

Lobbying Strategies at the State Level

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Today's Agenda

There are many opportunities to engage with policymakers and shape the business environment at the state level. During this webinar, we will cover strategies for successful engagement with state legislatures, including:

- Finding focus through effective issue tracking and prioritization.
 - Building a strategic engagement plan — especially with regard to establishing and prioritizing contacts.
 - Tailoring your message to state legislators' interests.
 - Maintaining integration with other functions and utilizing associations and coalitions.
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Before We Get Started: Nuggets of Knowledge

- Internal client management is an art form, often more difficult than external lobbying.
- How do you assess your own work, your team's work, and the work of your lobbyists?
- Political contributions – When? Why? How? Should your organization form a PAC?
- Killing a bill is always easier than passing one.
- Bad laws often pass while good policies often lose to politics.
- Don't forget to meet & greet.
- Get to know the staff. Get to know the staff very well.

Bring Your Issues More Sharply Into Focus

- Nationwide? Multistate? Statewide? Small geographical area?
- What are my business' primary markets? What locales should we care about?
- Are my issues unique to my company or do I have natural allies? Who are my indirect allies?

- Do I need a contract lobbyist or not? Coalition lobbyist? Long term lobbyist or hired gun?
- Is this a direct revenue issue or a cost of doing business issue? Or is this a fundamental philosophical issue that is not easy to measure monetarily?
- How will you measure success? Measurements matter!

Building Relationships With Legislators

- The absolute best time to go visit with a legislator is when you don't need something.
- Use the interim to your advantage. Visit legislators in their districts.
- Are assets located in their district? Does my company do business with the state?
- How do I maintain legislative relationships without creating the perception I am using their influence for my own corporate interests?

Building a Strategic Engagement Plan: Nuts & Bolts

- Be familiar with the different deadlines and procedures in the states where you are engaged.
- What internal expectations should I set and with whom?
- From what internal stakeholders do I need to get to “buy in” to the strategy?
- Know your state and local ethics laws inside and out.

- Is my business disrupting traditional statutory and regulatory regimes?
- Do I need to pass or kill a bill?
- Can I amend a bill or live with amendments?
- What is the underlying budget situation?

Strategic Engagement Plan: Strengths & Priorities

- What are my strengths? Political chits, assets located in a key district...
- Is pursuing this bill going to harm my chances in achieving other strategic priorities? Need to assess impact on both short term and long term priorities.
- Should I float a bill this year knowing it's going to die, but with the primary goal of giving the issue a chance to be socialized? If my bill gets slaughtered, do I look foolish re-introducing it next year, thus jeopardizing my longer-term strategy?
- What is my business client willing to live with vs. when is the point to cut and run?

What's Your Message?

- Do I need to launch a full fledged “issue campaign” on this particular public policy initiative?
- Messaging must, must, must be consistent not only from your organization's GR department but with PR resources as well. Do I need a media relations plan? Am I going to engage grass roots efforts (social media, letter writing, etc.?)
- Can a contract lobbyist deliver the message effectively? Do I need to be on the ground? Do I need my SMEs to attend meetings and hearings?
- You must be viewed by the legislator as a subject matter expert. You and your organization's credibility is at stake.

Tailoring Your Message to a State Legislator's Interests: Be Tactful

- Timing – other critical events may be happening the day you decide to storm the Capitol... Are budget negotiations ongoing? Are elections coming up?
- Tell legislators what your opponents are going to say. What are the needs of your opponents?
- If there is a fiscal impact, make it very clear why the costs are far outweighed by the benefits.

Maintaining Integration with Other Functions & Utilizing Coalitions

- Site visits hosted by coalitions for lawmakers.
- Informal groups of like-minded lobbyists & interest groups (ad hoc associations).
- Trade associations demonstrate your organization's interests are not the only interests that are engaged on public policy matters. There is strength in numbers!
- Formal association memberships.