A grassroots organization is the network of informed members who are ready, willing and able to answer a call for legislative action on a moment's notice. It is a critical part of an association’s political advocacy. A successful grassroots program is a two-way street: the state association keeps the membership fully informed of what it will be called upon to do and why and the network is organized to respond promptly when the call is issued.

Once the state association’s legislative position on a bill or regulation is set and the association wants to activate its grassroots, the association can inform its members of the bill or regulation through sending Legislative Bulletins and urging members to write their state legislators conveying the association’s concerns.

**Legislative Bulletins:** Legislative bulletins provide continuing information to the membership on state legislation important to the association, the association’s position on such legislation, and why members need to contact their legislator. Action bulletins should focus on a single issue and be simple and to the point. Here is a sample Legislative Bulletin:

**Sample Legislative Action Bulletin**

To: Presidents and Legislative Chairmen of Local Associations*

Background: As you know from prior bulletins, S.313 was introduced on behalf of the State Association for the purpose of eliminating from present law the provision for 90-day temporary licensing of agents representing life insurance companies, except agents who will collect premiums directly from policyholders. This morning, John Jones, President of the state association, appeared before the Senate Insurance Committee to support the bill on behalf of agents and advisors in the state. Upon the conclusion of testimony, the Insurance Committee adjourned until Monday, March 4 at 11:00 a.m., at which time consideration of S. 313 will be taken up in executive session.

The need for S. 313:

More and more states are realizing that temporary licensing is contrary to the best interests of the insuring public. At present, less than half of states issue such licenses.

In a recent five-state survey, only 54% of the temporary licenses issued were ever made permanent, indicating that the other 46% (approximately 13,000 agents) dealt with the public in important insurance matters but had no real knowledge of interest in life insurance as a key to family security.

Before approaching even one family to give advice regarding this most important
investment, an agent should be required to demonstrate at least a basic knowledge of the fundamentals of life insurance and its uses, whereas temporary licensees are required to meet no such requirements under present law.

Action Requested: Since S. 313 is one of the key measures in your state association's legislative program this session, it is essential that you assume responsibility for getting as many members as possible to contact members of the Insurance Committee immediately, urging favorable action on S. 313. Enclosed are the names and addresses of the members of the Senate Insurance Committee.

(*The list of addresses may be modified to conform to the grassroots organization of each state association.)

Letters to Legislators: Letters or e-mails are the backbone of a good grassroots operation. Their effectiveness will depend as much on what and how the members write as on whether they write. Form letters and obvious "pressure mail" look like a put-up job and should be avoided. Offensive, demanding, and threatening letters are worse than no letters at all. Letters that don't state reasons or letters, telegrams and petitions signed by large numbers of people carry little weight. Legislators are not impressed by ill-conceived, poorly-worded, and badly printed "resolutions."

What a good legislator wants to hear is an expression of the true, well-reasoned opinions of his constituents so that he or she can take a reasonable stand based on the desires and needs of those he or she represents.

So, the most effective grassroots letters are those written by members who have at least a basic understanding of the issues involved and who take the time to put them on paper. Encourage these members to write in their own words and on their own letterhead or stationery. Instruct them to come quickly to the point and give specific reasons for the action they are asking their legislators to take. Never threaten, warn, or abuse a legislator. Here is a sample letter to a legislator:

Sample Letter to Legislator

Hon. Richard H. Roe, Chairman
Senate Insurance Committee
State Capitol
City, State, Zip

Dear Senator Roe:

I have learned that on Monday, March 4, your Committee will take action on S. 313, a bill to eliminate the provision for the temporary licensing of life insurance agents from our insurance laws, except for those agents physically collecting premiums.

It is my understanding that more and more states are beginning to question the advisability of temporary licensing when measured against the public interest, and that now less than half of the states permit such licensing.

Based on recent statistics, which I believe are in the hands of your Committee, it seems fair to say that a high percentage of agents holding temporary licenses are merely "trying insurance" between jobs, and
have no intention of making life insurance a career. The best long-range interests of the insuring public cannot be properly served by persons who remain in the insurance business for only a brief period of time.

I hope you will agree that the purchase of life insurance is too vital to the security of the families of our state to entrust its sale to unqualified and perhaps disinterested persons. Therefore, I respectfully request that you use your influence to have the Senate Insurance Committee take favorable action on S. 313.

Very truly yours,

Robert O. Roberts

When to Activate the Grassroots: When a bill of importance to the association is scheduled for a committee hearing in the state legislature, activate your grassroots organization to contact members of the legislative committee to stress the association's position. If there is not time for a grassroots effort before the committee votes, then mobilize the members before the hearings are held.

If and when the bill is reported out of committee, the grassroots operation should again be called into action, this time contacting the entire house considering the bill. The same operation must be repeated in the other house of the legislature if necessary.

If the measure is not in trouble and is not a major issue of the session, it may be wise to save the grassroots support for another more serious issue. Calling out the troops every time a bill comes up can water down and exhaust an otherwise efficient grassroots system.

Encourage members to contact those legislators who have voted for the association's position, expressing their appreciation. Remember, there will be other sessions and other bills in the future.