Lobbying: Six Principles for Strategic Government Relations

1. In Practice, Democracy Respects Engagement More than Virtue

There is no obligation for those engaged in government to seek out the opinions or safeguard the interests of those who are absent from the conversations of the democratic process. The political reflex in response to involvement and advocacy, however, will always be a search to accommodate.

2. Clarify Basic Objectives and Delegation Ahead of Time

"Why talk to a person who can't deal?" ~An Elected Official

Work with your Board toward "knowledge-based" accountability and delegation.

3. Build Relationships in Government / with Other Advocates Before You Need Them

"Separate the relationship from the substance" ~Roger Fisher

Developed relationships are the first goal of effective government advocacy ... see their creation and nurture as capital invested in an association's long-term success.

4. Know and Respect the Rules of the Game

"Doing things wrong tells people you don't respect them." ~A Veteran Lobbyist

You aren't a government relations expert. Know your limits; have expertise available. Be involved early, when your presence can help produce a solution, rather than late, when opposition to a proposal or litigation against a law will threaten others, be expensive in the association's money and morale, and is less likely to produce success. Readiness to work with those in government and within their rules and customs sends a message of respect; over time, that will bring you respect and invite your inclusion.

5. Walk Your Association's Talk

"We must be the change we wish to see in the world." ~Warren Bennis

Represent in what you do and say, in the service you are willing to provide and the respect you show for all those in government, the core ethics, ideals and social values of the independent education community.

6. You've Got to Know What Others Want

"Focus on interests, not positions" ~Roger Fisher
There is no abiding "enemy"…. Everyone is at one time or another a potential ally. To form alliances, you must know others' interests…. There is no substitute for listening and research regarding all the players, not least those with whom you may differ some -or even most- of the time.

Outline for State Lobbying
Sarah Donnelley, Executive Director, AIMS (MD)

1. Know your friends in high places.
   Whom do you know personally -particularly among staffers (secretaries and aides):
   Circulate names to your schools to have them find matchups in parent, board, and alumni databases. Invite your friends in high places to a gathering with your school heads and trustees to give your generic message and thanks and to let them speak on their issues.

2. Profile delegates and senators.
Get background biographies and political profiles. Identify who is likely to oppose you on issues that are important.

3. Look up state lobbying laws.
In some states you will have to register as lobbyists and file reports.

4. Track bills.
Look for what the state has on the Internet. Classify bills as “no relevance,” “need to inform schools if passed,” “no position,” “may be of interest to some schools so they should be informed to act on their own,” AND “action required by the association.”

5. Position the association on bills.
Four positions in lobbying for bills, in order of difficulty:
   • Initiating a bill.
   • Supporting someone else's bill
   • Getting a bill defeated
   • Amending a bill

6. Procedures for each.
   • All are easier with coalitions.
   • Attend coalition meetings: state CAPE.
   • Know your higher ed. counterpart.

   • Integrity and trust is your greatest asset: don't ever fudge. You can't win trust back.
   • Be a resource for legislators: all need honest, factual information.
   • Always know who the opposition is and what they have to say: listen and read.
   • Inform the bill sponsor of your position as a courtesy. If you are opposed to the bill he might be an ally next time or he may want to work with you on fixing the bill.
   • Find which delegates are on which side.
   • Know who is undecided and concentrate there.
• Know which bills are serious and which are courtesies to a constituent or are fluff.
• Know which delegates have clout and who is respected and paid attention to.
• Spend time building your case/arguments carefully to submit as written testimony.
• In calling on delegates individually, be quick, sharp, succinct, cheerful, and grateful. NEVER linger unless invited to; follow up with a note of thanks and summary of your position.
• Take school people with you to testify who can illustrate the specifics of how this bill will directly affect them. Educate them well on the issue.
• Know when to call for an all out letter/telephone/email campaign from the schools.
• Know when you need to use your colleagues' connections, but treat this resource respectfully and don't overuse it.

8. TESTIFYING in front of a Committee (From Testifying with Impact by Arch Lustberg)
• Relax ahead of time to relieve nervousness and fear.
• Breathe correctly.
• Tense muscles and relax them.
• Sound confident, energetic, pleasant, and sincere.
• Get their attention: Listening all day is BORING!!
• Simplify your text. (This text needs to be different from your written testimony.)
  * Skip the big words, use contractions. * Keep sentences short. * Skip the alphabet soup and jargon. * Use your own words. * Figure out how to phrase your remarks by ideas. * Pauses matter. * Simplify the Delivery * Don't read verbatim the written testimony, but rather talk your text. * Chat as if you if you are having a conversation with only one person. *“Don't teach it, preach it, recite it, read it or orate it.” *“Say it. Tell it. Explain it. Practice it.”
• Oral Presentation Skills: * You have only one try to get your message across. * Think conversation. * Watch distracting use of your hands, nervous habits. * Notice your voice: work on making it pleasant to hear (not high, nasal, hoarse, etc.)
  * Volume, pitch and rate * Be pleasant and interesting to look at: your face is key and needs expression. * Ask someone you respect and trust to critique you or tape yourself on a video camera * Know the protocol

Author: Peter Tacy, Sarah Donnelley
Source: Presentation to NAIS Association Execs, Washington DC, 9/16/99.
Resource: Independent Schools Association of the Central States (ISACS)
Contact: info@isacs.org www.isacs.org 630.971.3581