

GU POLITICS FELLOW LIZ SIDOTI DISCUSSION GROUP OUTLINE

OPEN FOR BUSINESS

CORPORATE ENGAGEMENT IN POLITICS AND PUBLIC POLICY IN AN UNPREDICTABLE ERA

Discussion Group Synopsis

On its face, Republicans' winning control of the White House, Congress and statehouses coast to coast would seem to have been a positive development for everything from global corporations to mom-and-pop shops. But, so far, the Trump era has been riddled with challenges and risk for companies of all sizes.

An easy-to-anger unconventional businessman occupies the White House while stalemate dominates Capitol Hill. The media is as polarizing as it is instantaneous. Faith in institutions like government and business is at bottom-barrel levels. Globalization is under attack. Income inequality is driving a populist uprising. Shareholder revolts and consumer boycotts materialize weekly.

This discussion group will explore the increasingly tricky intersection of corporations, politics and public policy. Specifically, we'll examine how, in this wildly unpredictable environment, the business community has been forced to adapt its once sure-fire playbook and find new ways to participate in the political process and influence public policy.

Participants will learn how companies have been adjusting strategically and tactically on a range of issues, from jobs and health care to taxes and the environment. Specifically, they'll explore how businesses are retooling their engagement approaches, building new coalitions, developing fit-for-purpose campaigns, embracing the new media landscape and countering local activists through corporate social responsibility programs.

Week 1 – THEN AND NOW: Corporate engagement in the Obama era vs. the Trump era

Under the Obama administration, the business community felt shut out from policymaking, burdened by regulation and threatened by litigation. Today, the Trump administration has invited companies into the process. In Trump's first months, several industries have helped shape policy and seen business-hampering policies overturned. But they also have found themselves forced, by consumers and shareholders, to choose sides on matters like the Paris climate agreement, the travel ban and transgender military service. We compare and contrast the two approaches.

Week 2 -- PLAYING OFFENSE: Crafting an engagement approach that covers all the bases

Today, corporations have to do far more to influence policy and keep shareholders and consumers happy than simply lobbying lawmakers or donating money. They have to engage in a 360-degree way. The first step: identifying the business objective. Next: creating the right relationships. Finally: developing a strategy, identifying key messages and using a range of tactics – i.e. employing all the

tools in the toolbox, from social media to thought leadership events to one-on-one meetings. We look at what several companies learned as they engaged with the new administration.

Week 3 -- PLAYING DEFENSE: Managing crises and the golden rules of communications

Things don't always go as planned. Crises often occur. And they're always bad for business, hampering a company's reputation while also triggering new regulations and litigation as politicians inevitably get involved. Just how bad crises become depends on the response. Accurate, transparent, timely communications to the public and stakeholders often mitigates the damage while the "drip, drip, drip" of information can turn a small crisis into a big one. We look at how companies have responded to – and sought to contain – crises, including some of their own making.

Week 4 -- A SEAT AT THE TABLE: The trickle-down effect of policymaking

When the president signs an executive order or Congress crafts legislation, the impact on companies can be enormous, costing or saving them billions of dollars while adding or eliminating barriers to doing business in the U.S. The fallout – either positive or negative – is real, and companies, which always want to mitigate risk, must know very quickly where they stand on an issue, figure out how to influence the process and prepare to adapt quickly in any scenario. We look at what goes on behind the scenes when a company faces such a situation.

Week 5 -- THE MEDIA MACHINE: How to reach Washington Influencers

People in Washington are a different breed of information consumer – and the corporations that learn that early and adopt their strategies to those consumption habits are a step ahead of the rest. We look at this audience's viewing/reading/listening habits and explore how companies are shelving their traditional consumer marketing playbook in favor of a media approach that ladders up to a larger goal of influencing Washington policymakers – and doing it in a way that doesn't incite backlash among their other audiences, namely shareholder, consumers and employees.

Week 6 -- IT TAKES A VILLAGE: Banding together to influence the political process in new ways

No longer are companies relying primarily on traditional trade associations, like the behemoth Chamber of Commerce, to influence policy. Certainly, trade associations still have a role to play. But CEOs, themselves, are engaging more directly with the Trump administration and companies across different industries increasingly are banding together to create coalitions to fight for or against very specific policy changes, creating a situation of strange bedfellows at times. We examine this tool – and trend -- in corporate influence.

Week 7 -- SHOWING NOT TELLING: Corporate social responsibility that has impact

Corporations have long been criticized as greedy Big Business that only cares about the 1 percent. The reality is different, and several companies have made it a mission to show how they can have impact at a local level by launching corporate social responsibility programs that directly affect the pocketbooks of every day workers in places like Detroit, Phoenix and Baltimore. These companies know that it's not just good business but also good politics, because they're influencing policymakers' constituents in a profound way.

Week 8 – CASE STUDY: Immigration policy and corporate engagement in the Trump era

We take all of what we learned over the past two months and examine the immigration debate through the lens of corporate engagement, from the travel ban, to the legislation to reform legal immigration, to the real-world impact of the limited number of H-1B visas on seasonal businesses and employees. We look at how companies have influenced the process, including where they succeeded and failed.