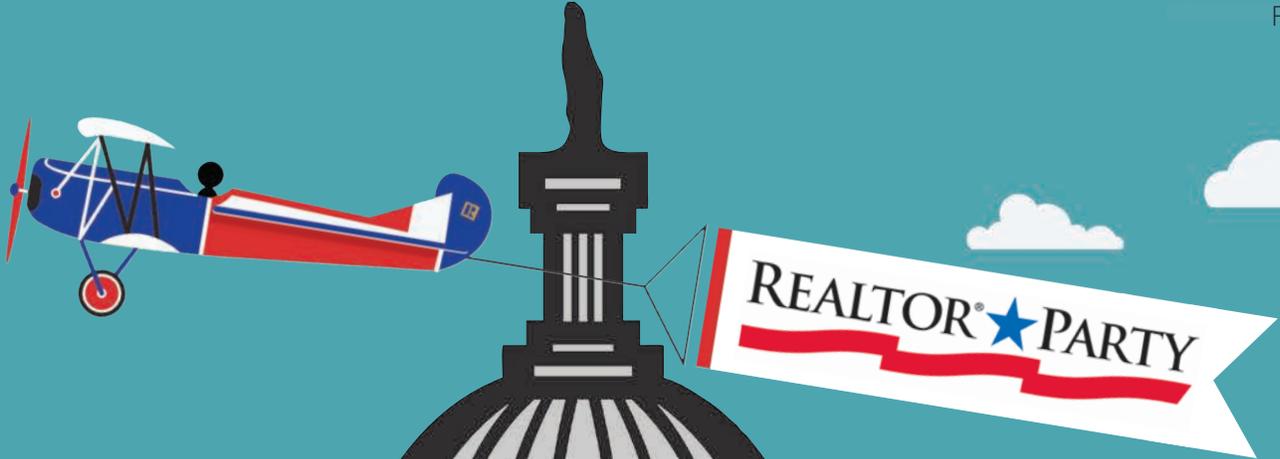


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Inspire Members to Take **Political Action**

Page 12



**How to
Communicate
Advocacy's
Value**

Page 16

**Tech Tools for
Politicking**

Page 22

**Engaging
Political Events**

Page 24





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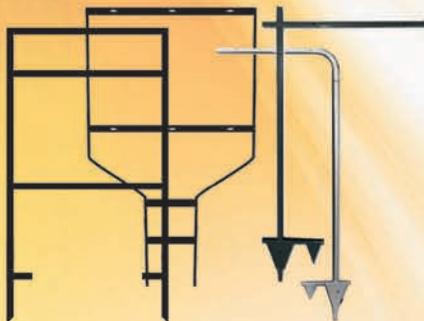
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REALTOR[®] AE

Summer 2015

features



Advocacy Actions

How and why to encourage your members to get involved in politics.

[Page 12](#)



The 5 W's of Effective Advocacy Communication

How to build participation in association advocacy, empower members to express their needs, and take action.

[Page 16](#)

AE voices

AE COMMITTEE CHAIR UPDATE Mobilizing Members to Political Action

[Page 2](#)

PROFILE

Diane Ruggiero

CEO of the Kansas City Regional Association of REALTORS® on listings and leadership.

[Page 28](#)

news

HOT TOPICS

REALTORS® Take the Lead in Neighborhood Redevelopment

[Page 4](#)



SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

Association charity events, fundraisers, and other ideas to inspire your community involvement.

[Page 5](#)

POLITICAL ADVOCACY

Space Coast Association wins impact fee delay.

[Page 6](#)

online

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need to know

OUTREACH

Projects That Transform Communities

NAR placemaking grants build more than just great local gathering places.

[Page 20](#)



TECH

E-Advocacy Tools to Rally Members

How to leverage technology to more effectively motivate, inform, and petition members.

[Page 22](#)

CORE STANDARDS

Advocacy Engagement Ideas

Plan now for how you'll meet the 2016 core standards advocacy requirement.

[Page 24](#)

LEGAL

Patent Troll Response

Legislators, regulators, and courts work to solve the patent litigation problem.

[Page 26](#)



"Whether it's advocacy activities, community outreach, diversity, or any of our other programs or services, they are only as strong as the volunteer leaders behind them."

Mobilizing Members to Action



Jarrod C. Grasso, RCE,
CEO, New Jersey
Association of
REALTORS®, 2015 chair
of the AE Committee

In New Jersey, our association is focused on four prongs of service: powerful advocacy services to protect member businesses and property ownership; best-in-class education to build credibility; access to market and industry data to complement our membership's expertise; and providing standardized forms and contracts to lower risk.

While each focus is equally as important to our overall vitality, our industry is hugely affected by legislative advocacy. But we cannot do it alone.

Every day, our elected officials make decisions that have reverberating effects on the way our members do their business. Through

many channels of support, the REALTOR® Party works to advocate for legislators and legislation that supports REALTOR® interests. No matter how much effort our capable staff and leadership put into advocating for home ownership and private property rights, if we are unable to leverage the combined voice of our membership, we fall short.

The challenge lies in encouraging members to become involved and invested at any level. Our members have to understand how their personal involvement can truly make a difference and act as a catalyst for change around them.

There are a few ways we mobilize members into action and increase engagement from an advocacy perspective. We've seen great benefit from the Broker Involvement Program. We send calls to action out about only the most important issues so we don't dilute our messages. When a call is issued, those brokers who have signed up with the

Broker Involvement Program have the call directly distributed to their agents. Response rates for broker calls have been historically higher when the call is sent from the broker personally.

When a member has been particularly interested in participating in government, we encourage him or her to be a voice for their colleagues. There are many tools

on the REALTOR® Action Center that help members encourage their fellow REALTORS® to be involved. They can download the REALTOR® Action Center app and send e-mails to their offices about it, post promotional banners on their websites or use REALTOR® Party graphics and logos in marketing materials.

Every year our association hosts a lobbying day at our state capitol where we invite our members and every member of the state Legislature to a networking breakfast. Here, our members are able to speak with the legislators who represent their districts, talk about issues that are important to REALTORS®, and show that we are a committed, involved group that cares about what happens in state government.

Our communication about the value of being involved in local, state, and national government must be meaningful and authentic to be effective. If our members are able to see how our involvement directly affects their businesses, saves them money, and increases their client lists through our advocacy efforts, investing in the REALTOR® Party will be a much easier sell.

Converting just one member into a believer of affecting real change through advocacy and legislation is a great success. Every new voice we add to the REALTOR® Party increases our strength at every level of government.



The New Jersey Association of REALTORS® leadership and area legislators broke ground in June for the future association headquarters in Trenton (the state capitol). This location was selected to represent the association's tie to the state's political and legislative activity.



430 N. Michigan Ave.,
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Washington, DC 20001-2020
800-874-6500
infocentral@realtors.org
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Chair, Association Executives Committee Jarrod C. Grasso, RCE
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Editor, REALTOR® AE magazine Carolyn Schwaar
Contributing Editors Paula Pisani, Bob Soron
Questions and comments e-mail: cschwaar@realtors.org
Advertising Sales Natalie Matter DeSoto,
800-501-9571 or 717-580-8184,
natalie.desoto@theygsgroup.com

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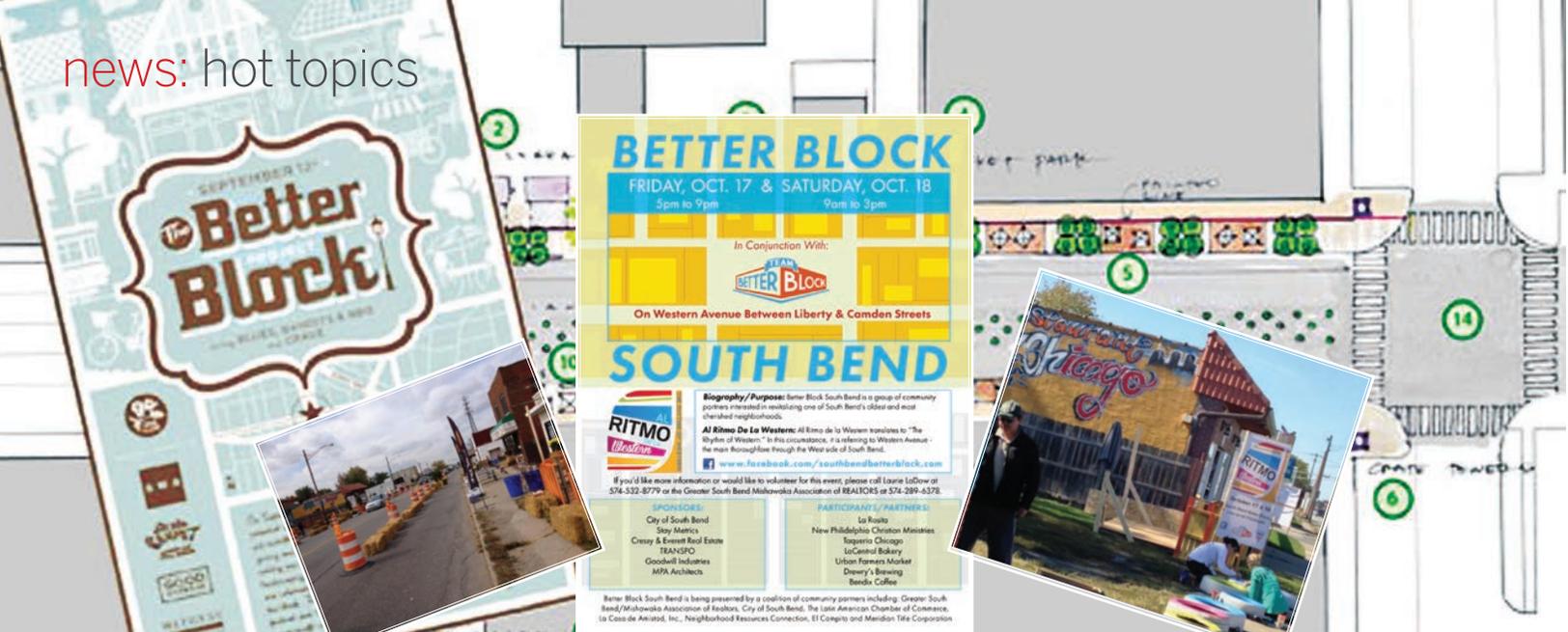
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South Bend REALTORS® Take the Lead in Neighborhood Redevelopment

By spearheading a redevelopment program on one street in South Bend, Ind., the 495-member Greater South Bend-Mishawaka Association of REALTORS® gained invaluable local government support and formed strong new ties with local businesses and organizations.

It began with a session about the Better Block program at the 2013 REALTORS® Conference & Expo in San Francisco. Association CEO Myron Larimer and then-President Laurie LaDow were so inspired that they decided to try the program at home.

The Better Block concept focuses on engaging a neighborhood in envisioning ideal improvements concerning traffic, businesses, leisure, and well-being for a single commercial corridor and then temporarily implementing those ideals over the course of a weekend.

Larimer knew there were blocks in South Bend in need of just such a boost so SBMAOR reached out in partnership to the city, identified a few tired blocks of Western Avenue for a Better Block project, and committed its leadership and resources to sponsor the effort.

The first step was to secure a \$15,000 Smart Growth Action Grant from the National Association of REALTORS®, to which SBMAOR added funds. Along the way, a number of community organizations contributed funds and assistance, and local businesses helped with in-kind services. The city provided \$5,000 and its park service lent ample departmental resources ranging from Dumpsters to hand tools.

In July 2014, months before any hand tools were needed, Andrew Howard of Dallas-based Team Better Block visited South Bend to explain the concept at a public meeting that drew about 150 community stakeholders. The next day, he met with project leaders to work

out specific strategies. Hours of planning, brainstorming, and recruiting followed. One month out, volunteer crews devoted weekends to clearing lots and painting. Just prior to the event, the city set up barrels to reroute traffic, and volunteers did some quick landscaping.

The October event weekend brought visitors from throughout the city to Western Avenue. The whole street-scape had been transformed with bike lanes, crosswalks, wider sidewalks, landscaping, and lighting. There were pop-up beer tents and food vendors, with an emphasis on the two local restaurants that were allowed to serve outside by special permit. A vacant lot became a dog park and a vacant building became a temporary art gallery. A local church timed its rummage sale to coincide with the Better Block event, and musicians enlivened the festive, family-friendly atmosphere. SBMAOR worked with a number of local media outlets that provided significant coverage throughout the process.

“We made a positive impact by bringing the neighborhood together in ways it never had been before,” says Larimer. Property owners discovered that by working together, they had strength in unity.

“We knew the project was a success even before the event, when business owners in the surrounding area, a couple streets away, started cleaning up and painting their properties. The effort was contagious,” he says.

Through its contact with two partners in particular, the Latin American Chamber of Commerce and La Casa de Amistad, SBMAOR gained a higher awareness of real estate issues affecting the predominantly Latino community of the Western Avenue corridor.

“With property values so low there, it had been difficult to get banks interested in financing transactions,” says Larimer. “Language and cultural barriers had been making it difficult for the community

to access the lending industry, but we're finding ways to bridge that gap. We're beginning to open a dialogue with the local Mortgage Brokers Association to address the problem," he says. "Thanks to the relationships we've built in the neighborhood, we're looking forward to bringing new opportunities for property ownership and economic development, and also for careers in real estate within the Hispanic community."

The process has gone a long way toward elevating SBMAOR's status with local officials and the city government, Larimer says.

"Our goodwill, energy, and resources have earned us a voice. We're finally being recognized and actually sought out for our input and support. Our goal had been to give greater, positive exposure to the neighborhood, and local businesses in particular, but the real success was much further-reaching than that."

From this experience, the Better Block South Bend community group was formed to continue the work revitalizing South Bend one neighborhood at a time. For more on NAR's Smart Growth grants, visit realtoractioncenter.com.



Atlanta's Access Management Group working at a recent Habitat for Humanity build.

Atlanta REALTORS® raise \$30,000 for Habitat for Humanity

Nearly 500 members of the Atlanta Board of REALTORS® came together to raise money for Habitat for Humanity and the association's educational foundation. The event was hosted by Jason Bailey of local radio station Rock 100.5. It featured a live band, the opportunity to bid on donated items and participate in raffles, and a cash drawing for \$10,000.



Four Rivers Association of REALTORS® Association Executive Amy DuBose standing amid the of food donated by REALTORS® to the local food pantry to aid flood victims.

Texas REALTORS® provide relief for local flood victims

"The Memorial Day floods in Hays and Caldwell Counties, Texas, were a devastating turn of events for our community," says Amy DuBose, RCE, association executive for the Four Rivers Association of REALTORS®. About 70 homes were destroyed in Hays, and 1,400 homes were damaged. In the town of Wimberley 70 homes were washed away by flash floods along the Blanco River, which rose 26 feet in just one hour and left piles of wreckage 20 feet high, according to a CBS News report.

Yet, within 12 hours of the flooding, the Four Rivers Association approved \$15,000 toward relief efforts. Within the next few days, the Texas Association of REALTORS® and National Association of REALTORS® infused money into the Texas REALTORS® Relief Fund.

As of mid-June, more than 200 families received \$355,000 in aid. Other areas in Texas also flooded during that time period, including Houston and Dallas, where the damage to property is estimated in the tens of millions.

Beyond the relief fund, members of the Four Rivers Association and neighboring REALTOR® associations (Highland Lakes Association of REALTORS® and the Greater McAllen Association of REALTORS®) gathered four truckloads of flood relief supplies for the flood relief donation center, 2,300 pounds of food for the Hays County Food Bank, and more than \$3,300 in monetary donations.

Association building model of water conservation

In Tucson, Ariz., sustainability is a quality of life issue that impacts real estate. In light of California's recently imposed mandatory water restrictions, Arizona's future water policies are under even closer watch. Earlier this year, the Tucson Association of REALTORS® became a model for water conservation by installing a rainwater harvesting system featuring a 2,825-gallon cistern to serve the association's recent green makeover of its parking lot.



Space Coast Association of REALTORS® wins impact fee delay

At the height of the economic downturn in 2009, the Brevard County Commissioners in Florida instituted an impact fee moratorium to help offset the cost of new construction. The moratorium was scheduled to sunset on Dec. 31, 2014, until the Space Coast Association of REALTORS® stepped in. Joining forces with building industry organizations, the association hired an attorney and a lobbyist to request an extension on the moratorium.

“We provided impact reports to the county commissioner from Robinson Cole, which is the free service offered to associations from the National Association of REALTORS®,” says Tammie Watts, government affairs director for the Space Coast Association of REALTORS®. “We were also able to provide a study from the National Association of Home Builders. These reports helped us show the county commissioners that Brevard had not yet healed from the devastation of years prior.”

When the impact fee moratorium went in front of the county commissioners, they agreed to extend it an additional two years to December 2016.



Orlando REALTORS® break ground on veterans housing project

Army veteran Keon Madison, his wife, and their four children are one step closer to the dream of home ownership, thanks to the efforts of Orlando REALTORS®.

In April, the Florida Real Estate Foundation—charitable arm of the Orlando Regional REALTOR® Association—broke ground on its veterans housing project. It took nearly two years of work to transform land donated by the city of Orlando and funds donated by major grantors into Heroes' Commons at Jefferson Park. This housing village of six single-family, ADA compliant detached homes is designed to incorporate unique architectural elements and flexible floorplans that can fit the needs of an ill, injured, or wounded veteran, if necessary. The homes are energy efficient and built with environmentally friendly materials and appliances. The architects

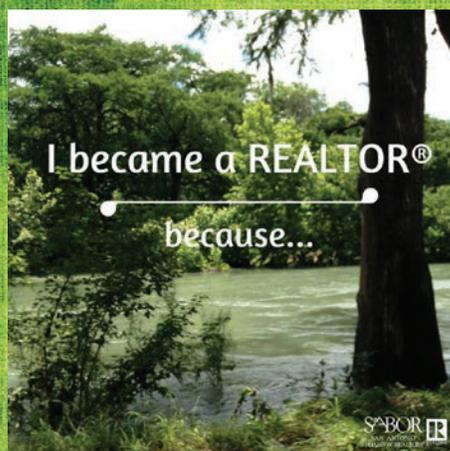
used the concept of shared garages to maximize the green space within the project.

The foundation will donate its first Heroes' Commons home mortgage-free to Keon when it is completed this fall, followed by five additional mortgage-free homes to other income-qualified veterans.

“We can never repay our military men and women for their sacrifice and service, but we can hope that the gift of home ownership can be a small token of our appreciation,” says Orlando REALTOR® and Florida Real Estate Foundation Chair Beverly Evans.

The veteran home owners and their families will receive access to supportive services to ease the transition from military life to the role of a successful new home owner.

For more on the project and to donate, visit floridarealestatefoundation.com.



◀ The San Antonio Board of REALTORS® inspired members to share why they became a REALTOR® in a savvy Facebook campaign promoting the hashtag #UseARealtor.

Colorado's Fort Collins Board of REALTORS® Young Professionals Network donated a playhouse to the Teaching Tree Early Childhood Learning Center. ▶



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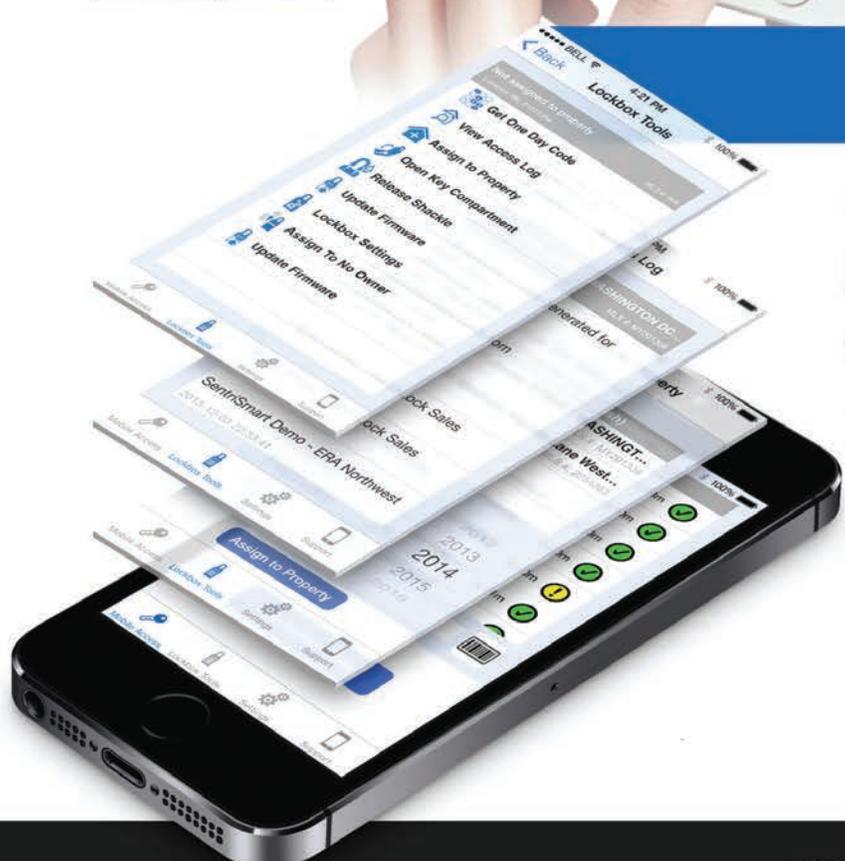


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▲ The Community Service Foundation of the Arlington Board of REALTORS®, Va., united REALTORS® and affiliates from a wide range of companies to participate in a neighborhood clean-up. Members mowed lawns, trimmed trees, and painted houses.

Hundreds of products in the redesigned REALTOR® store

The National Association of REALTORS® redesigned online REALTOR® Store makes it easier and faster to find and buy the products members' need to enhance their business. Based on feedback from brokers and agents, NAR streamlined the site, **store.REALTOR.org**, to highlight best-selling and sale products, enable product ratings and reviews, and enhance the shopping and downloading experience from your mobile device. There's also a simplified single-step checkout with an expedited process for redeeming rewards through NAR's Member Value Plus program. After purchases, REALTORS® will receive an e-mail confirmation with delivery tracking details. Plus, all digital downloads are stored in members' personal accounts so they can access them anytime. Visit the new REALTOR® Store for hundreds of real estate books, research reports, brochures, DVDs, and other products at deep discounts for NAR members.



Meet the New RCEs

These 10 REALTOR® association executives earned their RCE (Realtor® association Certified Executive) designation after an extensive course of study and exam in March. RCE is the only designation created specifically for REALTOR® association executives. It exemplifies goal-oriented AEs with

drive, experience, and commitment to professional growth. Candidates earn the designation by accumulating points through experience, education, and a comprehensive written exam. For more information on getting started toward your RCE, visit realtor.org/rce.



Dwayne Carte, RCE
Minneapolis Area Association of REALTORS®, Minn.



Michael Coughlin, RCE
Clinton County Board of REALTORS®, N.Y.



Scott Hughes, RCE
Northwest Louisiana Association of REALTORS®



Tiffany James, RCE
Greater Las Vegas Association of REALTORS®, Nev.



Kim Seibert, RCE
Southwest Indiana Association of REALTORS®



Liz Sturrock, RCE
National Association of REALTORS®



Kelly Travis, RCE
St. Cloud Area Association of REALTORS®, Minn.



Kim Wagar, RCE
Osceola County Association of REALTORS®, Fla.



Kaaren Winkler, RCE
Washington Association of REALTORS®



Lisa Yelich, RCE
Stark County Association of REALTORS®, Ohio

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Closing Side RPAC Investment Made Easier

One AE's game changing idea is now free and available to all REALTOR® associations.

During my inaugural National Association of REALTORS® Presidential Advisory Group meeting on RPAC policy last year, the assembled team was asked to come up with ideas to raise hard and soft RPAC dollars. As the newbie on the PAG, I felt particularly anxious about being able to contribute an innovative solution. The first day's discussions unfortunately yielded nothing.

I turned in around 11:30 that first night, but then at 4:30 a.m. sat bolt upright in bed and went to the desk where I drafted the idea for a new RPAC program called "We're On Your Side."

I turned in my homework assignment the next morning to the PAG chair who shared it immediately with the group. In short order, the idea was approved—complete with an NAR Game Changer grant to fund it.

Here's how any REALTOR® association, large or small, can raise more money for RPAC than they thought possible with very little effort and even less cost.

The basic premise is passive and seamless transaction closing contribution.

Easy for members

It's best to ask for money when members have it. Doing so at closing is ideal.

First, members sign up to pledge a predetermined dollar amount to the "We're On Your Side"—as in "closing side"—program every time they close a sale.

We encourage members to do this by comparing a small RPAC investment, say, \$25, to an \$8,000 or \$12,000 commission. That's not much, right?

Members sign up to the program via a simple form here in Michigan, but election law requirements may be different in each state, so check with your state association.

When a member's sale or side of the deal is closed and registered by the MLS and when the agent (or broker) is a program participant, the MLS system pings the billing system that a donation in the predetermined amount should be added to the agent's monthly MLS bill. Associations don't need to own or run their own MLS to make this happen.

These dollars are then transferred by the local association to the state association and are added to the mix for RPAC 1 and RPAC 2 activities, which in turn help the state meet the NAR needs-based goal and fuel that state's own statewide and local REALTOR® Party initiatives.

Easy for associations

The goal of the "We're On Your Side" program is to be easy for associations to administer. There is little purpose in maximizing the member's investment only to siphon off dollars to pay for administration.

The program efficiently moves dollars, hard and soft, in compliance with election laws governing the handling of contributions in Michigan. There are more details on this in the "how to" kit*.

Once an association elects to adopt the We're On Your Side program, it must design and implement the "bridge" code between the MLS system and the billing system. There may be a small



Needless to say, big corporations have deeper pockets than NAR and this hurt our mojo.



#5

FACT: RPAC was the fifth most influential action committee in Washington in 2010. Citizens United, we dropped to twenty-seventh.

This whole situation has made it more difficult to get relevant real estate issues heard above the white noise on capital hill.

REAL ESTATE ISSUES

#27

THE SOLUTION

The Traverse Area Association of REALTORS® created the "We're On Your Side" Program to support REALTOR® issues.



HOW IT WORKS

The plan is to have local associations roll out this voluntary program and collect voluntary sign-up agreements from agents and brokers so that a small contribution is made to RPAC for every side of a closed transaction.

Once the MLS system records a "sold", a review of the transaction occurs and if the REALTOR® is a voluntary "We're On Your Side" Member, the contribution is automatically placed on their monthly invoice. All funds directly support RPAC activity.

WHY IT'S AWESOME

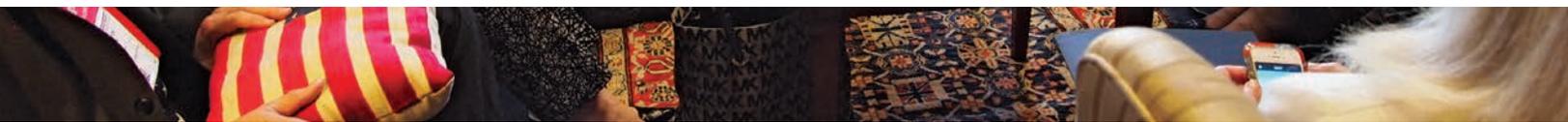
The RPAC "We're On Your Side" Program lets us passively raise money to support getting knowledgeable elected officials in office.

We want more people and informed officials impacting

It also helps us elected candidates on REALTOR® issues so homes, land and people's private



How and Why to Encourage Your Members to Take **Advocacy Action**



Members of the San Mateo County Association of REALTORS®, Calif., meeting with their congressional representative, Jackie Speier (center in yellow), in her Washington, D.C., office.

There's no doubt that REALTOR® associations have boosted their legislative and political advocacy in the past four years. With more programs, grants, support, and resources than ever before, the National Association of REALTORS®' goal of increasing member engagement in advocacy is paying off at the local, state, and federal levels. But there's still more to be done, says Bill Malkasian, NAR's vice president of political strategic planning.

Getting and keeping members involved in politics is often a challenge. Associations struggle with explaining the reasons for advocacy and investing in the REALTORS® Political Action Committee. It's a challenge to motivate members to volunteer their time.

RAE turned to REALTOR® association government affairs directors to help with ideas and inspiration on a few of the most pressing questions from association executives on getting members engaged in advocacy.

Why does every association need members directly involved in advocacy?

For local associations, especially small ones, drumming up enough volunteers to cover the basic committees and essential services is hard enough. That's why there's a tendency to leave politics up to the professional government affairs staff—sponsored either by the state association or a regional shared government affairs director. But staff can't do it alone. They need volunteers to fill several critical roles.

"The REALTORS® involvement is vital to understanding which aspects of the real estate business need protection or could be improved through policy changes," says Lennie Shewmaker, gov-

ernment affairs director of the Atlanta Board of REALTORS® and the Atlanta Commercial Board of REALTORS®. "It is great for elected officials to hear from a GAD on policies, but it is equally important that they hear from members about how a policy directly impacts their livelihood."

Without member participation, elected officials wouldn't truly understand who the GADs are representing. "Elected officials and government staff will dismiss a GAD's concerns if they do not believe he or she has the full consent and backing of the REALTORS® who live in and around their district," says Howard Handler, Illinois Association of REALTORS® local government affairs director for the northern part of the state.

"My expertise is in crafting the message that our elected officials and bureaucrats need to hear, but that message is best delivered by the practitioner who can speak to real-world experience," said Amber Sundsted, government affairs director of the Billings Association of REALTORS® in Montana. "Members are the best advocates for their industry and clients."

On the practical side, it would be impossible for GADs to meet and sustain working relationships with all of the elected and appointed officials in their territory—from council members to mayors to state-level legislators and all the important officials in between. Volunteers fill this critical role when they build professional relationships with decision makers in their community.

"The boots on the ground works," says Ryan Castle, CEO at Cape Cod & Islands Association of REALTORS®. "Having people contact their elected officials gets noticed."

“Politicians take us seriously because our members are involved and are educated enough on the issues to affect policy. The key to our success has been our members’ willingness to engage.”

— David DeLeon, governments affairs director, REALTORS® Association of Maui

How many member volunteers does it take to support an effective advocacy program?

Although an advocacy committee that decides and directs involvement typically has 10 to 20 members, the government affairs directors we spoke with said they wished they had more volunteers for other work, such as organizing RPAC events and meeting with elected officials in person.

“If we had more members involved in our advocacy program, elected officials would get even more of an earful about the impact they have on real estate transactions and home ownership,” says David Stark, government affairs director for the Bay East Association of REALTORS®, Calif.

With more volunteers, associations could attract more media coverage and could do additional outreach-based activities instead of just playing defense, notes Nicole Arnold, a shared local government affairs director for the North Carolina Association of REALTORS®.

“There are never enough volunteers when it comes to political advocacy,” says Sundsted. “Our association’s goal is to have a member sit on every board and commission of our local government. We encourage them to run for office.”

Of course, it’s not just the number of volunteers but who is volunteering that is also important.

“The desire is to have the most erudite and knowledgeable REALTORS®—market leaders and top producers—involved,” says Brian Bernardoni, senior director of government affairs and public policy for the Chicago Association of REALTORS®. “They have the most to lose.”

How can we ensure that members will accurately represent the association’s position?

REALTORS® who speak with elected officials are encouraged to share their personal experience while at the same time sticking to the prepared talking points, which can be a difficult balancing act.

“We’re fortunate that the REALTORS® who participate ‘get it’ when it comes to staying on message, and it helps that they’re briefed before we take the REALTOR® voice into the state capitol building,” says Stark.

Training and education are keys to volunteer effectiveness. Mock meetings with officials help members prepare for issue discussions. Associations also print issue briefs for members to follow or hand to politicians.

“The key is to prepare the members—have a script for them to work from and explain the dos and don’ts. You are always going to have someone in a big group go off script. Politicians are used to voters shooting off their mouths and rarely does it cause serious damage,” says Dave DeLeon, government affairs director for the REALTORS® Association of Maui.

How can I get more members involved in association legislative or political action?

REALTORS® will get involved in advocacy if it’s fast and easy, which means reducing or eliminating service requirements, identifying and mentoring younger members, and offering a variety of opportunities, GADs agree.

“Know what motivates your members,” says Bernardoni. “Some are motivated by civics, some by money, some by patriotism,



Virginia Association of REALTORS® members dining with their congressional representative, Barbara Comstock (center in pink), in Washington, D.C.



Nevada Association of REALTORS® members meeting with Senator Dean Heller on Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C.



Georgia Association of REALTORS® members grabbing photos with Senator Johnny Isakson after meeting with him on Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C.



Tennessee Association of REALTORS® members meeting with Senator Lamar Alexander near his Washington, D.C., office.



Greater Northwest Indiana Association of REALTORS® members meeting with Senator Joe Donnelly outside his Washington, D.C., office.



Chicago Association of REALTORS® GAD Brian Bernardoni (standing) and members meeting with their congressional representative, Dan Lipinski, in his Washington, D.C. office.

and others by being a joiner. The more you know about your members, the more angles you can use to get them involved.”

A controversial piece of legislation is a godsend for increasing member involvement. There’s nothing like a proposed transaction fee for overcoming member political apathy. Yet even the hot issues need to be put into context for members so they clearly understand how a policy or legislation affects their day-to-day business.

“Once that connection is made, look out, because they’re going to vote, write checks, make phone calls, and send e-mails,” says Stark.

Absent a hot political issue, the biggest influence on member involvement is being asked by another REALTOR® in leadership, says Sundsted.

“When members speak to each other about how many anti-real estate policies have not been implemented due to the association’s efforts, it’s eye-opening for those who have operated in this industry every day, unaware of the potential impact of local policy on their bottom line,” says Shewmaker.

Yet, the members who step up without being asked to serve are often the most effective because they already have an interest in politics, government, or public policy, GADs say.

“They have to have the politics gene,” says DeLeon. “If it is not something that innately interests them, once that big issue that bugs them goes away, so will they. In my experience, the people in any group—not just REALTORS®—who get engaged and stay engaged amount to about 1 percent. When there is an emergency, that number will go up.”

Even though associations may never get a large percentage of members directly involved in advocacy activities, Handler says, “we need every member to do the minimum: respond to CFAs, donate to RPAC, and be generally supportive of government affairs.”

Events that inspire members into advocacy action are visits to the state capitol, legislators’ offices, or Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C. These can have a transformative effect on members, GADs report.

“Members have varying degrees of interest in politics, but when we get them to Government Day at the state capitol meeting with lawmakers, for the most part, we change attitudes and open their eyes to the view the legislators have from the inside,” says Bruce King, government affairs director at the REALTORS® Association of Northwestern Wisconsin.

“A big draw for our association is visiting the General Assembly

in Raleigh,” says Angie Hedgepeth, GAD for the Fayetteville Regional Association of REALTORS®, N.C. “Members actually see the process and see what a difference it makes to sit down and tell their story to their representative. You can’t sell it to the membership; they have to experience it for themselves.”

How can I avoid alienating members who are loyal to one political party or want the association out of politics?

“I have yet to find an issue or candidate with 100 percent consensus among REALTORS®,” says Handler. “An association can be in favor of ice cream and puppies, and some REALTORS® will say that ice cream is high in cholesterol and kittens are better than puppies. No association will find universal consensus on all issues, but that’s no excuse for staying silent.”

Often the members most vocally against association involvement in politics are those who fear the association will support a candidate that they personally oppose.

“Remind your members that they are free to invest in candidates as citizens and to vote their conscience, but as representatives of the real estate trade, your association is equally free and equally obligated to participate in the system to protect the interests of that industry,” says Shewmaker.

Associations strive to maintain a singular focus on the best interests of REALTORS®, which isn’t always clear, so it’s important to give members the ability to set their own internal policies and goals, says DeLeon. “For instance, we have a strong, member-based candidate vetting process, but our association is dead set against doing overt public endorsements (let alone independent expenditures) so we reached a compromise in which we do internal endorsements to our members, affiliates, and their families. Candidates actively seek those internal endorsements.”

Hedgepeth recommends starting with small steps when warming up members to political involvement and outreach. “Last year, our association did its first independent expenditure for a mayoral race. It was a big step for our leadership, and our candidate won. It was a wake-up call to show our REALTOR® leaders that they can have influence and make positive change for our local community.”

Visit realtoractioncenter.com for resources and news on advocacy.



WHAT'S NEW FOR ASSOCIATIONS



HOST A SAFETY COURSE AT YOUR ASSOCIATION — FREE

REALTOR[®] University's "Real Estate Safety Matters" course helps REALTORS[®] limit risk to preserve safety and facilitate positive business outcomes. Your members will learn about safety protocols, data security for their business and their clients, and personal safety. REALTOR[®] University provides the course materials for free.



HOMEOWNER SAFETY & SECURITY TOOLKIT

This toolkit provides Associations with the context, materials, and best practices to get the word out about homeowner safety and security. Included in the toolkit are key messages, news release templates, blog posts, social media content and member email templates. Utilizing this toolkit will help fulfill one of the Consumer Outreach Core Standards.



SAFETY TIPS FOR COMMERCIAL AND RURAL REAL ESTATE

In these new articles, learn more about the potential and unique dangers REALTORS[®] face while working with commercial properties and in rural areas, and what they can do to stay safe on the job.

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The 5 W's of Effective

Advocacy Communication



How to talk about political involvement in a way that educates and inspires.

Unlike many professionals, REALTORS® have a strong, coordinated presence in local, state, and federal politics. Every REALTORS®' dues help sustain this presence through a wide variety of advocacy programs ranging from supporting candidates for elected office to registering members to vote. NAR is widely considered one of the most effective advocacy organizations in the country.

Yet, none of this success would be possible without a continuous communication effort focusing on the need for advocacy and what it achieves for REALTORS® and their communities.

Here we'll take a look at the essential who, what, where, why, and when of advocacy communications.

The Who

Who is communicating the advocacy message to members, consumers, and the media is nearly as important as the message itself. Association elected leaders play an important role in rallying fellow members around advocacy. Their speeches, media interviews, social media posts, and newsletter editorials are all opportunities to promote the political or legislative position of the association and the candidates it supports.

AEs are also essential spokespersons for the advocacy message. "Without a strong AE who understands advocacy and leads by example, chances of success are slim," says Dale Zahn, CEO of the West Michigan Association of REALTORS®. "It's up to us as AEs to play the role of cheerleader and rally the troops."

Customizing who your advocacy message is targeted to can also increase engagement. Consider crafting messages to different demographic segments of members about your local issues. Write messages directed at home owners that members can forward to their clients, and customize messages to attract potential coalition partners or pique local media interest in your cause.

The What

Political and legislative issues are rarely simple. The regulatory jargon alone can be daunting to understand. This is why associations strive to boil down multifaceted issues to their essence—their

relevance to REALTORS®.

"We have to frame issues so that members understand them and realize the reach of government in their business," says Brian Bernardoni, government affairs director at the Chicago Association of REALTORS®. His approach involves simple slogans members can get behind that sum up the heart of the issue. For example, "If builders don't build, REALTORS® can't sell." This easy-to-remember catch phrase helped Bernardoni communicate the core of his association's efforts to ease the zoning, building, and planning logjam in the city that prevented new development. "If they get the simple approach and see how it relates to them, I can get them to become more involved," he says.

The Where

If you're looking for a study that says politically minded professionals use Twitter more than Facebook, or that they prefer videos over text, unfortunately, you won't find it. The fact is that your advocacy-interested members are men and women, Republican and Democrat, tech-savvy and old school. Their preferred information outlets are just as varied.

Savvy use of every outlet of social and traditional media, as well as events and one-on-one conversations, are required for advocacy messages to generate healthy participation.

To update members on current issues, the Oklahoma Association of REALTORS® posts videos on YouTube every Friday during the state's legislative session. "Our GAD and contract lobbyist's videos helps members understand issues while also encouraging them to become a part of the process through calls for action and RPAC involvement," says Oklahoma's marketing vice president Steve Reese.

The Why

When members ask why they should invest in RPAC or get involved in advocacy, the answer most associations provide is the same: to help protect the interests of the real estate industry and private property owners. But to drive the message home, associations use specific examples of local laws or regulations that would not have passed without REALTOR® advocacy.



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Rules for Social Media RPAC Posts

“5 Reasons You Should Invest in RPAC” sounds like a great social media promotion piece sure to get some click-throughs to your association’s RPAC page. But if you post it as a Facebook or LinkedIn status update or a tweet, you’ve just violated federal and state election law.

Here’s why: Under federal campaign finance law, a trade association is permitted to solicit contributions for its federal PAC only from its restricted class, which includes its members, executive and administrative personnel, and their families. Because you can’t ensure that all of your social media followers are members, you can’t solicit RPAC investments via a status update or tweet or Instagram photo.

But you can still use Facebook and other social media for RPAC if you follow these guidelines.

Don’t ask, just the facts

You may not post anything that could be considered a “solicitation” for an RPAC contribution on any social media that is open to the public. Terms such as donate, invest, contribute, participate, give, join, etc., in your communications are clear solicitations, but so are posts that encourage contributions simply by pointing out the benefit of RPAC to the real estate industry or to members’ businesses. For example, if you post the names of Sterling R contributors and describe them as ensuring the future of the industry, then you are encouraging others to do the same. However, you can simply post the names of Sterling R contributors and congratulate them on their participation.

You may post general RPAC facts and financial information, such as how much has been contributed or the number of contributors to RPAC in a given period.

You may not post anything that expressly encourages attendance at an RPAC fundraising event. For example, tweeting: “Our RPAC Casino Night Sept. 12 will be the event of the year!” is encouraging attendance. You may, however, post information and photos after the RPAC event and mentioning how much money was raised for RPAC.

Restrict member RPAC posts

Federal campaign finance law also covers the posts and tweets your elected leaders and members make about RPAC. Although members can post factual information about themselves such as being a Major Investor, they cannot write posts encouraging others to make similar RPAC contributions. If a member posts an RPAC solicitation on your association Facebook page, delete it immediately.

Of course, associations can post any RPAC information they want in a Facebook group as long as it is closed to just members (just the solicitable class), for example a REALTOR® YPN group.

More details online

For more information and examples on what you can and can’t post about RPAC online, visit realtoractioncenter.com/rpac/for-associations/resources/educational-resources.html. Or contact Lauren Facemire at 202-383-1080 or lfacemire@realtors.org.

For example, the Illinois Association of REALTORS® produced a video recently titled “REALTORS® Made a Difference.” It features several legislators that the association helped elect and explains the important role REALTORS® play in shaping public policy as it relates to private property issues and the real estate industry.

Many associations, including NAR, issue a report of legislative success stories every year and work to keep those successes in front of members year round.

Still, many members view advocacy as someone else’s responsibility. “Our government affairs motto is, ‘take a seat at the table, or end up on the menu.’ REALTORS® get that message,” says Dave DeLeon, government affairs director for the REALTORS® Association of Maui.

At the Atlanta Board of REALTORS®, Government Affairs Director Lennie Shewmaker drives home the idea that REALTOR® party efforts are like a wagon: “You can get a free ride, or you can help pull by joining in the committee, responding to calls for action, and investing in RPAC. If not us, then who?”

The When

Because hot political and legislative issues pop up sporadically, it can be hard to keep advocacy in front of

members consistently. Yet regular columns, posts, and videos on advocacy are essential to maintaining interest and momentum.

“Our GAD runs a blog with regular content that we link to every Monday in our member newsletter,” says Michael Caesar, communications

director at the Charlotte Regional REALTORS® Association. “He also has a bimonthly e-mail newsletter and is extremely active on Twitter.”

Most members will quickly forget past advocacy successes unless they are reminded often. Use each medium consistently so that members know what kinds of communications to expect on each platform and how often to expect updates.

Ensure that your advocacy strategy includes these five W’s of communication for continued success.



Illinois Association of REALTORS® YPN video encouraging members to participate in political advocacy.



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REALTORS® Embrace Projects That Transform Communities

NAR placemaking grants build more than just great local gathering places.

If you've ever noticed how a few benches make a public square more inviting or how a community garden makes a neighborhood feel more livable, then you've appreciated placemaking.

Placemaking is a global movement that helps citizens transform their underused public spaces into places that highlight local assets, spur rejuvenation, and serve common needs. Examples range from playgrounds and public gardens to bike trails and sidewalk seating.

The National Association of REALTORS®' Placemaking Initiative encourages REALTOR® associations and their members to become engaged in their communities by creating beautiful and useful public places. As a place becomes more desirable and welcoming, surrounding properties increase in value.

Nearly 100 REALTOR® associations have built community places in the past few years with resources and financial help from the National Association of REALTORS®' Placemaking Initiative.

"We really didn't know what to expect when we set out to accomplish this," says Colleen Pappas, executive vice president of the Worcester Regional Association of REALTORS® in Massachusetts. "But everyone involved now shares a great sense of accomplishment in having given back to the community."

The Worcester association's placemaking project, with a \$2,500 grant and 15 member and staff volunteers, rehabilitated a park surrounding a veterans' memorial statue.

What are placemaking projects?

Placemaking can mean many things to many people. There is no standard model in use, but there are plenty of case studies on NAR's placemaking blog (spacestoplaces.blogs.realtor.org). In essence it means creating an enjoyable public space where the community can gather.

Places that reflect this concept include pedestrian plazas and walkways, parks, community gardens, walking paths, and bike

trails. Placemaking projects can include the whole place or an amenity, such as a fountain, a mural, seating, landscaping, or swings.

The Tuolumne County Association of REALTORS® in California, for example, designed new signage to welcome tourists and residents to the historic town center.

What placemaking is not, however, is exclusive or private. For example, park benches represent placemaking, whereas softball bleachers do not, because bleachers would benefit only those who play or watch softball and can't be used for another purpose. Placemaking is also about being accessible all or most of the time, which generally means outside spaces, not buildings or inside spaces. Placemaking is not infrastructure-related, so it would not focus on sidewalk or pothole repairs.

Examples and inspiration abound at the NAR placemaking blog and related sites such as placemakingchicago.com or the Project for Public Spaces at pps.org. NAR staff is available to help with ideas and rec-

Placemaking: Open area outside of a museum in New York City turned into a more welcoming gathering space with the addition of seating and a fountain.



Placemaking Easy Start Guide

NAR offers all you need to see your placemaking project through from idea generation to ribbon-cutting.

NAR Placemaking Resources

1. Placemaking Guide: A Guide to Transform a Public Space Into a Community Place is a resource REALTORS® and staff can use to learn the basics of placemaking, the kinds of projects placemaking entails, how to organize them, and where to go for assistance.

2. Placemaking Webinars provides more in-depth information on the various types of placemaking and how REALTORS® were involved in placemaking activities in their communities.

3. Placemaking Micro-Grants are available to REALTOR® associations to help them plan, organize, implement, and maintain these types of activities in their communities.

4. Spaces to Places blog is a regularly updated look at the placemaking movement, providing inspiration and examples for your next project.

These and more resources at realtor.org/topics/smart-growth/smart-growth-programs/placemaking.



Holly Moskerintz is community programs outreach manager for the National Association of REALTORS®. Contact her at 202-383-1157 or hmoskerintz@realtors.org.

In the last year, the National Association of REALTORS® has approved more than \$130,000 in funding for 64 local REALTOR® association placemaking projects.



Placemaking: Street parking turned into people parking in Chicago.

ommends starting with a place that doesn't take a lot of time, resources, or effort. In fact, expensive and labor-intensive initiatives are not the only—or even the most effective—ways to bring energy and life into a community's public space.

Piggybacking on a major project can be an excellent plan. For example, if a new community facility is being built, such as a library, park, or train station, consider creating a gathering place outside the building. Also, don't go it alone on your project; partner with others in the community, including gardening clubs, city planning agencies, arts and cultural groups, and other nonprofits.

Most associations that apply for a placemaking grant partner with others and pool funding and resources.

Many placemaking projects have sailed though from idea to reality with enthusiastic partners, solid city council support, and reliable craftsmen. Others, unfortunately, have not. Park benches or dog parks may not sound like complex undertakings but can be when they involve ordinances, licenses, labor unions, and politics. Keep this in mind when choosing a project.

Aside from the community benefit and the positive publicity for the association, the Placemaking Initiative is widely praised as a way to promote REALTORS® as stewards of their communities. In many instances, a placemaking project broadens the very definition of REALTOR® in the minds of residents. Plus, projects often fulfill your association's Core Standards community involvement requirement.

There is probably an eyesore in your community about which people, including you, say, "I wish they would do something there."

Well, why can't it be your association?



Greenwood Association of REALTORS® President Walt Roark, AE Kathryn West, and CEO of the South Carolina Association of REALTORS® Nick Kremydas.

◀ REALTORS® Walking Trail

"We received all kinds of positive local media coverage from this project. We were featured in an article and pictures on the front page of the *Index-Journal* on dedication day. Follow-up articles and pictures about the park always reference the REALTORS® walking trail."

— Kathryn West, association executive, Greenwood Association of REALTORS®

E-Advocacy Tools to Rally Members

What new technology may help to reach and inspire REALTORS®?

In today's increasingly technology-oriented world, it just makes sense that political advocacy would incorporate mobile apps, software, websites, and online services to get folks involved in important causes. Of course, getting members to become more politically aware and involved in your organization's housing- and real estate-related political initiatives can be a tall order, even with technology in your corner.

In this article, we explore several types of e-advocacy tools and show how they can be leveraged effectively to motivate, inform, and even petition members in an efficient and cost-effective way.

Mobile Apps to the Rescue

Keeping up with new and proposed laws and bills can be a monumental task for busy AEs and REALTORS® whose plates are already filled with work and life commitments. Using a mobile app such as Countable (iOS, free), you can quickly get up to speed on key issues, send e-mails to government representatives to tell them how you'd like them to vote via a single "tap" on your mobile device, and rally others to join the cause. The app features short summaries of federal and limited local legislation, the pro/con arguments, the costs of the legislation, and more. Be sure to type the bill number into realtor.org or the legislation database at www.kse

focus.com/billdatabase/index.php for the REALTOR® Party stance on the legislation.

Another app, Congress (by Sunlight Foundation, iOS and Android, free), proclaims to harness "the power of the Internet to catalyze greater government openness and transparency." It enables you to follow Washington happenings, learn more about members of Congress, track bill activity, and send e-mails to your representatives. As the 2016 elections heat up, look for more apps like these.

Creating an Online Platform

Creating grassroots campaigns and rallying support online has been made easier by a number of Web-based platforms designed to help organizations garner interest in their causes.

Your best bet, of course, is the NAR REALTOR® Party Hub (see sidebar), but if you don't like getting tools for free, there is a bevy of alternatives.

One popular contact, fundraising, and constituency relationship management solution, CiviCRM provides a suite of communications tools allowing you to build subscriber lists and create mass mailings. CiviCRM is used by large organizations such as Amnesty International and Wikimedia Foundation for their fundraising.

Other options include Engaging Networks, which provides software to support online advocacy campaigning, and Change.org, which provides campaign tools that claim to build support and drive campaign momentum. Groups looking for a way to create and use online petitions can check out options from iPetitions, PetitionBuzz, and GoPetition, all

of which offer platforms for getting constituents to "chime in" on important legislation.



Tapping the Social Component

Another easy and affordable way to get members motivated in favor of a cause or position is via the social networking platforms you're probably already using, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Google+. Not only can you build groups and pages with an advocacy focus, but you can tap a wide range of specific advocacy tools that integrate with your social platforms.

Tools such as JustGiving, Causes, and Razoo enable members to share their charitable giving actions on Facebook and Twitter. Plugins like these are great for spreading the word on community outreach projects and fundraising for organizations like Habitat for Humanity, but don't use it for RPAC (see p.27).

Twitter and Facebook ads enable you to direct a call for action to just your members, just people in certain ZIP codes, or by their interests, such as real estate.

Simple Advocacy Websites

If you want to create a completely separate brand or identity for, say, a legislative advocacy campaign in which your association is part of a coalition with other organizations, there are several easy mobile-ready web site builders, including Yola, Placester, and Weebly.



REALTOR® Party Hub

Far more than an advocacy platform



Respond to Calls for Action on Your Phone

Before your elected officials make important decisions about the housing industry and private property rights, make sure they hear from you. Sign up for the REALTOR® Party Mobile Alerts to get a text message whenever there's an important call for action from the National Association of REALTORS®. You can respond within minutes from your mobile device. More than 56,000 REALTORS® are already signed up to receive REALTOR® Party Mobile Alerts. NAR promises that members won't be bombarded with REALTOR® Party texts—they can expect only two to three alerts a year focused on the most critical issues in Washington, D.C., affecting your business and home ownership. To receive the alerts, text the word REALTOR to 30644 or visit realtoractioncenter.com/rpma. Another great way to stay informed and take action from a mobile device is to download the free REALTOR® Party Mobile App from your app store. The REALTOR® Party Mobile App features reports on how your state and local association are using NAR programs to build political strength in your own backyard. Plus, you can invest in RPAC from your phone. For more information, visit realtoractioncenter.com/app.

Slow and Steady Wins the Race

Whether you use one or all of the e-advocacy methods highlighted here, consistency will be the key to success. Simply sending out a few tweets, putting a new bill on an e-advocacy platform, or telling members about a new mobile app isn't enough. Keep the pressure on with a consistent effort focused on a steady communication flow and make sure the right team members are involved in the cause. Your association will stand a much better chance of breaking through the clutter and getting the attention and support it needs to achieve its goals.

By Bridget McCrea

The NAR REALTOR® Party Hub is a comprehensive, web-based grassroots communication system for online member outreach, engagement, and mobilization. It uses powerful software and features a free suite of tools for associations.

The tools are easy to use for any size association. No programming expertise is required to conduct campaigns, create content, or manage lists, while more technically oriented staff can maximize advanced features. Online and in-person training is free. The schedule of classes is posted at realtoractioncenter.com.

What can associations do with the REALTOR® Party Hub?

Enhance and manage your membership data.

NAR has enhanced the standard NRDS data asset to include RPAC donor history, member voter history, and advocacy participations. In addition to the standard data set you can further customize the member data view at the local level by the groups and interests of your members.

Send personalized communications.

Create professional-quality e-newsletters, e-mails, and action alerts with the messaging module. Many associations use this tool for their weekly and monthly member e-mail communications. List segmentation and dynamic content enable you to customize your message for each recipient, increasing their engagement with your association. Industry-leading deliverability services ensure messages reach your audience and avoid the junk mail folder.

Encourage and track member advocacy.

Mobilize your members to participate in the political process with the advocacy module. Personalized e-mail messages alert members to pressing legislative and regulatory issues and enable them to easily contact their elected officials. The REALTOR® Party Hub ensures successful delivery via fax, e-mail, or Web form. The Hub's engagement tools are optimized for one-click action to ensure transactions are easily completed, which leads to higher participation rates. Your association will gain insight into your members' participation at other levels of the organization and can run reports based on their overall participation in advocacy efforts at the federal, state, and local levels.

Coordinate your events and meetings.

Market your events, register attendees, sell tickets, send personalized communications about the event, and track event participation with the events module. Integrating your events with other engagement activities generates more comprehensive constituent profiles and enables an association to mobilize its supporters both online and offline. The events module can be connected to your existing NAR e-commerce account to facilitate the easy management of money.

Track communication success.

Reporting tools and analytics that summarize trends over time can help identify which advocacy approaches work and which fail to generate a response. The tools provide detailed data in a range of formats so you can effectively analyze your efforts and evaluate your ROI.

For more information on the REALTOR® Party Hub, contact Jim MacGregor, managing director, REALTOR® Mobilization & Communications, jmacgregor@realtors.org, 202-383-1188.

Advocacy Engagement Ideas

Plan now for how you'll meet the 2016 core standards advocacy requirement.

Nearly all associations successfully met the five elements of the core standards advocacy requirement. If it was a challenge, here is information to make it easier this year.

Adding the REALTOR® Political Action Committee solicitation to your member dues bill and participating in calls for action should become routine processes within your organization going forward. NAR's advocacy division fielded many calls about the dues billing in particular, ranging from how much to bill to how to conform to state regulations. The answers to these and other questions are gathered in the Core Standards FAQs at realtor.org/corestandards.

The engagement element of the advocacy requirement, however, takes some new planning every year to keep members interested in volunteering and making these events successful. If your association met the engagement requirement with a voter registration drive last year, try a different program for this year, advises Susie Helm, NAR's vice president of advocacy operations and communications.

"In the first year of the core standards, we encouraged associations to use programs that didn't take a lot of staff time or money," says Helm.

In fact, one of the most popular association advocacy engagement activities was to send local public officials NAR's *On Common Ground* quarterly magazine. The publication features housing issues and solutions, and NAR customizes the mailing to appear to be sent from the local association.

In Florida, most local associations did not find the advocacy requirement to be a challenge, says Anne Cockayne, RCE, director of policy services for the Florida Association



Political candidate forums are a great advocacy engagement idea. The Greater Nashville Association of REALTORS® cohosted an event in May with the Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce where mayoral candidates were asked a series of questions on topics from affordable housing to regional development. More than 400 people attended and the RPAC Major Investors were invited to a private meet and greet with the candidates.

of REALTORS®. To meet the engagement requirement, Florida's local REALTOR® associations conducted or participated in voter registration drives, hosted a candidate training academy, held candidate screenings, and voiced opinions as a group on issues affecting the community, says Cockayne.

In Illinois, each local association had a state government affairs director to help them select and complete an advocacy program, says Gary Clayton, CEO of the Illinois Association of REALTORS®. Local associations conducted 32 independent expenditure campaigns, 13 opportunity races, and six local referenda, he says.

Texas has worked collaboratively with its local associations for years to create a successful culture of PAC fundraising, member mobilization, involvement in the political and legislative arena, and community outreach, says Travis Kessler, president and CEO of the Texas Association of REALTORS®. "Consumer and advocacy engagement were not obstacles for our local associations in meeting core standards compliance requirements," he says.

Although Helm knows of no advocacy engagement activity by local associations that failed to fulfill the core standard requirement, she did field a few calls about whether just applying for an NAR grant qualified as an advocacy activity. The activity funded by the grant counts, once it's been accomplished.

"Going forward, we'll be encouraging associations to take on broader initiatives and grow their member and community engagement," says Helm.

Plan now to attend the advocacy hands-on workshop at the 2016 AE Institute where NAR's advocacy program managers will facilitate choosing future advocacy projects.

Download the **2015 REALTOR® Party Association Resource Guide** to discover the

NAR programs that your local or state association can use to become legislative, community, and political leaders.

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Realtoractioncenter.com/realtor-party/documents/MPR-Resource-Guide.pdf

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Patent Troll Response

Legislators, regulators, and courts work to solve the patent litigation problem.

Patent assertion entities — or patent trolls—continue to target the real estate industry with frivolous lawsuits.

Even though legislation to cut down on predatory patent troll behavior is moving forward on the federal level, opponents of many aspects of the current bills in Congress promise a long fight. NAR is working for patent reform as part of a coalition and continues to voice the need for a solution to legislators on Capitol Hill.

There has been more progress on the statewide legislative level. Legislators in eight states so far this year have approved laws designed to curb some abusive patent assertions. Colorado, for example, recently approved a bill allowing the state attorney general's office to prosecute people who send lawsuit-threatening letters seeking payments for patent infringement when they don't hold the patents or don't have legitimate claims for infringement. Currently, 19 states have approved some form of patent troll-limiting legislation. NAR is working for patent reform that weakens trolls while preserving legitimate patent rights.

There has also been movement in the courts against patent trolls. Chiefly, a U.S. Supreme Court decision last year limited patents on software, resulting in a series of district court decisions to invalidate questionable patents. Another 2014 Supreme Court decision made it easier to award attorneys' fees to the winners in patent cases.

However, the Supreme Court in May said that simply believing the patent you're accused of violating was invalid in the first place, is not grounds for an infringement defense. This case represents the first time the term "patent troll" was used by a Supreme Court justice in a decision (*Justice Antonin*

Scalia in the case of Commil USA LLC v. Cisco).

On the regulatory side, the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office recently handed down a final decision invalidating key claims of a podcasting patent that Personal Audio LLC, a patent assertion entity, was attempting to leverage against big-name podcasters, including CBS, NBC, and Fox.

Patent trolls often purchase vague and overly broad patents typically addressing commonplace technology and business methods. They demand a license fee or threaten to take businesses to court whether or not the business actually violated any patents. Often in the case of individual real estate brokers, the licensing fee could be a little as a few hundred dollars, whereas the cost of a court case could easily reach tens of thousands.

In recent years, members, REALTOR® associations, and MLSs have received demand letters or have been sued for using commonplace technologies such as scan-to-e-mail functions and online systems for searching and transmitting property listings.

Despite some legislative and legal progress, the patent troll letters keep coming. It's important to remind members that they have options for responding to a patent troll demand letter.

First, members could deter the patent troll by requesting additional information, such as the scope of the patent, the claims allegedly violated, and a description of the product or service that allegedly infringes it. A sample response letter is available at realtor.org/videos/window-to-the-law-patent-troll-demand-letters.

Members also could deny infringement, sue for a declaratory judgment of nonin-



Remind members that they have options for responding to a patent troll demand letter.

fringement (which legally concludes they are not infringing the patent), or challenge the patent's validity before the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

In some cases, it may be prudent to negotiate a settlement or license fee. For example, in 2007, many REALTOR® associations and MLSs were threatened with litigation by the owner of a patent for an online system to locate, search for, and transmit to others information about properties. Ultimately, an industrywide license for use of the patent was negotiated.

Consider keeping a record of members who receive a demand letter. Your association could help connect members targeted by the same troll. These members may decide to organize a joint defense group for the purpose of sharing information about the patent troll, challenging the patent, or collectively defending a lawsuit.

Finally, remind members that NAR's Legal Action Program provides financial support for litigation of significance to the real estate industry. If members are sued by a patent troll, encourage them to seek assistance from the Legal Action Program.

Additional information on patent trolls and patent legislation reform is available at realtor.org.



Chloe Hecht is an associate counsel at the National Association of REALTORS®. Contact her at 312-329-8248 or checht@realtors.org.

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Nurturing Success

Diane Ruggiero, the 2015 Magel Award winner, on listings and leadership

In Diane Ruggiero's 35 years of managing REALTOR® associations and MLSs, she's learned a thing or two about, well, just about everything you need to run a REALTOR® association. Her expertise on topics from leadership training to technology to political advocacy is broad and deep. This is why she's a sought-after speaker and trainer for REALTORS®, other AEs, and community groups nationwide.

Ruggiero, RCE, the CEO of the Kansas City Regional Association of REALTORS®, was one of the founders of the RCE designation and served on its advisory board for 12 years. She was also one of the original RAMCO project team members who had the vision for a better association management system. She has served as chair of the AE Committee, currently serves on the AEC's Chapter Formation Work Group, and is the AE liaison to the NAR Finance Committee.

Ruggiero was a charter inductee into the Dr. Almon R. (Bud) Smith, RCE, AE Leadership Society in 1998. Her service to the REALTOR® family has earned her the 2015 William R. Magel Award of Excellence in association management.

REALTOR® AE asked Ruggiero for her take on two of the timeliest issues affecting AEs today.

Is the industry finally coalescing around a single approach to the fair display of listing data online, or are approaches still fragmented?

I think brokers, portals, MLSs, and real estate companies are all trying to achieve the same goal when it comes to online advertising of listings, but nobody is really sure of the best way to do that. So although there are different parties, I don't think they're at odds with each other.

Certainly in the past few years, there's been a movement by big brokers to take back control of their listing data. They're speaking with a more unified voice, saying, 'We're tired of paying for leads, we're tired of our information being pirated, and we need to take control.' So, in that sense, the goal of the brokers when it comes to listings online has coalesced.

When I talk to my large brokers at the street level, I find that even though they're not actively part of the campaign for listing data control, they're certainly not against it. Their focus is on business, but when they hear from their corporate leaders that projects like UpStream* should be supported, they support it. My brokers think UpStream is a good thing, and they think they're going to get data control back. Although I'm not sure anyone knows yet exactly how that will happen, my brokers are supportive of the project.

My MLS has the same goal as my brokers when it comes to listing data control and protection. If they're supportive of RPR, which they are, then we're all for it. If they're supportive of Upstream, then we're right there behind them. We don't tell our brokers what's best for their business. We keep them informed and then we ask them what's best for their business."

Your association is very active politically and has a wide range of strong programs. How do you maintain this level of volunteer commitment from members?

Whether it's advocacy activities, community outreach, diversity, or any of our other program or services, they are only as strong as the volunteer leaders behind them. That's why identifying and encouraging leadership among our members is critically important.

If someone I meet at an event seems like a potential leader, I'll invite that person to be on a project team. It's up to both staff and leaders to encourage members to be involved. If I see a good committee person, I'll ask if he or she is interested in being the chair. It's all about identifying the potential, then recommending—not pushing—the right involvement.



Having a strong Young Professionals Network group is very important for attracting younger leaders to your organization. When a group of younger members came to us and wanted to start a YPN, I was a bit skeptical. Everything they wanted to do seemed to involve a cocktail party, and their approaches were very different. But after a while we realized that they are big supporters of the association and they are serious about mentoring and attracting more young people to become involved in the association. Now, their events attract a new group of people that we normally don't see. The younger members who are involved talk to other members and get them involved.

* For more on UpStream, visit blog.narrpr.com/ceo-update/may-2015-ceo-update.



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