

Effective Lobbying Is Getting Votes!

27 Fundamentals for More Effective State Government Affairs

1. Your threshold question for each lawmaker is, “Why would this lawmaker give me his or her vote?” Until you can answer that question, you are not likely to get the vote.
2. Your answer is, “Because I have what this lawmaker wants.” If you don’t, go home.
3. Lawmakers and staff are “customers.” Customers “buy” to meet their needs, not yours.
4. Likability is job #1. Customers who like you will want to help you and “buy” from you.
5. Lawmakers are not like you - and the longer they’re in office the less they’re like you.
6. Winning a lawmaker’s vote is 10% access and 90% heat. Access is easy. “Political heat” is a few active higher-level involved supporters, both in- and out-of-district. Organize your supporters.
7. Coalitions are indispensable. They exist for advantage - not for love, loyalty, or debt. Don’t pre-qualify or disqualify any potential partner. “Politics makes strange bedfellows.”
8. Get past “nice” to get lawmakers’ votes. A lawmaker’s being nice is not a vote!
9. “Lobbying is a dance of seduction.” Find and use each lawmaker’s susceptibilities.
10. “Facts don’t vote.” A lawmaker votes his or her own peculiar political calculus. Seldom are technical facts enough to get votes; but political facts may be all it takes.
11. 70% of winning a lawmaker’s vote occurs before talking to the lawmaker.
12. Lawmakers help friends and oppose enemies. Their voters matter, *constituents do not*. Lobby their voters, supportive special interests, and donors before you lobby lawmakers.
13. 80-90% of lawmakers are irrelevant to winning or losing your bill. Relevant ones are on key committees plus, the few, if any, lawmakers who actually care for you or your issue.
14. Convince relevant lawmakers to partner with you by showing each why working with you is good for him or her, politically. “Self-interest is the engine of government.”
15. Most lawmakers’ votes are won or lost at fish fries, not in committee meetings.
16. Most committee meetings are theater since their votes were bartered away at the fish fry.
17. “The lower you shoot, the higher you hit.” Lobby staff, then members of the committee of first reference, its chair, then gatekeeper committees. Lobby leadership last, if at all.
18. There is no unimportant staff. You may not need a staff person’s support, but you can’t afford his or her opposition. Build warm relationships with staff!
19. The more work you do for the legislature and especially staff the more likely your ideas will become law. Materials that don’t help them do their jobs end up in the trash!
20. Legislatures operate on 3 types of rules: 1) written; 2) unwritten; 3) unwritten and unspoken. Violate any – especially lobbyist registration – and you’ll be disrespected as ill-informed.
21. Unwritten rule 1: you have to talk to people you don’t like, and who don’t like you.
22. Unwritten and unspoken rule 1: “Thou shalt make campaign contributions” to be long-term capitol players. Money is good; voter+donor+constituent support is better; both is best.
23. Most lobbyists have little personal political power. Don’t confuse a lobbyist’s ability to say “hi” to a lawmaker with the ability to get that lawmaker’s vote.
24. Your lobbyist – contract or staff – should be a better lobbyist for the legislature. You and yours who are lawmakers’ friends are better lobbyists for your district’s lawmakers.
25. The best time to lobby is when you don’t need anything.
26. Agencies promulgate 90% of laws; legislatures 10%. This means what the legislature *giveth* an agency can *taketh* away, and what the legislature wouldn’t give you an agency might.
27. Nobody cares about your issue as much as you do. Neither money nor the best contractors can win your battles for you. If you don’t make it happen, then it probably won’t.