

Knowlegis Case Study

American Immigration Lawyers Association

*How to influence key staff via e-mail on a make-or-break issue
... even though you've never met them*

"Dozens of legislators and staff were jumping into our complicated issue with very little background. We used the Knowlegis staff e-mail feature to connect directly with staff prior to crucial hearings. It was amazing how easy and reliable it was. We'd e-mail key data to congressional staff on Monday, and our information found its way into the hearing record on Tuesday."

- Jen Sorenson, Advocacy Coordinator, AILA

Challenge

From a policy perspective, there are few issues that are as difficult as the question of how to reform our immigration system. In 2006, the immigration issue took center stage as President Bush was making sweeping reform proposals and the House and Senate were passing competing bills to address the problem. The leaders at the American Immigration Lawyers Association (AILA) found themselves in the middle of a political maelstrom, hoping to educate legislators and staff on the complicated questions associated with immigration reform.

In the summer of 2006, after the Senate passed legislation on the topic, the House announced a series of hearings that would be held throughout the country. Instead of traditional congressional field hearings held by the committee with jurisdiction over the issue, committees with no history or background on the immigration issue would be hosting hearings from California to New York. While AILA had built reliable relationships with key committee staff, the group was now challenged to educate hundreds of legislators and staff in a matter of weeks.

Solution

AILA needed to quickly organize lists of staff who worked for the committee members attending the field hearings. Educational materials needed to be targeted to each group and timed correctly so that the staff would use the data in the field hearings.

The Knowlegis staff e-mail feature solved AILA's communication problems. Each list creation and e-mail preparation took less than five minutes to create. The Knowlegis research department updates the staff lists and issue jurisdiction daily to ensure it is the most accurate listing of congressional staff available. AILA reached more than 500 staff members in less than 24 hours, delivering crucial information on the topic.

“When you have hours or minutes to communicate key data to staff and members, you have to rely on e-mail – so creating lists from scratch is impractical. The Knowlegis staff e-mail feature made every part of the project simple and helped us have the type of policy impact we’d hoped for.”

- Jen Sorenson

Best Practices Lessons

The case study represents a best practice for groups hoping to influence policymakers quickly. In this case, AILA included the following components in their communications effort, which made their campaign successful:

- **Recognize Information Need:** AILA deduced that many congressional staffers would need to get up to speed on a complicated issue in a short amount of time. By thinking strategically and moving quickly, they had an impact on the deliberative process.
- **Target Interested Staff:** AILA only communicated with staff members who needed the available information. By reserving their communications only to those key individuals, they retained credibility with offices (by not sending their message to the wrong people) and expended valuable resources on only those individuals who could impact the policymaking process.
- **Provide Credible and Timely Information:** When Members of Congress are preparing for a hearing or vote, their staff members genuinely want information from groups that have a vested interest in the topic or provide data that can help the Member shape policy or make a decision. AILA was a credible source on this topic and timed their message perfectly to reach their target audience exactly when they needed it the most.

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