

A General Guide to Lobbying and Tips

(Thanks to Rebecca Matthews for handwritten presentation notes from which this has been developed)

Anyone can lobby

Ten people who speak, make more noise than ten thousand who are silent. Napoleon Bonaparte

One of the great things about being a small country, with available MPs and an open political culture is that good ideas can get a hearing. However if we leave lobbying to a small number of firms and the corporate sector who can most afford to engage professional lobbyists and Government Relations advisors, then we create imbalances in our democracy.

Everyone should lobby

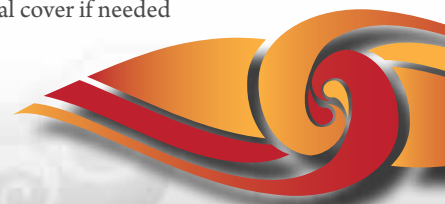
Okay, you've convinced me. Now go out there and bring pressure on me. President Franklin D. Roosevelt

- Lobbying should not be the domain of just those with good access and deep wallets
- The most effective lobbying is personal persuasion backed up by the mobilisation of public opinion
- Most lobbying done by NGOs or other groups relies more on tapping into a public mood rather than the individual strength of an argument
- There are many different actions that can be taken, e.g. the issue of mining in national parks was stopped through a major street protest in Auckland, backed up by direct lobbying efforts
- Often non corporate interests are on the side of the angels – but with the voice of a mouse. Right issues, popular and supported – but don't know how to lobby, or achieve the outcome
- Being strategic with limited resources is the challenge, but it is doable

How to lobby

- It requires sustained effort, utilising many activities or actions to achieve outcomes

- First set a goal. *Tip – make it narrow and achievable.* Measurable is important
- Also know what your compromises are – establish what outcomes you can live with
- Research the topic. Here are some basic research questions
 - What is wrong with the status quo? Identify all the problems that you are seeking to change. What are the negative outcomes? What is the law on this issue?
 - What academic evidence/ official reports support your cause? Quote them. Frame your proposal as a solution to the problem
 - Who are your allies? What influential individuals or organisations agree with you? Talk to them. Quote them
 - Who is the target? Identify the key decision makers that you need to persuade.
 - Identify indirect targets also who can assist in persuading the primary target
 - Research the target. Find out what they have previously said on the issue? What are their current concerns?
 - Frame your issue within their realm of concern and within the economic, social and environmental interests of New Zealand
- **Use public opinion to support your argument.** Polling is good if you can afford it. Some polling companies do omnibus polls that you can add 1-2 questions too for only a couple of thousand dollars
- Focus groups, online polls are also useful tools
- **Engage the media.** Backing up your lobbying with media stories is important. MPs seeing the issues they are being lobbied on in the media reinforce the perception that the issue is important and needs to be addressed
- It also gives MPs political cover if needed



The lobbying meeting

- **The meeting should not be too long.** Ask at the start how much time the MP has got and/or check with their staff member beforehand. Plan your presentation accordingly. Usually it will be 30 minutes max
- **Keep the MP involved.** Don't lecture for 30 minutes. Have 5 minutes max to overview your pitch and then open to discussion. Plan questions to get the MP talking
- **Recognise tiredness and boredom.** The MP may well be tired. Pick up the signs and focus down to the key points. Change the focus onto them; introduce something lighter
- **Know your stuff.** Only admit to ignorance if comprehensively cornered. If they ask a question, try and avoid saying that you don't know
- **Cope with aggression.** The MP may simply loathe the message or the messenger. If possible, maintain your cool and follow rational argument, focusing on the most powerful and irrefutable facts. Be aware that a threat can backfire

Top 5 lobbying tips

1. **Use real examples.** Make sure your argument is grounded in specifics as well as theory. How would it apply to the average NZer? What is the impact on the Government? (Using examples of case studies of where something has been applied overseas often helps)
2. **Use real people.** MPs are more likely to listen to every day New Zealanders than professional lobbyists. Real people telling real stories
3. **Meet in a comfortable place.** An MP is going to be most comfortable meeting in their office. You can invite them to your place, but initial meetings are best where they feel comfortable
4. **Leave a one pager.** Leave a bullet point summary of the problem, solution, key arguments, the specific ask and contact details for getting back to you
5. **Follow up.** MPs move on to the next issue. Do a follow up email or phone call or letter. Also make a note of any issues or concerns raised in the meeting and respond to these

5 Things you should know about MPs

- Their EA's run their lives. Book meetings through EA's. To meet with an MP in Wellington, they often have more time in recess weeks and later in the week – Thursdays are often best, as many are out of Wellington from Friday through to Monday
- They are expert on a few things. Many know their main subjects inside out, but they don't know every topic inside out. Don't patronise them, but don't assume in depth knowledge in your issue
- They are often driven by media coverage. Will it make them look good? Are there media opportunities in the proposal?
- They have to tow the party line. Individual MPs can be sympathetic and supportive, but at the end of the day most MPs are whipped along party lines, so it is best to build support with senior MPs and Ministers if possible
- They are actually quite human. They have families, interests, careers outside parliament. Don't be shy or put off

How you can apply these skills

- At the end of the day lobbying is about broadening the amount and deepening the quality of political engagement
- The more good ideas that get heard, the better off our democracy is
- Most work can have a political dimension. There are very few things that are unregulated or completely removed from the political sphere
- It is important to understand the relationship between MPs and interest groups
- It is about developing high quality messages that work
- It is about just doing it and learning and getting comfortable with political engagement.