

BUSINESS RESPONSE TO PHASING OUT DACA

This report marks the fifth in Weber Shandwick's series exploring business reactions to White House policy statements this year. The latest example of corporate activism arose from the Sept. 5, 2017 announcement by Attorney General Jeff Sessions to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. While some companies voiced opinion prior to this announcement, the majority of responses came within 24 hours of the announcement.

By Sept. 8, 2017, Weber Shandwick had collected responses from 62 companies, summarized below...

Of the 62 responses issued...

- + 77% came from CEOs, former CEOs or company founders
- + 94% were from companies with headquarters that leaned Democratic in the 2016 presidential election, with half coming from California alone – the state with the highest population of DACA recipients
- + 50% were from Fortune 1000 companies, representing over 6 million employees
- + 71% were signatories to letters from business leaders sent to President Trump and Congress by FWD.us (793 signatures collected) or a similar letter from the biotech industry (185 signatures)
- + 77% came from companies that also responded to other policy decisions this year, with 11% having responded to all five issues. 23% came from companies that had not responded to the prior events
- + 53% were issued by technology sector companies, followed by 10% from financial services, 8% business services and 5% from the media sector
- + 69% were via Twitter, but many other media were also leveraged, including interviews with traditional outlets (21%), company blogs/websites (14%), Facebook (5%), and op-eds (3%)
- + Among those who tweeted, eight different hashtags were used: #DACA (31%), #Dreamers (26%), #DefendDACA (26%), #WithDreamers (10%), #HeretoStay (5%), #AmericanDream, #Resist, and #DreamAct (2% each)

¹ Please note, companies are included in our analysis only if they have offered a distinct comment or response. Being a signatory to the FWD.us or biotech letter does not automatically put someone on our radar.

In terms of the content...

- + None of the reactions were in favor of the decision for eliminating DACA, but tonality varied. While 47% of statements were overtly negative, 50% were neutral and 3% were positive, or more upbeat in tone
 - o Many negative comments expressed disappointment with the DACA decision. Words such as “cruel,” “wrong,” “misguided” and “harmful” were used
 - o Neutral statements took a more forward-looking and constructive approach, calling on Congress to find a “permanent” and “long-term solution” to the challenges faced by DACA residents. In fact, far more comments specifically referenced Congress (47%) than President Trump (16%)
 - o Positively-toned messages focused on the benefits of diversity or appreciation for immigrants
- + Regardless of tone, almost three-quarters of business responses conveyed support for Dreamers, highlighting the group’s contributions to individual companies, the economy and communities, while other statements recognized the hardships that DACA’s repeal may induce. Some employed research data to demonstrate the economic importance of the 800,000 DACA holders. Keywords used include “contribute,” “community,” “strong,” and “value”
- + At least one-third of responses reflected on American society and how our treatment of Dreamers should align with the nation’s fundamental values. The terms “moral,” “human,” “core,” and “American Dream” were used. Additionally, some incorporated personal stories of the executive’s own immigrant experiences or those of company employees, personifying the ideals of DACA

Insights

Leverage personal stories and data to strengthen a policy position. Personal examples of the immigrant experience humanized the Dreamer as well as the executive activist. Citation of studies quantifying the economic benefits of Dreamers effectively conveyed the importance of this cohort. These are important tools for building authenticity and credibility.

Consider the effect your response may have before pressing “send.” Emotional and critical response gets noticed. Media coverage focused on the more provocative sentiments expressed by several business leaders, and while some may welcome that attention, other corporate activists may wish to present a measured reaction. Plan accordingly.

Twitter has been the chosen messenger, but traditional media maintains important influence. The depth and emotion that is captured in an interview, op-ed or employee letter offers the opportunity to fully explain an executive’s position, and gets shared multifold through social vehicles and syndicated articles.

Business coalitions and industry initiatives are a good entry point for those new to activism. The letters to President Trump from FWD.us and the biotech sector got significant play in the media, and while only a handful of signatories were spotlighted, hundreds of others provided strength in numbers.

Increasingly, we are witnessing the emergence of “upstanding” CEOs who choose to speak publicly on behalf of company values and social justice. Apparently, these CEOs believe that the benefits outweigh the risks in taking a public position on government policy.

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