

Advanced Citizen Lobbying¹

Equipping Groups with the Tools to Make a Deeper Impact

PLANNING FIELD PROGRAMS

Strength in Numbers

When an individual meets with a legislator, it has an effect. When a group meets with a legislator, this effect increases exponentially. You are no longer a gadfly, but a concerned group of citizens calling on their elected representative. If you are lobbying on behalf of a group, you should let the official know that the individuals with whom he or she is meeting are part of a citizen group and show your public official that the group represents an important, informed, and influential constituency. The constituent meeting is an excellent way to build your group's credibility.

Identifying & Recruiting Constituents

The composition of the citizen lobbyists' meeting with the elected official is important. If the lobbying organization meets with an elected official, but can not bring any of the official's actual constituents to the meeting, it indicates that the group does not have much a presence in the district. Be sure to bring constituents to the meeting. IF you do not have constituents in that elected official's district, **START RECRUITING!**

Internal Lists & External Networking

Figure out who in your group lives in which districts. Collect each member's zip (preferably zip+4) or each members' precinct number. This will be useful for lobbying and for campaigns. Ask other groups who have a stake in the issue if they would like to join you and find out who among them would make good advocates. Having a coalition representing many different organizations shows the targeted official how powerful your group is and how important the issue is.

Doorknocking & Phoning

Knock on every door in the district and see who cares about the issue. A coordinated canvass may take a lot of time, but you will almost certainly find the people who you need. If your targeted legislator asks you how you all know each other, let him know. A phone bank through the district is a less time intensive way to contact a number of people. The success rate for this kind of blanket phone canvass will be lower than the door canvass. Either canvassing method can be effective, not only at educating and engaging the district, but also at generating pressure on the official.

Communications Strategy

Before a scheduled legislative meeting is to take place, the group's communications team should plan a barrage of letters to the editor (LTE) published right before the meeting. Having a full article highlighting your issue in the major media outlets is even more potent. If you have difficulty scheduling the meeting, these 'spontaneous' LTE and media hits can be used beforehand to build pressure on the target. Mentioning your targeted official(s) by name in your media will get their attention.

The groups' grassroots activists can also organize call-ins and letter-writing campaigns preceding the meeting. Once the public official sees your issue as something that engages his or her constituents, the official will become more receptive to proposed solutions. Whether this coordination comes off as

¹ *Democracy for America Campaign Academy Grassroots Campaign Training Manual, 2009.*

orchestrated or spontaneous doesn't usually matter to your public official. Either they're responding to the needs of their constituents or responding to a group effective at mobilizing their constituents.

TIPS FOR YOUR VISIT

Practice Makes Perfect

In order to become an effective activist and lobbyist, you must practice your "pitch" and speaking about your issue. The best way to do this is to choreograph a role play of the constituent meeting beforehand. Everyone involved with the meeting needs to meet each other beforehand and have an explicit understanding of their role and the group's message. Determine who will speak and when. Go through expected questions and responses, try to anticipate roadblocks, and get familiar with the overall feel you want your meeting to have. If it begins to feel a little rehearsed, that's fine.

Focus your Message

Having a well articulated message is important if constituents at the meeting don't already know each other or are not from the same group. Have a meeting beforehand so that everyone is clear on the message and the task at hand. Make sure everyone involved understands all the principles and pitfalls of citizen lobbying and has a realistic understanding of the particular target's attitude about their issues.

Be Prepared, Be Organized

Make sure you identify everyone in the meeting. It is important for the legislator to know exactly who 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. Legislators and their staff appreciate it when you wear name tags.

Briefing materials should be just that – brief. Legislative staff only skim through thick packets of information. Legislators will read a well-assembled one-page fact sheet and usually won't read much more.

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.