

Lobbying

Introduction

Organisations engaged in lobbying activities seek to persuade public bodies of the reasons why certain issues, policies or laws should be supported or rejected. Despite its somewhat tarnished reputation, lobbying remains a useful tool for charities seeking to make an impact in the public sphere. Lobbying is a means by which organisations can further their objectives by influencing the direction and content of government policy decisions.

Techniques for lobbying government

Various channels and techniques exist for pressuring and influencing government. Whichever approaches you decide to adopt you should be mindful of the legal constraints detailed at the end of this document.

- Remember that ministers are not usually experts in the fields they represent. Your charity should aim to establish itself as the foremost authority in its field while fostering a relationship with the relevant department. In time you may be called upon for comment or advice.
- Consider seeking to influence other groups that are integral to the political process. Backbench MPs, opposition politicians, select committees, all-party groups, lords, civil servants, think tanks and the media may respond well to your message.
- Be positive in your approach. Seek to shape and respond to government policy rather than criticise it.
- Consider the specific structures, interests and needs of regional government. Is the angle your charity adopts when lobbying MSPs in Scotland suitable for use in Wales and England too?
- Be aware of the agenda and language of the current government. Tailor your approach and adopt a tone that is in tune with the people you seek to influence.
- Time your approach carefully. Inopportune lobbying is counterproductive and reveals your organisation's lack of understanding in the political process.
- Consider lobbying government in conjunction with other organisations that share similar goals to your charity. This tactic has the benefit of maximising a minister's time while impressing upon them the weight of support for your cause.

Attracting a politician's backing for your cause

Members of your charity should seek to cultivate the support of their local MP. Enthusiastic MPs will pursue their constituents' concerns, and thus your charity's cause, through a variety of channels in parliament. They may ask questions of ministers and the PM or propose a motion relating to your campaign. Your appeal for support will be one of many an MP receives everyday. To attract an MP's attention to your cause, therefore, consider employing one or more of the following techniques:

- Identify and target politicians who may have a particular interest in your charity's cause. Check national newspapers or Hansard for records of the issues in which they have

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expressed an interest.

- Provide facts about the potential effects of your charity's campaign on the minister's/MP's constituency.
- Invite the local MP to your charity's events in their constituency.
- Arrange for an MP to meet local charity workers or beneficiaries of your charity's work.
- Urge your charity's grassroots members to lobby their local MP by visiting MPs' surgeries or writing letters expressing their concerns and asking for support.
- Think carefully about the value of postcard campaigns. They are often limited in their impact.
- Remember that a politician's time is precious. Your charity should ensure that time and resources designated for lobbying are used wisely.

Using the media to lobby

The press reports policy announcements and key political debates every day. Newspapers in particular are an important means of communicating the major political stories of the day. Some people believe that the press may influence the political agenda and put pressure on the government to alter the course of its policies.

- Use the media to communicate your organisation's message and its response to the issues and policy decisions of the day.
- Make yourself well known to journalists to ensure that you will be called upon for comment when an issue relevant to your organisation hits the news.
- Ministers do keep abreast of what the newspapers are covering and which issues are making the headlines. If you are to capture the government's attention you should aim to gain maximum coverage of your story in the broadsheets.
- After an important policy announcement be prepared to respond quickly in order to get your message to the newspapers before your competitors. The faster your response the more likely you are to feature in a news story, gaining vital coverage and attention for your campaign.
- Some newspapers will take up a story or run a campaign that seeks both to shape public opinion and influence ministers. The relationships you build with journalists will make all the difference as to whether it is your charity's campaign that is featured.

Charity political campaigning: the law

Registered charities cannot legally be political bodies. Your charity may still contribute to the political process, however, so long as you are mindful of the political constraints.

- Activities in the political sphere should further the purposes of your charity.
- Your charity cannot state as its aim the attainment of a political purpose and its activities must be for the public benefit. Actions explicitly seeking to further or oppose government policy are not considered charitable.
- Your charity can still engage in activities aimed at securing or opposing changes in the law, government policy or decisions. The charity's trustees may take some political actions on its behalf as a means of achieving your stated aims. Such activities must clearly serve your charity's purposes and be subordinate to them.
- Your charity must ensure that adequate provisions are in place for the commissioning,

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control and evaluation of political activity.

- Non-charitable voluntary organisations, on the other hand, are free within the law to support any cause they desire.

Further resources

Dodds, Felix (2004) *How to Lobby at Intergovernmental Meetings*, Earthscan.

Organisations spend considerable resources taking staff to international meetings, often without understanding how these meetings work. This publication by Felix Dodds, Executive Director of the Stakeholder Forum for Our Common Future in London, is a guide on how to participate and be heard at intergovernmental meetings, whether as a stakeholder or a government official. Based on 10 years of lobbying at the international level, this book provides advice on the preparation and presentation of ideas, the consultation and negotiating process, and practical and logistical matters. It also contains reference material including tips for navigating the intergovernmental hot spots of New York and Geneva; lists of UN commissions; conferences and permanent missions; contact details of key international organisations, NGOs and stakeholder groups; and useful web addresses.