

GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY

A CHECKLIST FOR BUSINESS GROUPS

What killed comprehensive immigration reform in 2006 and 2007? The most important factor was grassroots advocacy by anti-immigrant activists. The naysayers made their voices heard on talk radio. They stayed up late at night posting on conservative blogs. Some sent bricks to their Senators – symbols of the wall they wanted built along the border. Then, when the bill came to the Senate floor, they made so many phone calls and sent so many faxes that they shut down the Capitol switchboard. Those in favor of reform did none of these things – that's why we lost. This must change, and we need to start now. Pro-immigration advocates need to learn to leverage our grassroots power.

FORM A PRO-IMMIGRATION BUSINESS COALITION

The best way to make your voice heard is to form a coalition of likeminded others and make the case together. ImmigrationWorks USA is a federation of 25 state-based employer coalitions – all formed in the last two years by employers like you determined to make a difference in the immigration debate.

- **Find a handful of likeminded employers and form a steering committee.** You don't need more than five or six others to get started. The combination that has worked best in other states: some individual employers and some trade association executives. Ideally, coalition members come from a variety of sectors that employ immigrants. But what's most important is their commitment to the issue and their determination to get the coalition off the ground.
- **Set a first focused goal.** In some states, it's fighting back against a bad bill introduced in the state legislature. In other places, it's public education – perhaps commissioning a study of immigrant workers and the state economy.
- **Build an organization that can accomplish this goal *and* live on afterward.** The two dozen coalitions in the IW network vary widely. Some have a formal organizational structure; others are ad hoc. Some have access to ample resources; others operate on grit and members' enthusiasm. Some are able to hire professionals; others prefer the passion of volunteers. No one answer is better than the others. Decide what works best for you and the circumstances in your state.
- **Whichever model you choose, ImmigrationWorks can help.** There's no need to reinvent the wheel. This is why we exist. We can provide toolkits and talking points. We can help you learn from other groups in other states. Together, we are stronger than the sum of our parts. That's why we've come together to form a national network.

ENGAGE YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES

Lawmakers care what their constituents think, and they try hard to be responsive. But they can't be expected to know your concerns unless you communicate them – clearly and often.

- **Visit your members of Congress at home and in Washington.** If you can travel to Washington, great. But you don't have to make the trip to make your voice heard. If anything, it can be more effective to meet with lawmakers in their state and local offices, where they're not distracted by floor votes and fundraising events.

Don't forget your legislator's staff. They are informed and influential with their bosses, and if you build a relationship with them, they become your eyes and ears and advocates in the lawmaker's office.

ImmigrationWorks has prepared talking points to use when meeting with your representatives. But the most effective thing you can do is tell your story. Legislators can read what the experts think, they can look up the facts. What no one else can do as well as you: make it real. Why does immigration reform matter to you, your workers and the economy? Tell a compelling story. Illustrate your point with an example – that's what will make your case memorable to your representative.

- **Write to your members of Congress.** Your lawmaker needs to hear from you about how to vote on legislation that matters to you. It's best to communicate by fax or email. The more timely and specific your letter, the more effective it will be. If you sign up at www.immigrationworksusa.org, ImmigrationWorks will send you action alerts informing you when immigration-related bills are introduced and when they are about to come up for a vote. IW also prepares sample letters. Use the IW website to send a personalized version with a click of the mouse. Or use the website to find your lawmakers' contact information and write your own letter – one that tells your story in more detail. Don't hesitate to write often – whenever immigration comes up in Congress. Our opponents do!
- **Invite your representatives to visit your business.** There's no better, more vivid way to make the case for immigration reform. Let your representative see for him or herself how foreign workers help keep your company afloat, creating and sustaining jobs for native-born employees. Tell them about the other companies up down the economic supply chain that would suffer if a lack of workers drove you out of business. Tell them what you pay your employees and how hard you look for Americans to hire, then ask them to imagine what would happen if your immigrant workers disappeared.
- **Invite your representative to address your local Chamber of Commerce or Rotary Club.** What better way to get them engaged and thinking about the immigration issues that matter to you? It's also a great way to start or strengthen a relationship. Lawmakers welcome this kind of opportunity – make sure your organization is on their list of stops.
- **Go to a town hall meeting and ask a question.** Go to a town hall anywhere in the country and watch who speaks up. Anti-immigrant advocates dominate the conversation. Pro-reform views are almost never heard. And lawmakers notice – a personal experience of this kind can make more of an impression than a stack of opinion polls. Even for legislators favorable to reform, memories of the anger they heard at a town hall or a campaign rally can dissuade them from voting for what they know is right.

As in a face-to-face meeting, the most effective thing you can do at a town hall is tell your story – a short, vivid version of why immigration matters to you.

- **Volunteer for your representative's political campaign.** Spend a few hours going door-to-door or making phone calls in support of a pro-reform candidate. This is a great way to get to know your legislator and his or her staff.

MAKE THE CASE IN THE MEDIA

Speaking out in favor of reform in the media is as important as communicating directly with your representatives. Lawmakers who read the case for an overhaul in the local newspaper or hear it on the radio are going to be much more comfortable voting in favor of it. Making the case in the media also emboldens other employers to speak out.

- **Write a letter to the editor.** If your local newspaper has run a story about immigration or editorialized about it, respond with a letter to the editor. Letters should be short and timely – send them the day you see the story in the paper or the day after. ImmigrationWorks has prepared some sample letters. Or use our talking points to write your own.
- **Write an op-ed piece.** Your local newspaper would much rather publish the opinion of a reader than an article by a Washington insider. Op-ed pieces are a little longer than letters to the editor and stand on their own rather than responding to something previously published in the paper. Start a conversation about immigration in your local paper by submitting an op-ed piece.
- **Call a talk radio show.** Talk radio all but single-handedly killed immigration reform in 2006 and 2007. Restrictionist activists called in en masse, those in favor of reform never picked up the phone. Call your local talk radio show and make your case – explain why immigration is important to your business and the U.S. economy.
- **Make news that draws attention to the case for reform.** Generating interest in the media is easier than you think. When you form a local employer coalition in favor of better immigration law, announce it at a press conference. Work with others in your state to commission a study of the local economy's need for immigrant workers – and release the report at a press event. Organize a conference and invite local speakers to debate immigration. The possibilities are endless, and ImmigrationWorks can help – with ideas about making news and getting attention for whatever you do.
- **Join the ImmigrationWorks Speakers Bureau.** Join our team of informed, articulate employers prepared to speak to the media about the benefits of immigration and the need for reform. We'll help coach you for conversations with reporters. We'll arrange for interviews. We'll organize press conferences for you and other employers willing to speak out. You're the best asset we have in the fight for immigration reform. Let us help you make your voice heard.

USE THE NEW MEDIA TO RECRUIT GRASSROOTS TROOPS

Politics is about arguments – about persuading elected officials. But it's also about numbers: the raw number of supporters willing to stand up and support a given position. The new media – the internet, blogs, social networking – have transformed the art of grassroots recruitment.

- **Help IW build a database.** How did anti-immigrant groups like FAIR and NumbersUSA ate a million faxes to Congress in 2007? They built a database of supporters who they could mobilize with a click of the mouse, alerting them when immigration came up in Congress and giving them tools to communicate with lawmakers. IW is building a similar capacity, but we need your help. First, visit www.immigrationworksusa.org and sign up to receive updates and action alerts. Then reach out to your network– your fellow employers, members of your trade association, customers, suppliers, employees and anyone else you know who cares about immigration – and ask them to do the same. Email and the web make it easy: all a new recruit has to do is click and sign in. But we can't do it without you – we need your help reaching out!

- **Viral email.** Remember chain letters? Email takes the concept to a new level. Reach out to five like-minded employers in your state, then ask each of them to reach out to five others. With the right, catchy message, there's no limit to how many recruits you can touch with an email making the case for immigration reform and urging others to sign up for the ImmigrationWorks mailing list.
- **Host an immigration house party.** Get together with fellow employers and others to talk about the broken immigration system and your local economy. Invite colleagues, customers, suppliers, employees. Bring in a local expert to say a few words about immigration reform or make the case yourself to start the conversation. You'll be surprised how easy it is to get people talking. Then urge attendees to engage more deeply by visiting the ImmigrationWorks website and signing up for the mailing list.
- **Participate in the online community on the ImmigrationWorks website.** The website is a trove of useful material: up-to-date news about immigration, the best studies of immigrants and the economy, talking points for meetings with legislators and ammunition for writing op-ed pieces and letters to the editor. But the website is also a community – a national network of employers like you deeply concerned about immigration. Once you sign up, you'll get invitations to participate in national conference calls and regional summits. You'll receive action alerts urging you to join others in a national push to communicate with Congress. We'll ask your opinion on issues. And we'll ask for information – about your immigrant workers and why they're important to you – that we can use in making the case to officials in Washington. Most important, we'll link you to two dozen other pro-immigration employer coalitions in other states – groups just like yours, struggling with the same challenges you're struggling with and fighting for the same goals.
- **Create your own page on the ImmigrationWorks website.** Members of Congress care about the views of constituents, not national organizations. Local activists want to make common cause with others in their community, not a national group far away. Combine your local clout and our resources by create a page for your state-based coalition on our website. This is the best way to give your members access to our news feeds, talking points, action alerts and the tools to communicate easily with their members of Congress.
- **Comment on a blog.** There's no better way today to get our message out or invite others to participate in our national network. You don't have to start your own blog – you can weigh in on the COMMENT section of an existing blog. Reform advocates need to make their voices heard – even on blogs that don't see the issue our way. And don't forget to urge readers: if you want immigration reform, sign up at www.immigrationworksusa.org to join the grassroots army urging Congress to get it done.

There are many ways to make a difference. These are just a few of the options. For additional information and ideas, visit www.immigrationworksusa.org.

Join our community. Be part of our network. Take advantage of the tools we offer. Together, we are more than the sum of our parts. We can win the battle for immigration reform – we just have to get organized!