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Mary Kate Cunningham:

Welcome to the Stronger by Association podcast. This podcast will share stories about how associations are solving problems in the United States and around the world. This is brought to you by American Society of Association Executives, ASAE, a membership organization of more than 46,000 association professionals and industry partners in the United States and 50 countries. Our members make the world safer, better and smarter.

Welcome to the Stronger by Association podcast. In this episode, we'll discuss the importance and value of congressional meetings to our advocacy work in the association community and to the members of Congress and the public at large. I'm so pleased to welcome two key members of the ASAE public policy team, Jeff Evans, associate director of public policy and Nate Fisher, manager of public policy at APAC. Welcome Jeff and Nate.

Nate Fisher:

Thank you, Mary Kate, I'm glad to be back.

Jeff Evans:

Thanks for Mary Kate, nice to be with you today.

Mary Kate Cunningham:

Today, we've got two great guests. Both a veteran of Hill meetings and lobbying and someone new to the process. I'm really interested to talk to them about how their meetings went and what best practices they would share. Jeff, can you share a little bit about the policy issue that our attendees brought to the Hill?

Jeff Evans:

Absolutely, happy to. So we've got two issues of this year for American Associations Day. Two issues that I'm very excited about. The first harkens back to the beginning of when everything changed in March 2020 with COVID, and that is the Pandemic Risk Insurance Act. So associations across the country and everyone really, as things started to shut down, associations lost quite a bit of money due to events being canceled. On average, about 35% of an association's budget is tied directly into major events and conferences. So when things shut down and it was no longer possible to have those events and conferences, on average 35% of the budgets just went away and that's to say nothing of reduced membership dues, sponsorships, things like that.

So our community was in a pretty bad way almost immediately because of those closures, and there was a long period of time that our association community was not able to access flagship relief programming, specifically the Paycheck Protection Program. So it was a little bit a double whammy and this Pandemic Risk Insurance Act introduced last congress by Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney from New York, would have provided business interruption and also event cancellation coverage in the case

of a pandemic moving forward. And it models closely the Terrorism Risk Insurance Act that came about after 9/11.

There are differences but it was modeled closely after that. And in a nutshell, insurers would provide the business interruption and event cancellation coverage and the government would provide a backstop and would pay for 95% of related claims which is a pretty big deal. Now that bill has not been reintroduced in the 117th Congress yet. We're still working with Congresswoman Maloney's staff to get that done but the issue and the need has not necessarily gone away even though things have drastically improved in terms of COVID.

So we're still very much into that piece of legislation because obviously if something happens again in the future, we need to be prepared and to wrap on that bill, the events aspect of associations is a great contributor to the economy, not just for that organization's bottom line but for local economies where these events are being held. So in order for our community to fully re-engage their ability to help support the economy, they need that security and comfort that this program would provide. Now moving over quickly to our other priority for American Associations Day, that is the freedom to invest in tomorrow's Workforce Act. And that actually goes back, pre-COVID. That was first introduced in 2019 and last year for the fly in that didn't happen, that was going to be our number one priority.

But since some of the PPP issue has gone away, we were thankfully included, our community was ... We were able to pivot back towards that historical priority. And what that bill would do would expand the use of 529 education savings plans, the eligible uses of those funds to be used on certifications and other professional credentials, things like occupational licenses and the like. And that's important because right now, 529 plans are specifically available to be used on four-year degrees, vocational schools and some things that are similar to that. And it has a reputation of being a rich person's tool to support academics, things like that.

Again, what this bill would do would make it a little bit more accessible for the average professional, whether someone is just entering into their career or their mid-career, if they can put money into these tax-favorable 529 plans, they would be able to use those monies toward certifications and other things directly related to their field. So they can use those funds to help them grow within their career.

And that's pretty important, not just for the individual, but any industry and profession that has robust credentials and the economy as a whole. We feel that this bill would very quickly inject more skills and experience into the workforce which has a downstream economic impact of adding dynamism to the marketplace, growing consumer choice and frankly building professionals' earning power. Because when an individual achieves a certification or a license, they tend to make more money because they are more distinguishable within their career and profession. And I will just end to say that this is a perfect issue for ASAE because it does not necessarily cater to one industry or another, it would in fact be beneficial to all industries and all professions where there is a robust certification or credential of some sort. And it's been received well. It's a bipartisan, bicameral bill and we are pretty excited about it.

Mary Kate Cunningham:

Thanks so much Jeff, we've got really some great issues to talk about this year and I'm really glad for all the work you put into that and the great data we can bring to the Hill. Now we have another key member of our public policy team, Nate Fisher, to join us, Nate plans and manages American Associations Day. This is his third fly in. And Nate, can you share a bit about the attendees who are joining American Associations Day? Is it open to everyone? Is it open to only seasoned lobbyists?

Nate Fisher:

Yeah. Again, thank you for having me on again. A continuation of our previous podcast, where we talked about preparing for American Associations Day, but I am proud to report that this year virtual American Association Day 2021 was a huge success. We had more people participate than ever before, and that's just a sense that shows that even not being in person and doing virtual meetings work. I know we talked in the past about the importance of American Associations Day and having that dialogue with lawmakers and everyone who participated this year are great members of ASAE, were amazing in that we had over 300 people participate throughout our sessions and representing over 20 states, which was fantastic and a great way to highlight our two big issues, the 529 bill and PRIA that Jeff was just describing to many offices on the Hill.

And we were so honored to have, not just two, but four Sentinel Award winners this year. On the Senate side, we had Bill Cassidy and Joe Manchin who we all know, especially Joe Manchin being a hot ticket right now both joined us. And then on the house, Chris Pappas and Brian Fitzpatrick who were so instrumental in getting a 501(c)(6) organizations eligible for the PPP program. So it was amazing to have not just one or two, but four members of Congress join us. And again, we're going to hear from two amazing guests, one who joined us for the first time and one who has been going to American Associations Day longer than I've been at ASAE.

So it was a great success and I can't wait to hear more from our guests and prepare for American associations Day 2022, which will hopefully be back in-person.

Mary Kate Cunningham:

Thank you so much, Jeff and Nate. Now we're going to get into the portion with our guests. We have two great association professionals, one who's a seasoned association lobbyist, and one who is new to association advocacy, and really has done a great job in her work this year. Now we are pleased to welcome Andrew S. Goldschmidt, CAE, executive director, National Grants Management Association. Welcome Andrew.

Andrew S. Goldschmidt:

Thank you so much, Mary Kate, and welcome to everyone on the podcast. My pleasure to be here.

Jeff Evans:

And thank you so much for joining us Andrew. Really appreciate your time today. And we've known you for quite some time, you've always been a faithful advocate for ASAE and the association community. You and I, while we didn't overlap, we worked at the same association way back when the National Parent Teacher's Association. So when we first met each other, that was a nice connection and I for one, I'm happy that this relationship has continued and very pleased and grateful that we can continue to lean on you for your steadfast advocacy. And to that point, as you have been an association advocate for quite some time now and participated in American Associations Day for several years, I'm just curious how your previous experience with this event and maybe like events from other organizations, how those experiences helped prepare you for the meetings you had the last few weeks.

Andrew S. Goldschmidt:

Well, thank you Jeff. Thank you for the glowing introduction. I really appreciate it. It's my pleasure, with my relationships with the incredible ASAE staff and Jeff is one of many, Mary Kate. We've got Nate here, Chris I could go on and on. And all of you have met in a year or so. It's my pleasure to participate in this

for many years. It's something that we all have to do in our day jobs, but of course we want to give back to our association, which is ASAE, my association for association so thank you for having me. I think one of the most important things that many years have prepared me is that just respect. I know that we have a bit of a sense of instability in the country, which I think bothers many of us. I've grown up in places and at a career where I have to work with both sides.

And just to have civility and respect, and also coming in prepared with a plan with your team, who's going to say what and how you're going to approach it. I thought it was interesting this year that I did send out my teams a link to all the Hill meetings, which I knew was a secure venue to hold those. And not one office did not actually take advantage of our team link, which I thought was an interesting tip there. So they weren't using their own Zoom or other channels. And also to keep in mind that you're not necessarily going to meet with the elected officials themselves. Let's be honest, right? We all know how this works, right? And you're going to be meeting with staffers and the utmost respect for the staffers. They have the ear of the officials and you do get your message passed on, specifically, those staff told me that what a compelling message it was, and in some cases, and that they would get it on the screen of the official this week and that's the exact goal you want to accomplish.

So I think learning over many years adjusting to virtual was a nuance this year. But I think the basics are still the same. I'm sure that Congressional Management Foundation, CMF, will verify some of what I'm saying, but you've got to work through the staffers. That's just how it works.

Jeff Evans:

Sure, that is a reality of what we do as much as we would like to meet with the legislators. Their time is precious, as is a time for staff. But as you noted, they're a little bit more accessible, but it sounded like you based your strategy with conducting these meetings on civility and preparedness which I agree are both completely critical. And ASAE, as a matter of fact, and as I'm sure you know is leading a civil discourse initiative. So we're certainly thrilled to know that you instilled that in your meetings because if anything, we want to come across to these Hill staff as a reasonable and civil resource, one that can be counted on whenever the time calls for it. So very much appreciate that.

And you touched on this a little bit in your answer a moment ago but I'd like to hear more about your experience with the virtual versus in-person. Obviously, everything was virtual this year for American Associations Day. So if you would please talk about what you thought might have been preferable in the virtual format, what might've worked a little bit better and what you consider as things that are missing from the virtual format that are perhaps better suited for in-person.

Andrew S. Goldschmidt:

Great question Jeff. I'm going to give full transparency here. My organization went fully virtual in December of 2019, so I'm going to lean into virtual a little bit and defend it as a medium and those that have questions trying to go back, and boy, am I glad I don't have a building to pay right about now? I'll just be honest, but I know it's not for everybody. And when I add to my team or we have changes on occasion it's very important to understand virtual whether you can operate in that environment. I've purposely think that virtual is great. I think it's amazing that the bandwidth was built so good that we all had a good experience over these last few months that may have been the most amazing feature of the whole environment that we have, that bandwidth was built under our nose.

And boy did it hold up when it needed to, so I'm going to lean in on virtual. I think it's an excellent medium, and I think it's convenient. We've seen that effect on our organization. We've had tremendous growth because it's so darn easy to host a meeting like you get in for the hour and you get

out, and you don't have to commute through our busy Washington, D.C. area. There's so many advantages of that. So I lean in on virtual as a really good medium, and I think there'll be a permanent change, I think more and more Hills because of security, because of the various things going on. I used to shoe leather the Capitol all the time. I worked a block from it for 20 years. And now maybe that's going to be virtual.

Maybe they're not going to be able to shoe leather the Hill so much. So it's going to be very interesting to see if that's a permanent change to some extent. What I would say is that it's very important to put a personal spin in virtual, just like you do, if you were in-person. Yet, it's a little harder to do. You're only seeing people from the neck up or whatever it might be. We planned ahead our team, our Maryland delegation that was very effective. The first thing that we did was we started off by everyone introducing themselves a little bit. Telling the Hill staffers about themselves, their organization, and telling them a little bit about their career, where they've come from. Just take a moment for that. And then the final person that gave that introduction was of course, the staffer.

You can't forget to allow the staffer to introduce themselves and tell a little bit about their political career history. That was extremely effective because it creates a personal bond so that when we transition to the actual issues, it's really like friends consulting about something that should be addressed versus we're here to pitch a lobbying issue or whatever the opposite end would be that would not be as effective. So and our virtual teams that we use, we use our own secure teams, grants, NGMA, National Grants Management Association links and security. I was a little surprised. I thought some of the offices would say, "Well, these my Zoom." Or, "Use my Zoom gov." Or, it didn't happen. So that there was some trust there too, which I found refreshing. And we went perfect with all that and the team we came prepared as well.

We talked about what are our most compelling issues are with our organizations and our team talked about that beforehand. We really got into a groove, I must say after the first meeting where we were really humming along and following meetings, because we just had it down. We knew who was going to speak for the most pertinent part of it, to their organization. We knew what order we would go into and we even provided some very effective links that staff provided. I know for those that may not be familiar on the podcast, Jeff, get that link out about the University of Chicago study much more about the Freedom Act because it's a compelling story about that being much more opportunities for minorities and women and in our organization, just to know, we have two passed our certification. Three years with a degree, three years of grants management experience, but five years without a degree, that's one of the ways that we've provided a channel way to non-college advancement.

So this is right in line with that, this issue, right? Providing more opportunities for advancement, especially for those that are underserved and that was very compelling in our meetings. I must say both sides of the aisle were very interested in this particular bill.

Jeff Evans:

That is great to hear. And I'd actually like to hear more about that in just a moment, but it sounds like you followed the formula with meetings and things went pretty well. And you touched on building that rapport which is essential. And I think so much of that is adding that personal touch, as you mentioned. Self-disclosure is essential to building relationships and relationships are essential to what we do on the Hill, whether it's virtual or in-person. So totally agree with everything you said. And also kudos for envisioning the future a little bit with moving to full virtual with your organization. If you happen to pick stocks just let me know.

Andrew S. Goldschmidt:

Yes. Well, we can all ride the current wave. Lets hope it keeps that way.

Jeff Evans:

Exactly. Well, well done but as I mentioned, I'd like to hear more about your discussion specifically on the freedom to invest in tomorrow's Workforce Act. And you had mentioned that University of Chicago study, they had a task force a few years ago. The task force still exists but the study was from a couple of years ago and basically what that study posits is that certifications and other professional credentials, things like licenses when achieved, they tend to reduce the minority wage gap and the gender wage gap. So African-Americans who achieve a certification or other professional credential, this study showed that they reduced that gap by 43%. And I believe for gender, it was somewhere in the high 30s. I don't have that number of top of mind.

But as you mentioned, data like that are critical to demonstrating the points and when you can put strong numbers like that in front of staff, it really makes the conversation a whole lot easier. So to that point, I'd love to hear more specificity about your conversations around that bill and how you and members of your group tied it back to specific instances of workforce development, anything that your organizations provide that might help professionals as a whole.

Andrew S. Goldschmidt:

Absolutely Jeff. It's very compelling message on the freedom to invest in work force. It really is. I think that study just underlines it and let me tell you, I'm a firm believer with my staff, my leadership mantras as I call it, are data-driven, decision-making, devil's in the details and always have A, B and C backup planning ready beforehand, not until something happens afterwards. That's Andrew's leadership module there for me. So let's start why I said that. Data-driven decision-making, when you provide a link like you did Jeff and the staff, exactly, right?

I mean, I had that in the chat and spoke to it at some point, and it's just data is apparent here. I mean, you went through it just a minute ago, so that really backs up what we're saying. So if you can have your data ready, snippets of data, their time is short, infographics are great, quick bullets of data, which is what this study had. That's the type of thing you want to use. They want to have a quick ... The CliffsNotes version, for those that know what a CliffsNotes is, is always the best here, right?

So that's going to be the most effective and thank you for preparing us well. They were very sympathetic to the freedom to invest and both sides of the aisle. I know there were quite a few sponsors, but my take was, of course we did Maryland delegation, and then I know a couple other folks also, but I'm basing it mostly on the Maryland delegation, which does have both sides of the aisle but wasn't really registering on their radar screens, but it will now. And so I felt like that we were very effective. I definitely felt that way coming out of every meeting. There was one or two offices that were a bit more questioning of what's the financial impact, or does it have a CBO score, things along those lines.

But for the most part, I felt like this just sounds like a win-win for all. It's a way to improve job prospects. It's a jobs bill, it's an advancement for underserved communities and advancement for all and not dependent on a college education. So much is, I mean, for all of us that have been college-educated or even masters, in my case and others, you forget that some people just don't have access to ever college, right? So there has to be a pathway to dance in their professions without that and we've established that as you heard a minute ago with the five-year path without college, or the three-year, you cut off two years and grants manager experience, you can sit for the certified grants management specialist or CGMS. If you do that and this is right in line with that.

And they really resonated with that because we had created that pathway. Now it's up to you Congress to also create that type of pathway, right? So that I know that that message really resonated. We had a team member from the social studies teachers, and of course my wife's a teacher, full transparency, so they need a lot of certification in continuing education. So that resonated greatly. And we also had a gentleman from AIHA, which is industrial hygiene and although they don't offer certification, many of their members have various certifications from their industry. So it really resonated, there were the real examples about how it affects our organization throughout.

Jeff Evans:

That's awesome. I'm really happy to hear that. And you just said it, one of the best benefits of this legislation is that it would impact the association community as a whole, irrespective of what the industry is and what the credential might be if it is one that is necessary to that field, it is of importance. So again, it sounds like you followed a pretty strong formula. And I do remember CliffNotes, certainly guilty of utilizing those in my past education days, but we can leave that there. And also the Andrew's mantras, we might have incorporate that into ongoing social strategy, so I don't think [inaudible 00:26:46]. Sure. So for our last question, I'd like to give you a softball here, and you've already discussed some of these things a little bit, but if you could just wrap it up in a nice bow, what tips do you have for association professionals, for congressional meetings, both for people who may not have conducted them before, and also for those like you who might be a little bit more seasoned?

Andrew S. Goldschmidt:

Great question. I hit on one earlier, which is just to be respectful of whoever you encounter throughout the process. That's something I've learned long in my career and in life and growing up in a family business, just to note that I've actually worked in for quite some time. And that you just learn you have to be customer-service oriented because you are ... It is a little bit of a sales or you're pitching an issue and you're trying to get a listen and they're extremely busy, probably grants managers are very busy right now. Trust me, I understand, but they help people may even be more busier. Having knowing many people worked on the Hill the staffers are ... God bless them. I mean a lot of them are younger and singles because it's so much hard work up there and they don't get paid that great.

I mean, let's just be honest. I've been doing this a long time. And so just to be very respectful of whoever you encounter because I know that they'll take that message to the elected official. And I've worked with members in the past like, "Oh, no, we didn't get to see senator so-and-so or congress person so-and-so." And I was just like, "That's okay. The staff person is the key, they're going to pass the message on." Right? So just to keep that in mind, don't let your members or yourself get discouraged. Work through the people that are willing to listen and pass on the message. So that's one of the biggest tips, just be respectful of everybody throughout the process. Come prepared, their time is very limited. I mentioned earlier. Come prepared with your quick message, infographics, and one-sheets are very helpful.

Thank you, ASAE staff for providing us very valuable one-sheets. And by the way, pertinent to the state too, we had our Maryland sheet ... We have 15% of our members in Maryland, that was really compelling. So that has got a real effect on Maryland. So the Maryland delegation is like, "Wow, you got 15% of your members are in Maryland." But I added that to, "Here's the Maryland sheet that ASAE gave us. Look, how many jobs are in associations here?" And then certification, look how many jobs it can create and opportunities are for many. It just was extremely compelling. And we had an insurance, somebody very good on insurance for the PRIA Act as well, Pandemic Risk Insurance. So we really came

prepared, come prepared. You don't have to know the Moby Dick level expansive knowledge, but you got to be prepared with your true talking points that will resonate.

And so we didn't have tremendous advancement meetings, but we did have meetings where we all planned a little, we knew who was going to speak first and we knew who was going to lead, which anybody who was a constituent and the actual official, I had that delegation member lead, right? It wasn't always me. I led with my particular Congressman. Another person led with another one where she was the direct constituent. So that also resonates too when I'm talking to my actual voter here, right? so that's very important to keep that in mind. If you can, we had districts where it didn't apply, or you have senators that apply to all. We just agree to plan it beforehand. So come prepared to lead. Always write the thank you right afterwards.

I'm one of those people, like if you're applying for a job with MGMA, you better write that thank you the next day. You can call me old school a little bit if you want, but I just think it shows the attention to detail and we fire those off and we got quick responses like, "Yeah, like I said, I'm bringing that up with the official this week, this Friday." I got that kind of information back. And there were some offices that did not respond to our inquiries. You're not going to win them all. I did have a couple where they seem to ignore our first approach and I just sent another one to another staffer thinking I may not have directed this to the right staffer. Would you be the right staffer? It's not like, "Hey, the other person didn't respond to me. Can you respond?" There's a big difference there in how you approach it, right? So keep that in mind. Very positive, optimistic customer service. We're here to consult. We're here to help, we're here to partner, we're here to work together, both sides of the aisle, regardless of who you are.

Jeff Evans:

That is excellent. Again it sounds like you hit all the notes just right. And going back to that respect and civility, wholeheartedly agree. I also tend to conduct my meetings and outreach in a similar fashion because just take any meeting, whether it's on the Hill or if it has nothing to do with policy, the people you're speaking with might not necessarily remember the specifics of the conversation, but they will remember how you made them feel. So that's extremely important and I'm very happy to hear that. And I'm also thrilled to hear about the thank you and the follow-up there because I might be millennial, but my mom did instill within me the importance of a handwritten thank you note. So I'm a big believer in that as well.

So it sounds like, as I said, you did everything not just right, but perfectly. We greatly appreciate your time, not just today, but during the meetings and throughout your time in this space, just supporting our community. And we look forward to continuing this relationship. I can guarantee you that we will ask things of you in the future. So I hope that you're as gracious as you have been, which I'm sure you will be. But really on behalf of ASAE our policy team, I just want to say, thank you again.

Andrew S. Goldschmidt:

Thank you. We were well-prepared because of this incredible team and yes, I've known all of you for many years, but that's a good thing, right? So that means you're contributing, I'm contributing. So thank you. Thank you for the kind words. My pleasure-

Mary Kate Cunningham:

Thank you so much for joining us Andrew.

Andrew S. Goldschmidt:

My pleasure. Thank you so much, everybody. And-

Jeff Evans:

Thank you.

Andrew S. Goldschmidt:

... we'll talk again soon.

Jeff Evans:

All righty-

Andrew S. Goldschmidt:

Take care.

Jeff Evans:

... take care.

Mary Kate Cunningham:

I am pleased to welcome the Ksenija Polla, CMP, regional director ICCA North America. Ksenija thank you so much for joining us today.

Ksenija Polla:

Thank you for having me.

Nate Fisher:

Well Ksenija, again welcome and thank you again for joining us. I know we first connected over a year ago, way back in early 2020, getting ready for an in-person American Associations Day. But we all know the world had other plans for us then but we were so excited that you were able to join us this year for virtual American Associations Day 2021, which I know was your first fly-in event that you ever participated in. So can you describe what it was like as a first time attendee?

Ksenija Polla:

Thank you Nate. And good of you to actually remember. We met last year and we're getting ready for our in-person fly in. And I had my colleague who was going to hold my hand and I was all geared up, had my flights all ready, and then COVID happened. So when you guys started this year with a virtual one, I was a little bit hesitant to actually do it in such a manner because I was on my own here in my office. I thought, "Ooh, will I be able to do this?" But I thought, "Okay, I already said, okay, last year. So let me try and do this. We've had experience with virtual for a year, so let's try and do this. And thanks to you and your team it was actually a painless experience, I have to say. You have prepared us with the program as part of the American Associations Day, as well as the prep session, they were really helpful to get our heads around it.

And most importantly, what was really helpful was the one pagers for the associations, also for Oregon, where I'm based at, and which we could share with the congressional staffers as well as the one-pagers on the bills we were advocating for.

Nate Fisher:

Yeah, that's awesome. Before we get into some of the meetings that you had, how did you prepare for those meetings, especially as you said being alone, virtually and not being in-person. What was your process of preparing for those meetings?

Ksenija Polla:

So one of the tips when we were doing those prep sessions, which you guys arranged was to really look into who we are meeting and what additional information we have from our association's perspective. So I actually was able to look into our own database and pull out some reports, which were connected to the PRIA, the Pandemic Risk Insurance Act, which we were bringing to the attention of the congressional staffers and could really relate some facts and figures, which we had as ECA, not only for the US market, but also for the Oregonian market and in terms of how much revenue was lost and how that impacted the constituents in Oregon.

So that was really helpful. And then one other thing you guys managed to help me with is to team me up with one of your colleagues who was also a newbie in advocacy, Amy on your international council team. And we wrote a script, met beforehand and really discussed who's going to do what and split the conversation and the topics based on the expertise and knowledge we both had.

Nate Fisher:

That's awesome. That's great to hear. I know earlier we were talking about the importance of data and making sure that everyone's prepared for the meetings and even participating for the first time and how easy it seems to prepare for those meetings. That's good to hear and for people who might be unsure of participating in the future. But let's get into the actual meetings themselves. I know you met with several congressional offices, including Senator Ron Wyden, from your State of Oregon who chairs the all-important Senate Finance Committee. What was that discussion like?

Ksenija Polla:

So originally I have set up a meeting with one of the different congressional staffers from Senator Wyden's office, which I received the contact of from your office. But then at the day of the call, we actually spoke to the person in charge of this particular issue, the finance issue, which was really great, because that conversation was so robust. Brianna has actually looked up everything ahead of time. So she looked up even more than what we had in that one-pager. She knew exactly that it was already in front of Senator Wyden, and she was able to ask very specific questions and give us very specific timelines and actions she was going to take after our call, which was really helpful because she seemed to know more than we, and I was okay because that's her bread and butter, and that's what she does every day.

So she had very specific questions which we were able to answer and we even managed to follow up with her already on your behalf and make the introductions to your team.

Nate Fisher:

Yeah, that sounds amazing. You lead into my next question, which is the keeping in touch with the staff? I know one of the important things that we talked about earlier and that we stress during our prep sessions is the critical point of keeping in touch with staff and making sure that the issue is always in front of staff and in front of mind for legislators. So I already know that you've already reached out and

kept in touch with some of the offices that you met with. Can you describe what your follow-up strategy is throughout this process?

Ksenija Polla:

So one of the tips was definitely to follow up straight away and say, "Thank you for the time." Which we have done after every single call and we have attached all the information we have received from ASAE staff. The one-pagers as well as the Oregon specific one-pager about the value of associations, to Oregon. And as I said, with Senator Wyden's office, we went even a step further and have introduced your advocacy team to them to keep that front and center. What we have realized is that with the PRIA, a lot of people wanted to know more on when is it going to be current again? So that was part of our follow-up strategy to really make sure that as soon as we have a date that we let them know when this is current again and for the rest, we have been able to mark down some of the actions which we need to do at the later stage, some of the questions we needed to find out and some of the information we need to get for them.

Nate Fisher:

That's great to hear. I'm keeping up with that dialogue and making sure the staff have all of their answers as this is so important to make sure we keep on pushing for our issues. So thank you on behalf of all of ASAE for that. On a more personal note, I know we've wanted you to come in D.C. last year, and this year we finally got you for your first fly in. What was your favorite part of the experience?

Ksenija Polla:

So my favorite part was to realize that they're all humans and they are all very approachable and they are just like us and that they are very interested to hear from people on the ground about some of their issues, which are surrounding their constituents. And I don't know if it was because of the virtual environment, but they weren't in their suits and ties, and they were all really super friendly and kind, which made it very easy for something which I first thought was a little bit daunting for a first-timer. It's still ended up a really very positive experience, which helped me in my own organization. We are an international organization and advocacy isn't as easy in the rest of the world as it is with the US where it's much more structured.

But I realized that through this experience, we can do a lot of support for our members globally with tools like you have prepared a lot of those one-pagers. We've done also, since I've been doing this, I managed to already prepare two one-pagers for our members to give them some tools for their advocacy efforts in their countries around the world.

Nate Fisher:

That's amazing. I'd love to hear that. I'm a little international buff myself. So I'm glad that even something as simple as a one-pagers is helping reach out and help advocacy strategies not only here, but in other countries too. Before I let you go, I have one last question. What would you say to somebody who's brand new, hasn't done a fly-in before and might be unsure to get involved?

Ksenija Polla:

I would say just do it. It will be a very positive experience if you embrace it, especially if you have somebody along ... You shouldn't do it alone. I don't think it would be as a pleasant experience if you're totally on your own. But if you have at least one more person in your group to advocate for the issue,

you should definitely try and do it, get outside of your comfort zone because the benefits of it are really multifaceted. So you should really embrace it and try and do it.

Nate Fisher:

That's great. Well, Ksenija on behalf of Mary Kate, Jeff, myself, ASAE and all ASAE members everywhere, thank you so much. It was such a pleasure to have you join us this year. And we know we have an amazing advocate in Oregon now. So thank you so much and we cannot wait to have you in person, hopefully for American Associations Day 2022. So thank you.

Ksenija Polla:

Thank you so much, and I can't wait to do this in-person as well. Thank you.

Mary Kate Cunningham:

Thank you all for listening to this episode of Stronger By Association. We had some really great discussions about advocacy and the importance of going to the Hill and really reminding members of Congress and their staff about association professionals, the vital role we play in the economy and society. Jeff, what were your thoughts about the interviews today?

Jeff Evans:

Well, I was thrilled to join today. We had two great advocates with extremely interesting perspectives, but my main takeaway, and I know I touched on this with Andrew a couple of times, and he had mentioned the civility and the respect piece and also Ksenija had mentioned understanding that the people she was talking to were actual human beings, which I can certainly relate to being a former beginning lobbyist. But for me, I think what's most important no matter what is to remember that we all are in fact humans and to treat each other with respect is always going to be beneficial to the goal or priority, the relationship building, whatever it might be. And so I was happy to hear that Andrew seems to understand that and Ksenija as well. And that's just something that we try and instill in our advocates because no matter what, showing that respect is, in my opinion, of the utmost.

Mary Kate Cunningham:

Thank you so much Jeff. And Nate, can you share any of your key takeaways from the conversation?

Nate Fisher:

Yeah, I think my big key takeaway from both of our guests is it doesn't matter what your background is, what association you work for, if you don't have a lot of experience in advocacy or have been in the advocacy world longer than I've been alive, everyone is able and has their first amendment right to lobby on the Hill. And everyone can have an amazing experience at American Associations Day and that we're growing and can't wait for an even better experience next year.

Mary Kate Cunningham:

Thank you so much Jeff and Nate for joining us. I know you both are so busy, so it's great to have you on the podcast to talk about our bread and butter, the advocacy work that we do.

Jeff Evans:

Happy to be here and besides, you're the boss. So wherever you tell us to be.

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Mary Kate Cunningham:

And thanks so much to the listeners. I would say for our closing comments, save the date on September 30th for the ASAE Summit Awards, we are going to be in-person in Washington, D.C. and it will be a great event to celebrate the association community and the great impact that we make. Thank you for listening to this episode of Stronger By Association. Thank you so much for listening for more information, visit www.thepowerofa.org and stay tuned for more episodes.