

Assessing Your Association's Fly-In Success



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Planning an annual government relations strategy that aligns with your association's goals often includes conducting one or several Hill Days, whether in Washington, DC, or in state capitals. Fly-ins can be an effective tool in your GR and advocacy toolbox, by engaging members to advance your association's public policy agenda. Consider these four questions when planning your Hill Day, and you can more easily and effectively assess the longer-term success of the event.

Why Are You Having a Hill Day?

This is the most important question to answer, and to do so honestly. Before

planning the details of your Hill Day, you should answer some guiding questions. What is the value and purpose of holding this event? What do you desire to achieve? Are your goals short-term and event-oriented or long-term and mission-centric? What is the return on investment (ROI) of a fly-in?

Is your Hill Day simply an annual item on your to-do list? Is it intended to provide some short-term excitement for your attendees, or is it a single opportunity to engage members within the context of developing and nurturing relationships with elected officials and their offices? Is it a high-profile method for creating buzz around your association or issue?

The answers to these questions should provide the basis for all else that follows, and all those involved in the planning should be clear about the purpose and goal.

Does the Agenda Reflect the Event Purpose?

If you are clear on the purpose, craft an agenda that supports it. Attendees should be clear about the purpose of the Hill Day, including what will occur before, during, and after it.

Dusting off last year's agenda with simple changes to date, time, location, and speaker names is easy, but it is also predictable and uninspiring for repeat attendees. Think creatively, use various types of learning methods, and bring in new speakers. Create opportunities that spur enthusiasm and participation, including games that spark friendly competition between teams. And by all means, use the feedback from each fly-in to improve your program and process.

Using association resources to plan and

implement a fly-in can be expensive and time-consuming, so be clear about ensuring that your Hill Day events are accomplishing the right goals.

Are Your Year-Round Advocacy Activities Integrated With Your Hill Day Purpose and Agenda?

If the purpose of the Hill Day is to support long-term, mission-centric goals, then year-round member engagement activities should reflect that. Policy issues and legislative process information and education should be part of the annual communication plan. Hold and record webinars or podcasts that are of interest. Make sure policy developments, updates, and successes are also included. Know where, when, and how your members receive and process information and deliver it that way.

Take advantage of the enthusiasm of Hill Day attendees. Congratulate them on the results they have achieved. Encourage them to set up a workplace visit by a member of the local district office staff. Set up an award for best advocate of the year. Provide a forum for your members to discuss their successes and ask questions of each other. Thank them often and avoid overtaxing them to prevent burnout.

How Do You Measure Success?

After a Hill Day, many assess its effectiveness by counting how many meetings were held. Or by asking how satisfied the attendees were with the hotel, meals, training, and overall experience. Perhaps you simply observe how happy and enthusiastic your attendees were.

What kind of ROI, consistent with event purpose, resulted? Look closely at

the association's resources that go into the Hill Day, as well as the desired member engagement and benefit received before, during, and after the event. Ask the attendees to evaluate their experiences. Follow-up with a phone call to those whose responses raise interesting, negative, or unanticipated replies. This creates a positive customer service experience. Satisfied and engaged members are more likely to renew their memberships.

Using association resources to plan and implement a fly-in can be expensive and time-consuming, so be clear about ensuring that your Hill Day events are accomplishing the right goals. Plan accordingly, benchmark your results, and use feedback. Shake things up and improve subsequent Hill Days to support your advocacy activity and GR program.

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