

SpeakUp 2017 Denver, Colorado

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Governmental Advocacy should be a high priority for any AIA chapter and you can't get any higher than the 2nd Annual AIA SpeakUp in Denver, Colorado. AIA Hawaii State Council provided a generous scholarship for me to attend this event which provided seminars and an interesting group exercise to promote advocacy skills through the grassroots of AIA. There was representation from across the country with local chapters ranging from a few dozen to thousands of members. Many were very inexperienced in advocacy whereas others had well-developed Political Action Committees (PACS) and targeted action plans.

The range of participants created a great learning environment where less experienced participants could glean info from more experienced chapters in addition to the programmed workshops held throughout the event. There was a great presentation on effective communication and presentation as well as panel discussions with State Legislators who shed some light on how to get your foot in the door and effective lobbying techniques. I found sessions where specific examples of effective lobbying and actual outcomes were most interesting and showed how diverse groups can find common interest and make effective arguments to lawmakers.

The workshop closed with a group exercise where we were split into five teams and each team had to produce a comprehensive lobbying strategy in support of a fictitious bill to support a Green School Requirement. The exercise involved organizing a group of 12-15 people and resolving specific tasks including:

- Overall Strategy
- Targeting
- Messaging
- Communications
- Forming Coalitions
- Member Engagement
- Effectively Utilizing PACs

The final day involved the teams presenting our plans to a panel of judges playing the local AIA Board. Our goal was to convince to support our team strategy and authorize us to move ahead. Each team took a very different approach with some doing skits and others taking a very dark approach using fear as the main motivator. I was very surprised at the diversity of approaches and the level of competitiveness between teams that developed in spite of the organizer's best intentions. Our team took a very analytical approach which I felt took the exercise to heart and really tried to focus on the specific tasks given to us. In the end, the team that took the doom and gloom approach was selected because their core message and talking points were the most memorable.

All-in-all it was a good experience and the most valuable part of the experience were the seminars and networking with other people who are involved with advocacy across the country. I would recommend that anyone interested in advocacy inquire with the AIA HSC to see if there is an opportunity for you to participate in SpeakUp 2018.

Mahalo to the AIA HSC for supporting my attendance of SpeakUp 2017.