

A Lobbyist's Hierarchies of Need

Many organisations may find the association between lobbying and campaigning deters them from getting the most out of dealings with government. However, much useful lobbying is simply about building relationships with decision-makers and allowing information to flow. Politico describes these levels in a hierarchy of needs: Need to Know, Need to Inform and Need to Negotiate (see box below) and emphasises that real lobbying only occurs at the third level of negotiation.

Hierarchy of lobbying needs

Need to Know is the most important requirement of an organisation and most basic level of government engagement. It can be satisfied by passive monitoring (making sure they know of everything that has happened) or through early warning (making sure they know in advance of likely policy planning or actions that could affect their interests).

Need to Inform involves the organisation building relationships of trust with government officials so that they become willing to use the organisations as a source of information for making representative policies. It requires knowing, and being known, by the relevant decision-makers who formulate, consider, scrutinise, amend and endorse policies.

Need to Negotiate is a higher level of engagement and relationship still. It involves making representations to the components of the power structure where there is a need to change policy. The bulk of government-related issues are resolved through negotiation, backed up by well assembled submissions, though it might also be necessary to ally outside influences, such as the media or public opinion.

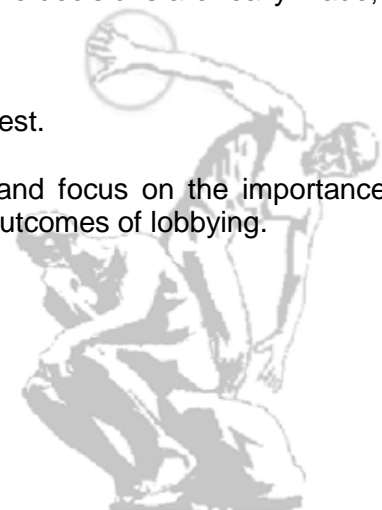
Source: Politico (p5-6)

Creating noise or being quiet

Many lobbyists emphasise that the effectiveness of lobbying is usually in inverse relation to the amount of noise generated. The most successful players (Politico):

- understand their targets needs, concerns and sensitivities and assemble their arguments accordingly (developing their approach as if developing a product for the market);
- understand the route map of the system, how it works and where decisions are really made;
- swim with the tide, wherever possible;
- work early while policy is still malleable;
- understand the need to show and prove a constituency of interest.

Other tips for effective lobbying are given in the following box and focus on the importance of planning and preparing, building good relations and handling the outcomes of lobbying.



Top tips for lobbyists

Planning and preparing

- Golden rules for drafting a lobbying plan: WHAT is the case, WHO makes the decisions, WHEN do we deal with our targets, HOW do we deal with them, WHY is every action objectively necessary?
- In much lobbying the objective is unrealistic – ask yourself: can we make this a yes-able proposition?
- Always think ‘why should you want to know me, deal with this, read this?’ Put yourself in their shoes.
- Do less but do it better – most lobbying is done to too many people in not enough depth.
- Every pound spent on research is worth ten spent on lobbying: source every statement or fact, anticipate the arguments against you and deal with them there and then. Do not sweep unconvincing data under the carpet.
- Some basic parliamentary monitoring is useful but high quality intelligence is more important (i.e. actively obtaining views on policy formulation, feedback on representations, attitudes towards you / your organisation).

Building relations

- Make sure there is a point to any contact programme – the system only has so much patience.
- If dealing with government on a day-to-day basis, assess the right level of seniority of official to build up your relationship with.
- Use directories, consultants or informants to help identify officials with interests similar to yours.
- In 90% of UK and 70% of EU cases parliament changes nothing – you must square your case with officials and Ministers first. Only a few cases are genuinely political.

Winning and losing

- Never crow about your victories.
- Do not surprise the system, brief official before you meet Ministers, brief the front bench researcher before meeting opposition spokesmen and advise officials before any announcement relevant to them.
- Never get NO on the record, better to withdraw and fight again.
- It's never won until its won, there are many cases where issues changed at the last minute.

Source: Adapted from Politico, pp312-316

