—how is this better for the economy, the workforce—but you can’t look opportunistic. We all should be focused on how we do our part to pull out of this, for both your company and your industry.” – *Senior Counsel, Public Policy*

- ***Organizations should begin cataloging stories that illustrate their role in the response to the pandemic and the ongoing economic recovery.*** Story banking—collecting human narratives and data points around organizations’ support of individuals, the industry or profession, or government entities themselves—can strengthen relationships and underscore the importance of public-private sector partnerships.
- Lawmakers and federal agencies likewise are proactively engaging the private sector advocacy community, on both COVID *and* non-COVID issue areas. This outreach can sometimes be overwhelming for government affairs professionals juggling a broad new set of responsibilities, though they recognize that lawmakers are dealing with their own challenges responding to high constituent need. For some, the current environment has enabled greater direct access to Members of Congress.

“It’s been more work than ever. We are hearing more from Members of Congress than usual, typically we are the ones reaching out.” – *Head of Federal Affairs, Business Services Company*

“It is really weird to say after 20 years in the government affairs space, we almost want them to stop calling to some extent. They want to know how they can help us with this one *really small thing* when we have *flames shooting out the windows*. Members of Congress feel pretty helpless right now, I think they are doing a lot of care and feeding, just making sure they are in touch with constituents and making sure that they are hearing from them regularly.” – *Senior Vice President, Advocacy and Policy, Professional Association*

“There are some federal agencies who are all-in working on COVID and there are other agencies who are not even concerned with COVID and they are pushing on us to keep non-COVID projects moving. We are trying to tell them we are focused on the pandemic, as are our members, but they don’t want to put everything on hold. We’re trying to delicately communicate that we need to put some things on the back burner.” – *Director, Government Relations, Professional Association*

“Because of changes to the House and Senate schedules, we’ve been able to get more meetings than ever. We have gotten some similar organizations together and had them all on a call together with a Member [of Congress]. And the Members are finding that helpful too.” – *Vice President, Lobbying Firm*

- With social distancing, forms of engagement have adjusted to a virtual environment. Government affairs organizations and congressional offices have shifted communications channels to texts, calls and video chats, with the efficiency of virtual meetings improving in recent weeks.

“We’re receiving many more phone calls, text messages with Members of Congress and staff.” – *Vice President, Legislative Affairs*

“Initially it was hard working with the Hill because I don’t think they were set up to go remote. But since mid-April the Hill has been much more willing to do these virtual meetings than they were at the very beginning.” – *Vice President, Lobbying Firm*

- With an expanded issue portfolio and a broader range of jurisdictions, many government affairs executives were confronted with new names and the need to forge new relationships.

“We are constantly having to Google names because we are dealing with agencies and bodies we didn’t ever have to deal with, like Commerce. Like, we might as well have not even known that there was another agency that existed outside of HHS. Now we are learning of all these new people who we need to deal with.” – *Senior Vice President, Advocacy and Policy*

- There is universal agreement that it can be near impossible to establish new relationships in the virtual environment brought on by the pandemic, doing so amounts to cold calling. Where preexisting relationships don’t already exist, most are relying on their outside lobbying firms to establish connections, but even client firms recognize the challenge of establishing relationships from scratch.

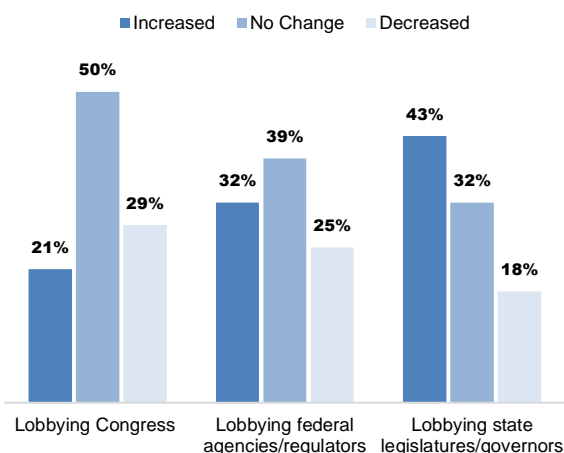
“Access is easier if you already had the relationship and you already had their number. If you didn’t have a relationship, work voicemails are full, they don’t have call forwarding. We have relied on our contract lobbyists more than ever. A good lobbyist who can set up a nice Zoom call and make an introduction, that is worth all the money in the world if they can do that. Some lobbyists are treating this like vacation time because they can’t be traveling or meeting with people. This is where the good consultants separate themselves from the lazy ones.” – *Director, Public Policy North America*

- ***The pandemic highlighted the primacy of relationships inside the Beltway, where the most effective government affairs executives put their years of strong relationship building to the test as never before.*** For continued strong engagement, government affairs leaders should consider how they might measure the strength of their existing (and desired) relationships. If they were forced to build new relationships—in a virtual setting—what pathways would they rely on to make those connections? And, of course, storytelling can also support relationship-building. Beyond stories that highlight the organization’s importance in the recovery, government affairs professionals might catalog stories of their support for individual policymakers and vice versa.

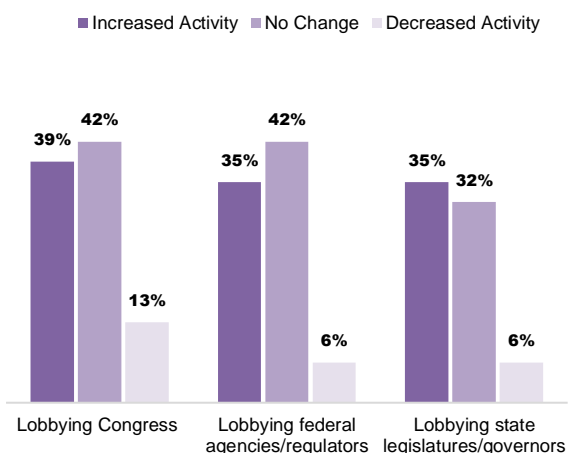
Expanding Relationships and Building Brand

- In the wake of COVID-19, government affairs organizations are connecting with a variety of new audiences. ***Heads of office report increased lobbying of Congress, federal agencies and regulators, as well as state legislators and governors.*** For corporate government affairs leaders, state-focused lobbying ramped up considerably.

Corporations - Lobbying Orientation: Are you doing more or less of the following activities as compared to before the onset of the pandemic?



Associations - Lobbying Orientation: Are you doing more or less of the following activities as compared to before the onset of the pandemic?



- ***In addition to lobbying governments, non-governmental stakeholder engagement has increased, especially for associations, whose executives work to gain alignment across their own members and industry peers.*** As noted previously, nearly one-third of corporations and twice as many associations increased their engagement with external stakeholders. Heads of office maintain that effective coordination is necessary to address the immediate crisis. What's more, establishing one's bona fides as a productive partner during this period can also enhance (personal and organizational) brand long term.

"We are an industry that is so disparate, there are about 30 different [organizations] that make up the industry, and we are all pretty autonomous. We are now trying to herd all the cats to get the industry aligned." – *Director, Government Relations*

"There is a lot of non-government facing lobbying happening right now... There is so much happening *among* organizations, outside of government." – *Senior Vice President, Advocacy and Policy*

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- In an unpredictable environment where circumstances—and narratives—can shift quickly, a wider network allows for greater visibility and a more robust early warning system for upcoming issues, which may outweigh the costs of more relationship complexity. To support relationship building and maintenance, government affairs organizations should consider applying standard frameworks to evaluate the long-term potential of partnerships: Is there a long-term strategic fit? Do they bring differentiated value? Will they help us gain additional credibility?

Remote Work

- While some organizations have operated in a remote environment for years, others are new to this situation, and are discovering—much to their surprise—that they can be just as (or more) productive working from home. Numerous heads of office note the significant time savings due to lack of travel.

“From a work-from-home standpoint, collaboration is good. The ‘government affairs’ part of the role has changed, for Hill meetings, it’s actually more efficient since you don’t actually have to travel up to the Hill or have someone from California fly into meetings with Members. On the fundraising side, candidates love to meet with people—we had a candidate on a virtual fundraiser for 45 minutes, then they joined another.” – *Senior Counsel, Public Policy*

“I never would have thought I could do it and now I’m thriving. I used to spend 60-70% of my time on an airplane and now I know I can do that work from home. This is different from the 2008 financial crisis because we’ve all been hit by the asteroid in this thing. We all are in the same boat.” – *Senior Managing Director, Government Relations*

- ***From a management perspective, ensuring connectedness while balancing individual needs—whether family dynamics or living alone—have been the greatest challenges to working from home.*** Some cite a humanizing effect to everyone working from home, but for others, combining professional and personal spaces has also led to non-stop workdays.

“Boundaries have been blurred, weekend and late-night communication has picked up. We’re operating under a low level of anxiety all the time.” – *Senior Vice President, Government Relations*

“I have two kids under five, I’m not the only one who has to deal with that. We have just had to be very explicit and forward about what our availability is and that is definitely an adjustment. Absent those issues and challenges I think we have really improved our productivity. The first two to three weeks, we just ran around like crazy but our communication across departments and across groups has really improved.” – *Director of Federal Government Affairs*

“The team has been thriving in managing their own work but the hardest part has been managing all of the dynamics and different personal implications on various people whether that be family, parenting and other aspects of the work-from-home environment.” – *Head of Federal Government Affairs*

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- ***While instant messaging, Slack, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet and Zoom offer opportunities for synchronous connection, several heads of office wonder about potential long-term shifts to the profession and engagement with Capitol Hill.***

Beyond meetings, fundraisers and other events, how does social distancing impact informal opportunities for influence on matters of policy?

“Our team is less concerned about when do we go back to the office, but more so, what are our daily lives outside of the office going to be like? We are at industry and association meetings, up on the Hill, attending receptions, attending dinners. What is all of that going to look like is the biggest question.” – *Lead, Public Affairs and Communications*

“As Congress is looking at these big bills, what they don’t have are these informal conversations walking down the hall... It makes you wonder who is helping them come up with their ideas, *who are the three people whispering in their ear?* Not knowing that [in this socially distant environment] kind of pushes you out of those conversations.” – *Head of Federal Government Affairs*

- As lawmakers become more comfortable engaging in virtual channels, some heads of office wonder if virtual interactions will become more routine. Other heads of office believe that the lack of televised hearings encourages Members of Congress to work across the aisle, though this may be limited to COVID-related issues.

“Lobbyists and politicians are such outgoing people, I think face-to-face and personal interactions will have to return back to normal... and there are many that think they need to be in person to get that work done. But I wonder if we will see a generational difference in Members of Congress who are willing to do calls and Zoom meetings.” – *Senior Vice President, Government Relations, Technology Services Company*

“I’m seeing more bipartisanship, Members of Congress are working behind the scenes and no one else is watching... Markups are happening behind closed doors. Maybe we see that continue. Maybe they will come out of this with long-lasting relationships.” – *Senior Vice President, Government Relations, Industrials Company*

Elections and PAC Activity

- For the majority of organizations, the November elections have been put on the backburner. Heads of office report continued interest in the elections from leadership, especially within organizations that are heavily regulated, but associations are especially sensitive to the more urgent needs of their members for whom election-related issues are not top-of-mind.
- Most organizations with PACs—corporations and associations—have temporarily suspended solicitations, fundraisers and giving. Some organizations with automatic payroll deduction plans have been able to add to their PACs without formal solicitations, while those with PAC Match programs have had to revisit whether this benefit can continue in the short-term.

“There’s still a lot of interest in the elections from management, but it has fallen down on the priority list. Everyone is trying to just keep their head above water. We are following it, but it used to be week-to-week, and then a number of primaries were postponed. Activity will come back as we get closer to the general election, but the drama on the Democratic side is resolved so we are in a holding pattern.” – *Head of Government Affairs*

“We continue to put resources and information on our website, where to register, candidate positions, etc. but our members are worried about surviving. We don’t want to be tone deaf to that. Elections are not a high priority.” – *Director, Government Relations*

“We’re keeping money in the bank for now, our key supporters know we’ll be there for them prior to the election... Most Members of Congress aren’t even actively asking for money, they’re just asking, ‘What’s going on with you? How is everything going?’ That encourages me to make sure those Members are at the top of the list when we are ready to provide funding.” – *Head of Federal Affairs*

- For those who have slowed traditional PAC activities due to the pandemic, knowing when—and how—to reintroduce solicitations remains an open question. The majority are looking to restart during the summer months. In the meantime, since participation in the electoral process remains important, continued education and increased communication with PAC donors, eligibles, members and employees is crucial. Heads of office state that these stakeholders are often hungry for information, whether legislative, regulatory or political updates. Email newsletters appear to be the most popular vehicle for continued engagement; others include webinars, including sessions with legislators.

“We decided to take a fundraising pause during this time but I don’t expect it to completely slow down. It is more important than ever to be communicating with members and your eligibles.” – *Senior Manager, Government Affairs*

“PAC has shifted to the backburner but our communications to PAC members have gone up and those are legislative updates and political updates as opposed to solicitation.” – *Director, Political Engagement*

“We did a call with PAC eligible staff and member representatives, there was no monetary ask or solicitation, just a way to keep people engaged. We likely will not solicit again until the end of the summer. For now it is just about providing benefits to those who are contributors.” – *PAC Director*

- ***Despite a pause in solicitations, the increased communications with both donors and non-donors enables PACs to engage a broader pool of advocates and sets a foundation for future PAC giving.*** Because the pandemic has offered an unprecedented view into organizations’ role and engagement—not just in the policy process but in the economic recovery—some may be able to position the PAC as a means to further support the organization and their community.

Closing Thoughts

- Expanding responsibilities, heightened role expectations, greater internal visibility—and external exposure—along with uncertain economic conditions all brought on by the pandemic are forcing today’s government affairs executives to quickly shift their focus. And yet, they are uniquely positioned to lead in uncertain times. Gauging risk and engaging in scenario planning are common practices for government affairs executives, and few are better positioned to build new relationships and forge new partnerships.
- The activities taken on in response to COVID-19 have offered many government affairs executives a new sight line into facets of the organization that were previously unseen. At a minimum, these actions may offer an opportunity to engage with peers in a more strategic way; at best, government affairs leaders can have more elevated conversations with leadership about the function and role of government affairs beyond specific policy outcomes.
- While there are many unknowns about the recovery, there are a variety of questions government affairs leaders might ask themselves to prepare for an uncertain future:
 - Storytelling. What narratives about your organization can you put in your story bank coming out of the pandemic? Support provided to your staff, members or industry? Progress on specific issues? Engagement with specific lawmakers?
 - Resourcing. How can you introduce greater flexibility into your function? What budget elements are “must have” vs. “nice to have”? Where can third-party support be most helpful?
 - Internal partnership. How can you ensure continued visibility for the government affairs function and systematize ongoing collaboration with internal peers?
 - External partnership. Which of your new partners will be good collaborators for the long-term? Where do they complement your organization?
 - Relationships. In what ways can you measure the strength of your organization’s relationships with X lawmakers, Y regulators, Z statehouses, etc.? Where are you exposed?
 - Virtual communications. How can you move to a world where there are more virtual fly-ins, virtual fundraisers, greater use of social media and digital-friendly “leave behinds”?
- National Journal looks forward to providing additional research and guidance to government affairs executives transitioning to the accelerated future. The following page offers a select list of existing resources that help address some of the questions posed above. We hope you find value in this analysis and thank you for your ongoing partnership.

Select List of Relevant National Journal Resources

- Storytelling
 - [Building a Best-in-Class Storytelling Capability for Your Organization](#)

Explores the critical role that government affairs professionals play in identifying and elevating relatable constituent stories in the Washington debate; includes four case studies on essential elements of a storytelling capability
 - [Storytelling Strategies for Purpose, Promotion, and Advocacy – Part 1*](#)

Addresses the disconnect between how we tell organizational stories and how audiences perceive and receive them; part 1 focuses on crystallizing the organization's approach to telling its story and strengthening storytelling culture
 - [Storytelling Strategies for Purpose, Promotion, and Advocacy – Part 2*](#)

Addresses the disconnect between how we tell organizational stories and how audiences perceive and receive them; part 2 focuses on establishing sustainable story collection processes and maximizing engagement in shared stories
- Management and Operations
 - [Metrics Picklist](#); [Metrics Picklist Addendum](#)

Provides a list of curated metrics for government affairs and communications executives seeking to measure and report on their group's performance
 - [Resourcing the Government Affairs Function for 2019*](#)

Provides insights into trends shaping key planning decisions around spending, staffing and investment priorities based on benchmarking data
- Case Profiles and Toolkits
 - [Aligning the Communications and Advocacy Functions](#)

Offers tactics to side-step common flash-points between government affairs and communications, promote collaboration and align external affairs strategy
 - [Congressional Relationship Health Scorecard](#)

Outlines a scorecard-building process for those seeking to evaluate the health of their networks and build confidence in their ties to Capitol Hill (and elsewhere)
 - [Digital and Social Media: A Brief Primer for Government Affairs Executives](#)

Serves as an educational on-ramp for government affairs executives who are asking, "What should I be doing on digital/social?"
 - [Partnership Evaluation Toolkit](#) (from [Extending the Enterprise](#)* pp. 97-109)

Highlights ways to evaluate the potential of new partnerships and the health and productivity of ongoing partner relationships

Note: Items marked with an asterisk (*) are available to National Journal members.