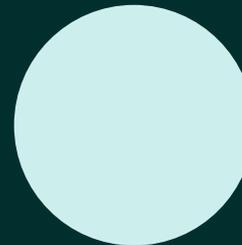
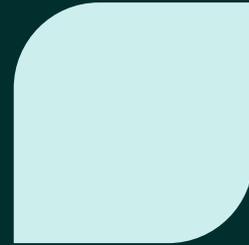
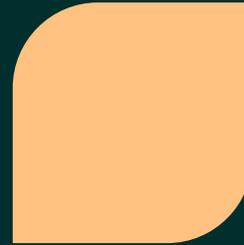
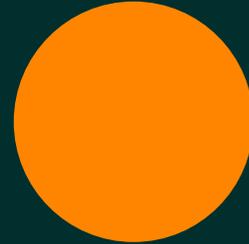




The Future of Public Policy Work

Best practices for using digital collaboration
in modern public policy engagement



Contents

Executive Summary	3
Chapter 1: Adapting to increased demand and decreased in-person access	4
Chapter 2: Strong coalitions and other public policy partnerships can increasingly make or break campaigns	7
Chapter 3: Social responsibility and public policy go hand in hand	11
Conclusion	15



Over the last two years, a new digital transformation has taken hold in public policy work. Public policy professionals have had to become more nimble, collaborative, and responsive than ever before.

The tools and strategies that have gotten the job done in the past are being rapidly outpaced by techniques that rely on digital collaboration. Being faster and smarter are critical for building an organization's reputation and power in legislative circles. Public awareness of social issues is also at an all-time high, putting heightened focus on how companies and organizations are responding to our shifting culture. These shifts have changed the rules for anyone working in public policy.

The Future of Public Policy Work is a quick start guide to understanding and adopting new best practices in the public policy and advocacy space. It is a collection of knowledge from top experts in their fields and those who are winning on some of the toughest and most complex issues of the day. These are battle-tested pros who have been at the forefront of advocacy and legislative work.

Public policy work today looks very different from the past. But with the right tools and techniques, teams can position themselves for success in 2022, and in becoming more adaptable as change accelerates. At Plural, we're committed to not only providing innovative technology, but also serving as your thought partner and resource to help you make a bigger impact on public policy.

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN WITH THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC POLICY WORK:

- How digital collaboration and the use of artificial intelligence have transformed public policy work — and how you can leverage this technology to win.
- Best practices for using technology to facilitate coalition work, while also advancing equity.
- Tips for navigating how and when your brand or organization should get involved in hot-button social issues — and how to do so in an effective and meaningful way.



CHAPTER 1

Adapting to increased demand and decreased in-person access.

Public policy work has changed by leaps and bounds since 2019 as a result of digital transformations spurred by the pandemic. Adapting to virtual meetings and hearings was only the first step. Few anticipated how the “always there” nature of online meetings would lead to an increased volume of work, and heightened expectations — despite the fact that communication through virtual meetings could be less effective and often disappointing. A few smart organizations stood out from the rest through their ability to pivot

and adapt, adopting methods for collaborating virtually and asynchronously, and streamlining manual processes through the use of digital workspaces.

The hybrid approach to public policy work continues. Teams that have successfully adopted new best practices and digital tools designed for efficiency and collaboration are better positioned to influence and win legislative battles in 2022 and beyond.

“

When the pandemic hit, we all went into our homes and had to figure out ways to interact with staff and members. It was a daunting task logistically, just to figure out where people were and the best way to get in contact with them. Bigger challenges came later, as we shifted to working more asynchronously. We knew how to build relationships through the process of collaborating on policy work in person, but we had to learn how to do that well online.

ORLANDO JONES

SENIOR ASSOCIATE
GOVERNMENT RELATIONS,
CENTER FOR SECURE
AND MODERN ELECTIONS



The Adjustment

Public policy teams have faced many hurdles as legislative bodies adjusted to virtual work — with varying degrees of success. How would teams keep the pressure on lawmakers when in-person meetings were limited? How would teams and partners collaborate well while working virtually?

Everything moved online. Gone were the days of passing notes during hearings, stopping by offices, or counting votes on a whiteboard in the office. Knowledge needed to be shared, and situational updates on legislation needed to be stored in a secure, accessible space.

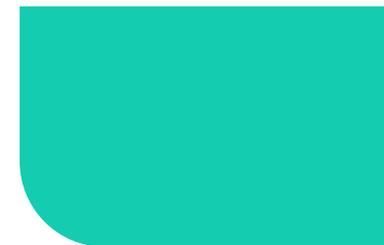
Over 2020 and 2021, with less time spent commuting, interacting informally in the hall, or moving from meeting to meeting, and less visibility into how others were working, expectations about the volume of work possible and people's ability to respond immediately skyrocketed. Public policy teams that didn't adapt could easily fall behind. Meanwhile relationship-building suffered. Communities and people with more marginalized identities struggled even more to be included.

In the nearly two years since the pandemic began, we've learned a lot about how to adapt public policy work for this new, hybrid virtual and in-person environment. So what can you do now to prepare for your next legislative session?

DIGITAL PRACTICES ARE NO LONGER “NICE TO HAVE”; THEY'RE HOW PUBLIC POLICY WORK GETS DONE.

In 2019, many organizations were still using ad-hoc solutions to track the large amount of information needed to stay on top of public policy progress and team workflows. Data lived in spreadsheets, scattered documents, email messages, texts, and chats.

Now, organizations are taking a more critical look at how they work, and prioritizing a deliberate approach that fosters efficiency and location agnostic collaboration. A faster pace is normal now.



To accommodate this new rhythm, it's vital for organizations to think deeply about the tools they are using and to explore the technology they may have passed on before as optional, but are now indispensable. For example:

Legislative intelligence and bill tracking automation

With people operating in a digital environment, competition to be the first to respond to changes in pending legislation, and to adapt strategies quickly increased. Fortunately many of the routine tasks involved in tracking legislation can be automated. Smart searches make it easy to find out what proposed legislation is relevant and important to a particular team. Automatic notifications of changes and the ability to track changes in bill text help public policy teams analyze changes and what impact they will have.

Shared digital workspaces

Discussions and assignments can be executed directly in shared digital workspaces integrated with tracking tools. Being able to have unlimited staff users enables public policy teams to streamline communications with legal departments, compliance, and organizers ensures that everyone is on the same page. With multiple organizations working on similar issues, or supporting or opposing the same bills, it's never been more vital to manage conversations tied to specific sets of issues or legislation.

THE "NEW NORMAL" IS HERE TO STAY

With 2022 sessions upon us, there's no doubt that the pace of legislative work will continue to quicken. For anyone working to influence legislation, keeping up with an ever-growing workload requires new levels of efficiency.

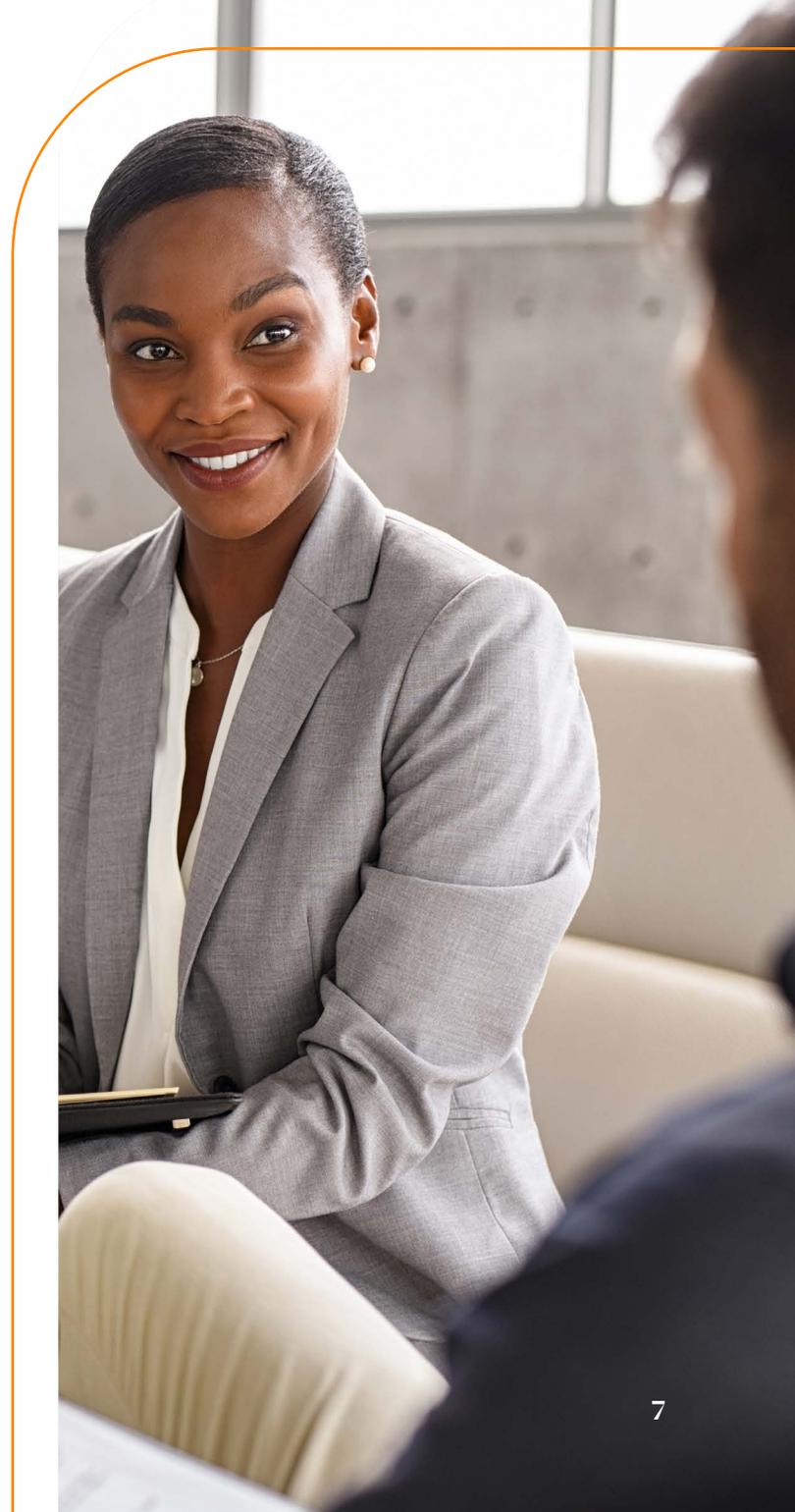
At the same time, many facets of the pandemic environment, such as virtual hearings, will continue. While this allows participation from any location, it also increases the likelihood of staff burnout. Utilizing tools that allow for real-time, secure sharing of notes and resources is vital not only for efficiency, but to allow smooth handoff of work between staff.



CHAPTER 2

Strong coalitions and other public policy partnerships can increasingly make or break campaigns.

Building coalitions and partnerships has long been a key strategy in public policy advocacy. While the pandemic has added new obstacles to overcome, it has also spurred innovation in how teams interact and collaborate. And with dramatic legislative change happening across the country, it's vital for allied groups to work together seamlessly.



Unlocking Collaboration

A winning partnership doesn't come together by accident — it requires intention, planning, coordination, and excellent communication.

Some public policy alliances are temporary, but most issues are won through persistence. Building a coalition that can endure and achieve big wins means investing time and energy in people-centric strategies:

1 OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

One-to-one meetings are crucial starting points, whether virtual or in-person. Finding the right partners means talking to those impacted by an issue, those working in the same space, and key decision makers.

2 BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS AND TRUST

Otherwise successful outreach can be quickly torpedoed by poor follow through. Creating secure spaces where collaboration can be cultivated allows trust to blossom.

3 TURNING ALIGNMENT INTO ACTION

This means bringing together key people from each organization to develop and execute plans that draw on their unique expertise and develop better shared solutions.



“

Initially, a lot of us were not familiar with all the different ways of engaging collaboratively online. So we had to figure out what works best for us, including the security. Ensuring safety is especially important when you're dealing with BIPOC communities.

JULIA FREEMAN

DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT,
VOICES FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

New Technology Improves Collaboration

The last two years have seen a rapid increase in demand for tools that allow people to do all types of work, from anywhere, at any time. This presents a huge opportunity to mobilize around various issues, and can eliminate some of the barriers to access. It also expands the ways organizations can engage partners on specific legislation.

Having private, easy-to-use digital spaces for collaboration on legislation makes it possible to be more inclusive. Encouraging collaboration to happen safely and securely between meetings — and as soon as the status or language of a bill is updated — helps coalition members build strong working partnerships, since interactions can happen from anywhere and conversations can be asynchronous.

“

Building coalitions is about connecting with people. That is still the case during the pandemic, we just do more of it online.

GRACE WALTZ

VP OF PUBLIC POLICY, MINNEAPOLIS REGIONAL CHAMBER



TRY THIS

Ask yourself these questions to help plan and manage effective coalitions:

1

WHAT STEPS CAN WE TAKE TO ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN TRUST ACROSS THE COALITION?

Partner groups need to establish common goals, and work collaboratively and transparently. Knowledge-sharing and security are also crucial to any coalition.

2

WHAT EXPERTISE CAN WE LEVERAGE ACROSS COALITION PARTNERS?

Each partner brings unique value to the table, whether that is geographic or subject matter expertise, or influence with legislators and stakeholders.

3

WHAT TOOLS AND ACTIONS WILL HELP US TO COORDINATE OUR EFFORTS?

With the many moving pieces in a coalition, it is vital to track who is doing what, and what progress is being made. Keeping everyone on the same page and preventing duplication of effort avoids lost time and resources.

4

HOW CAN WE BUILD A SENSE OF COMMUNITY IN A HYBRID VIRTUAL/ IN-PERSON ENVIRONMENT?

Bringing partners and allies together in shared spaces is crucial to effective partnership, whether it happens virtually, in-person, or both.



CHAPTER 3

Social responsibility and public policy go hand in hand.

One of the biggest challenges facing organizations and corporations is a heightened demand from consumers and supporters to get involved with prominent social issues. There's a lot to unpack, and this can be a tricky subject for public policy professionals and organizational leaders.

One thing is certain: your customers and supporters are paying attention to where you stand. On issues such as public health, climate, reproductive rights, voting rights, racial justice, and many more, there's no such thing as a neutral position.

“

Your silence is louder often, and you definitely risk your customer base, but you also risk the trust that you have developed in your customers as well. Staying at home and doing nothing doesn't yield you anything.

ASHLEY ROBINSON

DEPUTY STATE DIRECTOR,
AMERICA VOTES GEORGIA



It's Not *If* You Get Involved with Social Issues, It's *How*

Corporate and organizational leaders can be wary of engaging on social issues. It may seem easier to “stay above the fray” or to focus on narrow business interests. Others may see engaging as a distraction that would alienate consumers. But, more and more consumers are considering where brands stand on the issues they care about, and failing to align your public policy to your stated values, marketing efforts, and CSR programs can be even more risky to your reputation and political power.

For younger generations, most notably Gen Z and millennials, where their favorite brands stand on the issues they care about is becoming a top concern. Viral videos and social posts calling out brands to speak up are not a temporary trend. And these generations are not just consumers — they are increasingly taking leadership roles in their communities, business, and politics.

The longer a corporation or organization stays silent, the harder it can be to overcome the perception that your values and your customers’ and employees’ are misaligned. It’s all the more important if your product or organization is seen as profiting to the detriment of marginalized groups.

These are issues that can impact your company brand, an increasingly diverse consumer base and potential employees. To stay competitive, it’s vital to have active, genuine, and willingly vulnerable conversations about this now — including understanding more broadly the impacts of your public policy work.

“

There is something you can do that aligns with your mission and values, no matter what industry you’re in.

ASHLEY ROBINSON

DEPUTY STATE DIRECTOR,
AMERICA VOTES GEORGIA



The Key is Engaging Effectively

Statements posted on social media are not enough, and consumers and supporters can see through self-serving actions. This is why relationship building with those who have hands-on experience is critical.

Consider which issues matter most and where you can have a meaningful impact. Analyze how public policy issues related to your own mission impact different communities. Identify proposed legislation related to improving those impacts. Talk to other organizations doing work on the issues you want to address, building relationships with people who are experts in the topic.

This work will involve frank conversations with activists, employees, and in some cases shareholders. Activist groups may demand more than you're ready to provide. But that's okay — your goal is to find a place to start moving forward. Showing up in the community speaks volumes, and there's always a way to engage that takes into consideration your key stakeholders. The benefits of doing so will pay dividends over time, and is worth the investment it requires to begin.



Acknowledgements

The content in this eBook was adapted in part from a series of webinars held throughout 2021. We want to thank all of our special guests who made these events possible, including: **Orlando Jones** of the Center for Secure and Modern Elections and **Anna Johnson** of Fresh Energy for our [Working Smarter in the New Normal webinar](#), **Grace Waltz** from the Minneapolis Regional Chamber and **Julia Freeman** of Voices for Racial Justice for our [Building Winning Coalitions webinar](#), and **Ashley Robinson** of America Votes Georgia for our [Powerful Partnerships for Justice event](#).



Conclusion

Public policy work is evolving and teams must also evolve if they are to maintain an edge against their competitors and opponents. The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that flexibility is key, as is innovation.

With the right tools, teams can set themselves up for success. But executing the work will take focus, coordination, and cooperation. Just as technology has taken an ever-increasing role in public policy work, so has coalition-building and collaborative work among teams and stakeholders.

As the work continues to change, we at Plural will remain your partner in advancing the practice of public policy work, with not only the latest innovations in technology but also the advice and learnings from the top minds in the business.



Plural helps busy public policy professionals advance their issues by providing the most intelligent, streamlined, and collaborative public policy tracking platform available.

- Save time with automated legislative tracking
- Streamline workflows so you can respond effectively and quickly to change
- Synchronize team and partner strategy using shared workspaces
- Collaborate with internal and external teams without limit

For more information, contact us at info@pluralpolicy.com