

## Sign Code Work: The Importance of Getting Involved



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When it comes to understanding the need to get involved with local sign code issues, there are few more passionate than Ken Soday. Earlier this year, Ken was named the 2018 ISA Sign Code Champion for a lifetime of work devoted to building bridges between planners and local sign, graphics and visual communications companies.

Of course, there are options for advocacy throughout all levels of government: local, state and federal. But what it takes primarily is involvement. That's why representatives from three sign companies—SmithCraft Custom Architectural Signs, Trav-Ad Signs and FastSigns—attended a White House ceremony hailing the new tax law. Nicole Bergstrom and Brandon McMillen, both of SmithCraft, spoke, detailing how the law benefited them personally and their company.

Sign, graphics and visual communications companies can convey the impact of laws—local, state or federal—not only for the effect

on them directly, but also on their customers: other small businesses. But it takes a willingness to get involved. And that is something Ken has done since he joined the industry.

Back then, it didn't take long for him to run into a sign code issue that negatively impacted his company. He quickly got involved with ISA and received help, resulting in positive sign code changes. Ken found he really enjoyed the work, "trying to help people understand that we're not trying to sell bigger signs, but to provide the right product for our clients."

Now, he chairs the legislative committee for the Southern States Sign Association (SSSA) and continues to work on behalf of SSSA and the industry. But his involvement—and the involvement of others like him—has helped improve the relationship between the industry and those who regulate it, he believes.

"Up until seven or eight years ago, planners were not being taught about signs, or if they

were, they were taught that they should all go away," said Ken, partner of Stellar Signs & Design in Winter Park, Fla. "Now we have the Sign Research Foundation and its National Signage Research & Education Conference and these other programs. My job is getting a little easier."

Working on sign code issues for the industry means taking time away from his business, but it is a sacrifice he happily makes. "I've always felt like somebody needs to stand up for the people that aren't standing up. A lot of companies don't realize how this benefits them. Somebody has to do it. I have a passion for it, so I might as well do it."

He's willing to share the workload, though. "For somebody who is interested in helping out, I'd suggest they contact their regional association or ISA and let them know, 'I have an interest in doing this.'"

### STATS • FACTS

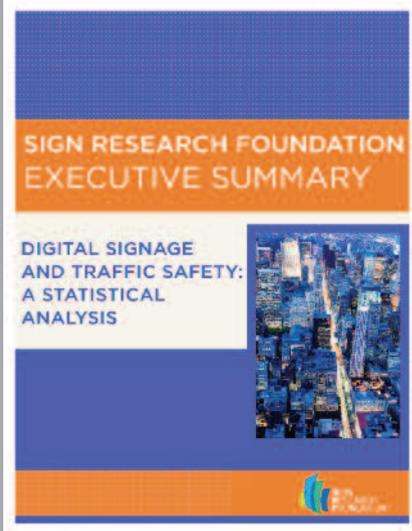
Small business owners estimate they would spend \$83,000 in regulatory startup costs, according to the Small Business Administration.



## A CHAMPION'S Top Tools

Ken Soday, the 2018 ISA Sign Code Champion, maintains a list of planners with whom he works, and whenever new research is released, he sends it on to them. He also makes sure that they see existing research. Here are his top resources for fighting restrictive sign codes:

- **Digital Signage and Traffic Safety: A Statistical Analysis**, with research conducted by Texas A&M University. The study showed no relation between installation of a new sign and an increase in traffic accidents. “There is a stigma around message centers,” he said. “They’re not for every business, but they have a real viable place in our industry and for business owners.”
- **Model sign codes.** SRF currently offers two options—A Framework for On-Premise Sign Regulations; and A Legal and Technical Exploration of On-Premise Sign Regulations—with an updated version due out this year.
- **The Economic Impact of On-Premise Signage**, with a 1997 study and updated version in 2013. Those studies, Ken believes, “open up more eyes than anything else, to realize how much impact this can have on the economic area. Planners had no idea what signs mean to a business.”
- **Planning for Sign Code Success™ Events**, which bring planners in for a daylong training on crafting reasonable sign codes. “That is probably one of the best things that ISA has ever come up with,” Ken said. Find out about upcoming events from ISA and make sure local planners know about these events, as they are aimed at local officials.



Ken maintains a list of planners with whom he works frequently, and whenever ISA or SRF releases new research, “I send it to them and say, ‘Look at the evidence-based codes compared to just choosing what a nearby community has as its code.’”

The years of educating planners—through formal events like Planning for Sign Code Success™ and informally by industry professionals reaching out to share research—are starting to pay off. And a new influx of younger planners—who perhaps received some education about signs while in college—are starting to move into municipal leadership. “They’re open to a little bit better use of signage.”

But the battle is far from over and he would appreciate a few more recruits. “The only way that we can continue to make advances is for everyone to stay vigilant. Keep your eyes and ears open. Some of the cities and counties are reaching out to the sign contractors, saying, ‘We’re looking for help with sign code. We’d like to have some input.’ Unfortunately, it’s not happening everywhere and not happening often enough. We have to be more proactive at making sure they know we’re here, why signs are important and that we want to help.” | 

## NEED **HELP** with a Sign Code Issue?

ISA's advocacy work is performed for free for local communities and ISA member companies, as well as member companies of ISA Affiliated Associations. Because we work throughout the U.S.—and there truly is nothing new under the sun—chances are good that we've encountered your issue before. We may know a winning strategy. Or we may have access to the right compelling argument provided by the Sign Research Foundation. If you have concerns about local, state or federal regulations, please contact ISA at [signcodehelp@signs.org](mailto:signcodehelp@signs.org).