

## Grassroots Programs Are an Effective Way to Get Involved

"Coalition Corner" is a monthly business training tool for HR staff, real estate agents, and other service professionals in the relocation, real estate and/or affinity program industries.

**G**rassroots, as defined by Webster's Dictionary, is "society at the local level" and "the very foundation or source." While lawmakers and politicians may seem to be far removed from everyday America, most legislative initiatives actually begin at the local level. Support, or opposition, by citizens is crucial to the outcome of any proposed legislation. Grassroots programs are the collective voice of American citizens who choose to support various causes, organizations, or industries. And when these voices speak, lawmakers listen.

As the relocation industry's premier public policy vehicle, ERC's Coalition takes a slightly different turn this month, offering tips on developing an effective grassroots legislative program. The material for this "Coalition Corner" is supplied by Amy Showalter, renowned consultant and proclaimed "grassroots guru." Showalter has helped numerous corporations and organizations increase their grassroots effectiveness, and illustrates here how a successful grassroots program is a continuous process of educating and empowering members to take action on public policy issues. Whether developing your own grassroots program or participating as a member in an established network, Amy's tips—or "Amyisms"—provide helpful direction.

**Set goals.** Be firm about intended results and work backward to create a strategy. Ask grassroots members what they want and what motivates them when setting goals.

**Recruit.** Personalize recruiting techniques: prove to potential grassroots members that the program needs them as individuals and appeal to their particular needs. Provide written role descriptions for the program's staff and volunteers to help set expectations. Spread the news; Amyism #4 is "Word of mouth from a grassroots evangelist beats 50 communications from your CEO. Nothing recruits better than a satisfied volunteer."

**Communicate.** As with any network, communication is key to a grassroots program. It is essential for staff to keep in contact with the program's members and keep them updated on activities. Likewise, members need to take an active role, alerting staff of any initiatives, report-

ing progress, and expressing their needs as a member.

**Educate.** Grassroots program managers must implement a reliable vehicle for educating their members on public policy, legislative issues, and the entire law-making process. Once armed with this knowledge, members should use it to further their position with the local constituency and community leaders.

**Engage your stakeholders.** Continuity and regularity are crucial to keeping members and legislators interested in your causes. Grassroots program managers need to engage members in meaningful activity on a continual basis in order to keep them involved and motivated. Without regular contact, members will leave the program. Equally important is continuous involvement with legislators, not just when a pertinent issue arises. Grassroots members should solidify relationships with their lawmakers by taking an interest in their office as a whole, working with the legislator's staff, and providing positive publicity about their career. All of these actions will help to build trust and narrow the gap between lawmakers and constituents.

Grassroots programs have the ability to affect legislation in all sectors of business, industry, and society. Being part of an effective grassroots program is a beneficial way to advocate and protect your interests and take a greater role in the legislative process.

To find out more about the Coalition's volunteer grassroots network, call 202/862-4229 or see [http://realestatecoalition.org/pdf/grass\\_app.pdf](http://realestatecoalition.org/pdf/grass_app.pdf). For more information on Amy Showalter's consulting program and her firm, The Showalter Group, please visit [showaltergroup.com](http://showaltergroup.com) or call 513/762-7668. ■

