

Duties of the Lobbyists

The lobbyist is an advocate who works behind the scenes for the passage or defeat of a bill. During the committee meetings, he/she is allowed to sit in on selected meetings and to speak when he/she is recognized by the chair. During the sessions of the Senate or House he/she speaks privately with individual legislators outside the chambers.

A Guide to Lobbying Procedures

A. Before contacting any legislators, take the time to read all available background material on the bill or issue which concerns you. Although it is obviously beneficial for you to know a great deal about the specifics of bills and issues, it is not essential that you know everything. The primary goal of your visit is to express your concern over a particular bill or issue.

B. If you have genuine expert knowledge, share it with the legislator. It will be welcomed. No legislator can be an expert on everything. (All views are important, but expertise is especially valued. Remember, any lobbyist's most useful role for a legislator is as a source of information.) If you have read the bill carefully and/or understand the issues involved as a result of personal knowledge or research, you may be of good assistance to the legislator.

C. Be constructive. If a bill deals with a problem you admit exists, but you believe the bill is the wrong approach, explain what you believe is the right approach. If you want to suggest amendments to a bill that has been introduced, it is important that you have: a) a clear idea of what you want to be included or deleted; b) the reasons to justify the proposed change; and c) good, strong facts to back up your position before you contact your legislator. If possible, leave copies of your position and/or suggested changes with the legislator.

D. It is usually a waste of time (for both of you) to lobby legislators who are already supporting your position, although they may be helpful in making suggestions for your lobbying efforts.

E. Do not "overkill." Most legislators have many demands on their time. An elaborate sales job or long, emotional speech will not be appreciated. They do, however, want your well-prepared facts and views, presented in a straightforward manner. Make sure their time is well spent in talking to you. Stick to the issues that you came to discuss; don't wander into other issues.

F. It is easy, particularly when dealing with legislators who disagree with you, to become angry and frustrated. If you disagree, a calm, reasonable attitude and a set of well prepared reasons for your position may change their minds on the issue. It is generally advisable not to get into arguments which may trigger prejudices. Remember, you may not have all the facts on an issue or bill.

G. Let legislators explain their views-listen without interrupting. They often have input from many resources to which you may not have access, such as fiscal agencies, state departments, other groups with expertise on the issue and legislation from other states.

H. Take a few notes about their comments, noting any questions they have. Give the answers you know, and offer to get the others, if possible. Understanding their views of the facts and where they come from will help your organization develop counter arguments.

I. Don't demand a commitment before the facts are in. Give your legislator a fair chance to examine all sides of an issue.

J. The legislative process is very complex and bills change their shape in committee and on the floor of both Houses of the legislature. A bill rarely becomes law in the same form as introduced. It is possible that the bill you supported originally is so changed in the process that you would oppose its final form.

K. A legislator may be forced to vote on the bill as a whole, weighing the good with the bad and the needs of all constituents and/or the state as a whole, rather than a particular group or individual.