

# APYN Skype School HIGHLIGHTS – Lobbying Tips?

21 July 2011

## Who facilitated the session?

Our friend Rathana from Australia! Rathana is the Activism Coordinator for AI Australia and has been involved in campaign for quite awhile.

## From the facilitator:

We are going to walk through some basic principles around lobbying

There is no exact science to Lobbying. There are lots of ways that you can approach it, but the basic fundamentals is recognising that lobbying is about engaging someone in a conversation who has authority or decision making power.

Lobbying forms part of a bigger campaign strategy - it is one element, it cannot be effective if it is the only tool you use in your campaign.

This is the basic definition of lobbying: To try to influence the thinking of legislators, public officials or figures with authority for or against a specific cause

Now lobbying is not always a safe practice in a lot of countries, because a lot of the time we are dealing with very powerful people - like politicians, senior public servants and key decision makers. And it should be said that we as youth activists must always put safety first - that way we can continue to campaign another day :)

So when we lobby, what we are doing is building strategic relationships with people who have the power to impact the issues that we are campaigning on.

People who are in positions of authority, for example, politicians, have been put there by people who are their 'constituents'. For a politician, this would be the general public who are allowed to vote, and this includes our friends, family, community members and the like. It is important to remember this because to build relationships with such people/leaders means understanding their 'self interest' and understanding why these leaders do what they do. Once we have established we generally understand why they do what they do we can figure out our strategy on how to make contact.

So there are a few ways you can get the attention of a key decision maker:

1. Phone them: You can ring them and leave a message, or try and have a conversation with them about your concerns
2. Write to them: Write a letter or email to them voicing your concerns.
3. Hold an event: You can hold a community event and invite them to attend
4. Attend Event they are hosting: At these events introduce yourself and make yourself known as a person who is interested in a specific issue.

It is always important to be polite and address them according to their title.

Remember - you want to get them on your side for your campaign.

When creating your 'message' for them try and link it to their self interest.

For example, I live in a city where our Mayor wants to make everything more environmentally friendly. So I would start with:

Dear Mayor,

I want to congratulate you on your great work with the environmental program.

I am part of a group of citizens in your citizen who want to help strengthen this work.

We need your help to.....

and then I would insert what my ask is and linking it to the Mayor's self interest of a more environmentally safer city.

In cases where the politicians are difficult to contact, a letter from your group/organization might be where you start. Politicians are generally very busy as we all know, and they get lots of requests from lots of different interest groups, the media, other politicians, and so on. So it is very important when we make contact that we stand out as someone who understands their vision. Sometimes politicians don't always respond to our first contact, and if you attempt to make contact a few times you can slowly begin to get their attention. If that fails, then try and make contact with one of their staff members, we use these strategies all the time.

But it is always, always important to be polite, and to speak to their self interest.

Remember - no one likes being blamed for a problem; but people love being part of a solution.

When deciding who you think may be the best person to help you in the change you are seeking you may want to ask yourself a few key questions:

1. What is the issue you want to change?
2. Who made the decision?
3. Did they make it singularly or in a coalition with others?
4. Is it conceivable/ and safe to access this person directly?
5. Are there others who may be willing to support your cause?
6. Do any of the "others" have a relationship that could be useful in influencing the decision maker?
7. Is there someone else you could lobby, who will talk to the decision maker themselves?

You should research who the players are in each area. For example, if you are lobbying about corporate responsibility potentially the CEO is not the best target; you may be able to talk to Board members, or service providers who may support your cause.

Research by:

1. Googling (if possible – most public figures have some information available publically)
2. Asking questions – think of people you know through your social networks- sometimes the best information comes by word of mouth
3. Make friends with their staff - sometimes a relationship with someone internally can be helpful in facilitating contact and gathering information.

Always remember that safety comes first when Lobbying powerful people.

Sometimes you may want a more established organisation or leader to do the lobbying on your behalf - and sometimes that's the first relationship you want to work on as a way of influencing the big decision maker

OKAY - so let's review just quickly:

We've talked about Lobbying being about building relationships with key decision makers in the cause/issue you are campaigning on

We've talked about ways to approach them e.g. phone, letter, email etc

We've talked about how sometimes we cannot always talk to them directly; and sometimes it even strategic to talk to them directly but more strategic to approach people in their sphere who may have a more direct 'self interest' related to the cause your campaigning on.

The most successful lobbying happens face to face - whether that's lobbying your a key decision maker in a campaign or lobbying your parents to change their mind on an issue. It's about the understanding the dynamics of the relationship, and always understanding that you are trying to get them onside and make them feel like they are part of the solution; not being blamed for a problem.

Here are some basic steps:

Step One

Write to the person, who strategically you think there is value in communicating with and outline you would like to have a meeting.

Step Two

Follow up your letter with a phone call and try and set up a meeting time. Remember to be persistent!

Step Three

Before the meeting, your group should get together and have a practice run, work out who will say what.

Step Four

Meet with the person, remember you will probably only have 20 minutes for your discussion, but if it goes longer keep talking!!

Tips:

<b>ALWAYS</b>	<b>NEVER</b>
Practice what you are going to say - including what roles each of you will play in the meeting – treat it like a theater.	Get upset if you don't know an answer to a question they may ask - you can always ask to 'take it on notice' or say 'Can I research that some more for you and get back to you with a thorough response'.
Go as a group	Go by yourself
Be polite	
Stay on message - really think about, if this key decision maker went home tonight and said to their family: "I met these youth activists today and they wanted....."	

Everyone from your group who is in the meeting should have a role to play and you should have defined ideas about what the role of each person should be - that way you give them impression of being a highly organised group of committed people. When picking roles it's important to play to each persons strengths.

Here are some basic roles:

Delegation Leader

Leads the conversation

Secondary Leader

Helps out and assists if things get confusing

Note taker

Take notes and action points to be followed up

Remember some meetings take a very long time to happen. You could be writing lots of letters, making lots of phone calls, sending lots of emails. All before a space becomes available in the persons diary. You want to make sure that the 10 or 30 minutes you get them counts!

It's always important to ask a key decision maker, if they haven't already made a commitment during the meeting, "Will you help us on this issue?" and "When can we start working together on this?" or something along those lines. It is far more appealing to the person than "When will you fix this?" or "Why haven't you fixed this yet?"

The final note is always remember, you are trying to a build a relationship to get them on your side so they will make a decision that will help your cause.