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You think lobbying in Washington is tough?

Ha! Go back home and try it!

By Amy Gilbody, Manager, Programs, Public Affairs Council

Last month *Impact* offered its readers lobbying tips from staffers on Capitol Hill. This month we leave Washington — well, we'll go across the river to Alexandria, Va., at least — for valuable pointers on lobbying at the state and local levels. Our experts: A very select panel of state and local elected officials, each a participant in the Public Affairs Council's popular public affairs training seminar, State and Local Government Relations Tools and Techniques: An Introduction to Best Practices.

Lobbyists find that things work differently and very quickly away from Washington. As our panel is quick to point out, one of the many things that make state and local government relations particularly tough is the fact that elected officials at these levels are part-time legislators with little or no staff. It's up close and personal with lawmakers most of the time.

On our panel are Richard H. Bagger, New Jersey Senate deputy Republican whip, Maryland state delegate Joan Stern, and Kenneth E. Davis, member of the Lower Merion Township board of commissioners in Pennsylvania. They'll give us their candid opinions on how you can best do your job at their levels. In other words, they will tell you what is effective and what isn't (translation: they'll tell you what mistakes you may have been making). You'll be as surprised at what you'll learn from this exercise as our state and local lobbyists were at our training program in Alexandria.

Here is your short — but powerful — course in lobbying where it can sometimes count the most: at home with your constituents. You'll find two of the headings a bit more descriptive than the simple "Don'ts" in most lists of this sort.

Dos

- ✔ When presenting a bill, provide a copy to the legislator with your relevant sections marked with a highlighter.
- ✔ Prepare a one- and at maximum two-page summary highlighting your key points. Bullets and graphs are appreciated as well as economic impact data and number of individuals who may be affected.
- ✔ Know your subject matter or have someone with you who truly does.
- ✔ Provide cover for controversial issues. Give them a reason and justification for supporting your bill.
- ✔ Always provide factually correct information.
- ✔ Provide the opposition's position as well.
- ✔ Be sure you meet with all citizens' organizations that are likely to be impacted by your project or think they might be impacted. Perception is the brother of reality.
- ✔ Stay current on the "at home" events. Develop a sense of the state or community and its issues by keeping up with state and local news sources and business and community organizations.
- ✔ After an election, send congratulatory letters to all the will-serve legislators. Introduce yourself to each new member and provide a one-page introductory letter with facts, figures and significant events for your organization.
- ✔ Recognize real authority. At the local level, be sure to introduce yourself to the municipality manager – he or she is the day-to-day chief of operations and is often in charge of making things happen, or not happen.
- ✔ Respect the legislator's time. Remember, he or she usually has a full-time job in addition to serving the state or community.

Tut-tuts

(Non-career-threatening goofs)

- ✘ Don't refer to a bill by its number. No legislator can be expected to memorize hundreds of bills by number.
- ✘ Don't disturb any legislator while he or she is eating or conducting other personal business.
- ✘ Don't disturb him or her at home.
- ✘ Don't be a nag. Don't pester — know when to stop.

Never, never, nevers

(Possible career-threatening gaffes)

- Never lie or provide false or misleading information.
- Never threaten, scold, personally attack, or embarrass a legislator. You're dead meat the second you make this mistake.
- Never ignore any legislator. You will need his or her vote some day.

Now for an important note: The Public Affairs Council's next state and local government relations training seminar will be held in Washington, D.C., next fall. The pointers you just finished reading are typical of the payload-heavy information you'll get then. Want more information? Call me — Amy Gilbody — at 202.721.0913 or e-mail me at agilbody@pac.org.