

Twelve Tips On Lobbying Virtually

1. **Come prepared.** Everyone should know what role he or she is playing. Set out a clear agenda for you and your colleagues. Before the call/virtual meeting, provide a set of materials for the legislator and the staff. Know how much time you have for the meeting. Know the issues, and know who are your allies and opponents.
2. **Identify everyone on the call.** It is important for the legislator or staffer to know exactly whom you represent, where your organization is based, and how many members your group has. Be sure to point out which advocates are constituents of the legislator.
3. **Make a personal connection.** Find out a little bit more about the staffer or legislator. It can be as simple as asking how they are doing or how long they've worked with the legislator. Ask at least one follow up question to make a connection before getting to business.
4. **Say what you know.** Stick to the facts. There is no faster way to lose your credibility than to give false or misleading information to a legislator. If you don't know the answer to a question, acknowledge it and offer to get the facts and get back to the legislator and their staff.
5. **Know Your Legislation.** Understand who has introduced it, who supports it, what committees are involved in getting it passed, where it is in the legislative process, and what the bill numbers are (HR and S).
6. **Be specific and direct about what you want.** Remind yourself what the purpose of the meeting is. Do you want the legislator to increase funding for a program in the budget? Sponsor a bill? Vote a certain way? Speak to the Assembly Speaker or Senate Majority Leader? Make sure you ask in a clear, direct manner. *Only one person* should ask the “pin-down” question.
7. **Stay focused.** Legislators are good at getting advocates to engage on every topic except the one at hand. Forcefully, but politely, steer the conversation back to the issue you came to lobby on. Do not leave before you get answers to the key questions.
8. **Don't argue.** No matter what, stay cool. You don't win any points for passion by arguing with a legislator. If there is resistance from the legislator/staff, take note of that and report back—this provides valuable insight for the larger movement.
9. **Maintain control of the meeting.** You asked for the meeting, and are the one with the agenda, so make sure to kick the meeting off. Given that the meeting is virtual, work hard not to talk over your colleagues, the legislator, or hill staff.
10. **Briefing materials should be just that – brief.** Legislators and their staff glance over thick packets of information. Legislators will read a well-put-together one-page fact sheet, probably nothing more than that. Email briefing materials to legislative staff before and after the call.
11. **Anticipate the arguments of your opponent.** It is better to address your opponent's arguments early in the dialogue. Do so directly and openly, without defensiveness.
12. **Follow-up and follow through.** Send a thank you note to the legislator and/or their staff. The note should memorialize the commitments you extracted in the meeting. Follow-up after an appropriate interval to find out if your legislator did what they committed to do. It's also important for you to follow through on commitments that you made as well.