1. GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

**Government Relations**

**3.1 Legislative Drive-In Day – Illinois Section**

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| **1. Section/Branch** | Illinois Section |  |
| **2. Section/Branch Size** | Very Large |  |
| **3. Project Contact** |  | |
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| **4. Project Category** | Government Relations | |
| **5. Project Description** | Organizing a legislative “drive-in” day for ASCE members to meet their legislators in Springfield, Illinois to talk about ASCE concerns and issues. | |
| **6. The Process**  (What you did, When and How) | The Illinois Section’s first involvement in exposing ASCE to the Illinois Legislature was in 2008. Illinois had not had a capital bill in almost 10 years. The state budget was (and still is) in poor shape.  The Illinois Section’s goal was to make our representatives aware of the State’s infrastructure condition and to encourage our membership to dip their toes in the political process and let ASCE’s positions on infrastructure and infrastructure funding be known.  We kept our message simple – pass a capital bill.  We were given a lead of a public relations coordinator in Springfield who was able to guide us through a plan and schedule that included the selection of a date when the legislature was in session to go meet. We organized a reception at a bar about half a mile from the capital. We had a good turnout – an even split between legislators and ASCE members – 25 and 25.  In 2009, the Section began organizing earlier by emphasizing our membership to contact their legislators early – let them know we were coming down and invite them to a reception at the Sangamo Club – a venue just blocks from the capital building and a popular hangout for legislators.  We reached out to the different sections in the state and invited them to participate and to invite their legislators as well. We used the same public relations coordinator who also setup a lunch at the Sangamo club prior to our storming of the capital building. We invited two senators who were spearheading the capital plan through the senate to speak at lunch.  The day of the “drive-in”, we gathered at the Sangamo Club for lunch – about 25-30 of us – Senators Sandoval and Bond joined us for lunch giving us a status of what they were doing to push the capital bill along. We gave them feedback and offered our assistance for whatever they needed in terms of support. After they left, we were given an outline of how to talk to our legislators from our PR coordinator and we went over our list of talking points. We were then turned loose on the capital and went to meet our legislators. We tried to get meetings with the key legislator’s months before but could not secure a time.  After our rounds to the legislators, we were back at the Sangamo Club for a reception where we were again able to meet with the legislators in a more relaxed setting. We again had about 25 legislators show to our reception. ASCE members who attended were past presidents of the Section, retired IDOT officials’, and members from other ASCE sections around the state.  In the years following we have worked with other like-minded organizations including American Council of Engineering Companies (ACEC) of Illinois and the Transportation for Illinois Coalition (TFIC). Both of these organizations have dedicated lobbyists and helped in coordinating meetings with legislators, unifying our voice with other groups that share our interest in infrastructure, passing a capital bill for sustainable funding, and generally reaching more legislators with a larger group.  We have also continued to work with other Sections and Branches within our State and the neighboring St Louis Section, as some of their members reside in Illinois. Armed with updated infrastructure funding data and needs identified by the Illinois Section’s Report Card committee, we had the opportunity to be heard in April 2019 during the legislative “drive-in” to lobby for the capital bill that was in development in Spring 2019. In June 2019, the Illinois legislature passed and Governor JB Pritzker signed into law the most robust capital plan in Illinois’ history and the first in nearly a decade, dubbed ‘Rebuild Illinois’. This capital plan provided $45 billion worth of funding for investments in roads, bridges, railways, universities, early childhood centers and other state facilities.  Planning with other professional organizations and ASCE Sections/Branches has helped in securing speakers at our lunch event prior to the legislative visits and provided an opportunity to have leaders within the House and Senate among the audience. The local chapters of the American Public Works Association (APWA) were also good partners. After the capital bill (Rebuild Illinois) passed, we made sure to thank our legislators, so the message was not simply to “give us money”. | |
| **7. Those in Charge** (Committee, Task Committee, Etc.) | Government Relations Committee consisting of:  Andrew Walton, Brian Pawula, Megan McDonald, John Lazzara, Patrick Lach | |
| **8. Time Frame**  (When Started, When Completed) | * + The initial contacting of other professional organizations and ASCE Sections/Branches begins in January to discuss strategy.   + “Save the Date” post cards were sent out to legislators (to their District and Springfield by our PR coordinator).   + Follow-up, formal invite letters sent to legislators with RSVP to our coordinator.   + A registration flyer was put in the monthly ASCE newsletter for members to sign up.   + ASCE members asked to personally call legislators to invite them to the Legislative Reception, any RSVPs should be forwarded to our PR Coordinator.   + Follow up phone calls to Springfield offices made by our Coordinator.   + The actual “drive-in” date is determined based on the State Legislative Session Calendar and when we believe we will be most effective in Springfield. | |
| **9. Success Factors**  (The Parts that Worked Really Well) | In previous years, our PR coordinator, Dave Kelm, was – and is – a great asset to helping us with how to approach this event and make things happen. He has been a great guide in navigating us through the political maze in Springfield.  Recently, our biggest success has been coordinating with other organizations, most notably ACEC-IL and TFIC, along with other ASCE Sections/Branches in Illinois. | |
| **10. Setback Factors**  (The Parts that did Not Work Well) | We were challenged engaging the other Sections and Branches across Illinois. The Illinois Section represents the northern portion of the State and to truly represent the interests of everyone we needed all our downstate members to participate. In the future we would like to use Region 3 and National support to facilitate. We did call/email leadership in the downstate areas but were met with lack of interest. | |
| **11. Creativity**  (This is something off the wall that we did) | After the “drive-in” in April, the comment from Senator Sandoval was that we needed to stay in touch - not to just meet when we needed something – be an advisor to the legislators for infrastructure. | |
| **12. Administration**  (What was most Important?) | Coordinating w/ ACEC-IL and TFIC early. | |
| **13. Follow-Up**  (What was most important?) | After the “drive-in” in April, the comment from Senator Sandoval was that we needed to stay in touch – not just to meet when we need something – but to be an advisor to the legislators for infrastructure.  The Illinois Section did a follow-up event with Senator Sandoval at a reception in Chicago setup by the Section to discuss the progress of the capital bill and other infrastructure issues coming out of Springfield.  We have also found that the Report Card has been a vital tool in our discussions with legislators about the importance of sustainable infrastructure funding. Continuing to update the Report Card and providing that as a leave-behind has been very effective. | |
| **14. Recommendations**  (What you should ALWAYS do with this project?) | Find someone who understands the political ‘lay of the land’ and who can help organize the event. Do not be afraid to ask a state legislator to speak to your group when you visit. | |
| **15. Cautions**  (What you should NEVER do with this project?) |  | |
| **16. The Outcome** | Excellent contacts with local legislators and the Illinois Section’s ability to express our concerns for the industry in a personal face-to-face setting.  The event was cancelled in 2020 due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, but this may lead to opportunities to have a future ‘virtual’ legislative “drive-in”. | |
| **17. Ongoing Activity**  (Would you do it again?) | Yes | |
| **18. Speaker Contact Information**  (person from your Region who would be willing to speak about the Best Practice) |  | |
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| **19. Additional Comments** |  | |