

# **LOBBYING**

## **Introduction**

Lobbying is the process of trying to influence decision makers. It is as old as politics itself, and just as legitimate. Lobbying can be carried out as a small group or an individual either through meetings, letter writing, phone calls or brief presentation.

All politicians can and should be lobbied. It is their duty to know what their constituents think and acquaint themselves with all sides of an issue. Those who are friendly to your position may give you more time. However, even those opposed can be affected by a direct show of community support for an issue.

You don't have to be an expert to lobby a politician. Concentrate more on the effect of the issue in your community. Stick to the community/personal side of the issue - that's the area where you are the expert.

Remember politicians are people. They have the same hopes, fears, dreams and failings as the rest of us. Generally, they want to get re-elected.

## **LOBBYING - GENERAL GUIDELINES**

### **Fears About Lobbying Politicians**

Many of us believe politicians know more than we do or they wouldn't be in decision-making positions. We think we aren't articulate enough or that we'll freeze when we approach the politicians. Maybe they'll ask questions we can't answer.

Often, we forget that the politician's job is to serve us. That's why they get elected to office. We forget that it's us -- the voters -- who hold the power.

Once you start meeting the politicians you'll see the "mystery" that surrounds them quickly fades. They're just ordinary people who come from a variety of backgrounds. They're often very responsive to the voters -- the people who can affect their future.

Many of our fears about lobbying can be addressed by looking at some groups who have lobbied government on issues that touch the average citizen. Who were their members? What made them credible spokespersons? Can we see any similarities between them and our attempts to organize a lobby?

If we look, for example, at the lobby formed several years ago to fight against the de-indexation of pensions, we see that the members of this lobby group were average senior citizens who had credibility as lobbyists because the pension issue directly affected their lives.

### **It's Not a Waste of Time**

Another obstacle to lobbying is the view that it's a waste of time, that we, alone, can't make a difference. But if our voices aren't heard, then our opponents will be the only group to get the ear of the decision-makers.

Too often, we measure our lobbying success on the outcome of legislation. We make our lobbying campaign into a "do or die" effort, feeling that we must either win or lose on the legislation, and there's no in-between. But we can measure victory in other, more realistic ways. For example, if it's the first time we've ever done a lobby, the fact that we organized and sat down with, called or wrote the politicians to express our views can be

seen as a victory in itself. Even if we don't directly see or speak to the politician because he or she is avoiding us, they do get the message that the issue is important to the community.

**There are additional ways to make your lobbying successful.**

1. Develop support by publicizing the issue within your organization and/or the community.
2. Organize additional actions within the community: organize a letter writing campaign, a phone or fax campaign, a letter-to-the-editor campaign to supplement your in-person meeting.

## **FACE-TO-FACE LOBBY**

### **TIPS FOR AN IN-PERSON LOBBY:**

#### **Arrange a Pre-Lobby Meeting**

Members of your lobby delegation should meet before hand to discuss what you're going to say.

#### **Plan the Agenda**

Decide what you want to discuss and the points you want to make. Practice making your pitch. If you are lobbying in a group, choose a spokesperson and a recorder.

#### **Know Your Audience**

Keep your politician's interests in mind. Making the point of the impact of this issue on the community does work. Remember, stick to your subject. Your goal is to persuade the politician to support your position

#### **Know Your Subject**

Anticipate questions and arguments and be prepared to respond. Don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer to some points -- offer to get back with information and be sure you follow through. The fact sheets provided in your kits should help with background information.

#### **Review information**

Review all the material and fact sheets in your lobby kit.

#### **Stick to what you know**

The best way to deal with the issue when talking to a politician is to talk from your own experience -- why this issue is important to you, your family, or your community.

## **Be Clear and Concise**

Don't try to cover too much ground -- confine your comments to the issue at hand. Explain your position, and don't assume the politician understands your point of view. Speak confidently and persuasively.

## **Be a Good Listener**

Try to determine areas of agreement. Avoid arguments and don't lecture. If the politician favours your position, ask for help in persuading his/her government.

## **Follow up with more information**

Don't worry if you're asked a question you can't answer. Just get back to the politician with the information later.

## **Keep control of the meeting**

Don't let the politician sidetrack you onto other issues. Politely stick to the issue at hand.

## **Use your clout in the constituency**

If possible, let the politician know the scope of the lobby. Ask other organizations and unions **who live in the constituency** to follow up by phone calls and letters. Even relatively small numbers of constituents visiting, calling, or writing a politician in his/her riding can be powerful. Constituents are voters who can help re-elect or defeat the MPP in the next election.

## **Try to get a commitment**

Know what you're going to say and what you want from the politician before your meeting. Ideally, you want the politician to support your position. Ask her or him to soften up the other elected members of their party. If possible, try to get a commitment from the politician about what they are prepared to do.

## **Leave the Door Open**

Try to prevent outright rejection of your position. Emphasize your areas of agreement, not your difference.

## **Don't Get Discouraged**

Not every politician will be sympathetic or supportive. Don't allow an early disappointment to stop you from continuing to lobby this politician.

Sometimes they need to hear things several times before they understand the issue, especially if they've never thought about it before. Sometimes they don't realize the importance of the issue to their constituency. **Their position on this issue means votes!**

## **PHONE LOBBY**

### **Points to remember for a successful phone lobby**

#### **Numbers Count**

- ▶ Ask every member of every organization to phone.
- ▶ Ask each member to get a friend to phone.

#### **Use a Script**

- ▶ Have a few people develop a script or speaking points as a guide for those doing the phoning. You can use the issue sheets from the kit to help develop your speaking points.

#### **Speak to the politician**

- ▶ If you are “screened” leave a definite message, stating your views briefly
- ▶ Ask the politician to get back to you
- ▶ Follow-up with another call

## **LETTER LOBBY**

### **Points to remember for a successful letter lobby**

1. Get the name & address right
2. Identify yourself or your organization
3. Get to the point at once
4. Use the issue sheets from the kits to help develop your argument
5. Personalize the issue: show how it affects the community
6. Ask for an action or response
7. Be clear about what you are requesting be done
8. Keep paragraphs to no more than six lines long
9. Numbers count - get support from unions, community groups and friends