

Lobbying Tips

The interests of our clients, our organizations, our fellows and ourselves depend enormously on political decisions that we can influence. So, for example, does the funding of our very jobs: LSC funds, state-controlled IOLA/IOLTA funds, other state funding, and in some places city government grants. Lobbying not only influences public officials on specific questions; it builds relationships with legislators as well as with lobbying partners, enhancing the understanding of our issues and the political presence and clout of the union.

Strategic considerations

- Coordinate with your area CAP Council.
- Get advice from your region's political director and from NOLSW staff.
- Inform other organizations that support your goals; build coalitions and lobby jointly.
- Consider help from *former* clients (to avoid the appearance of an unethical quid pro quo).
- Stay in touch with legislators through newsletters, thank you letters, etc.
- Coordinate your lobbying with effective media work

Prepare for your meeting(s)

- Make an appointment well in advance.
- Identify who in your group are constituents of the legislator.
- Marshall your arguments. For example, the funding of legal services provides access to justice, it saves the state money (reducing shelter and foster care costs and moving people from welfare to SSI/SSD), and it supports union jobs.
- Anticipate questions, and prepare answers for them.
- Prepare a one-page fact sheet that summarizes your points as forcefully as possible. Have enough copies to give the legislators.
- Prepare sufficient copies of any other supporting documents you will want to leave.
- Consider the possible use of an appropriate prop for emphasis, and plan accordingly.
- Tailor your request to each legislator in advance. Are you asking a staunch ally for help with other legislators, a supporter for sponsorship, or a non-supporter to refrain from active opposition? Information about legislators is available on the web.
For a list of state gov't websites, see:
http://www.usa.gov/Agencies/State_and_Territories.shtml
For city gov't websites, see:
http://www.usa.gov/Agencies/Local_Government/Cities.shtml
- If you will be requesting that any legislator send a letter, prepare a sample to take along.
- Agree on who will present each point. If it makes sense for each person to tell of a relevant experience, plan for that. Be flexible, however, and see that everyone is well versed enough to be responsive. Make sure that everyone speaks, and that no one dominates the presentation.
- Agree also on who will take notes and who will be responsible for later follow-up.
- Make sure each member of your team carries business cards.
- Dress appropriately, in business or business casual, with union buttons or pins.
- Arrive together at the meeting and be punctual.
- Be prepared for the very real possibility that you will actually end up talking to a legislative assistant, whose perspective may not be identical to the legislator's.

At your meeting(s)

- Have a spokesperson identify the organization(s) or coalition your group represents.
- Have each member of the team introduce him or herself.
- Those of you who are constituents, say so.
- If the legislator has been helpful in the past, recognize this.
- Ask how familiar the legislator or assistant is with the issue, and whether he/she already has a position, if you don't already know.
- Say exactly what you came for, with specific reference to any relevant bill.
- Quickly go over the fact sheet.
- Present your supporting arguments/anecdotes succinctly and don't overload on facts.
- Stick to the subject, and don't talk about other legislators unless specifically asked.
- Give the legislator a chance to express his/her point of view, and listen respectfully.
- Educate if necessary, but do not become impatient or argumentative.
- If you don't have an answer to a question, offer to get it.
- If someone, even the legislator, gets off topic or goes on too long, interrupt if necessary so you have the time you need to make your points.
- If the answer is "no", make them say it twice. For example, "Will the senator co-sponsor the bill?" and "Will you encourage the senator to co-sponsor the bill?"
- Even if you are turned down, leave on a friendly note.
- Discuss the next step. Ask for their card and schedule another meeting in a week to see what progress has been made.

Media work

When formulating your release:

- Define your goals, the more specific the better.
- Identify your audience. What message, in what format, will best reach them?
- Focus on the message, not the organization.
- Relate your message to a news "peg". Many papers only feature stories about groups about once a year, but hard news coverage, which includes events, has no limit.
- Try to fit in a human-interest element.
- Choose a communications medium.
- Draw up a fact sheet concisely explaining your agenda.
- Include background, resources, statistics, graphs, and a summary of the relevant bill.

When speaking with the media:

- Stay "on message".
- Do not trust reporters to share your goals.
- Be able to verify your information.
- Remember your ethical obligations to any client.