

How to lobby an elected official

Want to know the best way to make sure that elected officials understand your position? Meet with them directly, and tell it to their face. But make sure you follow these tips to make sure that your meeting goes smoothly and that you make a real impact.



1. Define your issue and choose your target

Your issue must be one that can be addressed by the level of government you are lobbying. You should be able to articulate your issue in a few clear concise sentences. Some questions to consider:

- What specifically do you want done about the issue?
- How does your issue affect the people that this politician represents?
- How many other people and organizations support your lobbying efforts?

2. Set up a meeting

Contact the elected official's office in the riding to set up a meeting date and time. When calling, identify yourself and who you represent and briefly state the reason for meeting with the elected official. Make sure you leave your telephone number with the elected official's office in the event of any change in the meeting time or date. In addition, get the name of the person you arranged the meeting with for the purpose of future contact with that office.

Once the meeting time and date have been set by telephone, confirm it by letter. The letter should contain the reason for the meeting, the time, the date and the location. You may also include the names of the other members who'll be attending the meeting with you.

If the meeting isn't taking place for some time, call a few days before the meeting to reconfirm.

3. Prepare for the meeting

Decide who will be going to the meeting. The elected official's office may ask how many and who will be at the meeting.

Hold a pre-meeting briefing session for all of those who will be meeting with the elected official. The purpose of this session is to:

- Review the purpose of the meeting.
- Review the materials you will be using and the document(s) you will be leaving with the elected official.
- Decide who the main spokesperson will be.
- Make sure everyone knows where and when the meeting will take place and confirm they will be able to attend.

Get everyone together a few minutes before the actual meeting time at or near the meeting location. Briefly review the agenda, and set out the order in which you want to proceed, who is to be responsible for which section and how different issues are to be brought up.

4. Stick to the point

- **Present your position clearly and request follow-up.** If the elected official is sincerely interested in discussing the issue and time is not a problem, take the time you need. On the other hand, don't be sidetracked onto other issues. The elected official may be trying to avoid the real reason for your meeting.
- **Listen well.** Much of lobbying is listening, looking for indications of the elected official's views, and finding opportunities to provide good information.
- **Keep your cool.** Be forceful in stating your position, but don't allow yourself to be trapped into a heated exchange that will gain nothing. Remember you are representing your fellow members and part of the message that you are trying to convey is that the members you represent are credible and responsible.
- **Answer questions.** Reply to the elected official's questions if you have the answers. If you don't have the information, tell the elected official you'll get back to him or her with the answer. Don't try to bluff or give answers that you're not sure of. It will only weaken your case and decrease your credibility. Make sure you follow-up with the information requested.
- **Don't make idle threats.** For example, if the elected official is not supportive, don't threaten to throw him or her out at the next election. A better tactic is to remind the elected official that you represent union members who are voters in his or her riding who are concerned about the elected official's position on this issue. The best tactic is to have others show their support too through telephone calls, letters and visits.

5. Demand action

If the elected official signals support for the union's position, ask him/her to:

- Discuss your position with other members of his or her caucus.
- Raise questions with members of government on the issue.
- Put a motion forward for discussion in the legislature.
- Agree to submit signed petitions you have gathered on your issue.
- Generate support from elected officials in the other parties to put pressure on the government to act on your behalf.
- Write to the elected official responsible outlining his or her concern about the issue.
- Make a public statement on the issue supporting your position.
- Consult with you on any further developments around the issue.

6. Follow-up

Send a follow-up letter to the elected official thanking him or her for meeting with you. You can also use this opportunity to restate your position on the issue as well as to confirm what action the elected official has agreed to take. If the elected official did not indicate support at the meeting, request his or her support again or that he/she reconsider his or her position.

Monitor the elected official's performance on the issue. When the elected official carries out the actions promised, thank the elected official for his or her support. If the elected official hasn't followed through, a polite reminder by telephone or by letter will let the elected official know you're watching what he/she is doing (or not doing).

Remember: Keep the rest of the activists and union members involved in your campaign informed about your lobbying efforts by putting together a short report outlining your activities.