

Lobbying in Annapolis

Adapted from Friends Committee on National Legislation: Lobbying 101

Lobbying might seem a little intimidating, right? We get it. And we understand that it's a big ask – but it's that important. We're with you every step of the way!

Your letters to the editor and emails to members of the Maryland General Assembly do make a difference, but nothing comes close to citizen lobbying if you really want to effect change in Annapolis. We ask you to lobby because legislators and staff tell us that in-person visits from constituents are the most influential way to communicate with the General Assembly.

Overview: There are four major steps for a successful lobby visit:

1. [Choose a specific action you want your senator or delegate to take and plan the visit.](#) [Get more information](#) about an issue you care about, then use our Lobby Visit Road Map to plan the meeting. You don't need to be an expert – the office wants to hear your story and how the legislation will affect voters like you.

2. [Get in touch with the office of your senator or delegate.](#) To find their contact information, google Maryland General Assembly/Legislator List.

3. [Go lobby!](#) Thank the office for a past action, ask them to take a new action on legislation you care about, then tell your story and ask questions.

4. [Follow up.](#) Send an email to the person you met with thanking them for their time and following up on any unanswered questions that surfaced during the visit.

1. Get Ready for Your Lobby Visit

Identify your “ask,” an action you want your senator or delegate to take. Talk to friends, family, and other people in your community who might be interested in going with you. Lobbying can be more fun with friends! Are you part of a community or professional group? Are there community leaders who have already spoken out about the issue? Lobbying in a group that represents different parts of your community can show the office that there's broad support for your position. You may even want to think about what constituencies or perspectives would be influential with your particular legislator.

2. Schedule Your Lobby Visit

Contact the Office to make an appointment. Find the contact information by googling Maryland General Assembly/Legislator List. Legislative offices want to hear from you -- it's just a matter of coordinating schedules. One option is to find out when the legislator will be in his or her local office and visit them there. If your senator or delegate isn't available, you'll often be able to meet with a staff member, either in the local office or in Annapolis. Usually it's possible to meet with the legislator if you are flexible as to time.

3. Go Lobby!

Think of at least four people who wear different hats whom you could include in your group -- they could be service providers, criminal justice professions, formerly incarcerated people, or concerned citizens.

If you've gotten this far, you're ready! Make sure to meet with your group at least 1 hour before the meeting to plan who will say what. Most meetings are 10-45 minutes long. You'll want to say thank you, make a clear ask, talk about who you are and your connections in the community, and ask questions.

Exchange contact information. Most staffers will give you a business card at the beginning or end of the visit – make sure you hang on to it!

Say “thank you” and build a relationship. Try to focus on building a relationship – start off by saying thank you for something (like a recent vote or for meeting with you), seek common values, and listen. This will allow you to gain more rapport with a legislative office over time.

Make one ask. You only have a short meeting, so in order to be most effective with follow-up, try to focus the meeting on one issue and one ask. Members of your group can always schedule another meeting on a different topic if need be.

Speak from your experience. Remember you definitely don't have to be an expert to be effective. All you have to do is speak from your experience and ask questions. Legislative offices can access all the facts they want, but what they can't hear from anyone else is the heart of why the issue matters to their constituents. You're in the office because they care about what you think as a constituent – not because of your credentials. Some question ideas include: (i) How can we support you to take this stance? Whom else do you need to hear this message from? (ii) When can we follow-up to receive a response back from the senator/delegate?

Bring a fact sheet to leave behind. It can be helpful to bring one piece of paper that has your “ask” written out, along with the names and contact information of everyone in your group. You can give this to the legislator or staff person along with one or two fact sheets or flyers

Take notes. Designate one person as the note taker. Consider bringing along the lobby visit report back form so that you or someone in your group can take notes on what the legislator or staff member says.

4. Follow Up

Send the legislator or staffer a thank you e-mail and summary of your visit within a week. Summarize your “ask”, list who was there and their community/professional affiliations, provide any information that they asked for, and ask any follow-up questions. In case you met only with a staff person, this e-mail makes it easy to pass your message and questions along.

What's Next?

Keep in touch with the legislator or staff you met with

You will be more effective if you build up a relationship with both legislators and staff over time and keep visiting. You can keep in touch over time to send articles or letters to the editor you write, share statements from community partners, and ask for follow-up visits.

You may want to ask for a meeting with the legislator when he or she comes home during a recess. Don't worry about being a burden or repetitive –we often hear that when you're tired of saying something, they're just starting to hear it.

Generate local media

Generating letters to the editor mentioning your legislator's name or gathering personalized letters from influential people in your community can help reinforce the message of your visit. You can send those materials directly to the legislator or staff person you met with and politely ask for a response from the office.

Think about who else you could bring along next time

One of the hardest parts of lobbying is doing it the very first time. So make it a little easier for someone else! If you have a friend who hasn't lobbied before, ask if they want to come along on your next lobby visit.



Lobby Visit Road Map

Planning your visit will lead to a more successful lobbying effort. **Assign names in each of the blanks for roles listed below, and plan out what each person will say.**

Group Leader: _____

Finds out how much time you have, makes sure that the ask is repeated clearly several times, and follows up.

Note-Taker _____

Gets the names and contact information of everyone in the meeting who is not in your delegation, takes notes to draft a follow up letter after the meeting.

Outline of Meeting and/or Follow up letter example:

1) Introduction _____

2) The “Thank You” _____

3) The Ask _____

a. Supporting fact one: _____

b. Supporting fact two: _____

c. Supporting fact three: _____

d. Personalize the ask; tell as story: _____

4) Answer Follow-up Questions by the Staff or Legislator _____

5) Exchange contact information _____

6) Thank the Staffer or Legislator _____

Lobby Report

Please provide the following information about your lobby visit. Send it to Pat Schenck at 604 Greenbriar Lane, Annapolis 21401 or pat.schenck@verizon.net.

Your Information

Email:

First/Last name:

Date of meeting:

Which senator or delegate were you lobbying?

Who else joined you on your lobby visit?

Who did you meet with? If he/she is a staffer, what is his or her role on staff? Provide contact information if possible.

How long did the visit last?

What was your specific ask?

What was the response from the staff or member of the General Assembly? What questions did they ask?

What follow-up will you do after the visit?