

Posted on September 19, 2017 by Rap Index

Metrics that Matter: Measuring *Quality* Grassroots Engagement

By Amy Showalter
The Showalter Group, Inc.
@amyshowalter

Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart, when concurring with the majority opinion in *Jacobellis v. Ohio* tried to define what constitutes obscenity: “. . . I shall not today attempt further to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description, and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. *But I know it when I see it . . .*”

I often think of that statement when defining quality grassroots engagement, as almost every advocacy professional knows it when they see it. It's a high bar, because the cacophony of voter sentiment is abundant and intense. And virtually every grassroots professional I have advised or observed admits that quality is what matters most for their grassroots development, and they want more involvement from quality advocates.

Why Quality Matters

I am going to bottom line this because it's so obvious to me, but bears repeating, I guess, in today's world of hyper abundant “keyboard courage.” (as Chip Felkel has aptly named ubiquitous online grassroots noise)

If you agree that the reason for your existence as a grassroots professional is to persuade undecided or opposition legislators to vote with your organization, then you should be encouraging the type of grassroots advocacy that changes their behavior, rather than only what “creates awareness” and is easy to count. If “creating awareness” is your cynosure, then quality probably doesn't matter so much, as “creating awareness” does not equal persuasion.

https://ssir.org/articles/entry/stop_raising_awareness_already.

Further, new research shows that encouraging “slacktivist” behaviors reduces future engagement and increases social loafing behaviors. Once you click “like,” you may be less likely to take more effective action.

My colleague Dr. Kelton Rhoads said it well:

Amyism #77 **Persuasion vs. Awareness**

“We increasingly see many campaigns that are deemed successful due to ‘increased awareness.’ It stems from the idea that ‘every little bit helps.’ Every little bit helps, however, is a fall back position when the campaign doesn't do anything else. We know from social psychology research that there are eight steps to persuasion. Awareness is step two of eight. There is much to persuasion beyond ‘awareness.’”

-Kelton Rhoads, PhD

Most organizations with any type of public policy concern have lobbyists, a social media presence, advocacy web sites, tools to generate instant legislator communications, and they often engage in traditional advertising to promote their legislative agenda. Further, if noise and quantity of legislator contact was all that mattered, everyone would win their campaigns. However, the proliferation of infotoxins in the legislative atmosphere doesn't equal legislator persuasion. I could argue that it contributes to gridlock, but that's a story for another day.

What Changes Legislators' Minds?

Dr. Rhoads and I found in rigorous research with over 25 top lobbying organizations that quality grassroots *engagement* and quality *advocates* is critical to influence success. It's a predictor as to whether an undecided or opposed legislator will change his or her mind. It's the tactics used, *and* the messenger.

We asked our research participants to cite two undecided legislators who were the targets of an influence campaign. We asked that one of the legislators be an example of a successful influence attempt, and the other one be an example of an unsuccessful attempt. Our request for the interviewees to include campaigns of various levels of success is important. By including a range of influence successes and failures, it allowed us to spot those factors that correlate with influence success, rather than with campaigns in general.

We asked the participants to account for *over 70 variables* that potentially predicted successful outcomes. We included a broad range of variables from many sources to distinguish this research from the commonly encountered "case history" approach that looks at a particular group winning a specific campaign, and then works backward to hypothesize what may have caused the win. The analysis consisted of locating significant correlations and performing a multiple regression analysis to locate variables that most strongly predict campaign success. The project also examined correlations that indicate what makes legislators more likely to publicly support your cause through lobbying colleagues, co-sponsoring legislation, and speaking out in favor of your legislation in committee.

The regression analysis found five variables that reliably predicted influence success. Two of the five embody quality grassroots advocacy: the number of face to face meetings with the undecided / opposed legislator, and the number of "key influential" in favor of the legislation.

Changing Minds via The Tactic: Face to Face Interaction

We asked the organizations how many face-to-face meetings took place between their grassroots advocates and the legislators. The influence literature is replete with the evidence that face to face communication is the most influential way to persuade. In concert with the scientific evidence, our data support the finding that face-to-face meetings increase influence success.

The bottom line: Quality advocates are not afraid to meet with lawmakers face to face. What percent of your advocates have met with a lawmaker face to face in the last year? Is the number increasing or decreasing over the years?

Changing Minds via The Messengers: Key Influentials

We defined "key influentials" as personal friends, local elected officials, and opinion leaders in the legislator's district. Their regard for an organization's issue impacts influence results.

Because legislators are subject to a plethora of influence attempts, they must naturally filter the information for veracity and credibility. Their reliance on the opinions of personal friends reveals that lawmakers are influenced by those they trust. Lawmakers are also influenced by those who have extensive

circles of influence, hence the finding that local elected officials and opinion leaders factor into persuasion success.

In fact, lawmakers rate certain types of constituents as more influential than others. Another research project we conducted with lawmakers across the country revealed that they consider most influential, in order: a family member, a personal friend, and a campaign worker.

The bottom line: Do you know who in your grassroots community is a “key influential?” What are you doing to cultivate the key influencers in your audience?

Turbocharged Metrics

Your metrics should always be determined by your overall strategy, and by what you know produces results, v. what “creates awareness.” This is why we came up with over 100 in our “Metrics that Matter” publication. <http://showaltergroup.com/services-and-products/products/from-activity-to-achievement-over-100-next-level-metrics-that-matter/>

Grassroots and PAC professionals are charged with persuasion: persuading their advocates to take action in a way that changes legislator behavior, and persuading their stakeholders to contribute to their PAC. So while you can measure elementary aspects of grassroots advocacy, you also should measure what matters.

Amyism #79 Metrics that Matter

“Shallow government relations metrics like email response rates, followers, PAC receipts and the number of lobbyist meetings prevents getting fired. Meaningful metrics that demonstrate your results, and the value of those results to your stakeholders, gets you promoted.”

The following are just a few examples of typical metrics and how you can amplify them to measure quality metrics – the metrics that impact grassroots persuasion.

Typical: Likes, loves, thumbs up, thumbs down, followers, etc.

Better: Number of online *influencers* who comment and repost your content

Even Better: Increase in frame adoption in online conversations

Typical: Number of form emails sent to legislators

Better: Increase in personalized messages to legislators versus form communications

Even Better: Increase in advocates who communicate with legislators offline

Typical: Number of meetings with legislators and legislative staff

Better: Proactive legislator and staff outreach —are they coming to you for advice?

Even Better: The decrease in number of legislator meetings with accelerated results. (Yes, you read that correctly.) Isn't it better to work with alacrity and reduce the amount of time required to get your result? If you're conducting fewer meetings, conference calls, grassroots events and getting better results, you're doing something right.

And, for my PAC friends:

Typical: PAC receipts

Better: Percent of your contributors who give at the legal maximum.

Even Better: Percent of those who increase their contributions from the previous cycle. This demonstrates commitment escalation, and it's an indicator of long-term culture change.

Amyism #51 Measurement

“Organizations measure what is important and do not measure what is unimportant. Smart government relations professionals who welcome and initiate robust metrics will have more organizational clout and resources than those who focus on measuring the number of emails to legislators, vanity social media followers, PAC receipts, and the number of lobbyist meetings.”

The bottom line is that if you can't measure a function in your government relations program, you can't prove it is happening. And if it's not measured, it's not important. Ultimately, failure to measure your work results in lack of organizational respect and resources. How do you measure up?

Amy Showalter is a national authority on grassroots and PAC effectiveness. She is the author of “The Underdog Edge” (Morgan James) and “The Art and Science of the BFF: 105 Ways to Build Relationships on The Hill, at the State House, and in City Hall.” Her insights have been featured in over 500 media outlets. Amy's clients include many of the nation's most prominent corporations and associations, including International Paper, Pfizer, Monsanto, Buffalo Wild Wings, and Southwest Airlines, as well as leading national organizations such as the American Heart Association, the U.S. Green Building Council, and the American Society of Civil Engineers. www.showaltergroup.com / Twitter: @amyshowalter

This entry was posted in [Blog](#), [Uncategorized](#). Bookmark the [permalink](#).

[← Money: How to run with the big dogs when there is no budget for big lobby](#)

[ICYMI: What it takes to make Congress actually listen →](#)

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Name *

Email *

Website

Comment

You may use these [HTML](#) tags and attributes: <abbr title=""> <acronym title=""> <blockquote cite=""> <code> <del datetime=""> <i> <q cite=""> <strike>

V1 SHUTDOWN ON 2018-03-31
Direct site owners to g.co/recaptcha/upgrade



[Privacy & Terms](#)

Post Comment

ARCHIVES

- [March 2018](#)
- [September 2017](#)
- [August 2017](#)
- [May 2017](#)
- [March 2017](#)
- [February 2017](#)
- [January 2017](#)
- [November 2016](#)
- [August 2016](#)
- [July 2016](#)

CATEGORIES

- [Blog](#)
- [News](#)
- [Uncategorized](#)

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR? NOW IS THE TIME.

It's time you leveraged your
key relationships for positive change.

SEE IT IN ACTION

[Client Login](#)



©2018 RAP Index. All rights reserved.

[WebSpeak Media - Digital Partner](#)

[View Accesskeys](#)