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## The generation gap in lobbying

By MARK J. GOLDEN, FASAE, CAE | 06/21/2012

All of us in our associations struggle with the issue of generational change: bringing the next generation of professionals into membership and the next generation of leaders into governance. But in the Congressional Communications Report, a new study from the Graduate School of Political Management at George Washington University and Columbia Books, I was struck by another generation gap that hasn't been much talked about, but has a profound impact on how associations do business.



In the comprehensive survey of both Hill staff and the people who lobby them, 51 percent of congressional staff respondents were 35 or younger. Only 17 percent of lobbyists were in that same age range. Nearly two-thirds of lobbyists were 46 or older.

Fifty-six percent of lobbyists had been in the game for 13 or more years; 56 percent of the Hill staffers had been on the job for three or fewer years.

This means that most of the congressional staff your association is attempting to reach and influence has never worked under any other conditions than those established by McCain/Feingold. Their entire career has been conducted in an environment that limited their contact with lobbyists to in-office meetings and widely attended events. They have never experienced the casual contact of a cup of coffee or a sandwich with your lobbying staff. You have never had the opportunity, outside of a strictly business (and severely time constrained) meeting, to try to establish personal credibility or any kind of rapport or relationship with this cohort.

And that is having an impact. Barely 20 percent of Hill staffers find those coveted face-to-face meetings you work so hard to set up to be effective or particularly useful as a source of reliable information. When they go looking for information, they rank associations and their lobbyists dead last in their list of the top-12 sources. (Perhaps it is not surprising that lobbyists themselves believe that their value to staff as a source of information is much higher than it actually is.)

We need to find new ways to make ourselves heard and to get the expertise, data and knowledge we possess to register with a generation that has never been given the opportunity to get to know associations as a credible source of authoritative information.

Golden is the former executive director of the National Court Reporters Association and a past chairman of the ASAE Foundation. Contact him at [mjgolden@cox.net](mailto:mjgolden@cox.net).

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