**TIPS FOR GRASSROOTS LOBBYING**

*Grassroots lobbying* is when everyday citizens contact their legislators to influence their vote on legislation. It is effective because the legislators hear from constituents who can vote for them in the next election.

*Lobbying* is when professional people work to influence public officials on behalf of or against a particular issue. This involves the ability to sell an idea for legislation to a majority of the members of a legislative body. It could mean convincing only the key budget writers or influential legislators that your bill needs to be passed.

1. **Know your legislator** Before you talk to your legislators about voting a particular way on a bill; you need to have developed a relationship with them. Get involved in their campaigns so they will know you personally and recognize you in a crowd. It will help you to get an appointment with them and to get your phone calls returned.

2. **Politics is Constituent-Driven** Help your legislator understand why your position is important to all of his or her constituents. Get other people in the legislator’s district to lobby them at home; giving their personal stories of how the legislation impacts their lives. You might even be asked to come to speak at a legislative committee meeting in Raleigh.

3. **Do Your Homework** Know your issue by researching it as much as possible. Be able to explain your issue, the bill you support or oppose, and what you want the legislator to do to help your cause. Before you approach your legislator, understand the legislative process, who sponsored the bill, the bill number, and which committee it is in. If your legislator is not on the committee, then be prepared to tell him/her who to talk to about the legislation. Always ask for them to support the legislation when it is voted on in the House or Senate.

4. **Information is Power** The secret is the distribution of information to legislators about the legislation. Be prepared to give the legislator information he or she can use, such as issue briefs, charts, statistics, etc., to sell your case. Using personal stories from people back home will assist you in selling your story. Place these written materials in a blue folder with the NCAE’s name on the folder or on a sticker.

5. **A Little Professionalism Goes a Long Way** Be credible, honest, trustworthy, and professional. Never threaten, lie, or conceal facts. Stay calm – if you lose your cool, you lose the case. Dress professionally—at least business casual. If you are testifying before a committee, you need to wear your Sunday best.

6. **Be Courteous to Legislative Staff** Always get to know the Legislative Assistant, Research Assistant, and intern because they are the gatekeepers to the legislator. They can help you to get an appointment or even might make sure your bill is calendared in committee. Get to know them on a first-name basis. It always pays to be nice to people.
7. **Be Positive** Sell your case without being critical of other people’s personalities, actions, or motives. Never say anything negative about one legislator to another legislator. Maintain a good sense of humor. Stay calm and collected while avoiding angry statements or emotional outbursts.

8. **Be an Effective Communicator** Communicate with your legislator by letter, email, or phone. Have constituents write letters or emails describing their own personal experiences that relate to the issue. Be sure to give your name and contact information. If nothing else, call the office to briefly register your opinion on the issue.

9. **Talk to the Legislator One-on-One or in a Small Group** Make an appointment with the legislator to discuss the issue, but be flexible about the time. Keep your comments brief -- 5 or 10 minutes at the most. Make your lobbying group small, each with a different perspective of the issue that they can relate. When legislators are busy, you might have to catch them after a committee meeting, in the hall, or outside the House or Senate Chamber. It is acceptable to “walk and talk” with the legislator on the way to their next destination.

10. **There Are No Permanent Friends and No Permanent Enemies** Don’t take your traditional friends for granted. Never write off a legislator just because of party affiliation. Don’t make enemies of legislators -- you may need them as friends tomorrow on a different bill.

11. **Build a Bond, Not a Gap** Research things you might have in common with the legislator. Use shared values to create easy, friendly, frequent communication with legislators. Perhaps they have people in their family who are educators which would make them more sympathetic to your cause. Knowing this can make them your advocate and advance your cause.

12. **Be a Good Listener** It is important to listen as well as talk to the legislator. Effective lobbying requires dialogue including questioning and answering between the parties involved.

13. **Be a Partner** Build coalitions and look for allies among other organizations such as the PTA. Be accessible to legislators and other lobbyists if they have questions or need follow-up information. Become known as a reliable resource. Remember that a lobbyist might work against you on one issue, but later might be on your side.

14. **Patience is Golden** Aim for consensus rather than for a “victory.” Be willing to settle for making progress toward your goal, getting the bill passed, and fine tuning it in future sessions. Things in the legislative process are done one step at a time.

15. **Stay Committed but Know When to Quit** Remember -- you are committed to your cause. Know why your legislation is important. You have a compelling, energizing reason to keep fighting until you get what you need. However, when you have accomplished your goal, know when to quit. Don’t overwork the issue or it could backfire.

16. **Thank Your Legislator** Thank the legislator for meeting with you before and after the meeting. Write a note or letter thanking the legislator for a specific positive thing they did to help you with your legislation. Put kudos in your newsletter so other citizens will see the great things they accomplished.