Quorum

2024

State of Government Affairs Survey

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Advocacy remains tough, with too many issues and too few resources — and the election will make it harder.

But many professionals are excited and hopeful about AI.

Contents

The State of Government Affairs

Public affairs professionals didn't hold back their opinions about the advocacy landscape this year. They see too many issues, too few resources, and a polarized environment that will make advocacy and lobbying harder in the months ahead. But, they are optimistic about a potential solution that can help address some of those challenges — artificial intelligence.

Quorum's 2024 State of Government Affairs Survey asked 225 public affairs professionals about the job, including what draws their concern and where they are focusing their efforts. The portrait they sketch shows gray skies, a world in which it is getting harder to mobilize advocates and capture the attention of lawmakers. The national election, they say, is unlikely to help.

"The prospect of getting anything done has been very difficult," said one respondent. "Polarization has turned the previously non-controversial issues into hot button issues by having to pass bills in large partisan packages." Another was even more blunt: "Polarization is great if you prefer no action. It is hard if you are trying to affect policy and create change."

Consider just the topline numbers to get a sense of how professionals in the advocacy industry are feeling:

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Nearly two-thirds (64 percent) say the polarized political climate in the U.S. makes advocacy and lobbying work harder.

How has the polarized political climate in the U.S. impacted your lobbying and advocacy work?

Harder **64%**

22% No Impact

14% Easier
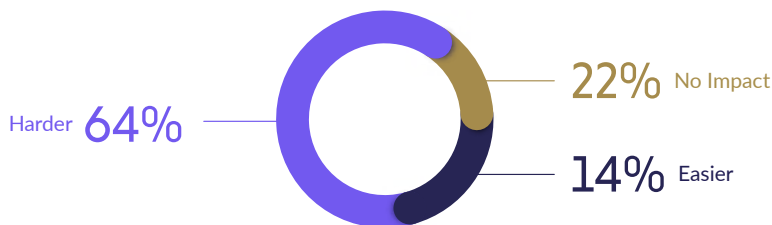
More than half (51 percent) say that work will get even more difficult in the months before November's election.

How will the 2024 election impact your lobbying and advocacy work prior to November?

Harder **51%**

33% No Impact

16% Easier
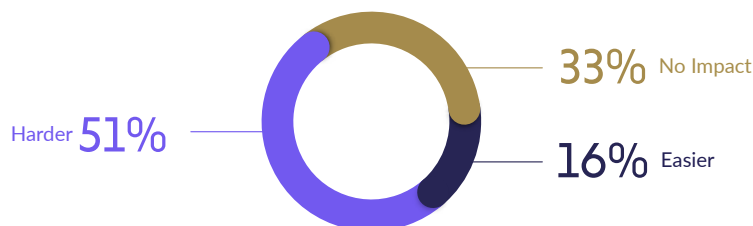
More than one-third (35 percent) say getting the attention of lawmakers and other decision-makers is their single biggest problem. It was the top answer when we asked them to name the biggest challenges.

35%

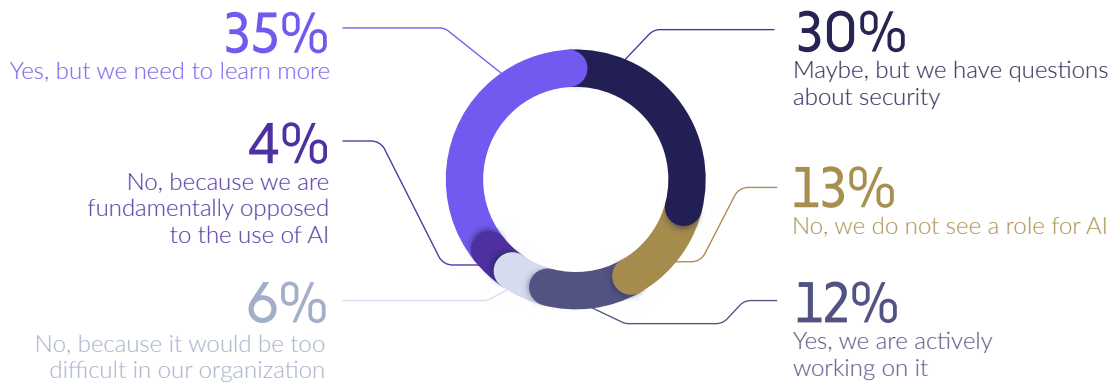getting the attention of lawmakers and other decision-makers is their single biggest problem

"Leading up to an election, it's critical that public affairs teams stay nimble and able to adapt," **said Alex Wirth, Quorum Cofounder and CEO.** "A strategy built around engaging your advocates, nurturing relationships with legislators even when legislation is slow, and leveling up your public affairs toolkit is imperative."

But, there was a bright spot to the industry's outlook. Perhaps surprisingly, many are optimistic about artificial intelligence. The survey shows that while AI tools are not widely used, they are greatly anticipated. **Only about a third of public affairs professionals (36 percent)** say they are currently using AI technology in their day-to-day work while 64 percent are not. Separately, more than three-quarters (77 percent) of those not using artificial intelligence say they are open to using AI once they learn more and get their questions answered.

Are you open to using AI in your work?

35%
Yes, but we need to learn more

4%
No, because we are fundamentally opposed to the use of AI

6%
No, because it would be too difficult in our organization

30%
Maybe, but we have questions about security

13%
No, we do not see a role for AI

12%
Yes, we are actively working on it

"While it's a difficult time to get policy through Congress and to keep up with state legislatures, new tools like artificial intelligence and new advanced advocacy tools are helping to keep up," Wirth said. "The teams that stay ahead of the game are the ones who will move the needle on policy."

The 2024 State of Government Affairs Survey reveals the biggest challenges teams face, their thoughts about working in a polarized environment, the areas they are trying to improve, and how they plan to approach AI. It also covers the tools and tactics they use. The result is a report that allows you to see how other organizations are approaching advocacy and benchmark your team so you can improve throughout the year. To see more results, read on.

Can Polarization Make Advocacy Easier?

While the majority of those surveyed said political polarization makes advocacy more difficult, some disagreed. Fourteen percent said it actually made the job easier.

How can that be? One answer is that people are sometimes easier to motivate in a polarized environment where they can be triggered.

As one respondent put it, "It is easier to trigger a response based on words and actions that are commonly associated with one group or another."

The Biggest Challenges
to Public Affairs

Polarization is not the only problem that public affairs teams are encountering this year. Many problems are related to the everyday work of advocacy. When asked to name their biggest challenges, for example, **the top answer (35 percent) was that it's hard to get the attention of lawmakers** and other decision-makers. And that's a problem that may get worse.

With every member of the U.S. House and a third of the Senate up for reelection—in addition to thousands of state legislators across the country—lawmakers will spend more time in their districts to campaign. Legislation often slows during an election year, because lawmakers don't want to be forced to cast votes on difficult issues.

"Lawmakers are focused more on political issues and not as focused on more 'common sense' topics," one respondent said. "Policy items that don't energize the base or boost clout are not as interesting to them." Another put it this way: "It's harder to find congressional champions that are willing to work in a bipartisan manner and who want to focus on issues that are important to the country but are not high priority."

The **second most common challenge (33 percent) was a lack of staff**, which was cited as the number-one problem in last year's survey.

Nonprofits especially feel the squeeze of staffing shortages, **with nearly half (47 percent) of nonprofit respondents pointing to staffing as their biggest challenge**. Staffing was less of a problem for companies

(only 27 percent said it was a challenge). Instead, about a third (39 percent) indicated that their biggest challenge was the amount of legislative and regulatory activity they needed to track.

What are the biggest challenges facing your public affairs program?

Challenge	Percentage
We are understaffed	33%
It's hard to get the attention of lawmakers and other decision makers	35%
We are underfunded	26%
Partisan polarization makes it hard to communicate	26%
The political landscape is unstable	25%
There is too much legislative and regulatory activity to track	24%
It's difficult to move your advocates to action	25%
It is tough to acquire new supporters	18%
We need to modernize our technology	9%

Putting Polarization in Perspective

Public affairs pros do cite political division as a problem, but it's not at the top of their list.

When asked about their biggest challenges, about a quarter (26 percent) pointed to partisan polarization and a similar number (25 percent) cited an unstable political landscape.

But traditional advocacy challenges drew a similar response. For example, 26 percent pointed to underfunding, 25 percent cited difficulty moving advocates to action and 24 percent said there is too much legislative and regulatory activity to track.
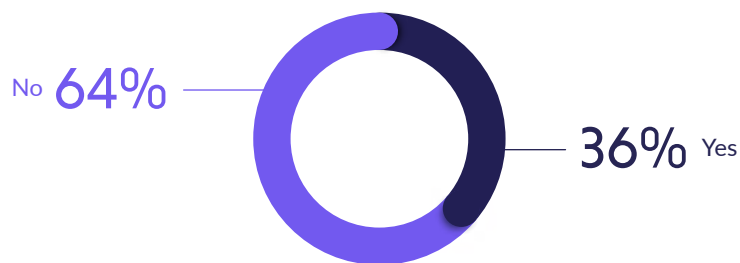
Many Pros 'Excited and Hopeful' About AI

With staffing such a major concern, perhaps it is not surprising that artificial intelligence tools are attracting interest, with the potential to free up more time for more strategic work. The survey asked public affairs professionals whether they are open to using AI and to characterize their feelings about using artificial intelligence in everyday work. The answers suggest that public affairs professionals are curious about AI and what it can do for their teams.
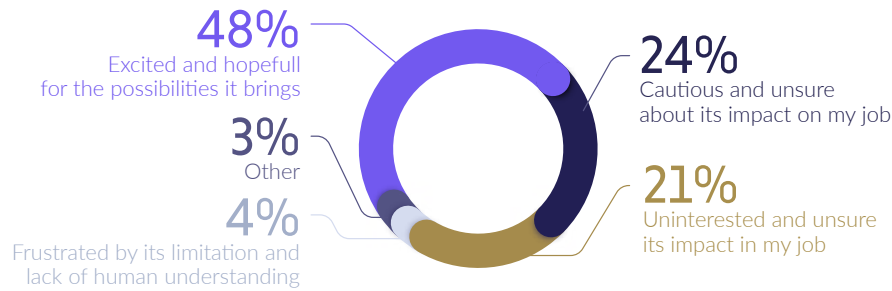
A majority (64 percent) said they are not yet using AI at work—meaning that 36 percent are using it. Early adopters are largely made up of agencies and consultants, who represent 60 percent of those currently using AI. That's twice the number of nonprofits using AI, which make up about 30 percent.

Is your team currently using artificial intelligence in your work?
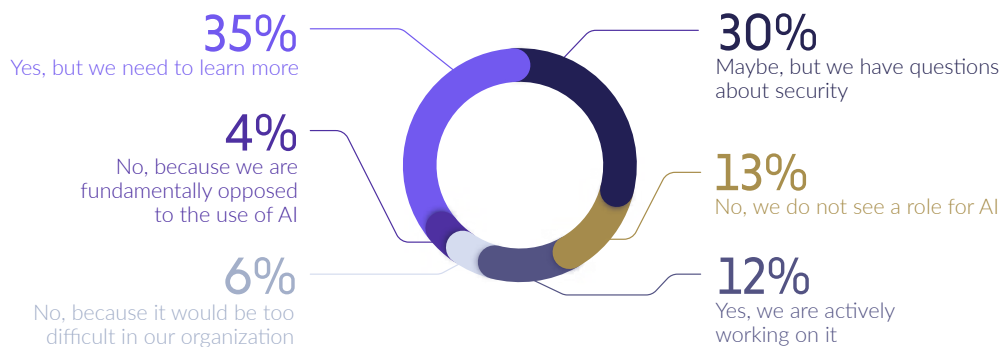
No **64%**

36% Yes

Almost half (48 percent) of all respondents said they are "excited and hopeful" about the possibilities that AI may bring. That's roughly twice the 24 percent who said they were "cautious and unsure." Only about one in five (21 percent) said they were uninterested in artificial intelligence, and prefer traditional methods for everyday work.

What best characterizes your feelings about using AI tools in your everyday work?

48%
Excited and hopefull
for the possibilities it brings

3%
Other

4%
Frustrated by its limitation and
lack of human understanding

24%
Cautious and unsure
about its impact on my job

21%
Uninterested and unsure
its impact in my job

More than three quarters (77 percent) of those not already using artificial intelligence say they are open to using AI once they learn more and get their questions answered. Only about a quarter (23 percent) said they are not open to using AI because it would be difficult to implement, they don't see a role, or they fundamentally oppose artificial intelligence.

Are you open to using AI in your work?

35%
Yes, but we need to learn more

4%
No, because we are
fundamentally opposed
to the use of AI

6%
No, because it would be too
difficult in our organization

30%
Maybe, but we have questions
about security

13%
No, we do not see a role for AI

12%
Yes, we are actively
working on it

What are the organizations that are using AI doing with it? Respondents say they are using AI to analyze bills, draft and iterate messaging, conduct research, write code, generate letters, content and reports, spark content ideas, parse data, and ease the workload of their staff.

"I believe thoughtful AI integration is essential," one public affairs pro said. "I'm optimistic about AI's potential to drive positive change when developed and used ethically." Another respondent expressed concern. "It's good for some things and not others. I hope it doesn't destroy the channel of email to elected officials."

For a generation of senior public affairs professionals who have already seen massive leaps in technology, AI represents another tectonic change. There are many questions about AI, from security to ethics. Yet the numbers suggest that many public affairs pros are leaning in.

"AI is a game-changing technology and its potential is huge," Wirth said. "It will redefine how organizations gather and analyze policy information, cutting down on manual tasks. It will not be long before every team is using AI in some way, and the organizations that move first will have an advantage."
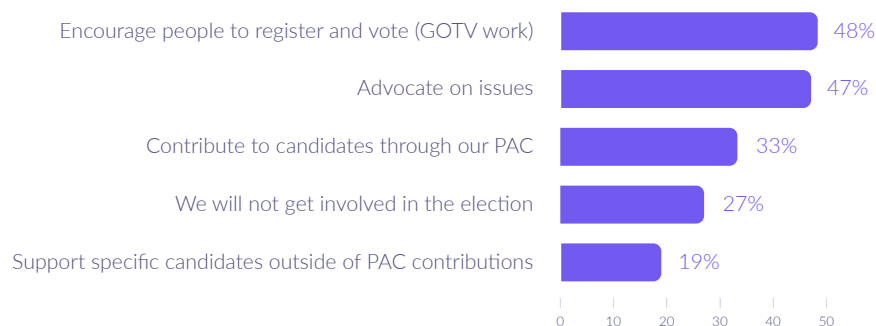
Where Are Teams Focusing This Year?

A national election that will decide control of the White House, Congress, and dozens of state legislatures ensures that many organizations will be focused on voters. Almost **three-quarters (73 percent)** of those surveyed said their organization will get involved in the election.
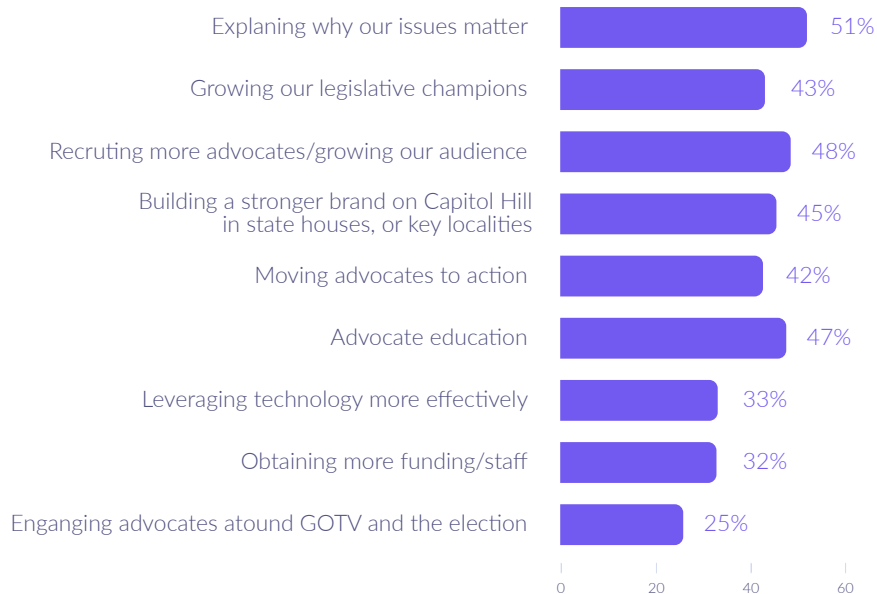
Overall, organizations plan to focus on two primary strategies for the election, both equally popular: **advocating on issues (47 percent)** and **encouraging people to register and vote (48 percent)**. About one-third (33 percent) said their organization will contribute to candidates through a political action committee, and one-fifth (19 percent) will support specific candidates in other ways.

How will your organization participate in the 2024 election?

Encourage people to register and vote (GOTV work)	48%
Advocate on issues	47%
Contribute to candidates through our PAC	33%
We will not get involved in the election	27%
Support specific candidates outside of PAC contributions	19%

0   10   20   30   40   50

Different types of organizations favor different tactics. For example, **more than half of those who work for nonprofits (53 percent) say their organization favors issue advocacy** while more than half of those who work at corporations (52 percent) say their company will conduct GOTV efforts. Only about a quarter of respondents overall (27 percent) said their organization will not participate in the election.
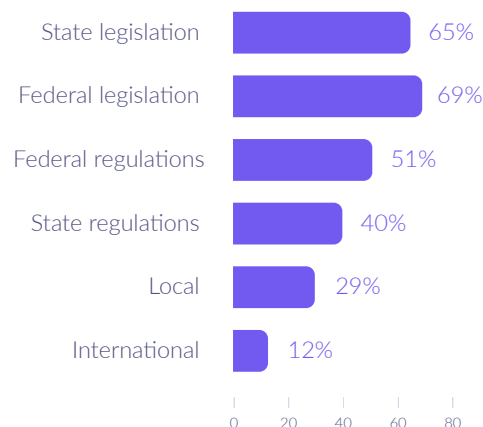
What will your public affairs program focus on in 2024?

Explaining why our issues matter	51%
Growing our legislative champions	43%
Recruiting more advocates/growing our audience	48%
Building a stronger brand on Capitol Hill in state houses, or key localities	45%
Moving advocates to action	42%
Advocate education	47%
Leveraging technology more effectively	33%
Obtaining more funding/staff	32%
Engaging advocates atound GOTV and the election	25%

But 2024 is about more than just voting. When asked what they are focusing on this year, many public affairs pros said they will address traditional advocacy challenges such as explaining why their issues matter (51 percent), recruiting more advocates (48 percent), and educating those advocates (47 percent).

Many others plan to focus on legislative relationships, including 45 percent of respondents who said they will work on building a stronger brand on Capitol Hill and state houses and 43 percent on growing legislative champions.

Where does your organization target its public affairs work?

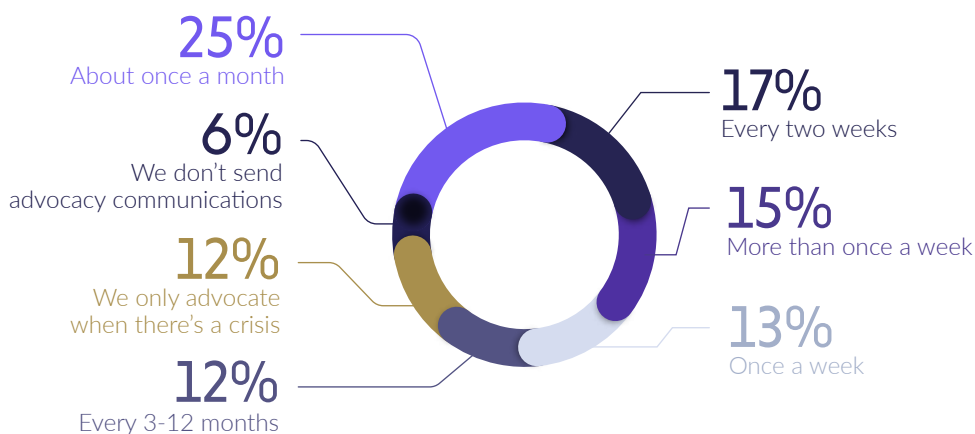|	
State legislation	65%
Federal legislation	69%
Federal regulations	51%
State regulations	40%
Local	29%
International	12%

What's Working for Teams Today?

The 2024 State of Government Affairs Survey asked public affairs professionals about the tools and tactics they use. The answers they gave can provide benchmarks for your team.

This year's survey suggests there may be some slowdown in how often organizations send advocacy communications. About **45 percent said they are sending more than once a month**, compared to 48 percent in last year's survey. Those sending once a week dropped from 20 percent last year to 13 percent this year. Those sending once a month increased from 20 percent last year to 25 percent this year.

How often do you send advocacy communications?

25%
About once a month

6%
We don't send advocacy communications

12%
We only advocate when there's a crisis

12%
Every 3-12 months

17%
Every two weeks

15%
More than once a week

13%
Once a week

When asked about the most effective way to communicate with advocates, **59 percent cited email**, interesting because email messaging is one area where artificial intelligence **can have a major impact. →** Organic social media came in second at 40 percent, with another 22 percent using paid social media. Only about one in five (21 percent) are using text messaging, lower than 33 percent who were doing so last year.

What methods of influencing advocates are most effective in your organization?

Method	Percentage
Email	59%
Organic	40%
Text	21%
Paid	22%
Don't	7%
Direct	14%
Other	17%
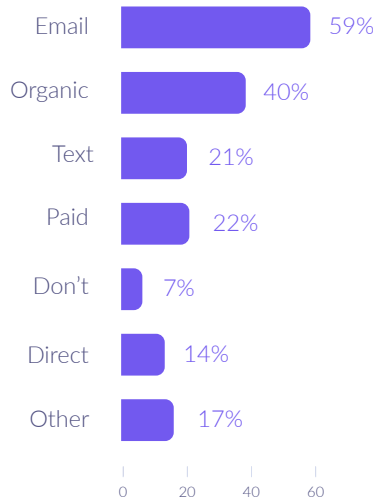
When it comes to influencing policymakers, **more than two-thirds of those surveyed (69 percent) said that in-person meetings are most effective,** followed by email at 40 percent. Interestingly, one-third (33 percent) said phone call campaigns were the most effective. Lawmakers at every level maintain offices and conduct constituent service—and they **have to answer →** the phones.

What methods of influencing policymakers are most effective in your organization?

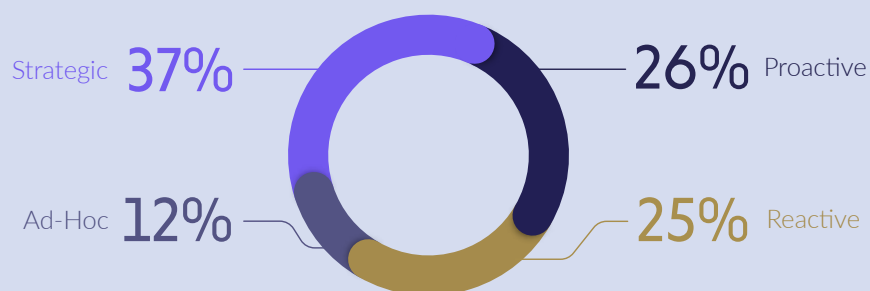| Method	Percentage
In-person meetings	69%
Email	40%
Phone Calls	33%
Social Media	24%
Other	3%
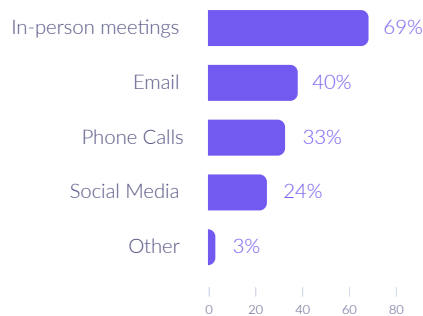
WHAT'S THE MATURITY LEVEL OF YOUR PROGRAM?

How sophisticated is your team's approach to public affairs?

Are you monitoring legislation and social media using professional software or are you using free tools? Are you storing information from stakeholder meetings in a way that's accessible to your entire team? Are your lobbying and grassroots strategies integrated?

Quorum has developed a scale that allows you to gauge the maturity level of your program. The survey showed that 37 percent self-report their program as "strategic", 26 percent as "proactive", 25 percent as "reactive", and 12 percent as "ad-hoc".

How would you best characterize the maturity level of your organization and its public affairs program?
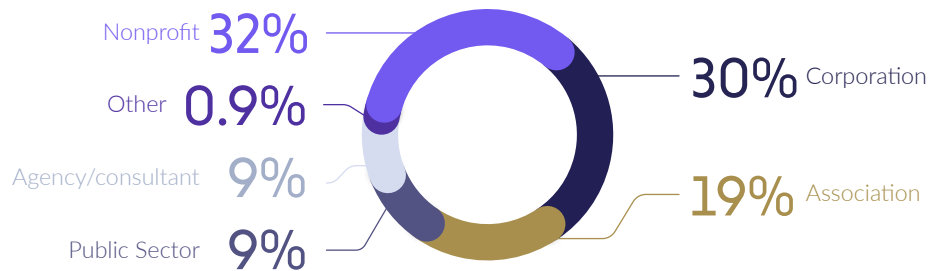
Strategic **37%**   **26%** Proactive

Ad-Hoc **12%**   **25%** Reactive

To find out where you stand, take this seven-question quiz .→

Mostly Cs: Proactive

Based on your answers, your public affairs program benefits from an effective toolset and a data-based approach.
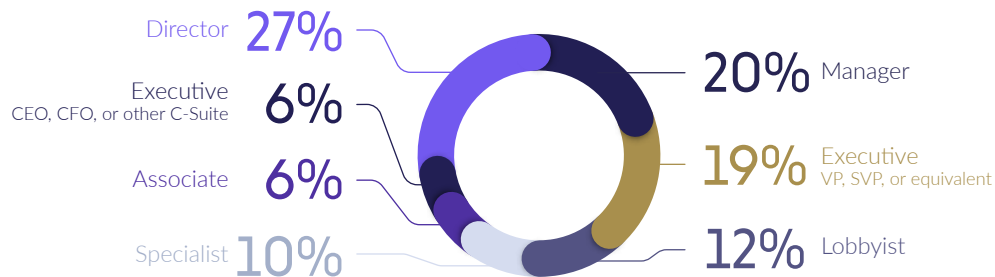
Show Me

Methodology

The State of Government Affairs survey was administered to 225 public affairs professionals by phone and email between Feb. 29 and March 27 of 2024. Participants remained anonymous.

What type of organization do you work for?

Nonprofit **32%**

Other **0.9%**

Agency/consultant **9%**

Public Sector **9%**

30% Corporation

19% Association

What is your role?

Director **27%**

Executive
CEO, CFO, or other C-Suite **6%**

Associate **6%**

Specialist **10%**

20% Manager

19% Executive
VP, SVP, or equivalent

12% Lobbyist

Conclusion

Polarization, staffing, and funding have made things difficult for government affairs teams—and the upcoming election will make things even harder. However, optimism abounds as the adoption of AI technologies accelerates. New tools, including offerings from Quorum, directly address some of today's biggest challenges. Teams now have access to advanced ways of analyzing large swaths of legislation, generating messaging to educate advocates or address polarized audiences, and unlocking time savings to allow for more in-person interactions—which remains the most effective form of advocacy and lobbying.

The state of government affairs is changing, and we only anticipate the rate of change will increase in the coming years.

Quorum