



2020 DIGITAL INFLUENCER REPORT

DIGITAL
INFLUENCER

RANDLE COMMUNICATIONS

FOURTH ANNUAL
END-OF-SESSION
REPORT

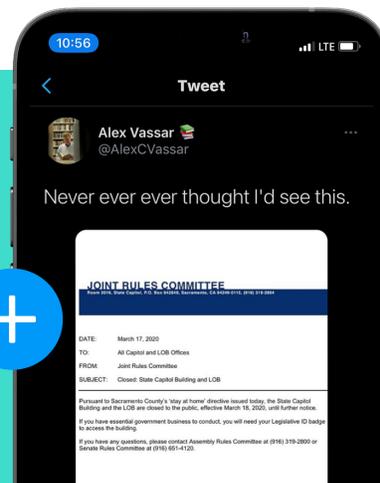
DIGITAL ADVOCACY: CALIFORNIA'S CAPITOL CAN'T FUNCTION WITHOUT IT

2020 was the year digital advocacy became non-negotiable. It's as key to the legislative process as committee hearings.

It was March 17, 2020. The California Legislature approved \$1 billion in funding as an initial response to the worsening coronavirus pandemic and then did something it had not done since 1862: recess in the middle of a legislative session.

NEVER EVER EVER
THOUGHT I'D SEE THIS.

Alex Vassar, an unofficial legislative historian for the California State Library, tweeted with a screenshot of a memo from the Joint Rules Committee announcing the closure of several legislative buildings.



2020 was the most challenging year in modern American history. The global pandemic, economic unrest, civil rights protests and one of our nation's most contentious elections stretched the country to its limits. California's 2020 legislative session came to an abrupt halt when the Governor declared a statewide stay-at-home order. Committee hearings that weren't canceled went completely virtual while staff and lobbyists were confronted with limited access to the Capitol building. To continue doing the people's business, lawmakers, reporters and advocates were forced to pivot and adapt to what was becoming a new virtual normal.

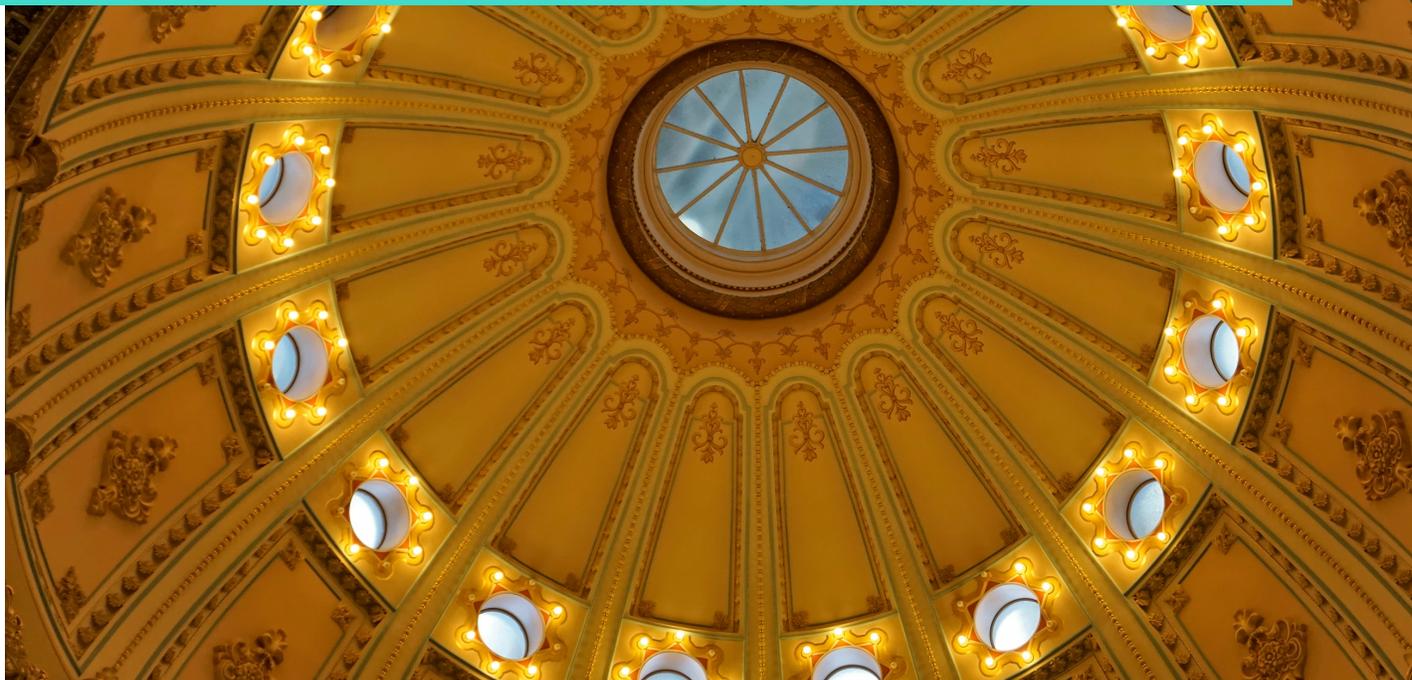
Digital advocacy became the only way stakeholders could engage and media could cover state government, accelerating the use and acceptance of digital tools as a means to shape the process, debate issues and drive policy. Those who didn't adapt were left behind.

Randle Communications (Randle) pioneered using social and digital media to impact the legislative process. As Sacramento’s top-ranked public relations and public affairs firm, Randle measures and analyzes Twitter activity and analytics to produce the Digital Influencer series.

In this fourth annual edition of Randle’s proprietary Digital Influencer Report, the firm turned to the backbone of the legislative process – Capitol legislative staff – for a first-of-its-kind survey to gain unprecedented insight into the intersection between digital advocacy and California policymaking. Unlike previous years, this year’s report does not examine specific bills because the pandemic changed session dynamics so dramatically. Instead, we analyzed findings from the #CaLeg Staff Survey to better understand the impacts of digital advocacy on California’s Capitol in a new COVID-19 world.

The 2020 legislative session turbocharged a transition to digital advocacy that was already underway. Today the game isn’t if you’re playing, but how well. It’s no longer about presence, but the quality of content, targeting, repetition and agility. Those who do digital best, make it a priority, invest in the tools of the trade and execute a well-planned strategy.

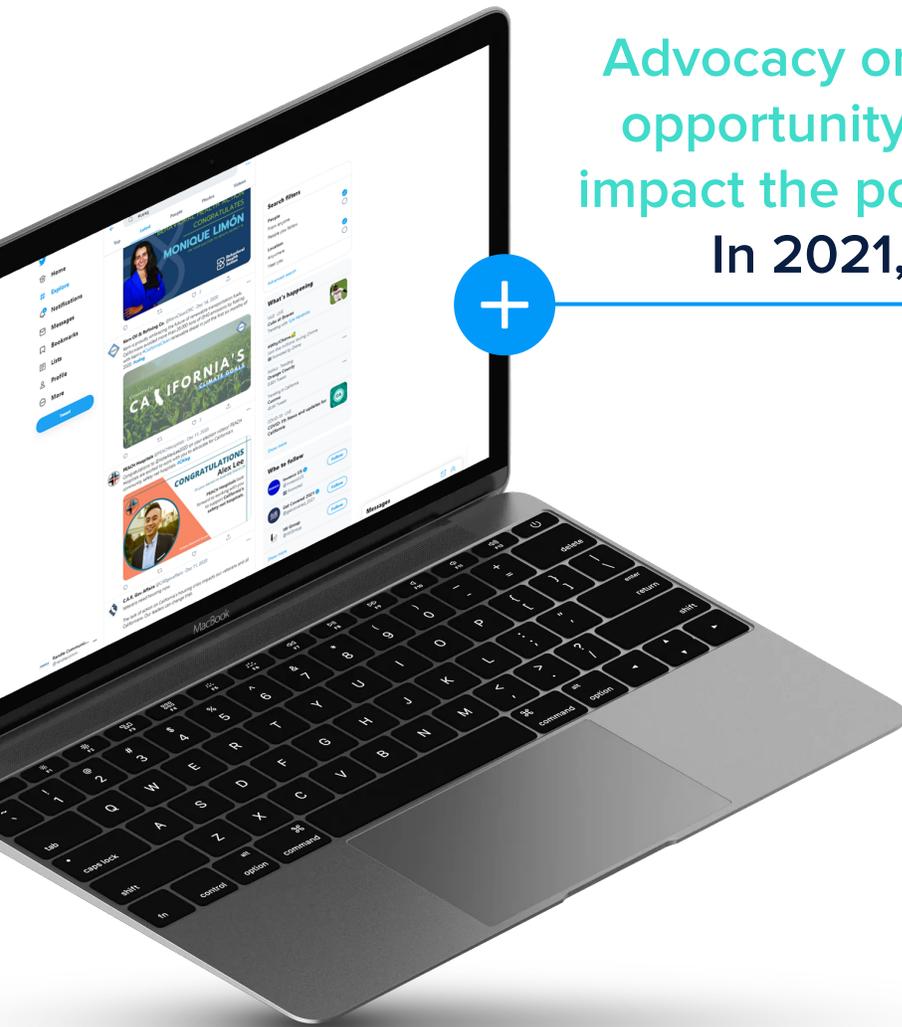
TODAY THE GAME ISN’T IF YOU’RE PLAYING, BUT HOW WELL.



#CALEG STAFF SURVEY

NEVER-BEFORE-SEEN INSIGHT ON THE IMPACTS OF DIGITAL ADVOCACY IN CALIFORNIA

Who better to ask about the effectiveness of digital advocacy than those who work on behalf of California's lawmakers – legislative staff. Chiefs of staff, communications directors, legislative aides and directors. These are the public servants who work closely with and for California's 120 legislators – and they're who we went to solicit their input for our first-ever #CaLeg Staff Survey. Staff at all levels and from both parties provided never-before-seen insight into the Capitol community's perspectives on digital advocacy and social media. Legislative staff reiterated what we've been saying for years – digital advocacy is essential.

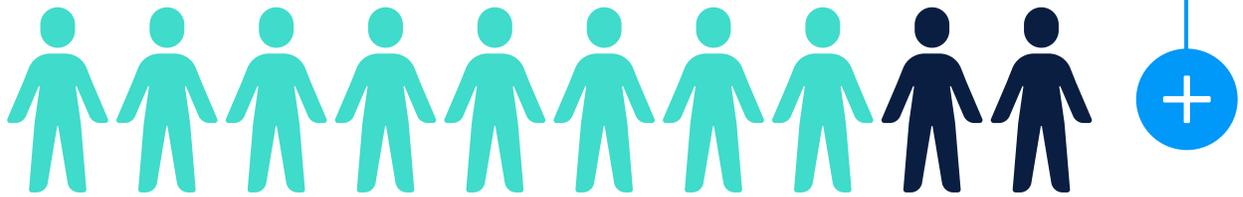


Advocacy organizations have an
opportunity like never before to
impact the policymaking process.
In 2021, it's essential to win.



Digital advocacy is more important than ever before

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated an already rapid shift to digital. More than three-quarters of survey respondents (76.9%) say digital advocacy is more important to advancing policy due to COVID-19 impacts. Moreover, 9 in 10 survey respondents (94.2%) believe social media is beneficial or very beneficial to the legislative process – and 61.5% believe it’s even more beneficial given COVID-19.



MORE THAN THREE-QUARTERS

OF LEGISLATIVE STAFF RESPONDENTS SAY DIGITAL ADVOCACY IS MORE IMPORTANT TO ADVANCING POLICY DUE TO COVID-19



What staffers are saying

Digital advocacy has been one of the only ways for advocates, organizations and legislators to spread the word on a bill.

[It] provides ability to drive conversation.

Digital advocacy is now one of the only ways to advocate!

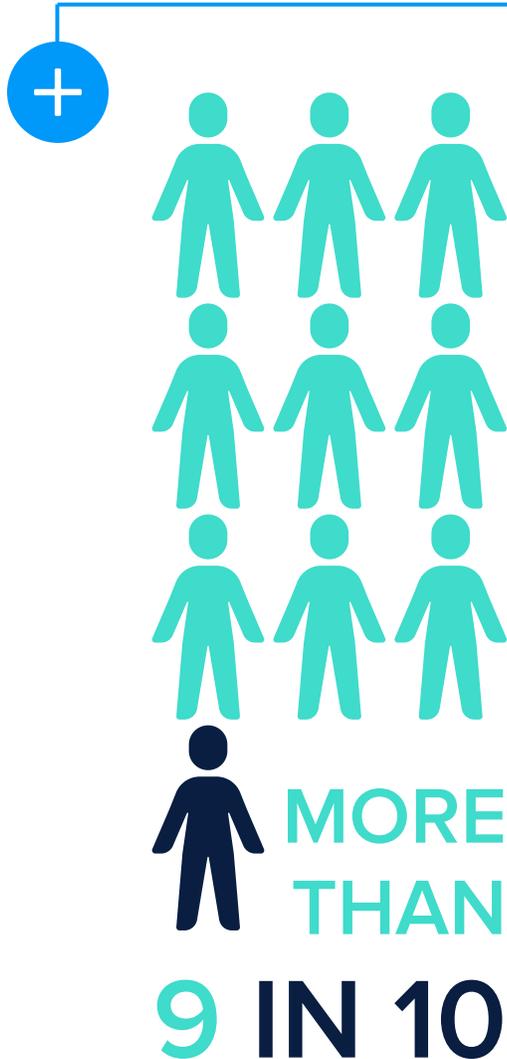




Organizations must adapt to the digital world – or risk not having a voice

In 2021, organizations must maximize their resources to move the needle with legislators and staffers say social media represents a highly effective way to communicate advocacy

objectives to members of the legislature. More than 9 in 10 respondents (92.3%) say social media is an effective way for organizations to advocate for a policy and nearly half (48.1%) believe COVID-19 has made social media even more effective for advocacy. This represents an increase from the previous year’s survey when 85.7% said social media was an effective way for organizations to advocate. More than half of respondents (61.5%) say paid social media content is an effective way for organizations to advocate.



LEGISLATIVE STAFF RESPONDENTS SAY SOCIAL MEDIA IS AN EFFECTIVE WAY FOR ORGANIZATIONS TO ADVOCATE FOR POLICY

What staffers are saying

When people advocate for an issue on social media, it is just like them making a phone call to our office or an in-person visit. We read what they are saying, who is saying it, how frequently they are saying it.

It gives more people the opportunity to engage.



Lawmakers and legislative staff rely on digital advocacy and social media to do their jobs

Social media and digital advocacy are necessary to the policymaking process in 2021. In fact, many staffers say their member of the legislature is likely to consider digital advocacy

Many lawmakers are likely to consider digital advocacy campaigns when weighing policy decisions

when weighing policy decisions. About 9 in 10 survey respondents (90.4%) say social media is beneficial or very beneficial to their work. Three-quarters say they use social media for legislative and issues monitoring and more than half use it for media monitoring, as well as to support proactive messaging on behalf of their member. Most respondents shared that they use Twitter, Facebook and Instagram multiple times per day

What staffers are saying

Now we pay more attention to digital advocacy but still give proper consideration to other forms of communications.



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW IN 2021

The digital transition was already underway, but as our #CaLeg Staff Survey found, 2020 accelerated it to warp speed. It will be known as the year advocacy went all virtual, pushing legislators, lobbyists and Capitol insiders to adapt rapidly. Based on the findings from the survey, here's what you need to know in 2021 and beyond to turbocharge your digital advocacy:

01

Remember to be Human

We all need more “good news” these days. Sprinkling content that provides a break from heavy news on social media and sharing personal stories can establish better two-way engagement. Share what your organization is doing to help the community, post a Zoom group photo or add content providing a glimpse into how current events or legislation impacts real-life. Humanity in your content can go a long way to establishing trust and building authenticity.

02

Sometimes, it's Better to Keep it Real

Know when polish and production are needed... and when they are not. While there is still a need for high production videos in digital advocacy, the most engaging content could be something that is happening in real time and conducive to a more authentic response. Sometimes the best content is right in front of you, so take out your phone and record it.



Unfiltered or produced?

During the pandemic, many swapped business shoes for flip flops while working from home. But there will come a time when business attire is once again needed. In the same vein, balancing raw, unfiltered content with produced, polished content builds a winning strategy. Knowing when and how is the key to success in 2021 and beyond.



Virtual is Here to Stay

Traditional advocacy was effectively eliminated by COVID-19. Virtual advocacy quickly took its place – and it's here to stay. We don't know what normal will look like, so savvy organizations will ensure virtual advocacy is part of their main playbook. While the reopening of the state will incorporate some of the traditional advocacy, there's no going back to a normal where digital isn't a must-do priority. Virtual advocacy days create cost-effective opportunities while maximizing increased participation, more diverse voices to be heard and greater impact on moving the needle. As we've said in previous years, it's imperative to make every day lobby day. Virtual advocacy must be part of your continued plan for engaging with legislators.



Be Ready to Seize Upon Viral Moments

The most authentic content tends to rise above the rest. Viral moments aren't planned, but how you respond to those opportunities and how they're maximized to advance your organizational goals can be. Look for and capitalize on viral opportunities. They could be the digital spark needed to make a big impact.





Be Real in Real-Time

Conversations surrounding diversity, equity and representation drove much of the #CaLeg discourse in 2020. Recognize that conversations and social movements will continue to be at the forefront of communications from advocates within various communities. How your organization responds matters and has an impact.



Integrating Influencers is Essential

You don't always need celebrity firepower to make it across the finish line, but you need authentic voices to champion your cause on social media. A successful digital advocacy strategy in 2021 includes real-life people serving as digital ambassadors who can activate grassroots audiences on policy issues.



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