



Engaging Your Members about Politics and Public Policy

A chapter guide to help members talk with employees about issues, candidates, and elections.

Disclaimer

The content of this packet applies only to federal activities. Please consult your legal counsel or local election attorney on local and state matters.

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Introduction

We heard a great deal in the last presidential election about the Republican and Democrat grassroots activities in turning out the vote, so it's easy to assume that "grassroots" efforts are limited to encouraging people to vote. But that's not so. "Grassroots activities" are nothing less than direct citizen involvement in an interaction with their elected representatives – it's what participatory democracy is all about.

Companies with successful political involvement programs know the worth of grassroots activities and encourage their employees to participate. They use email and their intranets to furnish their employees with information about important issues. Email "issue alerts" urge their employees to make their concerns known to their elected representatives, and provide the employees with suggestions for further action, like writing a letter or calling a lawmaker. From the legislator's perspective, hearing from the people affected by a specific legislative proposal is integral to forming a sound understanding of the policy matter in question – it can save a good legislative proposal or doom a bad one.

The Business Industry Political Action Committee (BIPAC) has done quite a bit of research on employer engagement, and their findings are encouraging. Employees consider their employers to be the single most credible source of information on issues, candidates and elections. In fact, nearly 80% of employees polled say they want their employer to provide them with issue information.

Many companies have historically shied away from giving their employees such information, assuming that employees negatively view corporate involvement in policy and politics. Research has also shown that employees who work for companies which implement political education and involvement programs not only appreciate the information they are given by the company, they want more of it.

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As employees learn more about how business issues impact their own jobs and companies, they become more empowered to enter into the public policy process, which can only be good for everyone in the long term.

Here are several ways chapters can engage their member companies:

- Invite Member Company Employees to a Chapter Roundtable
- Host a Meet & Greet with a Candidate or Member of Congress
- Invite a Candidate or Member of Congress on a Jobsite/Office Tour
- Forward AGC Legislative & Regulatory Action Alerts
- Register Member Companies' Employees to Vote
- Conduct a Get-Out-the-Vote (GOTV) Drive
- Create a Voter Guide

Important Terminology

Express advocacy: Express advocacy unmistakably urges the election or defeat (i.e. “vote for,” “defeat” or “support”) of one or more clearly identified candidate(s). A candidate is “clearly identified” if the candidate’s name, nickname, photograph or drawing appears, or the identity of the candidate is otherwise apparent.

Federal Election Commission (FEC): In 1975, Congress created the FEC to administer and enforce the Federal Election Campaign Act (FECA) - the statute that governs the financing of federal elections. The duties of the FEC, which is an independent regulatory agency, are to disclose campaign finance information, to enforce the provisions of the law - such as the limits and prohibitions on contributions, and to oversee the public funding of presidential elections.

Restricted class: The restricted class of a chapter consists the individual at each member company with whom the chapter normally conducts the association's activities. Typically, this person is an owner, CEO, COO, Vice President or senior executive.

The restricted class of a corporation consists of the executive and administrative personnel, shareholders and their immediate family members (of adult age). The executive and administrative personnel are defined as employees who are paid a salary rather than on an hourly basis and have policy-making, managerial, professional or supervisory responsibilities. First-line, salaried supervisors who perform essentially the same duties as the hourly employees they supervise are not included. Employees must be U.S. citizens or hold a green card.



Invite Member Companies to a Chapter Roundtable

Understanding where a candidate stands on important issues gives a voter the confidence to make an informed decision. If people choose to vote—then exit the polls feeling good about who they voted for—they are more likely to participate in future elections.

No one wants to go to the polls only vaguely informed about the candidates and issues. That may be why only about half of our eligible citizens exercise their right to vote. Lack of knowledge leads to lack of voting.

But where do we get good information? How do we sort through the daily deluge from candidates, parties, news organizations and others? Who do we trust for an expert opinion?

Research tells us that employees want information from their employers regarding candidates, issues and elections. In fact, employers are the most trusted source of this information. That makes the workplace an ideal setting for voter education.

The case is clear: employers have credibility and the opportunity to educate and motivate their employees so that they can make informed choices at the polls.

So how can chapters help members educate their respective employees?

As long as you do not specifically endorse a candidate, there is no limit on the amount of chapter resources you can invest to inform your membership about people, platforms, and issues of importance to the construction industry.

You may want to consider:

- Inviting an AGC of America staff member to speak about politics and public policy.
- Providing real life examples – “If H.R. 1 is signed into law, it will affect your companies in the following manner...”
- Placing articles in chapter publications explaining priority issues. Let members know how these issues affect their companies. Include the positions of all the candidates as well as the voting record of incumbents on these issues. AGC voting records are available on the [Legislative Action Center](#).

Host a Meet and Greet with a Candidate or Member of Congress

A meet & greet is an event that a chapter can host where individuals from member companies can exchange views with a candidate or legislator on issues of concern. Such an event provides participants with an opportunity to develop relationships and discuss issues with candidates and legislators who may be in positions to make decisions affecting the construction industry.

Developing relationships with a candidate can be a real help in influencing future public policy decisions. Since a strong personal relationship with policymakers is essential to successful grassroots advocacy, hosting such an event is an effective tool in building long-term relationships. In addition, a meet & greet can help participants evaluate candidates running for elective office.

Depending upon the makeup of the audience, the following federal election rules apply if there will be discussion of a candidate's campaign. If a member of Congress is invited to talk only about issues and legislation, these rules do not apply. Please confirm with the member of Congress' staff ahead of the meeting.

Before the [restricted class](#):

- The chapter may endorse a candidate. However, reporting will be required if endorsement communication costs exceed \$2,000 per election.
- A candidate may solicit contributions or volunteers.
- The chapter is prohibited from distributing campaign materials, but can distribute original content about the candidate or his or her positions on specific issues.
- You are not required to grant a request by an opposing candidate seeking a comparable experience.

Before the general membership:

- If a federal candidate is endorsed and costs to make the endorsement exceed \$250, the expenditures must be reported to the [FEC](#).
- A federal candidate may ask for support and leave behind information on how an individual can contribute or volunteer.
- The chapter cannot solicit or direct contributions to the candidate.
- Opposing candidates must be permitted with an equal opportunity to appear before the same group, if requested.

Here are a few popular ideas:

- A breakfast buffet, where a candidate or legislator has the chance to “meet and greet” members.
- A luncheon at which a candidate or legislator can briefly speak and then take questions.
- An informal “coffee” hosted at the home or office of one of your board members.

[Download](#) this step-by-step guide when planning or helping to plan a meet and greet with a candidate or member of Congress.



Invite a Candidate or Member of Congress on a Jobsite Tour

Visits by candidates and legislators to a member company's facilities are an effective way to build relationships with public officials. These tours illustrate firsthand how jobsite/office processes relate to legislative issues, and are an excellent tool for grassroots advocacy.

Tours also help showcase your member companies' facilities' environmental, health and safety standards.

Often your legislator is in his or her district office during congressional recesses, which are especially good times to schedule a tour. Below is a list of usual congressional recesses:

- President's Day Recess (February)
- Spring Recess (March/April)
- Memorial Day Recess (May)
- Independence Day Recess (July)
- Summer Recess (August - Labor Day)
- Fall/Winter Recess (November- January)



[Download](#) this step-by-step guide when helping a member company plan a jobsite/office tour with a candidate or member of Congress.



Forward AGC Legislative and Regulatory Alerts

Members of Congress and their staffs want to hear how their actions will affect constituents.

Sign up to receive AGC of America's legislative and regulatory action alerts if you have not already done so. When you receive an alert from AGC, please review it and take action at your earliest convenience.

Take a few minutes to think about how the proposed legislation or regulation will affect your member companies and their employees. Include that information in a chapter-wide email suggesting they take action, too. Chapters should also encourage members to sign up so they too receive the alerts.

Signing up is easy – just follow these steps:

1. Visit agc.org/TakeAction.
2. Under the Resources Menu, click "Subscribe to AGC Action Alerts."
3. An email will pop-up on your screen. Now, just click "Send."

After an important vote, send a follow-up email to your member company contacts thanking them for taking action. Be sure to let them know if the legislation passed or failed as well as how your state's members of Congress voted.

Register Member Company Employees to Vote

Despite all of the political spin and heated debate, the public policy decisions made by our elected officials impact the way your member companies do business. It is the voice and vote of you and your membership that matter most, and it is imperative that everyone take part in the democratic process by voting in local, state, and federal elections.

A chapter must comply with the following regulations if it wishes to conduct a voter registration drive.

To the restricted class:

- Voter registration drives may include a recommendation to register in a particular party or on behalf of a particular candidate. However, reporting will be required if communication costs exceed \$2,000 per election.

To the general membership:

- Voter registration drives may include a recommendation to register in a particular party or on behalf of a particular candidate. If the cost to make the recommendation exceeds \$250, the expenditures must be reported to the [FEC](#).

There are no reporting requirements for nonpartisan voter registration drives.

Your chapter may provide transportation to the place of voter registration, provided the service is done without regard to party affiliation or voting preference. Individuals conducting such drive activities cannot be compensated based on the number of individuals registered or transported in the course of activity.

Your chapter may want to:

- Include a voter registration drive as part of a chapter event: the chapter picnic/BBQ, monthly meeting, annual convention, etc.
- Include voter registration materials in member information packets, especially new member welcome kits.
- Send out a broadcast email as critical registration dates near. Do this for both primaries and general elections. Dates can be found on [ConstructionVotes.com](#).
- Consistently tweet or post messages on your chapter's Facebook page, reminding members about important voter registration dates in your state.

Samples materials and template messages can be found under the "I'm an Employer" section on [ConstructionVotes.com](#).



Conduct a Get-Out-the-Vote (GOTV) Drive

People fail to vote for a lot of reasons —lack of awareness, apathy, confusion, or the belief that “my vote won’t make a difference.” No matter how well a chapter educates and motivates its members, it’s important to remember that its work won’t count unless their employees vote early or on Election Day.

A chapter must comply with the following regulations if it wishes to conduct a GOTV drive.

To [the restricted class](#):

- GOTV drives may include [express advocacy](#) and recommendations on behalf of a particular candidate. (i.e. Election Day is Tomorrow! Vote for John Smith.) However, reporting will be required if communication costs exceed \$2,000 per election.

To the general membership:

- GOTV drives may include [express advocacy](#) on behalf of a particular candidate. (i.e. Election Day is Tomorrow! Vote for John Smith.) If the express advocacy cost exceeds \$250, the expenditures must be reported to the FEC.
- The GOTV drive cannot be coordinated with a federal campaign.

There are no reporting requirements for nonpartisan GOTV drives.

Your chapter may provide transportation to a polling location on Election Day, provided the service is done without regard to party affiliation or voting preference. Individuals conducting such drive activities cannot be compensated based on the number of individuals transported in the course of activity.

Your company may want to:

- Set up a call bank to remind member companies and their employees about Election Day.
- Send out a broadcast email the day before Election Day. Do this for both primaries and general elections. Dates can be found on [ConstructionVotes.com](#).
- Consistently Tweet or post messages on your chapter's Facebook page, reminding employees about Election Day.

Sample materials and template messages can be found under the “I’m an Employer” section on [ConstructionVotes.com](#).



Create a Voting Record Guide

Voting records that state how an elected official voted on issues may be sent to anyone without triggering regulation as long as they contain no language or indications that can be construed to endorse a candidate in an election (i.e. [express advocacy](#)).

Generally, voting records accompanied by candidate endorsements may be sent to a chapter's [restricted class](#) without incurring reporting requirements if communication costs do not exceed \$2,000 per election. If sent to the general membership, reporting to the [FEC](#) will be required if costs exceed \$250.

In addition, there are two types of voter guides that can be distributed.

1. A nonpartisan presentation of written questions posed to candidates along with their accompanying responses. You must provide each candidate with an equal opportunity to respond. If a candidate fails to answer a question, or to return the questionnaire, simply indicate "Did not respond" wherever relevant. Typically, these questionnaires can be directed to candidates through their campaign offices.
2. A nonpartisan presentation of the candidates' positions on various issues. Candidates' positions are researched using content from their campaign website, legislative record, and public statements. Sources should be supplied for each listed position.

In any voter guide, no candidate can be featured more prominently than any other and the candidate's responses cannot be rated or scored. Otherwise, the voter guide will be subject to the same reporting requirements above for voting records that contain an endorsement.

You can find the AGC voting records of your member of Congress on the [Legislative Action Center](#).



Barack Obama	Issues	Mitt Romney
Opposes	Repeal the Estate Tax	Supports
Opposes	Permanent Extension of the 2001 and 2003 Tax Cuts	Supports
Opposes	Maintain or Lower the Capital Gains Rate	Supports
Supports	Lower the Corporate Tax Rate	Supports
Supports	Government-Mandated Project Labor Agreements (PLAs)	Opposes
Supports	Card Check (EFCA)	Opposes
Supports	"Quickie" Elections	Opposes
Opposes	Repeal the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act	Supports
Supports	Individual and Employer Health Insurance Mandates	Opposes
Opposes	Small Business/Association Health Plans	Supports
Opposes	Immediate Approval of the Keystone Pipeline	Supports
Opposes	Congressional Approval for Regulations that Have an Economic Impact Greater than \$100 million	Supports
Supports	Cap & Trade	Opposes
Supports	Expansion of EPA Wetlands Jurisdiction	Unknown
Supports	Expansion of Requirements for Jobsite Stormwater Runoff	Unknown
Supports	Increased Funding for Infrastructure Investment	Supports

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