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Local Affairs Team
Protects Hospitality Businesses
with Municipal
Tracking Tool

Without adding headcount, the local affairs team of statewide association now catches more local policy issues with enough time to intervene.

The hotel, restaurant, and hospitality industries are heavily regulated at the local government level.

Between a wave of social reform policies and new public health restrictions to address the COVID-19 pandemic, staying in compliance with local policies has become a major expense for businesses in these industries.

To make sure these businesses are fairly represented when communities consider new laws concerning labor and wages, environmental protections, and public safety, hospitality trade groups have an ever-increasing responsibility to engage with local governments.

But in order to have enough time to advocate on behalf of their member's interests, they have to find out about issues before they come up for a vote.

Increased Local Political Activity Stretched a Thin Public Affairs Team Even Thinner

For one hospitality trade group, the task of keeping track of issues coming up in local governments across the entire state was becoming impossible. Primarily this was a result of loss of revenue during the pandemic, which led to staff reductions — at a time when the industry needed the association's advocacy more than ever.

Issues directly impacting the hospitality industry were popping up in communities of all sizes across the state in response to public concern about the pandemic, climate change, and income inequality, such as:

- **Labor laws:** minimum wage increases, secure scheduling ordinances, health care requirements, and hazard pay for frontline workers

- **Environmental protections:** fees or restrictions for single-use plastics (plastic bags, shampoo bottles, plastic straws) and other serviceware; natural gas bans (of particular concern for restaurants since there aren't many commercial alternatives to gas for cooktops)

- **Public health and safety:** COVID-19 vaccine check requirements for restaurants, venues, and hotels; outdoor dining regulations

To find out about local proposals the team relied on two primary means:

1) Scour newspapers and sign up for agenda emails, or

2) Wait for staff and members of local chapters to reach out about issues.

The Challenge

But the association only had local chapters in three metro areas, and **issues were popping up in small towns all over the state**. Too often, the public affairs team wouldn't learn about an issue until it was up for a vote at the next council meeting — as was the case of a secure scheduling ordinance that became a ballot initiative in the municipal elections.

The association learned of the vote to put the ordinance on the ballot too late to weigh in on the language in the ordinance or to impact the outcome of the vote. Ultimately, the initiative failed during the election, but it was a wake-up call to the team.

Municipal Monitoring Tool Helps Team Solve Small Town Coverage Gap

For public affairs teams of any size, monitoring small municipalities is often a challenge from a resource allocation standpoint. Since the majority of their time is spent preparing advocacy campaigns and meeting with elected officials, teams have limited hours available to proactively search for issues.

When teams rely on newspapers and emailed agendas to discover issues, the only way to proactively find issues in smaller cities is to read every newspaper and agenda from every city and county governing body every week — **a gargantuan task that's hard to justify when resources are limited**.

Thus, teams typically focus their monitoring efforts on the cities most likely to introduce ordinances that would impact a large proportion of the membership.

A small city might only introduce one ordinance every three years that could impact the hospitality industry, and it would only affect a relatively small number of members. But the impact on those members could still be devastating, and even worse, the new policy could set a precedent for nearby communities.

That's why this trade group invested in local legislation monitoring software from Curate.

While they were confident they were catching issues in the three largest metro areas around the state, they were routinely getting blindsided by issues in municipalities where they had no member or staff presence.

With Curate, the team now receives daily alerts when any issues of concern show up in meeting minutes and agendas from any municipality larger than 2,000 residents in the state.

Smart filtering options allow team members to find the most urgent issues first by sorting through the alerts by geographical area, date, and topic. The software also converts all documents into searchable formats regardless of how they were uploaded, making it easy to find specific issues in context without combing through hundreds of pages of unrelated text.

Public Affairs Team Ramps Up Solutions-oriented Advocacy Without Adding Headcount

Armed with automated alerts from Curate, the public affairs team now has visibility into the policy trends happening at every level of government across the state. And they've already discovered surprising insights.

For
Example

When the largest city in the state introduced a hazard pay proposal, the team thought the issue would be limited to that city. But Curate alerted them to newly proposed hazard pay ordinances in small cities all across the state, something they might have missed without the tool. They were able to track how the issue spread across the state and plan a more comprehensive advocacy campaign in response.

Even though the trade group had to reduce staffing levels during the pandemic, the team is now catching more issues than ever with enough time to engage with local leaders and even run full advocacy campaigns to educate the public when needed.

The team notes that it would take **two to four people constantly scouring public notices, newspapers, and municipal websites** to provide the same level of coverage they are getting through Curate. And by having access to the meeting minutes in addition to the agendas, they can read comments from elected officials and members of the public to understand local attitudes about each subject—helping them craft more effective advocacy campaigns.

The deeper coverage of issues also allows the team to be more solutions-oriented, which helps them build better relationships with local officials. Because they're spending less time finding issues, they have more time to collaborate with local officials and support local initiatives.

Whenever possible, the team offers up its expertise and resources to help officials avoid challenges and roadblocks that have come up in other communities.

In the last year, the association has been able to work with many communities to advance creative policies to support struggling hospitality businesses, including expanding and relaxing outdoor dining rules and allowing restaurants to rent out their kitchens when not in use.

The Result

With Curate, the public affairs can stay one step ahead of pressing issues in the local governments of 97 cities and 32 counties with significantly less manual resources.

Having ready access to this political intel frees up more time for their most valuable work: protecting the hospitality industry from harmful local policies and supporting beneficial initiatives.

Stop Getting Burned by Surprises in Local Government

Instead, seize opportunities and reduce risk with actionable municipal information with Curate.

We developed a tool that captures all the crucial information of meeting minute and agenda documents in one easy-to-use platform.

With more than 12,000 municipalities in our database, our team and proprietary technology extract the most relevant information so you don't miss one crucial detail.

Schedule a Demo

About Curate

Curate, a FiscalNote company, is a civic intelligence company that empowers organizations to monitor risk and find opportunities in local government discussions at scale.

Government relations professionals use Curate's database and custom reports to track policies, projects, and hot topics in more than 12,000 municipalities across the U.S.

Based in Madison, Wis., Curate is leveraging artificial intelligence to change the way organizations engage with local government.

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