

**Canadian Labour Congress**

# **GUIDE TO LOBBYING**



**CANADIAN LABOUR CONGRESS  
CONGRÈS DU TRAVAIL DU CANADA**



## WHAT IS LOBBYING?

We lobby because we want elected officials to understand and actively support our policy goals.

Elected officials don't have in-depth knowledge on all issues, the range of policy options at their disposal, or the impacts on working people, their families, and the communities they live in. They expect to learn about important issues and solutions from constituents, advisors and key stakeholders such as the labour movement.

Lobbying is a great opportunity to help politicians get to know us – to help them understand our goals and issues, and that union activists represent the best interests of all workers.

## AUTHENTICITY IS THE KEY TO SUCCESS

We don't need to be professional lobbyists to convince politicians and their advisors to support our goals. We just need to be authentic. We are the real, everyday experts on our issues. We just need to talk about what we know and demonstrate how we are connected to the people and communities we represent.

**We can't just leave it to union leaders to do the lobbying for us.** It's critical for us to engage as many union members as possible in this process, because ultimately, it is their engagement that demonstrates how powerful we are, and how much of a difference we can make in the day-to-day lives of all workers.

Our opponents have the resources to buy the services of professional lobbyists and pay for media influence, but we have the numbers – the masses of everyday people who are directly impacted by the decisions made by politicians – and we must use that advantage to make a difference.

## YOUR LOBBY TEAM

It never makes sense to meet with elected officials alone. In a team, it's easier to ensure we say what needs to be said, and track the answers. Before a meeting, the lobby team needs to decide:

- who will be the lead spokesperson;
- who will ask each of the questions; and
- who will be the Lobby Reporter.

*For the CLC Lobby Day, Lobby Reporters are responsible for filling out Lobby Reports for each meeting at <http://lobby.clcctc.ca>.*

## SETTING UP THE MEETING\*

*\*For the CLC Lobby Day, the CLC will schedule meetings for each team.*

Setting up a meeting with an elected official is easy. Start by calling their scheduling assistant (don't email or use social media). It's their job to ask questions, so be ready with answers.

They may try to engage you in a debate about the issue or try to discourage you from asking for a meeting. Sometimes they will offer to schedule a meeting, but won't give a firm commitment.

Here are some tips to help you succeed:

- Ask for the meeting as a constituent. If you are not a constituent, ask for a meeting as a representative of local workers, some of whom are constituents.
- When asked about the nature of the meeting, give a short answer such as, "I speak on behalf of many workers in the community (or region) and would like to discuss some specific issues with my/their elected representative."
- If the assistant tries to argue with you, discourage you, or even change your mind about asking for a meeting, do not engage in a debate or discussion. Continue to insist that you want to speak with your local representative in person.
- If needed, remind the assistant that you have the right to meet with your elected representative as a constituent and as a voter.
- Press for a commitment on a date and time convenient for you.
- If you cannot get a meeting, e-mail the elected representative directly, or phone an alternative office (sometimes there is more than one office in the constituency, as well as an office at the legislature).
- If you get a meeting, follow up with their office staff to confirm the details a few days before you attend, including how many people will accompany you.

## PLANNING THE MEETING

Prior to the meeting, your lobby team should get together for a practice run. Decide what will be said and who will say it. Determine the key points you want to make. Practice making them. Anticipate questions and practice your answers too. Here are some tips:

- **Know your audience.** Know the elected official's voting record and/or public statements on the issue(s) you will be raising in the meeting. Set objectives for the meeting accordingly. This means that if the elected official has historically opposed an issue that you are advocating for, it may be too soon to ask for a complete reversal of position. However, it may be an opportunity to at least be heard, and to begin building a relationship with the elected official, where there may not already be one.
- **Stay focused.** Most politicians will be interested in what you have to say. Some will be supportive; others might be preoccupied with their own interests or may already be predisposed to disagree with your position. Don't let this distract you.
- **Know your subject.** Speak about what you know and how it affects the people you know. If you are asked a question you cannot answer, don't be afraid to say you don't know. Offer to get back to them with information (and be sure that you follow through).
- **Be clear and stick to the point.** Confine your comments to the issue at hand, but don't make the mistake of presuming everyone understands your point of view. Speak with confidence and remember that your job is to persuade your audience that your opinion matters.
- **Listen.** Try to determine where there is agreement and any reasons for disagreement. Avoid getting into arguments, never lecture, and never make things personal. If you find there is support for your position, ask for help with persuading decision-makers at higher levels of government.
- **Leave the door open.** Work to prevent outright rejection of your position. Focus on areas of agreement, not on the differences.
- **Don't be discouraged by failure.** Not everyone will agree with you or be supportive. Remember, the importance of lobbying is to make your position known. Changing minds takes time, which is why lobbying is more than a one-time event.

# LOBBY DAY CHECKLIST

## BEFORE THE MEETING:

- Read the issue documents and backgrounders.
- Remember to dress appropriately. It is best to wear business casual attire to all parliamentary meetings and functions. This conveys professionalism and respect.
- Make sure you bring a “Leave Behind Kit” with you. This Kit should include your contact information, a brief summary of your arguments, and a set of recommended actions.
- Gather 15 minutes ahead of time, close to the meeting location.
- Ensure that everyone who will be attending the meeting has government-issued photo identification (driver’s license, passport, etc.) and brings it with them.
- Make sure you know who will take the lead and who will write the Lobby Report.
- Establish when other lobby group members will add comments or answer questions.

## AT THE MEETING

- Introduce yourselves to the staff as well as to the elected representative.
- Make a short statement of your position. If you have any requests to make of the elected representative (such as voting a certain way, presenting a petition, advocating your position to other decision-makers, etc.), be sure to make those clear from the start.
- Speak from your own experience as a worker, or as a representative of workers. Stick to what you know and why your opinions matter.
- Try to stay in control of the meeting. Don’t get sidetracked by the elected representative or any staff who attend. Stick to the issues you asked to discuss first and foremost.
- Try to get a commitment from the elected representative before the end of the meeting. Make sure any commitments are mutually understood, including those made by you to follow up. Indicate that you want to meet again.

- Say “thank you” to the elected representative and be sure to thank the staff who worked to make your meeting happen. You will need their help to make future meetings possible.
- Leave your contact information with the representative and their staff.

## **AFTER THE MEETING**

- Immediately sit down and talk with your team about what was said during the meeting. Decide what, if any, follow-up action is required and who will do it.
- For the CLC Lobby Day, Lobby Reporters are responsible for filling out Lobby Reports for each meeting at <http://lobby.clcctc.ca>.
- Tell your union membership about the meeting and your expectations.
- Encourage coworkers and other union members to contact the elected representative or their office about the meeting and its results. If you are satisfied, they should express their thanks; if you are not satisfied, they should express their disappointment.

## **FOLLOW-UP**

- Promptly send a thank you message to the elected representative. A letter is best, but an e-mail message copied to their staff will also do. Be sure to include any additional information you may have promised in the meeting, repeat your main requests and any commitments that were made.
- Set up another meeting, if necessary.

## **DEMOCRACY IN ACTION**

Thank you for taking the time to lobby. This is an important and necessary element of a functioning democracy – and it won't work for us if we don't engage with it.