



Advocacy Guidance

for Regional Branded Merchandise Associations

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Introduction

Each year, PPAI hosts a [Legislative Education and Action Day](#) (LEAD) event in Washington, D.C. This is an important opportunity for members to take the branded merchandise industry's concerns to the halls of Congress and build relationships with legislators and key staffers on Capitol Hill.

But advocacy is not a once-a-year effort. Regional promo associations and individual members are encouraged to build on the connections made during LEAD with calls, emails and visits to local congressional offices. This document lays out a "Federal First" strategy for ongoing outreach.

That said, it's also important that regional associations and individual members keep an eye out for legislation and regulation at the state level. Advocacy with your state legislators using these same strategies can build important relationships and awareness of the impact of promo on local, state and larger economies.

If you have any questions, please contact Rachel Zoch, PPAI's public affairs manager, at rachelz@ppai.org.

Focus on Federal Lawmakers

National legislation and regulation affects the industry as a whole, and PPAI focuses its efforts at the federal level. Adverse bills like the [SWAG Act](#), as well as tax rates and [labor rules](#), all have an impact across the country.

The most important step of any advocacy effort is to *determine your "why."* The most successful advocacy efforts center on a clear story or message that includes a specific request for action. (Visit [PPAI Media](#) and search "LEAD [year]" for PPAI's current legislative priorities at the federal level.)

Once you have decided on your focus, there are multiple ways to organize regional association members to advocate for the interests of the industry. This document details four strategies:

- Call campaigns (virtual phone banking).
- Letters (emails).
- Member visits to local legislative offices.
- Invite members of Congress and their staff to factory/facility tours or regional association events.



Virtual Phone Banking

One of the simplest ways to advocate is calling or emailing legislative offices. This can be done as an invitation to members to call at a time that's convenient for them (virtual phone bank) or as a coordinated in-person group effort added to a larger association event. Here are the five steps to execute a successful phone bank:

- Identify the issue to be addressed.
- Choose a day/week for association members to make calls.
- Create a short call script for association members to use.
- Send an invitation to members to make calls.
 - Provide the target date(s), your script, and instructions on how to look up contact info for their members of Congress.
- Ask members to report back to you on who they called and whether they spoke with staffer or left a voicemail.

Providing a script is the most important element of a successful phone banking effort. Having the words ready to go makes it easy for volunteers to feel confident picking up the phone and speaking up for the industry. Below are two sample scripts that can be easily customized for the issue or proposed legislation your association wants to address:

1. Sample House Call Script

Hello,

My name is [your name], and I live in [city, zip code] and work at [company name] in [city, zip code]. I am calling to [support/oppose] [name of bill]. [Briefly state how this bill would affect your company/job/livelihood.]

OPTIONAL: I would like to know what Representative [last name] is doing to [support/oppose] this bill, and I would be happy to provide more information on this and other issues and challenges the branded merchandise industry is facing.

Thank you for your time.



2. Sample Senate Call Script

Hello,

My name is [your name], and I live and work in [state] at [company name]. I am calling to [support/oppose] [name of bill]. [Briefly state how this bill would affect your company/job/livelihood.]

OPTIONAL: I would like to know what Senator [last name] is doing to [support/oppose] this bill, and I would be happy to provide more information on this and other issues and challenges the branded merchandise industry is facing.

Thank you for your time.

Congressional Contact Information

It's easy to call congressional offices in Washington using the Capitol Switchboard (9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Eastern) at 202-224-3121. A live operator will connect you directly with the office you request.

You can also call congressional offices directly, and it may be easier to reach a live person at a district office in your state. This is a great way to start building a relationship with the local staff of your federal representatives, too. Look up contact information for any member of Congress using the congressional directories:

- [Find your House member.](#)
- [Find your Senators.](#)

Click on the member's name to load their website and look for a "Contact" tab or button at the top or bottom of the page. Formats vary, but these pages should provide phone numbers, contact forms and sometimes even an online scheduling request form.

In addition to their Capitol Hill office, every member of Congress has at least one office back home. You can find contact information for all of those offices on the members' websites and make calls or request meetings to speak with staff members locally anytime.



Issue-Based Letters

Letters/emails are another tool to help amplify your message to legislators and highlight your regional association's efforts on your members' behalf. These can be a standalone campaign or in conjunction with a phone banking event or in-person meeting with a legislative office, and they provide a great way to facilitate remote participation from more of your members across your region.

As with phone banking, it's important to provide a ready-to-use message so your members feel confident speaking up for the industry. Be sure to include estimated industry statistics (available on PPAI's [By The Numbers](#) page) to communicate the scope of promo - both revenue and number of constituents - in the state. Below is a sample letter that can be easily customized for the issue or proposed legislation your association wants to address:

1. Sample Issue Letter/Email

Dear [Representative/Senator] [last name],

I am writing as a member of the [regional association name], an organization representing the branded merchandise industry, which supports an estimated [number of jobs] in [state] and contributes roughly [revenue] to the state's economy each year. Many of the companies in our industry are small, family-owned businesses that provide good wages and fostering local economic growth.

I am writing to [support/oppose] [name of bill], which would have a [positive/negative] effect on our industry. [Briefly state how this bill would affect your company/job/livelihood.]

The branded merchandise industry is a vital yet often overlooked sector of the U.S. economy - and these products are not just trinkets. They serve as meaningful tools for communication and outreach. For instance, the Department of Veterans Affairs frequently uses branded items to promote critical initiatives, such as mental health support programs for veterans, resources for job placement, and housing assistance. These items help disseminate essential information and connect veterans with the benefits they've earned through their service to our country.

I and [regional association name] would be happy to provide more information on this and other issues and challenges the branded merchandise industry is facing. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

[full name, job title]

[company name]

[city]



In-Person Meetings (August Recess)

An especially effective strategy is to request a local meeting with your members of Congress during the August recess, a month-long official break in the congressional calendar every year. Senators, representatives and their senior staffers travel home to spend time with constituents during the recess, and it's an excellent opportunity to connect with your federal representatives in a local setting.

Regional associations can organize an outreach program encouraging members to request a meeting with your members of Congress at their local offices, or better yet, invite them to a regional association event or promo manufacturing or decorating facilities for a tour and photo opportunity. For these types of visits, you'll need to decide who will interact with the legislator(s) and consider arranging refreshments in a conference room to extend the opportunities for conversation.

August is peak budget season, and many people are trying to secure these recess meetings, so it's important to begin outreach early. Requests for August recess meetings should be made by mid-June at the latest. (A template of a request letter for a recess meeting is provided below.)

What You Need To Prepare

1. *What's Your Message?*

The most important step is to *determine why you want to meet* with your legislators. The most successful advocacy efforts center on a clear story or message that includes a specific request for action by the legislator. Visit [PPAI Media](#) and search "LEAD [year]" for PPAI's current legislative priorities at the federal level. ([2025 summary](#))

Even without specific issues or legislation to address, these meetings can lay a critical foundation for future challenges. Establishing and maintaining relationships with policymakers is important so that when a threat does arise, legislators are receptive to (and hopefully even asking for) your opinions.

2. *Know Your Numbers*

Lead with the scope and economic impact of the branded merchandise industry in your state. If there is no looming legislative threat to the industry or your business, focus on educating lawmakers on how many jobs, how many small businesses, how much revenue, etc. the promo industry contributes to your state (and the effectiveness of the medium).

Estimated state-level promo industry statistics and case studies can be found on PPAI's [By The Numbers](#) page. This is important information to share in any meeting with lawmakers, but in the absence of a specific issue or bill to address, this is the most compelling information you can share.



If you do have a specific issue or bill to address, be sure you are prepared to share:

- Specifics on how the issue is affecting the industry/your business.
- Potential adverse effects if the issue is not addressed/the bill passes and is signed into law.
- The name and number of the bill (if applicable).

3. *Gift Limits*

No promo industry advocacy would be complete without sharing actual promo products – but it's important to *be aware of and comply with congressional ethics rules*, which apply to staff as well as elected officials. A good rule of thumb is that any gifts must fall *under \$20 retail value* (including decoration).

- House: <https://ethics.house.gov/gifts/>
- Senate: <https://www.ethics.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/gifts>

Be Sure To Follow Up

These visits are meant to build relationships, so *follow-up is critical*. If you manage to schedule a factory visit or office meeting with your member of Congress, be sure to take photos and post one with your thanks on your website and social media accounts. Also share the photo and your appreciation directly with the legislator's office via email, along with any additional information they may have requested during the visit. A written thank-you note sent by mail is also recommended.



Meeting Request Letter Templates

Customize these sample letters as needed to request meetings with your members of Congress or invite them to facility tours. While the August recess is a popular time for such meetings, you can adjust the dates and messaging for invitations to special events like the opening of a new facility or a regional association event.

1. Sample August Recess Meeting Request

Dear [NAME],

I am a constituent, and I have been a resident of [city] for the past [number] years. I live and work in [state] at [company name]. I would like to set up a meeting with [Representative/Senator] [last name] during the August recess to discuss issues and challenges the branded merchandise industry is facing.

[Include a brief description of your company, including products manufactured or distributed and the number of employees. Also include a note about your regional association and the number of members and jobs it represents.]

We have several issues we would like to discuss with the [Representative/Senator], including the role of independent contractors, the impact of tariffs and tax rates on small businesses, and most importantly, the uses and value of branded merchandise.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter. Please let me know what appointments are available either at [your phone number] or [your e-mail address]. Again, thank you and I look forward to meeting with you in August.

Sincerely,
[full name, job title]
[company name]
[city]



2. Sample August Recess Facility Tour Invitation

Hello, [NAME]:

I am a member of [regional association] and [job title] of [company], and I would be delighted to host [Senator/Representative] [last name] on a tour of our facilities in [city] during the congressional recess in August.

There are [number of promo companies] branded merchandise companies in [state], generating roughly [state revenue estimate] in annual revenues and employing an estimated [state employee estimate]. The majority of the companies in the branded merchandise industry are considered to be small businesses.

Numerous studies have shown that branded promotional products have a unique appeal to human memory and are the most effective form of advertising to prompt action across all generations. Adding a message to a tangible product converts an ordinary communication into a marketing experience that engages all five of the recipient's senses. Our industry's products are the most effective and practical method to market goods and services.

We would love to host [Senator/Representative] [last name] and members of their staff to discuss these issues in August, or perhaps on another convenient date when [he/she] will be in the district. Please let me know whether [Senator/Representative] [last name] is interested in meeting constituents at the [company] facilities in [city], and I will confirm with additional details, including the time and address.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,
[full name, job title]
[company name]
[city]