



A Guide to Lobbying

By Angela Arnett Garner

This introductory guide is designed to offer a basic understanding of the essential elements of effective lobbying. These recommendations are based on strategies that have been effective in my own career thus far as a notable social justice lobbyist in service of Indigenous rights. Below is a partial record of that service.

In 2011 I successfully lobbied Lincoln County government for consideration of allowing the installation of a proposed official Kentucky highway historical marker on the lawn of the historic courthouse in Stanford, Kentucky. I was appointed by Governor Steve Beshear in 2013 to serve as a commissioner for the Kentucky Native American Heritage Commission. As a commissioner I developed the County by County program in 2014 which was essentially a new strategic approach to lobbying officials on a local level, for issues the commission previously handled (without the preferred results) on the state level. This program is still being used today. I helped Stanford City Council pass the first Indigenous Peoples Day proclamation in Kentucky history in 2017. I lobbied Stanford City Council again in February 2018 to pass what would be the first permanent Indigenous Peoples Day proclamation in Kentucky history. In 2018, I lobbied city governments across the Commonwealth, speaking before city councils, mayors, and fiscal courts. Subsequently, I helped 22 additional Kentucky cities pass Indigenous Peoples Day proclamations -- more than any other state since the movement began in 1992 (these cities include Louisville and Frankfort).

I spoke before the Kentucky League of Cities which represents over 380 cities (Sept. 2018). I urged the assembly of Democratic and Republican mayors to pass an Indigenous Peoples Day proclamation. The measure passed unanimously, constituting the first time a civic organization passed an Indigenous Peoples Day proclamation in U.S. history. I worked with Governor Andy Beshear's office on the crafting and signing of the first statewide Indigenous Peoples Day proclamation in Kentucky history in 2020. I also worked with Governor Beshear's office on the signing of the second statewide IPD proclamation in 2021. I successfully lobbied Republican legislators, Senator Rick Girdler and Representative David Meade (Speaker Pro Tempore) in the writing and passage of two resolutions, permanently recognizing Indigenous Peoples Day for the first time in Kentucky by the Kentucky Legislature.

The first strategy to consider when lobbying elected officials is the preferability of micro focusing. Spreading your energy and time to cover an assortment of issues and projects typically yields less observable results. A lobbyist who focuses on climate change alone, for instance, will typically achieve more appreciable results than the lobbyist who chooses to focus



on climate change, reproductive rights, education, and immigration. An organization consisting of several people may be efficient in working on a number of issues together, but an individual should decide which issue they are most passionate about and stick with that. Furthermore, instead of focusing on the vast array of topics that fall under the umbrella of a single issue, choose one subtopic only to be even more effective. For instance, a lobbyist who is passionate about the environment may conceivably work on climate change, air or water pollution standards, the link between meat consumption and rainforest destruction and so forth. The list goes on and on. However, if the lobbyist elects to stick with one cause, and only one subtopic of that cause (i.e. environment: water pollution) then they will have much more time and energy to expend toward this endeavor, and thus will make a much greater impact. Additionally, effective lobbyists forge relationships with elected officials and members of the media. Those relationships will be enhanced if the lobbyist is recognized as a specialist in their field, a polished professional who is knowledgeable about the issue being discussed. If the lobbyist is known as an authority on a specific issue, officials will respect that fact and be much more willing to listen.

Design a marketing package that appeals to the elected officials being lobbied. The hard truth is that politicians operate largely on self interest and by extension, the interests of their constituents. For instance, when I lobbied various officials for the passage of Indigenous Peoples Day proclamations, I intentionally included in my pitch the reminder that Kentuckians treasure their state history, and many Kentuckians claim Native American ancestry. Native American cultural events such as the powwow circuit are popular attractions for their constituents across the state, and anytime we celebrate our state's rich history, we are supporting tourism which is a financial benefit to us all. Did any of these arguments encompass the moral heart of this issue? No. Yet assessing who the lobbyist is talking with, who has the power, is the key to formulating the entirety of the marketing package. Remember that for the lobbyist it's not always wise to state every reason why they personally believe in a cause. Realistically the marketing package should be tailored instead to as many groups of people as possible and preferably groups within the official's constituency. My aforementioned arguments used as a part of my speech delivered to help pass IPD proclamations appealed in this case to historians in general, and including those who treasure Kentucky history, and people interested in Native American history and culture. It also appealed to powwow enthusiasts, those who claim Native American ancestry, and those interested in promoting Kentucky tourism, and by extension the Kentucky economy. Lobbyists should always favor even small gains over being a moral purist. The lobbyist's primary objective should never be convincing officials of the totality of the moral facets of the argument. But rather, it should instead be to shift public perceptions and neutralize the issue politically. This process involves the gradual development of a political trend with the eventual multiplicity of individuals, organizations, city and county governments,



districts and so on. This trend development operates in part on the bandwagon effect. For every goal achieved, it will be that much easier the next time. After the passage of a measure, residents in the next town, county, district, et cetera, that lobbyists target, will be more likely to believe that this issue is no longer politically controversial or problematic. After all, the measure has been passed successfully. When I lobbied Stanford for the passage of the first Indigenous Peoples Day proclamation in Kentucky, there was so much heated debate that a city council member voted to table the discussion and bring the city council meeting to a close. I had to very carefully convince the mayor to even consider holding a second hearing. The mayor eventually agreed and scheduled this second meeting on September 19, 2017, just days before Indigenous Peoples Day was to be celebrated nationally. The discussion lasted well into the evening, as people on both sides of the issue passionately declared their sentiments. City Council members were ready with a vast array of questions from "why is this necessary?" to "why not just celebrate this on another day besides Columbus Day?" to "what would an Indigenous Peoples Day celebration look like in Stanford?". There were impassioned speeches of Indigenous peoples whom I had invited to speak, those also of city council members and other officials, residents of the town, and ofcourse my own. After the sun had long set over the quaint town of Stanford and the darkness enveloped the historic train depot where town meetings were customarily held, the city council finally decided to take a chance and sign the first Indigenous Peoples Day proclamation in Kentucky history. Several months and several towns later, I was planning to schedule a similar city council meeting with the mayor of Livingston, Kentucky. That would not be necessary, the mayor told me. He said that he was familiar with my work through news coverage. And then the mayor completely astonished me. "If you have one of those proclamations with you" he said, "I will sign it". I searched through my collection of papers I carried with me and found a sample proclamation. I filled in the provided blank space in calligraphic historic cursive "Livingston". The conservative Republican who was the mayor, the town barber, and a school bus driver of Livingston, read the proclamation, slapped it down on the hood of his pickup and signed it. Just like that. What had begun as a daunting, painstaking and at times, hostile political battle, had become a smoother process with every additional city attempted. And in this extraordinary case, almost effortless. Now officials across the state in many cases already knew why I wished to speak before their respective city councils before I walked in the door. They were heeding the fact that this formerly divisive political issue was being neutralized before their eyes. That fall (2018) I was watching coverage of Indigenous Peoples Day on Democracy Now. Amy Goodman had said that proclamations had been passed in cities large and small across the United States and included Livingston, Kentucky in her sampling of cities. My thoughts returned to the many months of lobbying city and county governments in cities large and small across Kentucky. I thought of the consequential shift in the public perception of this movement over that time, of the long journey



from Stanford to Livingston, and onward to Liberty and Louisville and many other cities --- one small step at a time.

Thus, lobbyists should always consider the value of compromise and strategy, instead of throwing all of one's cards on the table and attempting to convince elected officials of every facet of the argument. Remember the Tortoise and the Hare....slow and steady.

The lobbyist should take on the role of a lawyer. He or she should always anticipate the next argument or rebuttal of the officials before they even verbalize them, before walking through the door. They should anticipate all possible problems, pushbacks, or reservations, and have an answer for each potential argument before the discussion. Lobbyists should take the time to brainstorm before speaking to the officials to make sure they are covering every angle of the issue and being as thorough as possible. If there are 50 reasons why the officials and their constituents should support the issue, they should be listed (Again, lobbyists should design a marketing package tailored to the officials and their constituents as much as possible).

A successful lobbyist is a polished public speaker who exudes confidence. And the surest way to appear confident and relaxed, is to be knowledgeable about the chosen topic. More preparation equals less anxiety. If the lobbyist is not confident of his or her self and the importance of the message, the audience won't be either. It is important to practice good posture. In these important meetings they should carry themselves with confidence and poise. Lobbyists should project their voice and clearly enunciate their words. They should know their audience and their basic political interests. Lobbyists should share appropriate biographical information about themselves to acquaint their audience with their achievements and goals. They should ask pointed questions of officials to encourage them to think critically about the advantages of the proposals. Sharing true, relatable stories can be an effective method to captivate, entertain, and ultimately convince the audience of the benefits of the passage of their measure.

Politics is local. If there is a choice, it is always advantageous to begin lobbying for any particular issue on the local level where the discussion will be a more personal experience. Whether lobbyists know the official(s), share a political party affiliation, or agree with their known policies or not, they will still already have certain things in common. Obviously they both will live in the same district, county, or town. They may even know some of the same people there. They will both have a feel of this one of a kind place where they live, the people and their priorities, the coffee shops, the mom and pop restaurants, the local events, the farmers markets and so on. This community that lobbyists and elected officials share can be vitally important to forging a connection, a lasting relationship. Whether you live in a small town or a bustling city, these people and places that we hold dear may be the key to forming a bond that perhaps will result in effecting change. Lobbyists should familiarize themselves with personal and occupational



interests of the official(s). Do they chair a community event? Are they also an artist in their spare time? Are they a member of the local garden club? Lobbyists should choose something like this of interest to ask them about. Engaging officials in a discussion of a single question about a topic of interest will demonstrate to them that they are not only regarded as a politician, but also as a person, a multifaceted human being. Indeed, they will want the elected officials to view them in the same way. Lobbyists should limit their inquiry to one or two questions only and proceed with their proposals. The object is to humanize the discussion. Similarly, referring to an official by name (i.e. Mayor Smith, for example, as opposed to no name at all) reminds them of this personal, human connection. This reminds them to some extent of their personal responsibility to the discussion, of respectfully considering the proposal. The objective is always to be approachable, thoughtful, curious, engaging, and disarming.

It is wise to study the official's/governing body's constituency. The lobbyist should always know their audience. They may have initiated his or her concerns on the local level with the hopes of also approaching officials on the state level. If the political party with probable statewide majority is known, then the lobbyist should make a concerted effort to pass their measure in local districts represented by the same political party where applicable. For instance, if you know that you wish to pass your measure eventually on the state level and in all probability that state leadership will be controlled by the Republican party, then they should intentionally pass the measure locally in heavily or leaning Republican districts, towns, or counties. This will demonstrate for these state officials that the lobbyist's measure is supported by their constituents. This practice will streamline the processes of lobbying. Always think several moves ahead on the chess board. And the aforementioned objective of the lobbyist should be neutralizing the issue politically. Demonstrating constituent support is what neutralizing a political issue is all about.

Never underestimate the power of several wins of any form or type. A grouping of several smaller wins may even be more significant than a couple of larger gains simply because of repetition of coverage. In other words, the number of times that the lobbyist and their cause, their measures, are in the public eye, covered by the news media, and are considered by elected officials, will in the long run be an ingredient in the catalyst for change.

Similarly, the lobbyist should always utilize the news media to their advantage in promotion of their cause. The more frequently that the lobbyist's name and/or their affiliated organization is in the news, the more they will familiarize elected officials and their constituencies with their proposals and attract more members to their organization. A list of media contacts who have offered coverage should be developed. Lobbyists should not merely seek media coverage when they have achieved a far reaching legislative victory. But rather, media coverage should be



sought for a variety of reasons. Lobbyists should consider consulting a media contact when they merely wish to comment on a news item that relates to their cause, to inform the public of an upcoming event hosted by their organization, to announce the passage of a measure that the lobbyist originally inspired, in another town, and so many other reasons. In addition to utilizing TV and radio, social media, blogging, and podcasts, lobbyists should consider writing an op-ed or letter to the editor for a local paper in the town or area in which they wish to pass their measure. And organizations should consider one or two representatives for media appearances who are articulate, seasoned public speakers, at ease in front of the cameras.

So there is so much more to lobbying than in articulating opinions about social and political issues before elected officials. So much of lobbying involves employing strategy. These strategies include carefully choosing a focus and developing a reputation as a specialist or authority on that focus. It means always knowing the audience. Good strategy means building valuable relationships with elected officials and other members of the community. A successful lobbyist will be a persuasive, effective public speaker. A lobbyist is one who will be willing to think like a lawyer and anticipate any arguments or pushbacks against the proposals. Good strategy also means favoring small gains over being a moral purist and focusing on politically neutralizing the issue. And a good lobbyist will recognize the wisdom of utilizing media coverage to publicize and gain support for his or her proposals. For those who enjoy political strategy, public speaking, and working side by side with community leaders and government officials, lobbying is a rewarding profession. Yet by far the most fulfilling aspect of lobbying is effecting measurable social and political change for the peoples they are fighting for. Witnessing the resulting celebration by those people being championed -- the joy and renewed hope inspired by the invaluable work of lobbying is unequalled and truly priceless.

Lobbying vs Advocacy

There is a key difference between lobbying and advocacy. Nonprofits (including churches) are to a large degree limited in lobbying that they can do, but there is no limit to what nonprofits can do. The National Council of Nonprofits has this [great quick overview](#) of this distinction. To put it a bit over-simply, the basic difference is that lobbying is making a specific ask for or against a particular piece of legislation; whereas advocacy is making the case of listing out the impact of a particular piece of legislation.