

Lobbying for Success



The Virginia League of Conservation Voters
530 East Main Street; Suite 820
Richmond, Virginia 23219
Phone: 804-225-1902
www.valcv.org

Steps to Successful Lobbying

Forward

In each state of the United States the elected representatives of the people are charged with the responsibility of making and changing laws. The purpose of these laws is to describe and prescribe the conditions under which the citizens live and work. The Commonwealth of Virginia is no different from the rest of the states in the assignment of these responsibilities. All changes based on the laws enacted by the Virginia General Assembly affect each and every citizen. In order to influence the actions of the representatives, citizens must persuade legislators to support initiatives that are consistent with the people's goals. The use of effective and efficient lobbying can contribute to the accomplishment of the defined goals.

Planning For Meeting With The Legislators

Every effort should be made to meet with the legislator both in the local office and the legislator's office in Richmond. The home office meeting should be planned well in advance of the session of the General Assembly. Meetings in the home office usually provide for a more relaxed atmosphere and the legislator has a greater opportunity to give you full time and attention. Make meeting appointments at such times as will provide the greatest opportunity for the legislator, you, and your team to communicate with the greatest possible ease.

Meetings in the legislator's office at the capitol during a session of the General Assembly may become somewhat hectic. You must be aware of the demands on the legislator's time and his/her requirements for numerous meetings at a variety of locations. If offered, take the opportunity to talk with the legislator as he/she walks to the next meeting. Not only are there many meetings, but scheduling often appears to be on the spur of the moment. Make every effort to be aware of assembly procedures for setting up meetings and special sessions.

Because of such demands on the elected officials, it is possible that you may need to talk with the legislative aide. Let the legislator know that the aide and other staff members are welcomed at planned meetings. Be sure that you know the aide's name; recognize that the aide often "pinch hits" for the legislator at busy times in both the home and the General Assembly office.

Prior Planning and the Legislative Meeting

Learn about the legislator. There are factors that must be considered when planning the meeting. Know the representative's voting record (check the current VALCV Scorecard

online at www.valcv.org/valcvdocs/legislative.html); check who has donated money to the legislator (www.vpap.org); know the Senate or House committee assignments for your legislator (found on General Assembly site <http://legis.state.va.us/>); be aware of political affiliations; make an effort to learn what demands his/her constituents are making.

Don't take an army. Limit the size of the visiting group. A group of three members seems to be most appropriate. Often it is difficult to accommodate larger groups because of limited space. Be sure everyone is introduced. Sit so there is a degree of "position equity."

Assign "roles" to the members of the visiting team. With a team of three members, two should be given the assignment of presenting specific information concerning the hoped for legislative goals. The third member should be the observer, the timekeeper, and the report writer. Select the topics that will be presented. Decide the order of presentation for each topic based on a logical and expanding perspective. The observer should concentrate on the legislator's responses – verbal, emphasis, apparent interest, and body language. The observations should be used as the foundation for the written report.

Rehearse the visiting team. Identify the source material that will be used as a basis for selecting the topics. Rehearse the expected actions and outcomes of the proposed meetings with one person playing the role of the legislator. When there is more than one visiting team, it is helpful to have an individual "play" the legislator for each group in training. The person in the legislative role should attempt to pick holes in the presentation, ask questions, change the subject, and use similar responses to "test" the meeting plan.

Be sure that everyone is familiar with the issue(s). If you are unsure or have questions about the issue(s), contact the Virginia League of Conservation Voters at (804) 225-1902 or check the Virginia Conservation Network website at www.vcnva.org.

Have any necessary materials ready. If a bill is printed, make sure you have a copy for the legislator. If there is a position paper on the issue, have a copy on hand.

Try to anticipate arguments and have a defense or response ready.

When planning a lobby trip to Richmond, you can request a VALCV briefing. A briefing can be provided in Richmond prior to your meeting with your legislator. Issues change daily so you will be brought up to date on all matters.

Use the proper title. Unless the legislator is a friend, use "Delegate" when speaking to a member of the House of Delegates. When speaking with a member of the Senate, use "Senator."

Dress for success. Wear business attire. Your image should be that you are a professional person engaged in important business.

Recognize the role of the staff. Legislative aides will often attend meetings that you have set up with the legislator. Frequently, the legislative aide will hear your presentation when the legislator cannot attend. Ask the aide to take notes and to relay information to the representative. Also, it would be helpful to take a prepared written statement to be left for the legislator in these cases.

Recognize legislative responsibilities. In the capitol offices, the legislator may have to leave to conduct other business. If there is such an interruption, simply complete your business with the legislative aide.

Recognize legislative schedules. Members of the General Assembly and their staffs frequently have full schedules. You may be required to change the time of an appointment on short notice. You may have to meet on the run with the legislator heading to another meeting. Be flexible and gracious about making adjustments.

Don't wear out your welcome! Once you have communicated your message, don't inconvenience the legislator or the staff by staying longer than necessary. Remind your timekeeper to keep the group on schedule.

Presenting Your Case (The Meeting Agenda)

The primary purpose of lobbying a legislator is to gain a commitment for a vote on an issue. How you present your case will make a tremendous difference in how your message is received. Here are nine suggestions that will help you achieve your goal and make the meeting productive.

1. State the issue and the desired outcome.

2. Build the argument. Start with points on which there is likely to be mutual agreement between the legislator and the visiting team.

3. Relate these concerns to real people.

4. Give the legislator a chance to agree.

5. Move on to other points. Make use of source materials (i.e., materials prepared and distributed by individual conservation organizations, VALCV, and VCN. Before the meeting, select all points to be made.

6. Seek a commitment. "Based on the information you now have, can we count on your support?"

7. *Wrap up.* Thank the legislator for his/her time and for his/her attention to the presentation. If there is a positive response, let the legislator know that you appreciate the commitment to all members of the conservation community. If there is a negative response or if you feel that more information would be appropriate, ask the legislator if you can send more information. Don't press for a change of mind on the spot.

8. *Debrief immediately.* Get consensus on what was said, not said, and what the legislator agreed to do or not do. If you could write a report for the VALCV executive director, it would be very helpful for ongoing lobby efforts. Oral reports are forgotten too easily. The conservation lobbyists do utilize these reports. Forms are available, but any type of written report will do. Fax, mail or email your report to the VALCV executive director, Lisa Guthrie.

Phone: 804-225-1902

Fax: 804-225-1904

Address: VALCV, 530 E. Main St., Suite 820, Richmond, VA 23219

Email: VirLCV@aol.com

9. *Follow up after the visit.* The actions of a follow-up are essential regardless of the apparent outcome of the meeting. Write a short letter to those in the meeting, thanking them for their time and interest in this very important matter. In addition to this letter from the members of the visiting team, ask all members of your organization in that district to write letters to the legislator. These letters should include appreciation for favorable commitments or, in the alternative, requests for a change of legislation that is in the interest of constituents. Don't forget to have the team observer fill out the response form immediately after the meeting. Send copies of this report to appropriate members of your organization and to related organizations like VALCV which are working toward the same purpose.



Using Proven Techniques

Simply stated, lobbying is an attempt to persuade someone to accept your point of view through the sharing of information. Here are some additional tips to help increase your effectiveness.

- * ***Be prepared.*** Have the facts about the issues firmly in hand. Verify that all members of the visiting team know the facts and agree on the issues.
- * ***Be friendly.*** Don't let your efforts at persuasion sound like threats.
- * ***Be open.*** In addition to being prepared to speak, be prepared to listen. Plan the structure of the meeting in such a way that all participants will have an opportunity to do both.
- * ***Be calm.*** Be aware that everything you have planned may not happen the way that you anticipated. Maintain a professional demeanor at all times.
- * ***Be careful about your own body language.*** Avoid making loose statements like "I certainly agree with you," or careless nodding of the head on statements made by the legislator.
- * ***Give Examples.*** Provide anecdotal information about the issue. Examples may be remembered more than the facts of the issue.
- * ***Don't argue.*** If you find yourself in disagreement with the legislator, don't become embroiled in an argument. Your responsibility is to present your case, not necessarily win your case.
- * ***Don't apologize.*** Don't make statements that require an apology. Be careful to speak from a basis of fact. Do not use innuendo, thoughtless criticism, or personal attacks in referring to legislators or to other groups or retirees. Remember that you are speaking on behalf of ALL members.

* ***Don't get sidetracked.*** Don't allow any participants in the meeting to initiate unrelated topics into the discussion of the subjects specified in the goals. Guard against such departures whether originated by the visiting team or the legislator. Don't commit the organization to support a position.

* ***Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know.*** If you are not sure of an answer, say, "I'll check out that question and get back to you on it." This will give you a good reason for you to contact the legislator again.

* ***Don't give up.*** Continue to keep your legislator informed about the issues involved. If they supported the initiative, let them know that success came from their support. If the legislation is not passed, let them know that the need still exists.



Suggestions for Conducting a Meeting

1. Call for an appointment with the legislator with a reasonable lead time whenever possible.
2. Be ready to give the nature or subject of the meeting. Give the names of the team members to be present and one phone number where you can be reached.
3. Consider sending or dropping off advance information dealing with the subject of your visit. This may save a lot of explanation time.

Organize Your Lobby Team

The team should consist of three to five members, each of whom has a specific function. These functions would be thoroughly delineated. If there are four or five people on the team it might be desirable to have two people ask questions and/or two listeners, depending upon the skill and desires of the team members.

1. The leader or team captain: This is the person who sets the tone on the interview. He/she establishes rapport with the candidate. He/she has the "nice person" persona. He/she puts the questions, as succinctly as possible, in his/her own words. If necessary, he/she interprets the question – again, succinctly, and supplies whatever background information is needed.

2. The listener or reporter: After this person says how-do-you-do, he/she doesn't say anything further at all. He/she does not take notes. Nothing inhibits free discussion more than a pencil and note pad in someone's hands. He/she not only listens to what is said, but he/she also listens for attitudes, for signs of strain. (Example: Every time salary is mentioned, the candidate pulls his earlobe. What could this mean?) He/she tries to spot the candidate's "hidden agenda."

3. The track person: This person had either a big job or a small one depending on how the conversation goes. If the interview seems off on a tangent, he/she can courteously interrupt with phrases like "you said a moment ago--," "Did you mean---?" or "I think Mr. Leader meant to ask if---." the track person keeps the interview moving, and could signal its change of pace or termination. However, he/she should not attempt to stifle a discussion that is giving some insights even though it is off the track. He/she keeps the conversation from meandering fruitlessly.

Communications From Home

Letters and phone calls from home are very important during the General Assembly session. Legislators are quick to note “back-home” support for conservation goals. Keep current with the General Assembly website to check the status of bills.

(<http://leg1.state.va.us>) If you cannot reach your legislator personally, you can leave a message with the Constituent Viewpoint toll-free line **1-800-889-0229** or (804) 698-1990. Faxes and emails are also helpful in a time crunch although you cannot confirm that your message was received. “Snail mail” letters still make the most impact with many legislators.

Sample Mailing Address During Session

The Honorable _____ (use full name)
P.O. Box 406
Richmond, VA 23218

Dear Senator/Delegate _____:

Contacting Legislators

You can contact legislators at the House and Senate several different ways.

E-MAIL

Email addresses are listed on the General Assembly website (<http://leg1.state.va.us>).

PHONE

You can telephone legislators.

For delegates, all Richmond phone numbers are: (804) 698-10_ _).

The last 2 digits are the delegate's district number. For example, Del. Jim Scott's district is #53, so his phone number is (804) 698-1053.

For senators, all Richmond phone numbers are (804) 698-75_ _).

The last 2 digits are the senator's district number.

FAX

You can also fax them.

The House fax number is: (804) 786-6310.

The Senate fax number is: (804) 786-4640.

CONSTITUENT HOTLINE

You can also use the toll-free "Constituent Viewpoint Hotline": **1-800-889-0229**.

Use this number to call in your position on an issue. Your comment will be relayed to the delegate or senator, but you cannot speak directly to the legislator.

GENERAL INFORMATION

For information, call Legislative Information Services at (804) 698-1500.

TTY/TDD

For TTY/TDD services call (804) 698-7419 (Senate) and (804) 786-2369 (House).

Lobbying Report Form

Senator/Delegate: _____

Senate/House District: _____ Date Visited: _____

Whom you met with (Member &/or staff person): _____

Issue(s) Discussed: _____

Please give a brief analysis of the Member's/staff person's comments on the issue(s):

Your Name: _____

Home Address: _____

Home Phone: _____ Work Phone: _____

Personal Email Address: _____

Please return to: Virginia League of Conservation Voters
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