

TIPS ON LOBBYING

INTRODUCTION

Time and energy are precious commodities. This goes for politicians' time and energy, as well as our own. Lobbying has most impact when it is timely, to the point, clearly focussed and positive in tone.

Lobbying should be regarded as just one aspect of a broader political campaign. Other political activity engaged in by organisations can be complementary to lobbying. For example, protests, letter-writing campaigns or media publicity can lend support to lobbying.

It is the electoral bottom line that matters to all politicians. While some will have an intellectual, principled or personal interest in various policies, for example, the crucial issue is: will my Party win votes, or lose votes? When you lobby, bear this in mind. Try to put your case so that its support in the community is emphasised, and its potential to win votes outlined. Have an answer to the inevitable question, "But how can we sell this to the public?". Present your idea in a positive way, and have responses ready, in case difficulties and problems are raised.

PREPARATION FOR YOUR MEETING

BACKGROUND WORK

The Politician

Find out relevant information about your politician. If your meeting will be about schools, does the politician have children? What about his/her electorate? Where is it? What educational institutions are in or near it? Where did the politician go to school?

Some of this information is available on the Parliamentary website, and on Federal party websites. All members of Parliament have one of more home pages of their own, and typically these include media releases and speeches by the individual. You can also conduct a search, via the internet, of Hansard, to find what the person has had to say in Parliament on your issue.

Check what party and parliamentary committees he or she is, and has been, a member of. Obtain advice about special areas of interest, so that you can tailor your spiel to suit.

The Issue

Research the policy history of the relevant party or parties, and the attitudes of individual opinion-leaders, on your issue and related topics. Know the context you are operating in.

The written material

Your briefing material for the politician should be clear, well-presented and succinct. You should set out the issue and your proposal (what you want him or her to do) as clearly as possible. Don't throw too much at the politician, but provide what you regard as essential or useful material that further amplifies your case.

If you hope to raise, say three issues, set them all out on one sheet of paper, with your policy or action proposal. On this sheet, refer to other separate sheets (again of one or two pages) that provide a little more detail on each of your three issues. In turn, these secondary briefing sheets can refer to the more lengthy material that you have provided at the back of your set of documents.

The first sheet provides an agenda, as it were, and

an outline for the meeting. During the meeting, you might turn to each of your three issue sheets one by one, presenting a graph or table, perhaps, and the key points you want to raise. Do not turn to the longer documents at all.

Include contact details for the people attending the meeting and the organisation that you are representing. You might also include in your "kit" copies of important articles from the news media.

THE MEETING

Organising the Meeting

If you do not have personal contacts in the office of your target politician, you will probably have to start with a formal letter. Keep this brief and courteous, but ensure that, in the letter, you provide the politician with a reason to meet with you. Do not be overly general or vague. State the issue clearly and concisely. If you are also seeking meetings with other members of the same parliamentary party, give details.

Follow up the letter, perhaps a week later, with a phone call to the office of the parliamentarian. Remember that, especially in the case of backbenchers and of parties in opposition, workloads are often extremely heavy and staff are few. Do not expect to be able to hold a long, discursive conversation with the staff member or adviser. Ask if the letter has been received and whether it will be possible to make an appointment.

If, in preparation for a lobbying round, you have developed a form letter for general use, know when not to use it - for example with the Minister or Shadow Minister. Their special role should be acknowledged in your initial approach.

Once the meeting is confirmed, send or fax another letter confirming the details of the appointment and setting out the names of those attending.

Contacting the Politician(s):

- Start with a formal letter
- Then a phone call
- Know when to give up
- Confirm the meeting in writing

The Lobbying Team

If at all possible, do not lobby alone. Two or three is a good size for a team. Too many people are difficult to accommodate and can be overwhelming: it is hard for the politician to remember their names after introductions have been made. Too many people are hard to organise and discipline, from the lobbying team's point of view.

Have a leader who will orchestrate the performance and make sure that other team members are prepared to observe this discipline. Do not allow people to lobby if you cannot rely on their behaviour and manner: it is crucial that the tone of the meeting be constructive and polite. You might allocate roles or topics for team members.

- Don't lobby alone
- Be disciplined
- Have a leader
- No "loose cannons"
- Dress neatly

The Meeting

Politicians are busy people. It is appreciated if lobbyists are succinct and that they show that they are aware of the many pressing concerns impinging on the time of the politician. You will be allocated half an hour, at the most, in the politician's diary: do not overstay your welcome. Fortunately the office will contain a large clock that will help you to keep track of the time. If you do not get to the end of your presentation by the time you are due to finish the meeting, your written material should be able to stand on its own to present the remainder of your case.

Especially if your meeting takes place in Parliament House, it is likely that it will be interrupted. A division in the Chamber is the most likely reason for this, but urgent business may also arise. Be prepared to brief the politician's adviser in his or her place and, if necessary, simply to hand over your material if you run out of time.

Make sure that you explain clearly and concisely what it is that you want the politician to do to help you and what your own goal is. Too often lobbyists have no clear purpose and this wastes politicians' time.

The meeting itself

- Be punctual

- Don't overstay your welcome
- Be prepared for interruptions
- Be clear and concise

Follow Up

Follow up all requests from the politician and provide any further information that you believe would be useful. Do this promptly. If the politician asked you a question that you could not answer on the spot, provide a written answer. You can use e-mail for these purposes. (But do not flood the politician's e-mail address: he or she receives several hundred e-mails a day, and you do not want to be marked out as a nuisance.)

Make sure that he or she has clearly-presented contact details for you and your organisation.

- Follow up with further information promptly
- Provide contact details

Stay in Touch

Stay in touch with the politician, providing updates on your campaign and on the issues. Do this judiciously (not too often) but as necessary.

MAKING VIEWS KNOWN

Politicians

The Kit contains information about how to contact each state parliamentarian.

At the time of going to press, the candidates for each party have not been finalised (they have until a month before the election).

The Public

Letters to the Editor

Sydney Morning Herald

e-mail: letters@smh.fairfax.com.au

mail: GPO Box 3771, Sydney 2001

Daily Telegraph

e-mail: letters@dailytelegraph.com.au

mail: PO Box 2808, GPO Sydney, 2001

Make it a point to find out your local newspaper contact details.

Talkback Radio

702 (02) 8333 1000

2UE 131 332

2GB 131 873

2SM 131 269

Make it a point to find out and keep handy your local radio station "open line" number.