



IREM® From the Front Lines Podcast

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AID+ESG Summit Recap

Welcome to another edition of From the Front Lines, where we discuss both the day-to-day and one-of-a-kind issues facing real estate managers. In this episode, we talk to Rebecca O'Brien CFRE, Associate Executive Director of the IREM Foundation, and Ted Thurn, IREM Senior Director of Government Affairs about the Advocacy Impact Day, AID, and ESG Summit held in Washington, DC, February 27th and 28th. Welcome to the podcast, Rebecca and Ted. First, can you give us a recap of the event schedule and speakers? Rebecca, why don't you start?

Absolutely. So we started the day with ESG programming and kicked off with an opening session called ESG Can't Wait, Get Ahead of the Curve with Technology. And this featured Liza Benson who is a partner at Modern Ventures, which is a venture capital firm that invests in technologies that tend to thrive in real estate. She brought in Matt Ellis, who is the founder and CEO of Measurable, a very common platform that is used in real estate management to measure ESG progress. They had a fireside chat, and generated lots of information for our audience. It was a great session. And then following the opening session, we broke into breakout rooms for concurrent sessions, where guests were able to learn from some of our speakers on how to get started with their ESG programming kind of, you know, practical hands-on sessions on what types of first steps you might take. And then also a history on the evolution of ESG that was presented a little bit more of, you know, how ESG has evolved in real estate over time. And then our group came back together for a luncheon programming and an opportunity to network with one another, and also heard from a panel of ESG experts, great panel moderated by Kimberly Pexton, from JBG Smith, and she led a discussion on how we can transform ESG from just simply compliance, actually moving to competitive advantage. And then following the panel, we wrapped up with awarding the Jackson Control Sustainability Awards, which recognize excellent and sustainable property management.

And Ted, how about you on the advocacy portion?

Yeah, so the afternoon session was more advocacy focused and members were able to attend a presentation from Ben Evans, who is the federal legislative director for the US Green Building

Council. And Ben was able to talk about how to get more insight to incentives through the Inflation Reduction Act. So Ben was giving some kind of pointers and tips to our members about how to get these green incentives. And then after that, we had a presentation with myself, and a couple of our lobbyists from NAR to talk about a few things, to talk about how to conduct successful meetings with legislators, the issues that we brought to the Hill, which was the Choice in Affordable Housing Act, and also the Respect State Housing Laws Act. And then after our presentation, the members were then able to go to a cocktail reception, where they were able, again, to network with their colleagues and peers. It was just a great opportunity to meet in an informal fashion with a drink and some appetizers to talk about the day, what they experienced and how they were going to go to the Hill and who are they going to meet with. And then after that, our members, we had over 100 members attend the Summit, which was great. And they all went to the Hill the next day to meet with their federal representatives. And we conducted over 100 meetings with members of Congress. So it was really a great Advocacy Day, really impactful and valuable for members.

And starting with you Ted, what was the big highlight or headline coming out of this event?

Well, for me, what I would say was the headline is how IREM 's Advocacy Day expanded to a full day of programming, which included the environmental, social and corporate governance, also known as ESG. You know, in years past, what we've done is that our orientation for Advocacy Impact Day was afternoon sessions. It was about two to three hours and we talked about, okay, this is how you meet with legislators. Here's some of the issues that we're going to talk about and then next day they went to the Hill, but incorporating the ESG education, you know, IREM, and the foundation really aligned and providing tools and resources on sustainability for IREM members. And again, I think it was really impactful to hear about all the ESG programming, and the tools that you can use in your toolkit and the incentives through the Inflation Reduction Act. And I really think it elevated the experience for members. And like Rebecca mentioned, it also included the working lunch and networking opportunities. I think another highlight for me was that we invited students from Virginia Tech, they were able to attend and learn about the issues facing the property, management industry, and being able to network with our seasoned professionals. So to me, that was really great to see how we have this new young workforce ready to enter into the property management industry, and just being able to connect with our IREM members, you know, for networking for mentoring. So that was really a great highlight for me.

And Rebecca, what was the big highlight for you?

Yeah, well, I agree with everything Ted shared. But I would also say that just seeing so much engagement during the sessions, even in sessions where we weren't really planning for much Q&A, there were so many questions from the audience, I think people were really interested and hungry for knowledge. And that was great to see. I think also, you know, there was a lot of great networking happening, I heard a few conversations between some of our attendees and panel speakers, just continuing this, you know, deepening of knowledge sharing and understanding. And

then, as Ted mentioned, the students that were there, you know, it was kind of brought up that for those students when they enter into real estate management careers, in you know, the next three to five years, you know, ESG is going to just be an integrated part of the norm of real estate management. And so it was really interesting to kind of see the event happen through their eyes.

And Ted, what themes emerged among the speakers and attendee discussions on the advocacy side?

Well, really, the theme that I really picked up on is that there are a lot of issues facing the real estate management industry, but that IREM is at the forefront of addressing these issues. So we were able to talk about how members are working with legislators on issues such as the Choice in Affordable Housing Act, which does expand and streamline Section 8 vouchers, and reducing the federal burdens being placed on landlords with Section 8. We were also able to talk about the Respect State Housing Laws Act, which is another burden placed on owners and operators regarding the eviction process. So we were talking about those issues, how to expand more affordable housing, how to lessen federal burdens, but also how to implement long term sustainability solutions that best fits with the needs of our members' buildings through market based approaches. Another theme that I would say is we were able to provide how we are advocating on these issues. For example, our president Libby Ekre, she was just invited to a meeting with Marcia Fudge's office who's the secretary for HUD and talk about housing affordability with them. We also, right before the Summit, one of our members who's also an instructor, Ralph Amigucci, testified before the House Financial Services Committee about examining the failures of status quo housing policy. Mr. Amigucci, you know, did a great job with his testimony. He talked about not only the challenges, but the solutions that could have a positive impact on housing affordability, like increasing the nation's housing supply, such as through the Choice in Affordable Housing Act, also through expanding low-income housing tax credits, also known as LIHTC. He also talked about eliminating exclusionary zoning and harmful land use policies, and also talked about incentivizing adaptive reuse of underutilized commercial properties. So those were the themes that I experienced at the Summit. Just talking about, hey, here, we're facing a lot of challenges. But IREM and our members are at the forefront to address these challenges.

Rebecca, what were some of the key messages from the experts who spoke at the ESG Summit?

Well, I really loved that our ESG panel actually came right in. And you know, being in DC and knowing that ESG is kind of a political hot topic, the very first question that they addressed is, you know, the political side of ESG. And I think that was really a big theme of the ESG content as well is that, you know, people need to kind of get stopped getting caught in the politics of ESG and focus on the business case. The moderator pointed out that, you know, nearly all of the panelists that were speaking to us about ESG had been in this industry for more than 30 years. And that really spoke to the fact that, you know, while we're calling sustainability initiatives, ESG at the moment,

really, this is something that's been around for a very long time, and ultimately, is just good business case, good business sense. So when we're talking about, you know, taking care of properties and reducing consumption of resource that really has a positive impact to the ownership's bottom line. And that's also good risk management. So I think that was, that was kind of one of the big themes was that, you know, stop focusing on the political aspect of ESG and really think about how you can leverage these concepts to improve your properties and their profitability. And then the second kind of takeaway, I think was, was just really measure, you know, measure your, your progress. And if nothing else, even if you can't start a full-blown program, and you don't have a lot of resources, at least start looking at your properties and understanding how you can measure what you're doing currently, so that you have something to benchmark against in the future.

And can you recap the Jackson Control Sustainability Awards? Who were the winners, and what's next?

Yeah, so that was very exciting. This was our second year hosting the Jackson Control Sustainability Awards. And this year, we actually recognized a total of about 15 properties across three different categories. Categories included, just, you know, kind of measurable, quantitative awards for like water reduction and properties, as well as carbon and energy reduction. But then out of those 12 properties, we selected three groups to recognize in these leadership award buckets. So the first one is called the Sustainability Innovation Award. And it's awarded to a property that's applied innovative green building technology to achieve their sustainability goals. This year, we awarded that designation to via which is a 71-unit multi-family housing property in California, and is managed by Essex Property Trust. The second award is called the Sustainability Team Award. And it recognizes a firm that has created a culture of encouraging sustainability initiatives, which we know is important because it takes you know, an entire team and truly a culture to make progress in this area. So we were excited to award that to Hazard Center Office, which is managed by Avison Young. And Hazard is located in San Diego, California, they're doing a great job, so it was wonderful to acknowledge that team. And then the third and last but not least, Leadership Award is called the Visionary Impact Award. And that gives honors to a property that has demonstrated exceptional leadership and sustainability, which was awarded to the ownership team at Physicians Realty Trust. They have demonstrated incredible leadership and dedication to environmentally friendly building practices across their entire portfolio. Now, out of those three top award winners, we will be launching a People's Choice Award for kind of a final recognition. And we'll be publishing some, you know, many case studies on each of these properties, and inviting the public to vote in April during Earth Month.

And Ted, can you tell us about the visit to the Hill? What issues did members discuss with legislators and what was the reception?

Yeah, so visits to the Hill were great. Like I mentioned earlier, we conducted over 100 meetings with legislative offices, issues that we brought, as I mentioned, was the Choice in Affordable Housing Act, the Respect State Housing Laws Act, and we also talked about sustainability. There's not a bill on sustainability. But as Rebecca mentioned, and I mentioned previously, it was more about how do we implement sustainability through a business kind of perspective, really moving away from this politically charged, thought of ESG or sustainability and just talk about how this can be a win-win for both sides for our members, and for you know, legislators how they can implement thought-based legislation that really can be supportive of the property management industry. Now, I was with our Arizona group when we went to the Hill, so unfortunately, I wasn't able to attend all 100 meetings, that would be quite the trick there. But what was exciting is that we met with our representatives from Arizona, where our president Libby is from, and I was with their group. And one of the representatives that we met with Representative Deb Lesko, we talked to her about the bills. And then we heard from her staff, like the next day, saying that she was willing to be a co-sponsor to support the Respect State Housing Laws Act. So that was really exciting, encouraging, just shows that, you know, our voice does matter, and that we were able to get legislators to support a bill. So just seeing that advocacy in action was very exciting. So it was a great reception, it was a great visit to the Hill, our members always love going to the Hill to talk with their federal legislators. So I would say it was a great success in our meetings on the Hill.

[Any final thoughts to share on AID and ESG Summit this year?](#)

We know that real estate managers make a difference in the lives of the people who occupy the buildings that they manage and within their communities. And we know that you know, in the work our audience is doing every day, they're making an impact. This event was a really great opportunity to even go a step further than that, and coming together in a formalized way to understand how real estate managers can make an even deeper impact not just in their communities where they're working, but across the profession and the industry in general. Understanding how you know, advocacy plays into real estate, and, you know, the improvement of properties and communities, as well as people's lives. And the aspect of ESG that's creating, you know, benefits to the environment, as well as social good, and creating a positive bottom-line impact as well. And I'd like to give a special thank you to one of our sponsors, Avison Young who contributed to help make this event possible.

Yeah, I would echo that. I think it was a very robust meeting, we really elevated the experience. I think people enjoy that we're able to put educational components into it. So I really feel like yes, as Rebecca mentioned, this is kind of the first year that we've done it. And look forward to doing it again in 2025, and, you know, maybe adding more, you know, types of programming. It might, you know, not only talk about sustainability, but, you know, we might talk about other issues as well. So really looking forward to the planning and 2025.

[Thanks for joining us, Rebecca, and Ted.](#)

Thank you. And I just want to say Todd, one last thing is that I would like to send out thank yous to our members who were able to attend the event. I'd like to say a thank you to all the presenters at the Summit. And especially would like to say a big thank you to the staff at HQ. It was definitely a team challenge, and it was a team project. And so I'd like to thank everybody, staff at HQ for this.

Thanks Ted and thanks Todd. It was great to be here today.

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