

Working with Nonprofit Organizations in Community Settings: Preparing Your Organization to Lobby¹

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Introduction

This article is part of a series *Working with Nonprofit Organizations in Community Settings*, designed to provide basic information on governance, planning and operational details for community-based nonprofit organizations. Information provided in this series will help the Board of Directors, leaders, staff and volunteers of nonprofit organizations that provide a variety of services to local communities.

Rationale

Nonprofit organizations can effectively lobby for their issue. In fact, they are often in an ideal position to do so because they already have many resources to get started—especially much needed information about the issue. The Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest (CLPI) lists ten reasons for nonprofits to lobby (CLPI, 2004a):

1. A person can make a difference.
2. People working together can make a difference.
3. People can change laws.
4. Lobbying is a democratic tradition.
5. Lobbying finds real solutions.
6. Lobbying is easy.
7. Policymakers need your expertise.
8. Lobbying helps people.
9. The views of local nonprofits are important.
10. Lobbying advances your cause and builds public trust.

Preparation

There are several different steps that an organization can take to prepare for, and engage in, lobbying. These include the following missives (CLPI, 2004c):

- Get motivated and educated.
- Prepare for legislative advocacy (get a phone, internet access, etc.).
- Study the legislative process.
- Review the relationship between your organization and government (all levels).
- Create a who's who list (of government officials).
- Prepare the board of directors.

- Connect legislative advocacy with governance (define/discuss how public policy affects your organization).
- Take stock of your human resources (time, money, staff, etc.).
- Develop useful data (about the organization that can be used for lobbying).
- Look for allies.
- Develop a public policy agenda (2–3 most important legislative changes the organization wants to lobby for).
- Review the law. (Lobbying on issues is legal! Supporting candidates for office is not.)

Strategies

There are many ways to successfully lobby for a cause that are inexpensive yet effective. Strategies might include writing a letter to your elected government official(s). Do not underestimate the power of personal letters. On the same token, a personal visit is also an effective way to lobby. It is a powerful statement of interest and commitment. The important thing is that your position and purpose are delivered. Presenting testimony at a public hearing is another very effective strategy. Here, your message will reach a wider audience, one that usually includes elected or appointed officials; plus an agenda and a record is kept of what was said. The press is a frequent visitor to public meetings, thus presenting a good opportunity to speak to them about your issue (CLPI, 2004b).

References

- Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest. (2004a). 10 Reasons to Lobby for Your Cause. Retrieved electronically October 2006 from <http://www.clpi.org/nuts-a-bolts/get-started>
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Center for Lobbying in the Public Interest. (2004c). Make a Difference in 3 Hours per Week. Retrieved electronically October 2006 from <http://www.clpi.org/nuts-a-bolts/get-started>

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