

10 Tips on How to Lobby

1. Come prepared. Everyone should know what role they are playing. Bring a set of materials for the legislator and extra copies for the staff. Know how much time you have for the meeting. Know the issues, and know who are your allies and opponents.

2. Identify everyone in the room. It is important for the legislator to know exactly whom you represent, where your organization is based and how many members your group has. Be sure to point out which advocates are constituents of the legislator.

3. Say what you know. Never lie. There is no faster way to lose your credibility than to give false or misleading information to a legislator. If you don't know the answer to a question, acknowledge it and offer to get the facts and get back to the legislator.

4. Be specific and direct about what you want. What is the purpose of the meeting? Do you want the legislator to increase funding for a program in the budget? Sponsor a bill? Vote a certain way? Speak to the Assembly Speaker or Senate Majority Leader? Make sure you ask in a clear, direct manner. Only one person should ask the "pin-down" questions.

5. Stay focused. Legislators are good at getting advocates to engage on every topic except the one at hand. Forcefully, but politely, steer the conversation back to the issue you came to lobby on. Focus on getting answers to your key questions.

6. Don't argue. No matter what, stay cool. You don't win any points for passion by arguing with a legislator.

7. Maintain control of the meeting. Don't let the legislator start facilitating the meeting. You asked for the meeting. You are the one with the agenda.

8. Keep briefing materials brief. Legislators and their staff will read a well-put-together one-page fact sheet, but will do little more than glance over a thick packet of information.

9. Anticipate the arguments of your opponent. It is better to address your opponent's arguments early in the dialogue. Do so directly and openly, without a hint of defensiveness.

10. Follow-up and follow through. Send a thank you note to the legislator. The note should memorialize the commitments you extracted in the meeting. Follow-up after an appropriate interval to find out if your legislator did what he or she committed to do. It's also important for you to follow through on commitments that you made as well.