

CAHF CHAPTER TOOLKIT

D. Chapter Grassroots

Building a Successful Chapter Grassroots Program

CAHF chapters play a very important role in legislative advocacy.

Within the 19 CAHF chapters around the state, grassroots structure must be solid, grassroots advocates must abound, and grassroots communication and accountability must be disciplined. CAHF's grassroots advocacy – and with it the association's strength in the policymaking arena – cannot succeed without these attributes.

Likewise, promoting and supporting chapter-based advocacy effectiveness is among CAHF staff's most critical responsibilities, and as a CAHF chapter or member, you can rely upon the support and guidance of CAHF staff to ensure you build and maintain a strong localized grassroots program. The key, however, is to have chapter leadership and committed chapter members who are willing and capable of driving the engine of grassroots locally – to make the calls, do the follow-up, and ensure the meetings, letters and calls happen not only when a crisis is upon us, but on an ongoing basis as well.

Key Players in CAHF Grassroots Advocacy

While all CAHF members have a part to play in promoting and achieving our grassroots goals, there are three groups that must be fully engaged and “on the ground” to make CAHF grassroots succeed.

Chapter Presidents provide leadership to their chapter's grassroots/legislative program. They:

- Work with Association staff and local chapter members to enhance the level of chapter involvement in the legislative and political processes.
- Recruit enthusiastic chapter Legislative Representatives and Key Contacts.
- Educate chapter members and ensure participation in grassroots activities.
- Establish a strong local member network, and promote leadership development within the chapter to identify new and future Key Contacts.
- Motivate members to respond to CAHF Alerts and other “calls to action.”

Chapter Legislative Representatives direct operational support for grassroots activities. They:

- Coordinate local CAHF member grassroots activities.
- Ensure ongoing communication with Key Contacts on CAHF policy positions.
- Monitor Key Contact and general membership follow-up on CAHF requests for local assistance.
- Support Key Contact in their efforts to promote CAHF's legislative agenda with legislators.
- Provide chapter presidents and/or Association staff with appropriate feedback.

Chapter Key Contacts provide the most direct support on legislative issues, and are the very essence of grassroots in the CAHF organization. They:

- Promote CAHF's legislative agenda with individual legislative offices.
- Establish meaningful relationships with local legislators and their district staff.
- Educate legislators regarding CAHF policy positions.
- Respond to CAHF requests for grassroots lobbying on specific needs.
- Ensure industry visibility in the local political arena.

In some cases, a chapter president may also serve as the chapter Legislative Representative, or as a Key Contact for one or more of the chapter's legislative delegation. But no matter who is serving in the Key Contact role, it is one of the most important responsibilities of any within CAHF. The CAHF member who performs this task successfully can potentially deliver unparalleled benefit to their business and our industry.

Elements of a Successful Chapter Grassroots Program

This overview will give you a sense of where to focus your chapter grassroots organizational and advocacy resources. It is important to remember that enduring success in your advocacy efforts will be largely dependent upon meeting the organizational needs of chapter grassroots, and developing emerging leadership with the chapter.

1. Appoint a Legislative Representative

- Every chapter should appoint a Legislative Representative.
- The Legislative Representative should be someone who is committed to providing leadership to the chapter and who is interested in legislative issues. Most importantly, the Legislative Representative should be someone who will make the commitment to devote the time necessary to remain informed on legislative issues and follow-through with CAHF staff, chapter members and key contacts on legislative action requests. The Leg. Rep. should also be someone who is comfortable calling chapter members and asking them to participate in grassroots activities.
- Legislative Reps. are responsible for providing the legislative update at chapter meetings and ensuring on-going communication with key contacts and chapter members on CAHF policy issues and legislative activities. CAHF staff will provide issue papers, guidance and support on CAHF activities to make the Legislative Rep's job as easy as possible.

2. Legislative Update at Every Meeting

- All chapter meetings should include a legislative update.
- CAHF members will be more responsive to requests to attend a legislative meeting or write a letter on a bill if they know what has been going on at the state capitol. A great deal of the general membership does not attend CAHF statewide meetings so it is important to update chapter members on upcoming legislative and budget issues.
- Information on upcoming opportunities to meet with legislators. summaries of recent meetings and the current status of key legislative issues are all things that should be shared at the chapter level.
- Time can also be set aside occasionally to do short letter writing campaigns, coordinate fundraisers or events, etc.

3. Identify Key Contacts

- For each legislator assigned to the chapter a "key contact" needs to be identified. This will enable CAHF to quickly establish relationships between CAHF members and legislators.
- A key contact should be someone a legislator has had interaction with on the local level or someone who is committed and interested in establishing a relationship with that legislator.
- Chapters need to support their key contacts by attending meetings with legislators at their request, providing support for fundraising activities and making sure communication with legislators is consistent.

4. Schedule Legislative Visits For All Legislators

- Every local legislative office should be visited within the first 3 months of the year. The legislative session starts at the first of every year. thus it is important for legislators to understand the significant issues for that year. A chapter can set aside time to coordinate volunteers or designate groups to visit legislators by a certain deadline.
- A chapter could also invite a legislator to speak before, after or at a chapter meeting. A fundraiser for the legislator could also be organized to correspond with a chapter meeting. CAHF can provide the chapter members with legislative information needed to communicate to a legislator or their staff. If the legislator is not available to meet with you at a desired time, a legislative staff member will be sufficient. Sometimes a staff member is preferable because they will most likely be doing the substantive work on the issue and have more time to address your concerns.
- Every legislator should be visited in their Capitol office at the CAHF Legislative Conference in March. Appointments at this time are very important because clearer issues and problems have developed and you'll need to explain the matter to the legislator or staff member. Call the scheduling secretary at their Capitol office and the office will most likely arrange an appointment.

5. Invite Legislators to a Facility

- It is important for legislators and their staff to see what the long term care industry is all about. A legislator *and* their staff member who handles health, seniors or legislative issues should get out to a facility in the district at least once every two years. Prioritize legislative tours by experience to the industry. Focus first on those legislators and staff who have NOT been to a facility.

- Pick a facility within the legislators district and arrange for the visit to include a walking tour and explanation of the facility and available services, a talk with the residents and staff, and a photo opportunity for your newsletter or for submission to the local newspaper. A fundraiser for the legislator can also be held at a facility.

6. Utilize Media Opportunities

Legislators like to be recognized and associated with good things happening in the district. Invite a legislator to an event where he can meet with constituents or that the media might cover.

Ideas for Functions at the Facility:

- 100 Year Old Birthdays (you may be able to ask the legislator to sponsor a resolution to be presented to a resident celebrating their 100th birthday).
- Employee Recognition (for long term service to the community).
- National Nursing Home Week or Assisted Living Week (support for employees who work hard to provide quality care)
- Ribbon Cutting (new or additional services available to the community's constituents).

Ideas for Functions in the Community:

- Chapter Employee Recognition Dinner (many constituents in one room that have provided outstanding long term services to community residents).

7. Establish a Chapter Communications Network

Chapters need to develop and implement an internal communication system that will effectively get the word out quickly on essential budget and legislative issues. Timing is of the essence when a bill is moving through the legislative process. Members should be kept abreast of industry issues on a continuing basis and mobilized quickly to respond to specific alerts by sending letters or calling their representatives. Successful chapter networks must include one or more of the following features:

Telephone/Fax/Email Tree

CAHF will frequently ask members to contact their legislators in support or opposition of important legislative issues. Requests often require an immediate response because a bill may be scheduled to be heard in committee or up for a vote. The success of CAHF's grassroots efforts depends heavily on the fax/phone trees to ensure a quick and successful response.

Designate someone in the chapter to construct a telephone/fax tree and secure a commitment from the person that makes up each "branch". When the starting person only has to contact a few people, who in turn contact a few more people, and so on – information can be spread throughout the Chapter very rapidly.

A tree fax/phone/e-mail can set up as follows:

- Chapter president and leg. rep. focuses on alert from CAHF Sacramento,
- Leg. rep. ensures chapter key contacts communicate with their respective legislators,
- Chapter president contacts the chapter board,
- Each board member contacts 5 members,
- Each member contacts 5 more, and so on.

Constituent calls and letters do influence a legislator's opinions and actions, and to ensure CAHF member participation, follow-up should take place within the chapter organization. Chapter members should be asked to confirm their contact with the legislator's office by reporting back to their "Tree Contact." Chapter Legislative Representatives should also report on follow-through at chapter meetings.

Alert System

Develop a system where members respond to CAHF Alerts in a timely manner and someone monitors member responses. Representatives like to hear from their constituents - a few letters can have a major effect on a piece of legislation. Contact with Assembly or Senate members must occur with rapidity to positively affect their decisions. Chapter Legislative Representatives should provide a status update and a copy to CAHF Grassroots or Legislative Departments of something that was transmitted to the legislator, so we can reinforce your message with your representative.

Chapter Meetings

Keep members informed about current legislative and local affairs. Always include a legislative report as a standing item on your meeting agendas. Have the legislative representative and/or individual members involved in a particular issue discuss their past, present and future work with government officials.

8. Grassroots Leadership Development

To sustain your chapter's grassroots program, it is very important that chapter leadership work to identify new members who are willing to learn and accept positions of responsibility in chapter grassroots. Both chapter leadership and CAHF staff should work together to ensure these individuals are exposed to grassroots activities, through both training and participation in advocacy, in order to demystify the nature of grassroots and bring them along at an agreeable pace until they are ready to take on a key role.

