

How to lobby government

Anyone who can make a phone call or write a letter can lobby. If you, or your organization, believe in some cause or other, really believe that in some measure, great or small, this would be a better world if your cause were advanced, then by all means you should lobby.

There are two reasons to lobby. First, because virtually every aspect of our lives, every institution, every activity is affected by government. And in Canada, government responds to the wishes of the people. This is true whether the government is that of the Village of Somewhere, the Province of Anyplace, or the country of Canada.

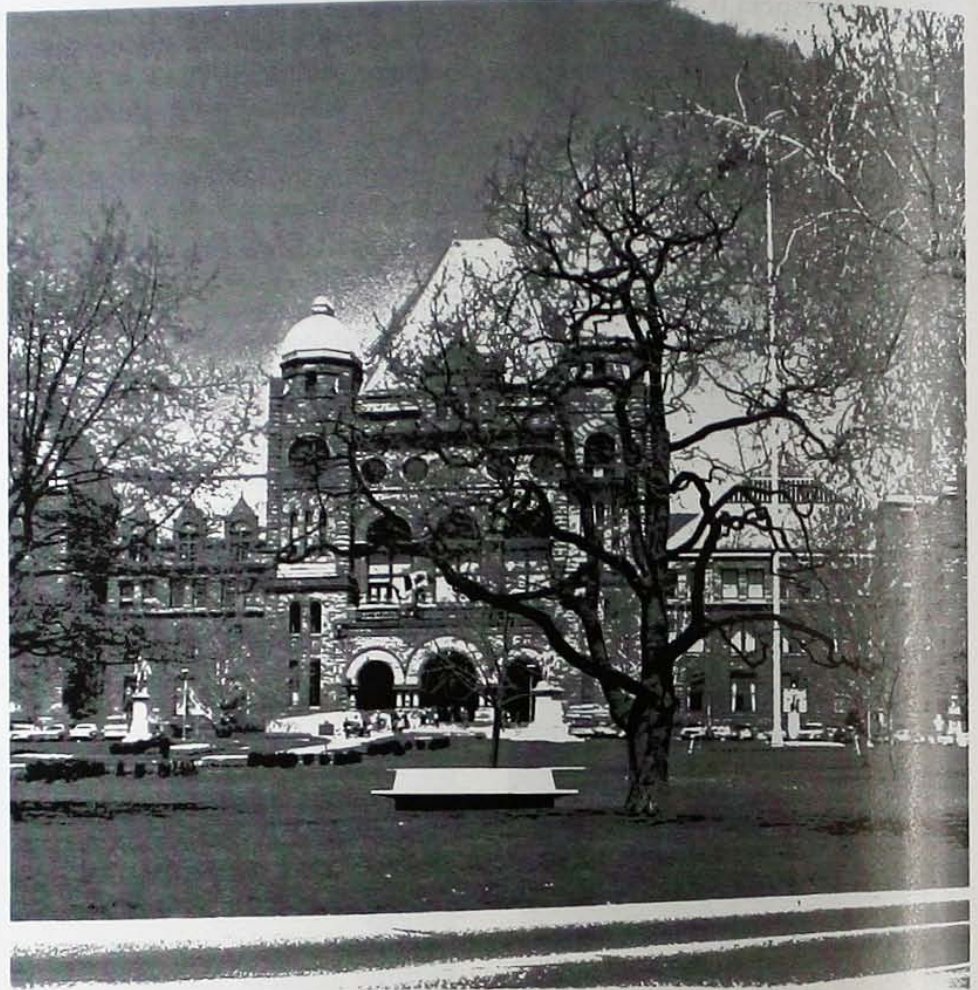
At times this may not be apparent and at times it seem to take forever, but sooner or later the actions of our governments reflect the wishes of our people. However, there is one big IF. Legislation reflects what the people want ONLY if you and enough others take the trouble to let your elected representatives know what you want.

The second reason you, or your organization, should lobby is that if you don't, someone else will. Every conceivable cause — save the whales, preserve neighborhood schools, conquer leukemia, promote arts — has its advocates. Competition for a place in the legislative sun is ceaseless.

Before going any further, let's define lobbying. Lobbying is nothing more nor less than trying to persuade the members of a legislature, be it township council or the Government of Canada, to enact legislation favorable to your cause, or on occasion, defeat or repeal legislation unfavorable to your cause. The legislation may set up a new program, change an existing one, guarantee certain rights, appropriate funds, etc.

Sometimes people won't lobby because they're afraid they don't know how. They are staunch supporters of their cause, they recognize the importance of lobbying, and they know it pays off. Yet they hold back on the mistaken notion that lobbying is only for experts.

Like anything else, the more you know about how to lobby, the better you will be. But, again, if you can



make a phone call or write a letter, you can lobby.

All you need to be an effective lobbyist are three things:

1. A few basic facts
2. Belief in your cause
3. Common sense

The most important single thing a lobbyist needs to know is his or her subject. What is the substance of the legislation you are proposing or opposing? Why is it so important? What will happen if it passes? What will happen if it does not pass? How much will it cost? Normally the place to get these facts is from within your organization. Usually, whoever asks you to get involved in lobbying, perhaps the chairman of a committee or the executive director of your organization, will provide these facts along with the call for action.

It certainly helps to know the legislator or legislators you contact.

What are their interests? What are their backgrounds? What is their record of support? Who is the chair of the committee that will consider your proposal? Who is the chief spokesman for the opposition? And, the good lobbyist knows how the system works: what steps a proposed municipal ordinance or a federal bill goes through from introduction to enactment; which committees will consider the legislation.

Facts alone are not enough. Without conviction, dedication to the cause, loyalty to the organization, and determination to see the job through no matter how long it takes, a lobbyist won't be very effective. Far better to say no than to agree to lobby for something when your heart isn't in it.

The minimum principles you need to know are these: be brief; be clear; be accurate; be persuasive; be timely; be persistent; be grateful. These common sense principles apply whether you're lobbying by telephone,