

Legislative Toolbox



What Makes a Good Lobbyist?

by Becca Pryse and Valerie Dosland

Many organizations interested in government relations frequently ask “What makes a good lobbyist and how will I know one when I see one?” For an organization it is important to hire a lobbyist who establishes a strong relationship with the organization, its members and who works hard to understand the organization’s issues and concerns. Here are some other things to consider:

A good lobbyist knows the legislative process. To succeed, a lobbyist must know the intricacies of the legislative system and what is the best way to work within that system.

A good lobbyist knows the people involved. It is equally as important to know legislators and key legislative staff people. A good lobbyist works hard at building good relationships with legislators and staff. However, they are also aware of who legislators are, even if they don’t know them, the committees they serve on, the communities they represent, and their major areas of work and interest.

A good lobbyist is involved — early and continuously. Issues don’t start happening the day the session convenes; most of the important work is done many months ahead.

A good lobbyist knows their issues and is prepared. Thorough knowledge of your issues is

essential. A good lobbyist understands the issues and is able to communicate in terms important to legislators.

A good lobbyist knows how to communicate — briefly and effectively.

A good lobbyist is honest. A good lobbyist is willing to say “I don’t know, I’ll get back to you” when they don’t know the answer to a question. It’s always better to wait and give accurate information rather than give a legislator bad information.

A good lobbyist respects the system. A good lobbyist understands the process but also understands and believes in the unique and sometimes strange way the legislature works.

A good lobbyist doesn’t look for “quick fixes.” They understand it may take some time to bring about change. Hard, patient and involved work pays handsome returns over the long haul.

A good lobbyist understands the term “reality.” It often doesn’t matter whether or not a particular issue is a good or popular one—if it takes money and the state is cash-poor, it will have a tough road. Issues that sound good to some may simply not sound as good to those who legislate, so the issue will take considerable time and strategy to “sell” at the Capitol.