

BCGEU CHILD CARE CAMPAIGN TOOLBOX 2: Lobbying campaign

General guidelines

- Fears about lobbying politicians
- It's not a waste of time
- A lobbying campaign
-

Lobbying methods

1. Phone
2. Letter writing
3. Postcards
4. Meeting
5. Petitions
6. Public Meetings

Lobbying campaign – three stages

- First, develop support by publicizing the issue within your organization and community.
- Second, decide the kind of lobby – letter, phone, meeting with the politicians.
- Third, take action.

LOBBYING – GENERAL GUIDELINES

Community and union members form powerful lobby groups. As voters, we make up an influential constituency.

Despite this power, many of us are not confident with the process of lobbying, especially if we've never done it before. We must deal with our hesitations about politicians before we begin the process.

Fears About Lobbying Politicians

Many of us believe politicians know more than we do or they wouldn't be in decision-making positions. We think we aren't articulate enough or that we'll freeze when we approach the politicians. Maybe they'll ask questions we can't answer.

Remember, the politician's job is to serve us. That's why they get elected to office. Never forget that it's us – the voters – who hold the power.

Politicians are often very responsive to the voters, the people who can affect their future.

Many of our fears about lobbying can be addressed by looking at some groups who have lobbied government on issues that touch the average citizen. Who were their members? What made them credible spokespersons? Can we see any similarities between them and our attempts to organize a lobby?

It's Not a Waste of Time

Another obstacle to lobbying is the view that it's a waste of time, that we, alone, can't make a difference. But if our voices aren't heard, then our opponents will be the only group to get the ear of the decision-makers.

Too often, we measure our lobbying success on the outcome of legislation.

But we can measure victory in other, more realistic ways. For example, if it's the first time we've ever done a lobby, the fact that we organized and sat down with, called or wrote the politicians to express our views can be seen as a victory in itself.

Even if we don't directly see or speak to the politician because he or she is avoiding us, they do get the message that the issue is important to the community.

PHONE LOBBY

Numbers Count

- Ask every member of every organization to phone.
- Ask each member to get a friend to phone.

Speak to the politician

- If you are “screened” leave a definite message, stating your views briefly.
- Ask the politician to get back to you.
- Follow-up with another call.

LETTER LOBBY

1. Get the name and address right
2. Identify yourself or your organization
3. Get to the point at once
4. Target your message to the audience
5. Request them to take action, including responding to your letter
6. No paragraph should be more than six lines long
7. Be clear about what you are requesting be done
8. Numbers count – get other letters of support from unions, community groups and friends

LOBBYING IN PERSON

1. Arrange a Pre-Lobby Meeting

Members of your lobby delegation should meet before hand to discuss what you're going to say.

2. Plan the Agenda

Decide what you want to discuss and the points you want to make. Practice making your pitch. If you are lobbying in a group, choose a spokesperson and a recorder.

3. Know Your Audience

Keep your politician's interests in mind. Example, pay equity, childcare, Privatization – cutting women's incomes reduces spending in the local community. Some politicians will be genuinely interested in maintaining a strong pay equity law. Others will be concerned with their own interest. Making the point of the impact on the community does work. Remember, stick to your subject. Your goal is to persuade the politician to support your position.

4. Know Your Subject

Anticipate questions and arguments and be prepared to respond. Don't be afraid to say you don't know the answer to some points – offer to get back with information and be sure you follow through. Contact your local labour council, BC Federation of Labour, or community organizations if you need more information.

5. Be Clear and Concise

Don't try to cover too much ground – confine your comments to specific issues. Explain your position, and don't assume the politician understands your point of view. Speak confidently and persuasively.

6. Be a Good Listener

Try to determine areas of agreement. Avoid arguments and don't lecture. If the politician favours your position, ask for help in persuading the government.

7. Leave the Door Open

Try to prevent outright rejection of your position. Emphasize your areas of agreement, not your difference.

8. Don't Get Discouraged

Not every politician will be sympathetic or supportive. Don't allow an early disappointment to stop you from continuing to lobby this politician. Sometimes they need to hear things several times before they understand the issue, especially if they've never thought about it before. Sometimes they don't realize the importance of the issue to their constituency. Their position on this issue means votes.

MORE TIPS FOR THE LOBBYING MEETING

Review Information

Review all the material you have on the issue.

Stick to what you know

The best way to deal with the issue when talking to a politician is to talk from your own experience – why this issue is important to you, your family, or your community.

Follow up with more information

Don't worry if you're asked a question you can't answer. Just get back to the politician with the information letter.

Keep control of the meeting/phone call

Don't let the politician sidetrack you onto other issues. Politely stick to the issue at hand.

Use your clout in the constituency

If possible, let the politician know the scope of the lobby. Ask other women's organizations and unions who live in the constituency to follow up by phone calls and letters.

Try to get a commitment

Know what you're going to say and what you want from the politician before your meeting. Ideally, you want the politician to support your position. Ask her or him to soften up the other elected members of their party. If possible, try to get a commitment from the politician about what they are prepared to do.