

# Grassroots lobbying tips

## What is grassroots lobbying?

- Grassroots lobbying is not big-money lobbying. We don't do the kind of lobbying that gives "lobbying" a bad name. Big-money lobbying is all about directly or indirectly buying votes from legislators in exchange for political contributions, personal payoffs, free trips, gifts, or other favors.
- Grassroots lobbying is not confrontation or protest. We are all in favor of these tactics under the right circumstances. Lobbying to get a bill passed is not one of those circumstances. Protest and confrontation will cost us votes for our bill.
- Grassroots lobbying is not going hat-in-hand looking for help, requesting, asking for favors from the legislator. We are equals, this is a democracy, and their role is as public servants. They work for us. They deserve all the courtesy and respect anyone else does, but they don't deserve to be treated as our superiors, dispensing or withholding favors.

Instead, grassroots lobbying focusses on one thing only, passing this bill, and involves –

- **Education:** We can help the legislators better understand the problem and our proposed solution. The legislator can help us understand their thinking on the issue, the arguments that they find most and least persuasive, the views of other legislators, and so on.
- **Finding common ground:** Once you find common ground with the legislator -- interests in common -- then you don't need to ask for favors. You can discuss "What are we going to do together to solve this common problem?"

## Getting ready

Before the meeting, learn as much as possible about the legislator, their record on the issue, their background, and recent press releases or articles. Think about what you plan to say. Think about what common ground you may have with the legislator.

## The meeting

Be on time. If the staff tells you that the legislator can't make the appointment, offer to work out a time later in the day. If the staff says, sorry, they're all booked up for today, tell them you are ready to schedule, right now, an in-district meeting at a later time. If the staff schedules it, then talk to the staff about the issue. If not, then just leave your background materials, and depart.

Briefly introduce the individuals of the group, and where they live. The legislator will want to know whether they are listening to someone who is a voter in their district.

## **Basic talking points**

*Oil and gas drillers have an exemption from Ohio law that lets them hide any chemical as a trade secret without justifying it to anyone. The law makes it difficult for the public to challenge trade secret claims. Oil and gas drillers don't have to report their hazardous chemicals to fire departments and emergency planners like other industries do. It's almost impossible for doctors, nurses, firefighters, EMS, police and haz-mat teams to get complete chemical information in an emergency situation. If a doctor or nurse goes through the process to get complete chemical information, they can only use it to diagnose or treat a single individual.*

*When the new state law was being considered last spring, the Ohio State Medical Association sought and won improvements in the bill. These were welcome, but more changes are needed, concerning speed of information access, emergency preparedness, trade secrets and limits on the use of the information.*

*Senate Bill 17 and House Bill 42, the Fracking Emergency Medical Right to Know Act, would bring oil and gas drillers in line with other industries in our state. It would require them to submit information to emergency planners, and provide doctors, nurses, firefighters, EMS, police, and haz-mat teams with complete information when they need it, and let them use it how they need to.*

Be brief, and give solid examples of the problem. Personal stories are best. Whenever possible, speak from your own experience. Stay on the issue. Keep turning the discussion to common ground.

Invite the legislator to ask questions, offer their own thoughts, giving an assessment of other legislators' views, and so on.

### **What if the legislator asks a question I can't answer?**

Saying "I don't know," increases your credibility with the legislator. They spend all day long listening to lies and exaggerations. It's refreshing for them to hear someone honest enough to say they don't know the answer to a question. Just say, "I don't know. I'll check and get back to you." When you follow-up with the answer, they will note that you kept your promise to get back to them. And it will be an excuse to give them some more information about the issue.

### **What the legislator can do to help:**

*Co-sponsor the bill.*

At the end, leave fact sheets and other background materials with the legislator. Be sure to end on a positive note. Never burn a bridge: Always leave the door open to working together in the future.

### **Follow-up**

We are eager to find out what happened. Please call Melissa English, (513) 221-2100, or Nathan Rutz, (216) 861-5200, to let us know how the meeting went. Also, be sure to send a follow-up letter to the legislator, reviewing any items you or they promised to do, and adding information or points if necessary. Thanks.