

Tips for Citizen Lobbyists

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Lobbying is important but Citizen Lobbyists (YOU!) are more effective. First, what do lobbyists do? Legislators get major pieces of information about issues from lobbyists. Legislators also learn about advantages and disadvantages of voting for or against. Lobbyists tell members of the Association what is going on and open doors for members to talk with their legislator or staff.

In order to be truly effective, an association or fraternal group must utilize its' best resource – its members. As a member, you are the Ace in the Hole. You are a Citizen Lobbyist.

Where do Citizen Lobbyists come in?

Everyone has special interests. Everyone is a special interest. Lobbying means communicating **your special message** to public officials. The difference between a Citizen Lobbyist and a professional lobbyist is that the professional is hired to communicate your message because you don't or can't talk with lawmakers every day. When you do talk with legislators/staff, you make a huge difference.

You are very powerful as a Citizen Lobbyist:

Citizen Lobbyists (you!) can cut through the clutter and convince the legislator because you have a special role. Your interest is not hypothetical because you live with the outcome of their votes, The legislator needs to know specifically why the matter is important to you and your family. Who better to tell your legislator than you? Legislators listen to you because you know about the issues affecting them. Besides, you vote.

Remember that the best way to succeed in lobbying is through developing a relationship with the legislator and staff. Although there are Days on the Hill and legislative dinners or breakfasts back home, developing a relationship means that they trust you enough to call you ahead of time **BEFORE** they have to vote on a piece of legislation. This gives them the chance to get good advice to help them do the right thing.

Pointers for Meetings

Remember that legislators are human beings. Dress respectfully, be punctual, start your meeting with a compliment (if possible), be friendly and polite, and thank the legislator (or staff member) for taking the time to meet with you.

1. Introduce yourself and tell the legislator you are representing your industry as a member of the PA State Grange.
2. Get to the point. What is the bottom line? What do you want them to do?
3. Never make up or exaggerate information - your credibility will be forever lost. **If you do not know the answer to a legislator's question, tell them you will find out and get back to them**, and then DO IT!
4. Treat legislative staff with respect - they are not just the gatekeepers, but their opinions often weigh heavily with the legislator and they provide institutional wisdom to legislators who may be unfamiliar with details.
5. Provide a short fact sheet on your issue(s) provided by your association, but don't weigh them down with too much paper.
6. Try to put your issue in the context of the legislator's own district.
7. Press for an explicit commitment. Will he/she support XYZ? Polite nods are friendly but meaningless.
8. Allow the legislator a chance to respond, listen carefully to his/her advice, and don't interrupt.
9. Be understanding of the complex pressures upon legislators.
10. Never criticize another legislator, lobbyist, or the opposition.

Following Up Always send a written follow-up note thanking the legislator again and summarize any action items from the meeting. Ideally, the note should do three things: first, thank them; second, remind them of your main argument; third, remind them of any follow up they promised to do. Remember, the goal of a Citizen Lobbyist is to develop and maintain a relationship with a decision-maker. You care about your special interest over the long-term. Thus, your relationship should be long-term as well.

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