

Tips for Effective Citizen Lobbyingⁱ

Preparing to Lobby:

- **Make an appointment.** Dropping-in or cold-calling is okay, but you are more likely to have your decision-maker's positive attention and not get cut-off, if you schedule a time to meet or talk on the phone in advance.
- **Be persistent.** If you find that the staff people or decision-maker you need to speak with is out of the office, leave a message for them with your name and number. If they don't return your call within two to three days, then call again. Keep track of your calls, but remember that they are very busy.
- **Do Your Homework:** Learn as much as you can about your issues. Be able to explain how it affects you personally. Know the arguments of the opposition and prepare a response to those. Anticipate questions and have answers ready. If you want them to take action on a specific bill, know the bill by number and know the reasons why you support the bill.
- **Tell the Truth:** Legislators rely on you for good information. Hundreds, sometimes thousands, of bills are submitted during a legislative session, so legislators appreciate it when their constituents help them discern which bills and issues are of concern to their constituents. But remember, you will never regain your credibility once you lose it. If you do not know an answer to a question, say so. If you promise to find an answer, do it. Do not exaggerate or make up information. Just speak the truth as you understand it.
- **Keep it Simple:** Work from the KISS principle—Keep It Short and Simple. Think about what you want and why you want it. Legislators appreciate it when you get to the point and respect their time. Because your meeting or call might be interrupted, get to your request in the first few minutes.
- **Think Big, But Always Know Your Bottom Line:** Always ask for more than you think you can get. The legislative process is one of compromise – legislators try to give everyone something. Prioritize—decide what is most important and be willing to compromise on everything else.
- **Practice what you are going to say** so you sound natural and persuasive, and not sound like you are reading straight from a script. Practicing will build your confidence and add to your effectiveness. Always prepare thoroughly for your conversation.
- **Be courteous.** Always, always be courteous. A "How are you?" after the initial hello works wonders! On the other hand, being abrasive is almost always counterproductive, and it provides a good excuse to ignore your request. Be sure to let them know that you are a constituent.

Following Up

After meeting with a legislator, government official or an aide from his or her office, it's important to continue to assert yourself and stay on top of the situation. Follow these tips to maintain contact.

- Thank the legislator, government official or his or her representatives for listening to your concerns, especially if they take action. **Commend them publicly**, including letters to the editor or items in newsletters. (Be sure to share them with their staff.)
- Get the name of the staff person you speak to and try to deal with the same person each time. Remember that if the legislator or government official is helpful and you praise her or him publicly, next time they may help even more. The ultimate goal is to **build a positive, long-term relationship**.
- **Provide information** as needed. Expect to fax or email information to your representative's office. Offer to fax or email information as many times as necessary, because they get many requests each day. If you do fax something, call immediately to make sure that they have received it.

General Guidelines for Citizen Lobbying

- **Take Your Friends Where You Find Them:** Find your friends and work with them. In politics, a friend is someone who helps you when you need help, whether a Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative. Never cut anyone off from contact; your opponent today may be your ally tomorrow.
- **Do Not Waste Your Time and Energy:** Trying to convince those who are publicly committed to their position is a waste of your time. Put your energy into swaying undecided votes. However, keep lines of communication open with your opponents in anticipation of possible compromises.
- **Build Coalitions:** Work from a united front. Find groups and individuals who agree with you on an issue and work with them. Do not expect them to agree with you on every issue or expect the coalition to last forever. It does not matter who gets the credit as long as it gets done. Grabbing credit is divisive and gives your opponents something to exploit.
- **Thank People Who Help:** Everybody appreciates a pat on the back!

ⁱ This document draws heavily from "Ten Commandments of Lobbying," by Lyle Krewson – lylekrewson@home.com, and citizen lobbying tips in Amnesty International's *Raise the Roof* video.