

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The team at Phone2Action is committed to providing government relations professionals with industry-leading research. The **State of Advocacy 2020** report draws insight from the millions of actions taken annually on the Phone2Action platform. Here are some of the major findings.

Digital Advocacy Exploded in 2020

Fueled by fears over the pandemic, frustrations over racial injustice and perhaps the most contentious election in a generation, the records for most major metrics were shattered:

- **Activity.** 14 million actions were taken on the Phone2Action platform from January to June, a record by any measure. That was 8 times the number in 2016, the last presidential election.
- **Participation.** Organizations recruited more new advocates in the first half of 2020 than ever before, bringing a whopping 3.4 million people into the process. That's a 121-percent increase over a comparable period in 2018 and a 306-percent increase over 2016, the last two major election years.
- **Connections.** More connections were made between activists and elected officials—emails, tweets and phone calls—in the first half of 2020 than in any other period since Phone2Action began collecting data. More than 12.6 million connections were made, a 78-percent increase over a comparable period in 2018 and a 952-percent increase over 2016. The volume of advocacy email alone went from 7 million in the last half of 2019 to 12.4 million in the first half of 2020.

'The COVID Effect' Was a Major Driver

When America declared a state of emergency over the pandemic on March 13, it marked the beginning of a dramatic increase in digital advocacy on the Phone2Action platform. We call the activity between March 13 and May 30 "the COVID Effect." During the peak, a total of 52,000 people took action every day in this period—roughly 36 people every minute. That is 20,000 more people each day than in a comparable period before the emergency declaration.

Gig-Economy Companies Led Corporate Mobilization

Many companies found themselves in an awkward position when the pandemic struck, uneasy about communicating with an audience that was clearly enduring pandemic-induced hardship. However, many companies stood out, using cutting-edge tools to mobilize tens of thousands of advocates. We tracked a cohort of companies during 2019 and 2020 and found they mobilized 34 percent more advocates to send messages to lawmakers in 2020. Airbnb mobilized 42,000 people across 54 campaigns from January to June; Etsy mobilized more than 35,000 people in 22 campaigns; and Uber mobilized about 19,000 supporters with five campaigns.

“**Innovation is at the core of what these companies do. These companies are incredibly innovative. There’s a recognition that innovation is not just a product feature or a company feature. It’s a cultural feature as well. It’s important for our company to innovate culturally. That’s what you are seeing.**

—PHILIP MINARDI

HEAD OF PUBLIC POLICY, EXPEDIA GROUP

- **Campaign Types.** Companies favored Contact Your Legislator campaigns in 2020. They accounted for 81 percent of all advocates mobilized by corporations. They were also more effective in 2020 than they were the year before. **The average number of advocates mobilized per campaign grew 98 percent, moving from 582 in 2019 to 1,158 in 2020.**
- **Legislator Targets.** Companies focused most of their campaigning on federal lawmakers, who accounted for 56 percent of corporate mobilization in the first half of 2020. Corporate mobilization campaigns that targeted Congress were the most effective. **The average number of supporters mobilized per campaign saw a 5-fold increase—399 percent growth in 2020 over 2019.** In real numbers, the average federal campaign mobilized 1,172 people last year. This year, that number was 5,853.

• THE 2020 EDELMAN TRUST BAROMETER, WHICH MEASURES TRUST WORLDWIDE, SHOWS THAT **TWO THIRDS** EXPECT BRANDS TO **BE A FORCE FOR SOCIETAL CHANGE** AND **74 PERCENT** SAY THAT CEOs SHOULD **TAKE THE LEAD ON THAT CHANGE.**

• THE **MOST EFFECTIVE TIME** FOR CORPORATE CAMPAIGNS WAS **FRIDAY, BETWEEN 11 A.M. AND 9 P.M. EST**, WITH 9 P.M. THE MOST EFFECTIVE HOUR.

STATE OF ADVOCACY

EXECUTIVE
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PHONE 2
ACTION

Companies Led in Supporter Retention

Companies led the pack in terms of organizations that retained supporters—and kept them active—over time in 2020. Retention is measured by the rate of return, which shows the percentage of supporters who come back to take action multiple times. A high return rate shows an active list and a healthy program. **The average rate of return for corporations was 78 percent higher in the first half of 2020 than it was in a comparable period in 2019.**

Return rates are boosted when other metrics, such as those that track loss in email and text messaging programs. Expedia Group, for example, is a leader in email with open rates that approach 60 percent while unsubscribes are about 0.09 percent. Ben & Jerry's has a well-run text program, with an overall 0.8-percent opt-out rate

Top Corporate Tactics

Companies used a number of tactics to successfully engage audiences in 2020:

- **Harness Facebook Lead Ads.** Using Facebook Lead Ads, companies saw a **683-percent gain** in the number of advocates acquired from March 13 to May 30 over the same period last year. Lead Ads were the single largest source of new advocates for companies. Overall, companies attracted almost 400,000 new supporters. Pfizer, Hallmark and others all used Facebook Lead Ads for outreach.
- **Mobilize Local Supporters.** Companies like Etsy, Uber and DoorDash use targeted strategies that focus on the areas where they operate. The result is powerful: local supporters reaching out to local policy makers. In New Jersey, for example, DoorDash helped give a voice to nearly 3,200 workers, who sent messages to state lawmakers in support of legislation that would preserve their flexibility and autonomy as independent contractors.
- **Go International.** Many companies, including Airbnb and Patagonia, have run strong campaigns overseas. Etsy, for example, ran 22 campaigns in the first half of 2020, and 19 were targeted abroad, from Spain to Bulgaria. It took real work to create those campaigns in so many languages—and Etsy pulled it off.
- **Foster a Give-and-Take Relationship.** Hallmark, Ben & Jerry's, Seventh Generation, PayPal, Liberty Mutual and Expedia Group are among the hundreds of companies offering their stakeholders tools to navigate the election, including voter registration. Not every interaction with an advocate should be an ask.