



## Step Up, Speak Out, Impact Policy

### *An Advocacy Guide for Responsible Business Leaders*

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#### **Policymakers at all levels ask, “What does business want?”**

The answers they get are mostly from multi-national corporations, conservative trade associations, and entrenched industries with legacy funding from taxpayers. If your firm is not among these, laws and regulations are unlikely to meet your business needs.

Who tells policymakers about the needs of green, responsible, and innovative companies — **triple-bottom-line** firms that value people and planet as well as profits? Company leaders like you can, with a little help from this Guide.

Policymakers of all political views and at all government levels listen to business leaders. They respect your risk-taking, your job-creating abilities, and your overall economic impact. You have the expertise to explain what responsible businesses want — and you have unbeatable credibility based on your firsthand experience and values. That’s just as important when talking with a policymaker as is knowing the details of an issue.

Our mission, like yours, is bigger than getting media coverage; even bigger than passing good laws. It’s changing the unofficial process that lets entrenched, legacy corporations — including those with destructive practices — decide for everyone “what business wants.”

You already operate, donate, and vote in a way that matches your values. But this Guide can help you step up your game as a business leader. When you tell your company’s story to media and lawmakers, you challenge the cynical narrative that the struggle is “polar bears vs. jobs” or some other false choice. Your story proves that companies can and do reap profits without exploiting people and destroying the planet. That’s news, that’s exciting, and that disrupts the old policy ideas for the better.

**You know you have an inalienable right to petition your government.**

**And you know the stakes have never been higher.**

**We hope you’ll take this opportunity to strengthen your business voice, and be heard.**



## Part I : How to Lobby Your Elected Officials

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### **As a business leader, your voice is uniquely valuable to lawmakers in your community, your state, and on Capitol Hill.**

Your voice is one of the few that can cut across party lines. Elected officials rely heavily on input they receive when influential community members “lobby” them. That influence can be yours. To use your business voice to advocate for a needed policy change (or to keep good policy in place), plan to meet with an elected official who represents you and has a meaningful role in the matter that concerns you.

Your objective is to help persuade a legislator to vote a certain way on a certain bill, or persuade an administrator to change specific regulations. At a minimum, you want to show policymakers there is a better way of looking at “what business wants” from government.



#### **Before you make contact**

- Determine what your “ask” is – what do you want the official to do?
- Who is the most appropriate officeholder to target for that ask? Make a short list of policymakers who are involved with or voting on your issue, then decide.
- Do some research on how the targeted elected official has voted previously on this or similar issues.

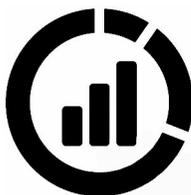
#### **Request a meeting**

- Phone your target office to explain what you would like to discuss with your policymaker or official. Send an email with the same information. *Congressional offices and others often have online forms to schedule meetings, too.*
- If you are a constituent (eligible to vote for the official), say so. And say you’d like to vote for the official in his/her next election.
- Always identify yourself as a business leader and include your title, firm name, and headquarters location.
- Prepare a list of the people you plan to bring with you to the meeting (the official’s security will want this).
- Understand that schedule constraints may have you meeting with the official’s staff, and that any meeting will be brief – usually under 30 minutes.
- Prepare a one-page, leave-behind document – with graphics if possible – repeating your “ask” and outlining your points on the discussed issue.



#### **At the meeting**

- Thank the elected official and staff for their service.
- Help the lawmaker or staff member understand why the issue matters to you, and if possible, to others in your community or your industry. *The number of constituents potentially affected can be important.*
- Offer data that shows how it would help or hurt your business if the policy being discussed is/is not changed.



## Part I : How to Lobby Your Elected Officials, continued

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### At the meeting's conclusion

- Thank the official and staff for their time, then set a follow-up date for them to get back to you on your “ask.”
- Have your photo taken with the official and/or staff, and give them your leave-behind fact sheet.



### After the meeting

- Send a thank-you note and post a photo from the meeting on your company's social media.
- Email the photo with a short news release to your local and/or industry media.
- If you do not hear from the official by the planned follow-up date, contact his/her office politely but frequently until you have your answer.



### Any time: Amplify your voice

- If you don't have time to meet personally with each policymaker on each issue, you can still make an impact.
- Participate in sign-on letter campaigns through credible organizations such as ASBC, Environmental Entrepreneurs, Small Business Majority and others.
- Obtain the approval of your industry/professional/community coalition or board of directors to write letters on their behalf advocating for your shared position.
- Cultivate grassroots support: Ask your clients, vendors, customers, and colleagues to weigh in on the issue to demonstrate support for your position and build pressure.
- Find your expert validators: Research the reputable think-tanks and independent experts whose research findings and analyses validate your position. Cite them to reassure policymakers and gain further support.
- Leave messages with lawmakers identifying yourself as a constituent and a business leader, and briefly stating how you would like them to vote or act on a specific issue.
- Attend town halls and other public events in your home district. Elected officials have an obligation to meet with their constituents and they need to see you are interested.
- Invite policymakers to your business to let them see what you do and whom you work with. The positive impact your company makes can be eye-opening. Your company's customers, vendors, and employees may be their constituents, too.

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## Part II: How to Craft Your Message and Cultivate the Media

As a business leader, you can have a powerful influence by having your views reach policymakers through media. Your credibility comes from your personal experience in running a business. You have a uniquely newsworthy perspective; a powerful “hook” to earn attention from reputable media of all kinds. And media attention for your responsible business is also good news for your firm’s relationship with investors, employees, and customers.



### Newsflash: Responsible business works in the public interest

Too often, the news narrative suggests business and the public are on opposite sides. Your business is proof that’s not true. For mission-driven, “green,” and high-road businesses, public policies that are good for business are usually also good for our country.

Because of how you operate, media may be interested in public positions you take on legislation or regulation. Beyond your usual news releases on your annual charitable donations and special events, how you manage to do well and do good — and what you think is a good or bad piece of legislation — are stories with built-in interest. The challenge is to provide fast-moving and overworked media with what they need, when they need it. “Earned” media is just that: earned.



### Prepare for your media opportunity

Smart businesses have always rushed information at journalists’ requests, and now that’s a 24/7 job. News media posts new content so frequently that journalists rely on briefings/fact sheets and interviews obtained at the last minute.

Breaking through the info-clutter to capture media attention is a big challenge. Today’s news media at all levels use journalists who cover specific subject areas; for example, the environment or business — but not where they intersect. That can be frustrating for a responsible business looking to pitch a story idea, but it’s possible to get twice the coverage if you shape the pitch to each specialist’s area and bring in the other aspects secondarily. Meanwhile, with the rise of special-interest blogs, magazines, podcasts, and other niche publications that often have large and/or highly engaged audiences, your options for getting featured can expand greatly if you learn to pay close attention to what kind of stories an outlet usually publishes.



## Part II: How to Craft Your Message and Cultivate the Media, continued

- **Collect your thoughts and assets.**

If you have a strong view on health care, climate, water, fair wages or any other topic that directly affects your business, don't wait until the next piece of legislation comes up. Write down a brief message explaining your views now. Even better: Think about personal anecdotes or examples that show how you came to your point of view or why it's important. Gather data to support your point, from within your business or from third-party sources. Make sure you have high-resolution photos of yourself and your business easily available. Having all these handy can help your pitch or ideas stand out.

- **Choose the right journalist(s) to contact.**

Research the media outlets where you would like to appear and which journalists cover stories on government policies, climate change, and business (for example, energy companies in your state). Pay attention to bylines over time to get a sense of what a journalist's beat or specialty is.

- **Start locally.**

Get comfortable pitching and being interviewed by local newspapers, TV stations and other news outlets before you go to national ones. Your story already has a "why should I care" connection in a local context that's harder to create in a national one.

- **Give media a reason to notice right now.**

Why should the media share your perspective *now*? Tie your pitch to an issue in the news, such as the US leaving the Paris Agreement. Mention that the issue impacts your business as well as your industry and/or businesses in your community or region. For example, if the news is that extreme weather is disrupting supply chains, can sea level rise affect your industry? How is your business planning and taking action so that what's happening elsewhere is less likely to happen where you are? Holidays and anniversaries can be useful time hooks. Pitch those stories farther in advance than ones related to breaking news; a good rule of thumb is 3–5x the publication frequency (3–5 months ahead for monthlies; 3–5 weeks ahead for weeklies).

- **Find the decision-makers.**

Look on the media's website for editors, writers correspondents, reporters, producers, and bookers. The goal is to find someone who can present your idea at editorial meetings where decisions are

made. Find out where and when these decisions are made and identify the team that's the best match for your story.

- **Make contact.**

Introduce yourself and ask if the person is interested in your perspective on an issue. If they have time, make an initial verbal pitch and try for an in-person meeting. If they're on deadline and not able to talk, set a time to call back.

- **Tailor your pitch to the media's needs.**

Depending on the outlet, your ideas likely have an edge because your triple-bottom-line business is out of the ordinary. An upcoming or recent government decision, public health concern or environmental problem may offer an opportunity to state the business case for a sustainable approach. Pay attention to whether the outlet has recurring features or segments where your voice might be a good fit.

- **Change media's expectations.**

To change how the media views the story, offer a narrative about stewardship vs. shortsightedness, the value of paid sick leave as part of customer care, etc. Your idea will stand out when your opinion is different from the usual business view — and your reasoning is different from that of typical cause and charity groups. Give reporters a story to help them cover the issue in a fresh way, and you'll be bringing sustainable thinking to the fore.

- **Find a good fit for your story.**

If your story on paid leave doesn't find a home in the business section, try the lifestyles or family section. If your story on clean water doesn't connect with the business section, try the travel, recreation, or health sections. Even great ideas have a lot of competition; if your idea is not chosen, you will still have strengthened your position as a useful media source for future stories.

- **Write op-eds, guest columns, and guest blogs.**

Beyond being a source for media interviews, you may want to write pieces for publication. Research publications and other outlets where you'd like to be published to understand their requirements. Identify writers' guidelines on their websites, or call to request them. Research your chosen topic to relate your experience as a sustainable business owner to larger related issues.

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## Part III: How to Share Your Views on Social Media

News stories break first on Twitter and are then fleshed out on platforms like Facebook and LinkedIn. Opinions follow almost immediately. Most individuals, businesses, and nonprofits are very active on two or more social media platforms.

### Using social media to express your views can:

- **Attract new prospects** who like your views and will join your email list or follow you on social media for more information about your mission or to try your products.
  - **Reinforce existing customers' loyalty** to you as a high-road business and prime them for your valuable promotions.
  - **Build relationships** with fellow business leaders who are potential vendors, networking allies, leads sources, and/or customers.
  - **Focus on attracting policymakers and nonprofits** that share your view and value your involvement.
  - **Tie in with live events** of all kinds – trade shows and conferences, community celebrations, public demonstrations, and more.
- As with your other marketing and communications efforts, all of these social media benefits work synergistically to reinforce and amplify each other.**



### Make advocacy on social media work for you.



- **Develop a strategy.**  
Who is your intended audience? What goals would your content accomplish with them?

- **Strengthen your core.**  
Establish your basic identity to be used across all media channels to ensure a consistent image and core message. Make sure your vision and values underlie all news and opinions you post over time.

- **Choose fewer outlets and greater frequency.**  
Decide how often you can realistically commit to posting on social media, and stick to a schedule. Use an editorial calendar and scheduling tools such as Facebook Publisher and Hootsuite to plan ahead and automate posts. Choose a few social media outlets to engage on; then post frequently, consistently, and at the highest quality level you can manage.

- **Keep a consistent "voice"**  
– your company's personality – across all media, from a long-form blog to a 140-character tweet. Authoritative, scientific, professorial, thoughtful, enthusiastic, collegial, friendly, confiding; whatever tone fits your company, appeals to your audience, and builds a sense of community.



## Part III: How to Share Your Views on Social Media, continued

- **Don't exploit a crisis.**

Even if your product or service ties in, don't try to co-opt a serious event for business purposes. If you post anything after a weather disaster, violent incident, or other all-too-common crisis, keep it strictly, simply sympathetic.

- **Think mobile first.**

Most people now use their phones as their primary social media device; size your images appropriately and make sure your post appears correctly on smartphones.

- **Learn from your results.**

Track responses to your posts. When you have a number of data points, you can analyze what kinds of posts your followers best respond to.

- **Write enticing Facebook posts**

that are short (one or two sentences) and attention-getting in a good way. Include a link, a graphic, and a call to action (e.g.: visit our website). Facebook favors videos hosted on its own platform, so try posting your videos directly to Facebook and using Facebook Live to stream your next event.

- **Look on Twitter** for late-breaking news and discussions about policy (and everything else). Tag other accounts to engage them and use popular hashtags to engage in discussions you want to be part of.

- **Keep your tweets very short**

with a clear link and call to action. Use graphics and upload video directly to Twitter whenever possible. Use Twitter Lists to track other accounts of interest. Use Bitly to shorten your links and see who clicks on them (bit.ly)

- **Boost influence with your personal Twitter account.**

Find a balance between your company, your brand, and yourself. Present some unique value on your own Twitter account that a follower wouldn't get by just following your brand. Use this account to build on your personality and influence as a business leader. Add a bio and tag your company's Twitter account in it.

- **Use Instagram wisely.**

A purely visual platform, Instagram works best for brands with a wealth of photo content to build a narrative and a following. Unless you're using paid advertising, other platforms work better for sharing links and having users click on them.

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is sponsored by:



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SUSTAINABLE  
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COUNCIL

The American Sustainable Business Council advocates for policy change and informs business owners and the public about the need and opportunities for building a vibrant, sustainable economy. We represent more than 250,000 business owners, executives and investors who believe in the triple-bottom-line of people, planet, and profit.

**Put what you've learned in this guide**

**to work:** become a member of ASBC for in-person access to elected officials and policymakers, peer-to-peer networking with business leaders, personalized media and policy training and more.

Visit [Join.ASBCouncil.org](http://Join.ASBCouncil.org) to join ASBC today.

**CONSCIOUS**  
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Conscious Company is a globally distributed bi-monthly print magazine and website for and about individuals, companies, and social entrepreneurs who use the power of business as a force for positive change in the world. Through CEO interviews, how-to articles, and thought-leadership essays from experts, we enable and inspire a community centered around positive global impact, mindfulness in business, and purpose-driven work.

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## Appendix: Resources

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**Find the Status of National Bills.  
Contact Elected Officials.  
Arrange a meeting with a Legislator.  
Schedule a meeting with a State Legislator.**

**Find the Status of State Bills.  
Find your National Legislator.  
Identify your State Legislator.  
Comply with the laws governing lobbying.**

-  **Track Upcoming Congressional Activity** This webpage provides links to upcoming House and Senate floor activities. This includes committee hearing schedules, roll call votes, nominations, and brief descriptions on how the legislative process works.
-  **Track Status of Congressional Bills and Resolutions** This webpage provides the ability to search for past Senate & House bills and resolutions and track upcoming legislation. Search for bills and resolutions by sponsor, committee, subject, and current status. Review voting records for each member of Congress past and present.
-  **Track Status of State Bills** This webpage provides links for upcoming and past legislature bills for each of the 50 states. Search for bills by subject, current status, and Governor approval.
-  **Senate Switchboard** This general contact page for the U.S. Senate includes information on how to email the Senate, send postal mail, general phone numbers, and contacting the Senate webmaster.
-  **House Switchboard** This general contact page for the U.S. House of Representatives includes the House phone number and mailing address and links to the phone directory of Representatives.
-  **White House Switchboard** This webpage includes information on contacting the White House via telephone, postal mail, and submitting questions online.
-  **Find Your Senator** This page lists senators alphabetically and includes DC Office address and phone number, personal website, political party, and state represented. The search feature allows searching for senators by name, state, or election class.
-  **Find Your Representative** This page allows searching for your House representative by matching your zip code to congressional district. This will bring you to link to your representative's website and contact information.
-  **Meeting with Your Representatives** How to schedule a meeting with your national representative.
-  **Directory of Representatives** Lists all members of the House by state and district, with links to each member's website. From there, you can find addresses for DC and local offices, staff information, and procedures for scheduling a meeting.
-  **Get to Know Your State Government** This webpage provides links to all 50 State Governments, including the State Senate, State Assembly, and general State Government switchboard.
-  **Meet Your State Representatives** This webpage allows you to type in any address across the 50 states and will find your national and state representatives. From there, you can find a representative's website and navigate to the contact page which will give you directions on meeting with them.
-  **Lobbying Disclosure Act Guidance** Provides updated information and requirements on the Lobbying Disclosure Act of 1995 including regulations on "gifts" to Congress, registration requirements, and reporting activities.  
*Anyone who lobbies professionally needs to meet certain requirement for registration, reporting, and disclosure. ASBC helps its business members engage in advocacy in ways that meet the lobbying rules.*