



WITH KEY PROGRAMS ON THE CHOPPING BLOCK, THE NATIONAL HUMANITIES ALLIANCE TURNS TO GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY

Phone2Action Ensures That Supporters' Passion Is Politically Productive During Presidential Transition

A CORE PROGRAM UNDER THREAT

On January 19th, 2017, the eve of the Presidential Inauguration, an article in the Congressional publication *The Hill* put Robert Bowen on high alert. "Trump team prepares dramatic cuts," proclaimed the headline. Among the proposed changes: the "National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) would be eliminated entirely."

The NEH makes grants to "cultural institutions, such as museums, archives, libraries, colleges, universities, public television, and radio stations." That makes it a crucial federal program for the National Humanities Alliance (NHA), whose members include museums, libraries, colleges, and universities. Bowen is a member of its government affairs team.

"For a lot of our community, the [NEH grants] are very important funding streams that are critical to work that they're doing," he says. "They were personally very concerned."

To face this threat head on, the NHA needed to mobilize its supporters - and fast. That's why it turned to Phone2Action.

THE WEAPON OF CHOICE

The Alliance knew from past experience that Phone2Action is a powerful weapon in a fiscal fight.

When international education programs were threatened with deep cuts in fiscal years 2016 and 2017, NHA used Phone2Action to drive thousands of messages to members of Congress. In both cases, the program in question emerged from the budget process with its full funding intact.

"Mobilizing our advocates and our members' constituents to show lawmakers in DC that there is support for these programs is really critical," says Bowen. "We see it as absolutely core to our mission that we're mobilizing and engaging the humanities community to advocate for itself."

NHA had chosen the Phone2Action platform for a number of reasons, including its compatibility with NationBuilder and its intuitive experience for end-user advocates. Bowen also says they needed "something that was flexible, where we could turn a campaign around in 10 or 15 minutes, and create an action alert on an issue in response to breaking news."

"So far, nearly 35,000 advocates (80% of them new) have sent over 150,000 messages to members of Congress."

Robert Bowen, Government Affairs,
National Humanities Alliance



TIMING IS EVERYTHING

The NEH funding threat required a rapid response. “Our community was ready to act, and you have to be ready with an action alert the moment your supporters are thinking about it,” says Bowen. “If you show up two days later with a call-to-action, it’s not going anywhere.”

The message needed to go directly to the general White House inbox, since, at that point in the transition, there wasn’t an obvious individual to contact about NEH funding. As Bowen considered an action alert, however, he confronted a major issue. He needed to get messages to the Trump Administration immediately, even though Donald Trump wouldn’t be President until the next day.

Bowen feared that messages sent on January 19th would go to the outgoing Obama Administration, and the new President’s team might never even see them. Sending an action alert on the 19th could be a waste. But sending an action alert on the 20th could greatly diminish the response rate.

“THEY RESPONDED IMMEDIATELY”

Bowen contacted Phone2Action to see what options he had. “They responded immediately with a solution already built into the platform, which allowed us to launch the campaign on the 19th and hold all the messages we collected. Then, on the 20th, within a few hours of the Inauguration, we could release them to the new Administration.”

Bowen made sure his action alert also allowed advocates to send messages to members of Congress. “We wanted to make sure we were getting advocates to take action on everything at once, rather than trying to get people to come back again and again,” he says. “And, because the Phone2Action platform allows for customized messages tailored to different audiences, we were able to send the President a different letter than the ones sent to Senators and Representatives.”

On January 20th, Washington heard from humanities advocates. NHA sent tens of thousands of messages to the House, the Senate, and White House with one clear theme: save the NEH.

THE FIGHT GOES ON

While the NEH funding debate is still ongoing, NHA remains committed to advocating for its survival. In fact, this campaign is NHA’s largest using the Phone2Action platform. “So far, nearly 35,000 advocates (80% of them new) have sent over 150,000 messages to members of Congress,” says Bowen. In addition, Phone2Action has helped drive phone calls, tweets, and Facebook shares. Lawmakers are getting the message, and Bowen reports encouraging vocal support from some members of Congress so far.

Meanwhile, NHA’s email list has expanded as its advocates and partner organizations share action alerts with their own networks. That’s because those who take action often choose to sign up for future NHA alerts. Thus, Phone2Action alerts about the Trump Administration budget helped grow the NHA list by nearly 75% in less than five months.

Phone2Action is also leveraged in Bowen’s in-person lobbying efforts on Capitol Hill. In meetings, he can point to constituent messages that were sent through the platform. The goal, he says, is that “by the time we get to the offices, they already know about these issues because our members have done a good job of sending emails and making phone calls.” As a former Congressional staffer himself, Bowen knows how impactful grassroots advocacy can be.

As the budget process for Fiscal Year 2018 continues to move through Congress, Bowen plans to send action alerts at other key points in the process (when a subcommittee produces a draft bill, for example). “We’ll find ways to make it new again and to give it new life,” says Bowen.

Those hoping to cut humanities funding might say the same thing. But with Phone2Action, Bowen and his team are ready for the next battle.

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