



Citizen Lobbying 101

Who, what, where, when, and why?

Who?

Knowing who you want to lobby is just as important as knowing what to say.

1. If it is a federal piece of legislation, you will need to know who your Congressman is. This is based on where you live and can be obtained by visiting **house.gov/htbin/findrep** and typing in your zip code.
2. U.S. Senators represent the entire state. There are 2 senators for each state, so knowing who they are is important. Both can be contacted if you want to lobby on a federal bill that is before the U.S. Senate.
3. Knowing the difference between your STATE Representative and your FEDERAL Representative is important. Finding your state representative and senator is also based on your residential address.

State Representatives can be located at this website:
house.mi.gov/#findarepresentative

State Senators at this website:
senate.michigan.gov/FindYourSenator

4. Sometimes the “who” is not necessarily your personal representative, senator, or congressman but rather a chairman of a committee where the bill is located or a member of the committee. Perhaps the “who” is the floor leader (the person in charge of putting the agenda together for a vote on a bill), a member of the leadership team or the bill’s sponsor.
5. Occasionally, if there is local impact, the person you will want to lobby is a local official such as a city council member, county commissioner, mayor, or local school board member.

What?

Know what you want to say in advance of meeting with an elected official.

1. If it is a bill that has already been introduced, you will want to know what the bill does/doesn't do, if you support/don't support it or if you'd like changes made. Elected officials are very busy, so knowing what to say and being concise are important.
2. What you say will vary depending on the mode of communication. A face-to-face meeting can allow for back and forth discussion and may be better if "what" you want to talk about is pitching an idea or offering suggestions on how to improve a bill.
3. Written communication is a great option if you want to convey information to an elected official. You can include studies or other official information in a letter format.
4. E-mail communication can also be effective if you simply want to convey a short message. For example: Please vote yes on Senate Bill 123 or please vote no on House Bill 456. Understand that most of the time, emails will go to staff and not the representative or senator, but they do make an impact.
5. Phone calls again are great to convey short, concise information about your position on a subject. Remember, phone calls are usually taken by staff, but they do keep track of how many people called in support or opposition of bills—particularly from constituents.



Where?

Depending on the issue and your location, lobbying can be done at the Capitol—in the “lobby,” at legislative offices, coffee hours or committee hearings.

1. Where to lobby is determined by whether you are near the elected official. It is unlikely you will be able to lobby a U.S. congressman in his office in Washington, D.C. but if you can, you will want to make an appointment.
2. If possible, go to the elected official’s office to lobby in person. Call to make an appointment in advance. State Representatives and Senators each have an office located near the Capitol in Lansing.
3. U.S. Senators and Congressmen each have an “in-district” office, so it may be possible to arrange a face-to-face meeting when Congress is in recess. Another option is to meet with a staffer.
4. Often elected officials will hold “coffee hours” or other opportunities in-district where people can come and talk without an appointment.
5. If you want to talk to a local official, go to the city council meetings, county commissioner meetings or township meetings. This includes school board meetings.
6. Good old fashion lobbying takes place at the state capitol most Tuesdays, Wednesday, and Thursdays. Simply stand in the “lobby” and send in a note to speak with the Representative or Senator of your choosing.



When?

They say timing is everything in comedy; it's everything in politics, too.

1. Talking to legislators before action is taken on a bill is a lot more effective than trying to amend it later. So, as soon as a bill is introduced, you should make your voice heard.
2. When a bill moves from committee to the floor is a good time to lobby members of the chamber to vote for or against a particular piece of legislation.
3. Talking to members of the committee where a bill is located before a hearing is good. If you can't talk to all the members, you can put in a card requesting to address the committee.
4. Some issues are time sensitive, for example budget items. There is an open window to deal with these kinds of things, so knowing when certain schedules are set is key to proper timing.



Why?

Often people think lobbying is only for professionals. Citizen lobbyists have more power than they think.

1. Legislators rely on feedback from citizens to make informed decisions—they aren't and can't be expected to be experts on everything.
2. Often legislation is extremely complex. Offering additional insight, particularly on a subject which you are very knowledgeable about, is valuable, and legislators generally appreciate hearing from citizens with expert insight.
3. A thoughtful, factual, and timely letter or e-mail written to a legislator can solidify or cause a serious review of a previous judgment on an issue.
4. Elected officials are particularly tuned into their own constituents. Remember, people in their districts vote them in or out of office.
5. On any one issue, even a few letters or e-mails to one legislator can have an important impact. Sometimes, just one letter or e-mail, with a new perspective or with clear-cut, persuasive arguments, can be the decisive factor in a legislator's action.



How?

Being a citizen lobbyist does not need to be intimidating or overwhelming. Legislators are people, too. That said, knowing the system, the timing, and the protocols can make it a lot less intimidating. The Michigan Citizen's Guide offers some very helpful information:

legislature.mi.gov/documents/Publications/CitizensGuide.pdf

The important things to remember are:

1. **Be kind**—even when dealing with someone who disagrees with you.
2. **Be prepared**—do your homework and know what you want to say before you talk to a legislator.
3. **Be concise**—legislators are very busy, so you will make your point better if you keep it focused on your message.
4. **Be original**—use your own words. Form letters are fine, if it's simply "please vote yes or no," but legislators are more apt to pay attention to people who bothered to write their own sentiments.
5. **Be constructive**—simply disagreeing with a policy without offering a solution is not as effective. In some cases, you may simply want the idea gone, in which case, offer good, solid rationale.
6. **Be happy**—try to make civic engagement as pleasant as possible. You catch more flies with honey than vinegar.



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