

TIPS ON LOBBYING CONGRESS

(Courtesy of www.yourcongress.com, www.fcni.org, and www.butera-andrews.com)

Meeting with your members of Congress or their staff and developing a personal relationship are the most effective ways to influence the legislators' positions on an issue. Phone calls, faxes, e-mails, and letters are all important, but not as effective as meeting in person with members of Congress or their staff.

Be On Time

Members and their staff are very busy, and often can't see you if you are not there at the time of your appointment. (They may be late, but not you!) Also, always give yourself enough time to make your next meeting.

Keep it short and to the point

Good lobbyists say exactly what they want and why in the least amount of words.

Say thank-you

Be sure to thank them for their time. In addition, few people say anything positive to Members of Congress or their staff. If you know that they've done something good, say thank-you. They'll remember it. After the meeting, send a thank-you letter, repeating your issue. This helps to develop a relationship over time with your member of Congress or their staff.

Get to know the staff

Good lobbyists don't complain when they don't get to meet the Member of Congress. The staff are indispensable for accomplishing the Member of Congress' goals, and has a knack for making requests disappear, if given a reason to do so. If possible, it's always helpful to establish a constituent link. If you have a business in their state or area, be sure to let them know.

Listen and gather information

Ask for your legislator's view on an issue. Be passionate *and* patient; don't react angrily if you don't get the response you want. Remain polite.

Make a specific request

Rather than something generic like, "I want you to support the environment," a more effective "ask" is to request support for a specific bill or legislative action. For instance, "I would like Congressperson Doe to support H.R. 1234, the Tree Planting Act." Give several brief points why your Member of Congress should support this legislation. Avoid a long philosophical debate about the issue; be concrete. Never intentionally provide incorrect information.

Tell the whole story

Good lobbyists don't patronize. They acknowledge when something is difficult and are upfront about the opposition. If you get a question you don't know the answers to, tell them you will find out the answer and get back to them.

Timing is everything

Good lobbyists know the process of Congress, mention proper deadlines, and don't ask for requests at the last minute.

Always one page, and always written up in advance

Good lobbyists have already written a draft of what they want before they ask for it, and are always happy to leave it or send it over.

Capitol Hill is the last place to burn bridges

Good lobbyists don't go ballistic when they are told no. They are courteous, even if the person with whom they are talking seems uninterested or even rude. Good lobbyists regroup and wait for another chance. DC is a very small place, and being a jerk will only mean you get a reputation of being a jerk.

Don't be surprised if:

- *The person you meet with is very, very young.*
- *You have to walk to meet the member of Congress.*
- *You're meeting only with staff.*
- *You meet in the hall.*

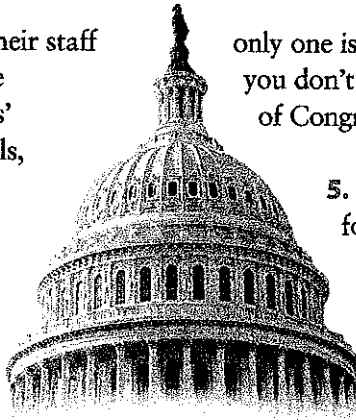




Eight Tips for a Successful Lobby Visit

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1. **Make an appointment.** Schedule the lobby visit in advance; don't just show up. A broad-based delegation of constituents (five is ideal) increases the likelihood of getting a meeting with the legislator rather than his or her staff. Fax the scheduler with your written meeting request (who, where, when, and why), and follow up with a phone call. Many offices ignore a request for meeting with their member of Congress if it's not made in writing.
2. **Know your legislator's record.** Information on your legislator's co-sponsorship of bills and previous votes is available at www.fcnl.org (click on "Contact Congress" in the left column and then enter your zip code). You can also find valuable personal information about your legislator on his or her home page by following the links from "Contact Congress." Have a face-to-face pre-meeting with your delegation to determine who will cover which points and who is going to "chair" the meeting to keep it on topic.
3. **Be punctual and positive.** Be on time, and thank the staff person for his or her time. Even if you disagree on most issues, compliment the member of Congress for a vote or action you appreciated. Building rapport with staff is important in developing a long-term relationship.
4. **Focus the meeting.** Briefly introduce the individuals of the group, the organizations you represent, and the topic you wish to discuss. It is important to talk about



only one issue and to stay on this topic. Remember, you don't have to be an expert on an issue; members of Congress meet with you because you elect them.

5. **Listen and gather information.** Ask for your legislator's view on an issue. Be patient and passionate; don't react angrily if you don't get the response you want. Remain polite.
6. **Make a specific request.** Rather than something generic like "I want you to support the environment," a more effective "ask" is to request support for a specific bill or legislative action: "I would like Congressman Doe to support H.R. 1234, the Tree Planting Act." Give several brief points why your member of Congress should support this legislation. Avoid a long philosophical debate about the issue; be concrete.
7. **Follow up.** Tell the staff person you will get back to him or her if you can't provide information about an issue on the spot. If the staff person is unfamiliar with a bill or is unsure of the legislator's position, ask for follow-up correspondence. Leave one or two pages of relevant material.
8. **Express your thanks.** At the end of the meeting, thank the staff person for his or her time. Send a thank you letter to the staff person soon after your visit, repeating your "ask." A letter is a nice gesture and helps to develop a relationship over time with a member of Congress and her or his staff.

It often takes several meetings with a member of Congress or his or her staff to influence legislative action. A lobby visit is important to establish a relationship with a congressional office and to get congressional attention on an issue, but make sure to follow up with phone calls, faxes, emails, and letters to the editor.

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