

APRIL 2009

INFLUENCE POWER

Lobby Decision-Makers

What is lobbying?

Lobbying involves educating and persuading decision-makers so they understand, accept and will support our point of view and policies.

Why lobby?

The goal of lobbying is to convince decision-makers to use their influence to help get our ideas implemented — to make our policy, their policy. Lobbying offers the opportunity to:

- **Provide information:**

Politicians and staff frequently don't have the facts they need to make an informed decision. Lobbying gives us the chance to bring them "up to speed."

- **Get our voices heard:**

Lobbying offers a direct opportunity to be heard by our elected representatives. But it also provides us with the chance to get our message out to others in the community by inviting them to join us in lobbying.

- **Put pressure on decision-makers:**

Politicians face many competing demands and it is our job to make sure our issues become their priorities. A lobbying campaign lets them know our point of view. It can also make them aware of what other influential groups and the voting public think.

- **Make the connection:**

Engage their interest or empathy. Tie the issue to their constituency, background, area of responsibility or a local concern.

***Remember:** Many lobby groups come with views that are contrary to our values. We need to speak up to ensure our voices are heard as well.

Who should we lobby and when?

When it comes to lobbying, we think first of our elected representatives. It's essential that these decision-makers at all levels of government — federal, provincial, and municipal/school board — be a central focus in any lobbying strategy.

But there are many others who influence public opinion and decisions, and who are in a position to support us. These groups and individuals can play a powerful role through speaking out publicly, reaching out to their members, asking questions, and joining our campaigns. As a part of your lobby strategy, you should consider working with:

- opposition parties;
- university governance officials and faculty;
- school board members and staff;
- labour movement;
- parent and education groups;
- social justice organizations;
- community leaders and campaigns.

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How do we lobby?

Lobbying can include a wide range of direct and indirect activities. To be effective, these activities must be carefully planned and co-ordinated in terms of timing, targeting and messaging.

Direct lobbying: Working directly with those who make the laws and their staffs is what we normally think of as lobbying. It includes:

- in-person meetings;
- providing analysis and information;
- presenting briefs and making deputations;
- negotiating in person or through round-table discussions.

Indirect lobbying: A more broad-based lobbying campaign involves outside activities that will put pressure on the politicians. The purpose of these activities is to shift the politics, and to build and demonstrate wide public support around the issue. Activities can include:

- letter-writing and email campaigns;
- phone lobbying;
- mass lobbies or “Lobby Days”;
- community-based lobbying;
- media activities, including interviews, media releases, media conferences, op-ed pieces, and letters to the editor;
- rallies and community meetings.

Resources:

- Canadian Labour Congress. *Campaign Organizing in Your Community: A Handbook*. Ottawa: 1991
- OSSTF. *Lobbying 101: Lobbying Resource Binder*. Toronto: 2004;
- The Democracy Center. *Lobbying — The Basics*. www.democracyctr.org/resources/lobbying.html: February 2006
- The Humane Society of the United States. *Tips for Successful Lobbying*. www.hsus.org/legislation_laws/citizen_lobbyist_center/lobbying_101: February 2006

Some general pointers for all lobby activities...

• **Less is more:**

Know what you are trying to get across and the key points you want to make. Don't overload with several issues or complicated data — keep it clear and simple. Remember you can always provide additional information in writing or at a later time.

• **Set realistic goals:**

Know what you want to accomplish and be realistic about short-term and long-term goals. This will help you determine what forms of lobbying activities would be most effective.

• **Don't try the hard sell:**

Know who you are talking to and why. Pitch your message and your strategy accordingly.

• **Don't write people off:**

Gaining the active support of allies is important, but it can also be useful to neutralize opposition or win silent support.

• **Be honest and accurate:**

Whether your lobbying is to influence politicians directly or to build public support, you must be reliable. Your relationship has no future if you lose your credibility and their trust.

• **Prepare, prepare, prepare:**

Plan carefully, know your plan, and stick to it. Use the experience of others to learn what is required and the “do's and don'ts.” Remember practice makes perfect.

• **Make it easy to be involved:**

Many people are unwilling to lobby, thinking they don't know enough about the issue, don't have enough time, or it doesn't matter. Organize your lobbying efforts to help overcome this resistance.

• **Be persistent:**

Don't count on a “eureka” moment. It takes time and effort to educate people about an issue and get them to shift their position.

• **Do follow-up: Write or call after the meeting:**

Thank people for their time. Remind them of commitments. Provide additional information. Keep doors open.