

A man with a backpack is signing a document at a table. In the background, a woman in a blazer stands near a large American flag. The scene is set in a bright, modern interior.

TRAINING MANUAL : Q2 2021

HOW TO TALK TO A REPORTER OR ELECTED OFFICIAL

**THE FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT:
PREVENTING CORRUPTION AND
PROTECTING VOTING RIGHTS**



BUSINESSFORWARD
FOUNDATION

INTRODUCTION

Business Forward has helped more than 250,000 business leaders brief policymakers and work with local media, publish op-eds, testify at public hearings, lobby members of Congress and the White House, and advocate online.

They have appeared on *CNN*, *MSNBC*, *CNBC*, *FOX News*, and hundreds of local broadcast and radio stations. They've been featured in national outlets, like the *Wall Street Journal*, *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and hundreds of local papers.

We've also helped business leaders submit testimony to state legislatures, EPA, DHS, House Ways and Means, Senate Finance, and the White House.

We're here to help you make the most of your time fighting for the issues that you care about. This manual is intended to help you get started.

The New York Times



CHICAGO
SUN★TIMES

Bloomberg
Businessweek

MILWAUKEE • WISCONSIN
JOURNAL SENTINEL



THE PLAIN DEALER
CLEVELAND.COM

The
Washington
Post

MSNBC

PUGET SOUND
BUSINESS JOURNAL

THE SACRAMENTO BEE

THE
HILL



Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

The Detroit News

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
WSJ

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POLICY BACKGROUND

THE *FREEDOM TO VOTE ACT* IS A SET OF REFORMS FOR PROTECTING AND IMPROVING AMERICAN DEMOCRACY.

1. STRENGTHEN VOTING RIGHTS

- Create a nationwide standard for early voting and automatic voter registration
- Set guidelines for vote-by-mail and ensure access to early voting
- Require same-day voter registration in federal elections

2. PREVENT CORRUPTION IN GOVERNMENT

- End partisan gerrymandering by setting specific criteria for Congressional redistricting
- Protect nonpartisan election officials

3. ENHANCE ELECTION SECURITY

- Provide grants to upgrade election systems
- Implement voting system security requirements
- Set standards for post-election audits
- Create reporting requirement for foreign involvement

4. INCREASE TRANSPARENCY IN POLITICAL SPENDING

- Require increased disclosure of political donations
- Add transparency rules for spending on political ads

On September 14th, a group of nine Senators released the *Freedom to Vote Act*.

The bill is a revised, compromise version of the *For the People Act*, which passed the House in May but stalled in the Senate.

KEY CONCEPTS

At our briefings, small business leaders tend to make one or more of six critical points.

SMALL BUSINESS LEADERS WANT MONEY OUT OF POLITICS MORE THAN ANYONE.

We're tired of being asked for contributions — and tired of being criticized for the ones we give. The only people who like the current system are incumbents and entrenched, special interests. Our system will work better if we take big, dark money out of campaigns.

TRANSPARENCY IS A POWERFUL FORCE IN BUSINESS. WE NEED MORE OF IT IN GOVERNMENT.

We're responsive to our stockholders, employees, and customers. Government should be more responsive to its citizens.

Increased disclosure of political donations would ensure a government that listens to Main Street — not just big, corporate donors.

IF WE ALLOW CORRUPTION IN ELECTIONS, IT WILL SPREAD TO THE REST OF GOVERNMENT.

Gerrymandering and voter suppression are both ways to stay in office. An official without fear of her next election is more likely to break the rules.

WE BENEFIT FROM OPERATING IN THE WORLD'S "SAFE HAVEN" FOR BUSINESS. WE NEED TO PROTECT THAT.

Ignoring government corruption will make us look like the rest of the world, and that will make it harder for us to attract investment, open new markets, and create new jobs.

OUR EMPLOYEES, CUSTOMERS, AND SUPPLIERS WORK HARD EVERY DAY. WE SHOULDN'T MAKE IT HARDER TO VOTE.

Restrictive voter laws are messing with something that isn't broken. My employees manage long commutes, second jobs, night school, and family. They're not lazy. They're just busy — and responsible. We should make it easy for them to vote.

RESTRICTIVE VOTER LAWS DIVIDE OUR COMMUNITIES, AND NO ONE WANTS TO INVEST IN DIVIDED COMMUNITIES.

States compete with one another for new investment and jobs, and companies look for a talented workforce, sound infrastructure, good schools, and a strong community. These election laws send the wrong signal and will turn off investors. Once you start losing bids, it gets harder to catch up.

8 RULES TO FOLLOW

1: MAKE THE BUSINESS CASE

You have a business to run, so you want the time you volunteer to be meaningful and efficient. Focus on what you can best contribute: **the business case.**

1. THE QUESTIONS UNDECIDED AMERICANS ARE ASKING TEND TO RELATE TO JOBS, TAXES, ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY, AND GOVERNMENT WASTE.

They want to know how a particular bill or issue will affect their industry, their town, and their employer. And they trust business leaders more than politicians.

A business owner can explain what a reliable rule of law means for their business, and how the *Freedom to Vote Act* prevents corruption.

“

I own a small solar company in Texas. Here is how a corrupt bureaucracy has allowed entrenched, special interests to use dark money and lobbying to delay and weaken energy policies which would have driven growth in our sector.

”

2. A DATA-DRIVEN, RESULTS-ORIENTED APPROACH, FOCUSED ON REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE, HELPS DEPOLITICIZE CONTENTIOUS ISSUES.

Undecided voters appreciate an evidence-based approach, and business leaders can connect their experiences with proposed public policy decisions.

For example, a recruiter in Florida can explain that the *Freedom to Vote Act* would strengthen her community and help it attract workers.

“

I recruit employees for software companies in Jacksonville. Making it harder for Floridians to vote hurts our state's reputation, and makes it difficult to convince talented workers to relocate here.

”

2: UNDERSTAND YOUR MISSION

Business leaders generally contribute to the debate in one of three ways. **Before you speak out, be sure to understand which role you're playing.**

1. RAISING AWARENESS ABOUT A PROBLEM

For example, a business leader can explain the cost of managing employees who struggle to find the time to vote without interrupting their work.

And they can demonstrate that the solutions in the *Freedom to Vote Act* make sense.

“ Making sure employees have the time to vote and understand the process isn't about any party, candidate, or issue - it's about eliminating the choice between coming to work and going to the polls.

The *Freedom to Vote Act* would make registering and voting more accessible and consistent.

”

2. PUSHING SPECIFIC CONCEPTS DURING A LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

For example, an Oregon business leader can use the facts on vote-by-mail security to explain how proposed laws intentionally disenfranchise voters and undermine the strength of their democracy.

“

Oregon was the first state to institute a universal vote-by-mail system, and we know our election system is accurate, fair, and trustworthy.

Since 2000, our election administrators have sent out more than 100 million mail ballots. There have been only 12 cases of proven fraud, 0.00001% of all votes.

The *Freedom to Vote Act* would make sure that Americans don't lose the freedom to vote, which would actually be a problem, unlike voter fraud.

”

3. HELPING CLOSE A DEAL, SUPPORTING A TOUGH VOTE

Today, it's too easy for special interests to control what becomes a law. Even allies can block a “good” bill because it's not “perfect.”

For example, a business leader can respond to Americans who think the *Freedom to Vote Act* should go further.

“

You may be right that the *Freedom to Vote Act* doesn't completely remove the influence of money in politics.

But if this bill fails, special interests will continue to take advantage of our government — and small businesses like mine will pay the price.

”

3: HAVE A CLEAR OPINION

“On the one hand... but, on the other hand...” won’t help a member of Congress decide how to vote, and newspapers are unlikely to publish an op-ed that fails to pick a side. **If you’re going to speak out, be clear.** Raise an alarm. Provide cover on a tough vote. Avoid equivocation.

BRAD SMITH, PRESIDENT, MICROSOFT

WHY WE ARE CONCERNED ABOUT GEORGIA’S NEW ELECTION LAW

Just last month, Microsoft shared its decision to invest substantially in Atlanta. As I announced together with Georgia’s Governor and Atlanta’s Mayor, our company is making significant investments that will put Atlanta “on the path toward becoming one of Microsoft’s largest hubs in the United States in the coming decade, after Puget Sound and Silicon Valley.” We are creating thousands of new jobs, and we are proud to become a rapidly growing member of Atlanta’s important business community.

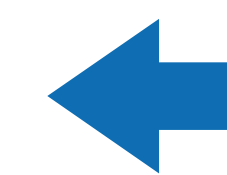
That’s why we are concerned about many aspects of Georgia’s new “Election Integrity Act.” Two things are clear to us. First, the right to vote is the most cherished aspect of democracy. And second, this new law has important provisions that unfairly restrict the rights of people to vote legally, securely, and safely. That’s why we voiced concern about this legislation even before it was passed.

We are concerned by the law’s impact on communities of color, on every voter, and on our employees and their families. We share the views of other corporate leaders that it’s not only right but essential for the business community to stand together in opposition to the harmful provisions and other similar legislation that may be considered elsewhere.

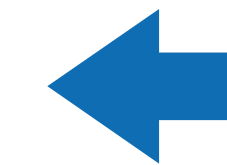
It’s also important for the business community to be principled, substantive, and concrete in explaining its concerns. Let me share some of the new law’s provisions that we believe will harm individuals’ ability to exercise their right to vote:

[Restrictions on voting drop boxes, absentee ballots, and provisional ballots]...

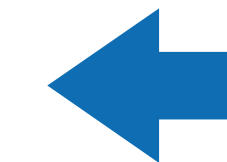
We hope that companies will come together and make clear that a healthy business requires a healthy community. And a healthy community requires that everyone have the right to vote conveniently, safely, and securely. This new law falls short of the mark, and we should work together to press the Georgia legislature to change it.



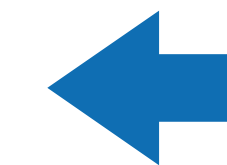
INTRODUCES GEORGIA LAW BY
CONNECTING TO STRATEGIC
INVESTMENT DECISIONS



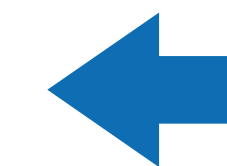
EXPRESSES CLEAR OPINION



PIVOTS TO BUSINESS COMMUNITY
AS A WHOLE



PROVIDES SPECIFIC EVIDENCE
TO JUSTIFY OPPOSITION



REITERATES BUSINESS CASE AND
CLOSES WITH CALL TO ACTION FOR
FELLOW BUSINESS LEADERS

4: SPEAK FOR YOUR EMPLOYEES, CUSTOMERS, SUPPLIERS, AND COMPETITORS

You're most effective when you cite your employees, customers, suppliers, or competitors as evidence. For example, an accountant with 50 clients has credibility on simplifying the tax code, while an accountant with 50 employees has credibility explaining the kinds of health care options they value.

Most business leaders share the name of their company when they talk with reporters, publish an op-ed, or speak out elsewhere. These executives are building their company's brand:

“

At ABC Construction, we deal with government for permits, over regulations, and as a contractor. The only thing worse than bureaucracy is corrupt bureaucracy. We can't afford to let big, special interests buy even more control.

”

Alternatively, you can also speak generally, without naming your company, as an expert in the industry:

“

I've been in the construction business for 20 years. I deal with government for permits, over regulations, and as a contractor. The only thing worse than bureaucracy is corrupt bureaucracy. We can't afford to let big, special interests buy even more control.

”

BUSINESS LEADERS ACROSS SECTORS RELY ON THE RULE OF LAW TO ENSURE AMERICA REMAINS AN ATTRACTIVE PLACE TO DO BUSINESS.

“I've done business all over the world. The **US is still near the top of business-friendly countries**, thanks, in large measure, to its **long-established history of respecting and upholding the law.**”

- Richard Robertson, Director, Sybro Global
Denver, CO

“**Businesses thrive when our democratic institutions are protected**, and without protections from the courts, our economy and free market society start crumbling.”

- Millie Herrera, President, The Miami Group & Associates
Miami, FL

“We represent a brand in America that is fairness, voting, democracy, and **that helps our companies when we walk into the room... those values that we bring with us as Americans around the world — we all benefit from that.**

If we are seen as losing that at any level systemically, that is going to hurt everybody down the road... people respect American companies for a reason, and we want to retain that.”

Charles Phillips, Managing Partner & Co-Founder,
RECOGNIZE

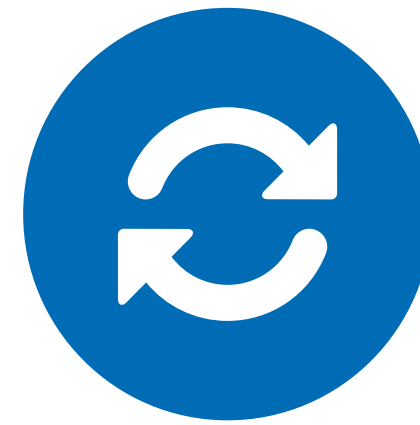
5: KEEP IT SHORT, KEEP IT SIMPLE (AND PRACTICE)

Talking live to a radio reporter? You'll get two questions and about 20 seconds. Taping a TV interview in your office? The station will use about 30 seconds of your 15-minute interview. Meeting with your senator? You'll get about five minutes.



REPORTERS CAN'T QUOTE YOU IF YOUR ANSWERS ARE TOO LONG.

Elected officials, who meet with dozens of constituents every day, won't remember your key points if they're buried.



TO BE SUCCESSFUL, MAKE YOUR POINT QUICKLY, AND MAKE IT REPEATEDLY.

Extend your idea with examples. Ideally, start each interview with three points in mind; practice each point before you speak with the reporter or official; and practice referring back to your points in different ways.



USING LOCAL EXAMPLES AND SIMPLE COMPARISONS CAN HELP YOU MAKE YOUR POINT MORE QUICKLY.

For example, a business leader in Michigan can advocate for increased infrastructure spending by explaining that 22% of their roads are in poor condition, which costs the average driver \$644 per year. By comparison, 7% of Oregon's roads are in poor condition, which costs drivers only \$256 per year.

6: REFRAME QUESTIONS ABOUT “HOT BUTTON” ISSUES

The whole point of having business leaders speak out is to get beyond the partisan or hot button issues that dominate most press coverage.

Your job is to focus on what the issue means for business, jobs, and economic growth. That’s your area of expertise. If a reporter does ask you an off-topic question, **pivot back to your key points.**

EXAMPLE -

A business leader can support the *Freedom to Vote Act* by explaining what it would mean for the communities they live and work in. But a reporter may respond to your point by asking about the political feasibility of the bill, particular senators, or even the filibuster.

SUGGESTED ANSWER:

“

I can’t speak to the political process, or where certain elected officials are on the bill, but I do know that voters should pick who governs them, and officials shouldn’t be able to pick who votes for them.

And I think a majority of voters agrees with me.

”

SMALL BUSINESS LEADERS ARGUE FOR A FAIR, ACCESSIBLE DEMOCRACY.

A thriving economy depends on an orderly, functioning democracy.

- Jon Bruss, Health Care Administrator, Grand Rapids, MI

Democracy will keep and attract the best and most talented people.

- Jim Cannon, System 3 Analytics, Deerfield, NH

It is important that a majority vote represents a majority of the people.

- Eleanor Biderman, Plattsmouth, NE

Every voter has the right to choose who they want to represent them on issues that they feel are important and best for their community.

- Chrisseda Columbus, CCME Training Service, Atlanta, GA

7: ACT LIKE YOU'RE ON-THE-RECORD, EVEN WHEN YOU'RE NOT

The rules for “on” and “off” the record can vary from reporter to reporter. As a general rule, **we recommend you operate on-the-record – and pick your words accordingly.**



ON-THE-RECORD:

The reporter can quote you directly (by name).



OFF-THE-RECORD:

Off-the-record can mean different things. It usually means the reporter can only use information if a second source verifies or shares it. Sometimes, it relates to how you are cited. For example, a reporter may refer to you indirectly (for example, as “a partner at a Cleveland VC firm”), or she may use your information without citing you at all. Some reporters consider this method of citing individuals “on background.” On background can also mean you are willing to share research or other information with a reporter but do not want to be featured in the story.



Because reporters apply these rules differently, you need to set the terms of the conversation before the interview begins. If you do not specify “off,” you are “on.” If you specify “off,” and the reporter says nothing, you are still “on.” If you do not want to be quoted, establish the terms under which the reporter may use the information and how it will be attributed.

REMEMBER: YOU CAN'T TAKE SOMETHING OFF THE RECORD AFTER THE FACT.

8: PICK YOUR BATTLES – AND LET BUSINESS FORWARD HELP

A single business leader, acting alone, is unlikely to have an impact. But hundreds or thousands of business leaders, making similar arguments at the same time, are hard to ignore.

It also helps to deliver your op-ed, interview, or post when your particular issue is in play. For example, we had a handful of opportunities to fix our immigration laws over the last few years. Each opportunity was driven by the budget process, or some other legislative priority. Each time, immigration advocates and Business Forward worked together to deliver business support for a reasonable compromise that would protect immigrants and respect the rule of law.

We encourage you to share your work with us, and we promise to limit our “digital actions,” surveys, and “a reporter just called” requests to moments when you can really make a difference. We won’t waste your time.

With your permission, we can also include your comments in testimony we present to Congressional committees and federal agencies.



FOR WOMEN’S HEALTH WEEK, BUSINESS LEADERS FIGHT BACK

This week is Women’s Health Week, and **more than 1,700 entrepreneurs, executives and small business owners** have signed on to a letter from Business Forward, affirming their belief that access to health care is essential to women’s professional and personal success.

MAY 17, 2019



TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF 1,000+ SMALL BUSINESS OWNERS CONCERNED ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE

APRIL 25, 2017



BUSINESS LEADERS TO POLITICIANS: “RESPECT THE RULE OF LAW”

New report shows business leaders’ concerns over attacks on the judiciary... **475 business leaders submitted personal statements** about America’s courts.

MARCH 7, 2019



IN THEIR OWN WORDS: 10 BUSINESS LEADERS EXPLAIN WHY THEY ARE CALLING FOR MAJOR CHANGES AT AMERICA’S SCHOOLS.

JULY 24, 2018

BEST PRACTICES

OP-EDS AND LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

OP-EDS

Op-eds make an argument about a pressing issue, usually featuring an unusual and compelling voice from the community. Most newspapers limit op-eds to 600 words.

VALUE

In deciding whether to publish your piece, editors will ask four questions. Is your issue important? Is it timely? Does it have a significant local angle? And does the author have a credible and interesting angle?

STRUCTURE

Use eight to 10 short paragraphs, about two to three sentences each. Start with an anecdote that introduces your point of view. Explain why the issue is important right now. Introduce your business, and explain how this issue affects your business. Close with a call to action.

PITCHING

Larger papers have online tools that allow you to submit your op-ed. Others invite you to email your document. Start with the largest newspaper in your market, or a leading outlet in your particular industry. Be sure to check whether it's published a similar piece recently. If so, move on to your second choice. When you submit an op-ed to one paper, you can't shop it to another until the first gives you an answer.

RESOURCES & LINKS

<https://resource-media.org/writing-slam-dunk-op-ed/>

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR (LTES)

LTEs typically respond directly to an article or op-ed the newspaper has recently published. You can also respond to a recent news event. Keep your draft to 200 words or less. We recommend you use four short paragraphs, 1-2 sentences each. Don't be surprised if the newspaper edits for space. Larger papers have online tools that allow you to submit your LTE. Others invite you to email your document.

RESOURCES & LINKS

<https://resource-media.org/letters-to-the-editor/>

TALKING TO YOUR ELECTED OFFICIALS

GENERAL

A small number of calls from informed constituents can have a bigger impact than you might think. Regular communication, over time, builds trust. Be sure to focus on your elected officials – the ones who represent where you live, where you work, or your employees. In Congress, Representatives of other districts are likely to ignore you out of deference to your Representative and because they cannot use their office funds to pay for communications outside their districts.

LETTERS

Use email. Regular mail to Congress is re-routed, sorted, and x-rayed. This can add weeks to delivery. Most offices have email forms accessible from the “contact” tab on the lawmaker’s official website. Include the legislation or issue in your subject line – with a “yes” or “no” to make your opinion clear (e.g., “NO on steel tariffs” or “YES on carbon pricing”). Keep your message to three paragraphs. Use a fact-based approach. Cite local examples, if you have them. Identify yourself as a constituent and business leader in your first paragraph.

CALLS

Identify yourself as a constituent or as a business leader with a presence in the district. Identify the topic/bill you want to discuss. Be clear about your position. Ask for the Legislative Assistant covering your issue. If they refer you to a Constituent Liaison, that’s okay. If you have data about the bill or your business, describe it (e.g., “These new tariffs raised the price of steel by 25%. This new cost wiped out 40% of my profit this month.”). Ask for the name and email of the staffer responsible for that issue, then send him or her a follow-up email with the data.

REQUEST A MEETING, OFFER A TOUR

This is one of the best ways to break through with a business government office. Ask for the Legislative Assistant covering your issue. Request a meeting with the official. If dealing with a Member of Congress, request a meeting back home, during in-district work periods. If appropriate, invite your elected official to visit your place of business.

RESOURCES & LINKS

FIND YOUR REPRESENTATIVES

<https://www.house.gov/representatives/find-your-representative>

RESEARCH THEIR BIOS, COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

<https://www.congress.gov/members>

RESEARCH THEIR VOTING RECORD

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/votes>

SEARCH FOR SPONSORED BILLS

<https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/browse>

FOUR STEPS TO ANSWER ANY QUESTION

LISTEN

PAUSE

RESPOND

STOP

LISTEN

- Really listen to what the reporter is saying.
- Don't miss an assumption or loaded statement.

FOUR STEPS TO ANSWER ANY QUESTION

LISTEN

PAUSE

RESPOND

STOP

PAUSE

- Take a moment to collect your thoughts.
- Remain calm and count to five in your head.
- Start with a complete sentence that gets to your main point.
- Avoid filler words.

FOUR STEPS TO ANSWER ANY QUESTION

LISTEN

PAUSE

RESPOND

STOP

SOFTBALLS

- Tell me about X.
- What role does business need to play in public policy?
- Why do business leaders care about expanding voting rights?

HARDBALLS

- Should Delta have come out stronger against restrictive voting laws in Georgia?
- Mitch McConnell says Big Business is acting like a “woke parallel government.” How do you respond?

CURVEBALLS

- Do you think Biden’s dog Major should be allowed to stay at the White House even though he’s had several biting incidents?
- Who did you vote for in 2020?
- What do you think about vaccine passports?

FOUR STEPS TO ANSWER ANY QUESTION

LISTEN

PAUSE

RESPOND

STOP

STOP

- After you have shared your point, take a beat. Stop talking.
- Count to 10 in your head, and then ask if they have another question.
- Remember: Reporters use silence as a tactic to get you to keep talking.

STAY ON MESSAGE

BRIDGING:

Acknowledge the question and move to your message.

“ Let me put that in perspective... ”

“ What’s important to remember is... ”

“ That’s not my area of expertise, but what I’d like you to know is... ”

FLAGGING:

Let the reporter know that you’re about to give one of your main points.

“ The most important thing you need to know is... ”

“ Here’s what I really want to make clear... ”

“ The critical point here is... ”

ABOUT BUSINESS FORWARD FOUNDATION

The Business Forward Foundation is an independent research organization that takes a business-minded look at policy issues affecting America's economic competitiveness. The Foundation combines insights and advice from more than 250,000 local business leaders across the country with rigorous policy analysis to educate the general public on some of the most important issues of our time.



INFO@BUSINESSFWD.ORG

BUSINESSFWD.ORG

655 15TH STREET NW
SUITE 580
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20005

202.861.1270



THANK YOU FOR JOINING
