



Promoting your Cause

Sometimes people and organizations won't lobby because they're afraid they don't know how. They are passionate about their cause, they recognize the importance of advocacy, they know it's important to lobby and it pays off. Many coaches and club members hold back on the mistaken notion that lobbying is for experts only.

The more you know about how to lobby, the better you will be. All you really need to be an effective "lobbyist"- (or convincing people to see your point of view) are three things:

1. Some basic facts
2. Passion for your cause
3. Common sense

Knowledge is Power

The most important thing a lobbyist or advocate needs to know is their subject. What is the substance of the project or legislation you're proposing (or opposing)? This includes the program initiative, and if building a new pool or renovating an existing one, what will this encompass.

- Why is it important?
- What will happen if it passes?
- What will happen if it doesn't pass?
- How much will it cost?

Most of these facts are readily available from USA Swimming but for local information you may need help from your state and local code departments or a licensed Architect and/or engineer in your area.

Know your local Representatives

It certainly helps to know the legislator or legislators you're contacting but it's not imperative that you know them well, as most people incorrectly assume. Get to know some of their interests and especially their public background.

- What is their record of support?
- What position do they hold in the Legislature?
- Who is the chair of the committee that would consider your proposal?
- Who is the chief spokesman for the opposition, if any?

An effective advocate knows how the system works, what steps to go through from introduction to enactment and which committees will consider the legislation. It is wise to seek local political advice from others, such as local businessman, past political appointees, or even your local school board members in your community.

It is disastrous to break procedure, present an ill-conceived project plan or an early vision and cost without laying the groundwork. It's important to meet with individual representative in advance. No one likes to be surprised, and you don't want any surprises, especially in a public forum.

Remember that Conviction Counts

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 (and it can take a long time), a lobbyist will not be very effective.

Concentration Counts

Unless you have the ability to spend money to hire the appropriate design and construction experts early, you will be able to only focus on one issue at a time.

- Learn how the system works before jumping into a tough legislative environment
- Study your material and marshal your resources- You are filling the role as the expert
- Develop your committee roles and set objectives clearly and concisely.

Develop your Vision.

Your committee should consist of some people outside the swimming community such as local business owners, construction companies or even a local engineer. You will find it useful to have a past legislator, school official or local representative from the tourist and convention bureau or Rotary on the committee.

- Develop your consensus in the community as well as other advocates
- Present your vision to individual legislators as a test for how to proceed.
- Present your vision to the entire legislative branch in a public forum asking for assistance. This should include having a legislative member act as a liaison for the committee. Now you are on the public record as an "officially" recognized committee. Find out when the future meetings are and ask to be entered on the agenda for updates.
- If the committee does not have alternative funding sources work with your legislative liaison to present a request for funding to get the Feasibility Studies done.
- Develop your studies and supporting reports, feasibilities and conceptual drawings etc.

Do not be frustrated if your local government officials do not seem overly helpful. They are always looking for ways to NOT spend money and they probably have numerous projects under consideration. It will seem like they are putting up roadblocks at every turn but it's a test of your conviction and the communities.

Use Common Sense

At a minimum you need to know the following:

- Be brief;
- Be clear;
- Be persuasive;
- Be timely;
- Be persistent
- and most of all PLEASE BE GRATEFUL!

The hard part is the timing. Until you become an expert you may need to rely on your volunteer committee leadership or Legislative liaison.

Don't make Promises

Never promise a reward or threaten retribution for failure to support your cause. Be persuasive not argumentative or demanding. Don't knock the opposition. They believe in their position as much as you do. Try to find common ground with the opposition and try to persuade them to join in. Otherwise make sure you understand their position and include their position in your presentations. Don't shy away from the negatives, have answers for them as well as bring oppositions to them to show you are aware of both sides of the issues and have thoroughly thought through your proposal.

Preparing for the meeting

Write out what you would like to discuss on paper; this will get your thoughts on paper. Then create a very brief outline to use to go over what you are going to say. Know your information before the meeting then go in and speak with passion, not from paper (you don't want to sound rehearsed).

Meeting Face-to-Face

It's better that the first meeting is one on one, however if you are uncomfortable going in yourself make sure it's with a limited number of people not to exceed three, but the fewer the better. Make sure that everyone present can also speak to the subject as well as you and they're not there for the ride. Make sure they are on the meeting list. Don't surprise your legislator. The fewer present the more candid the legislator will be.

Always be Brief

When writing to legislators do not exceed one page. If you have too much information and its important add appendixes. Make sure to personalize your message and never misspell the legislators name or get the title or address wrong. When going to meetings in person plan to go over your topic in five minutes but not to exceed ten minutes. Be on time, present your case and leave. Never linger around unless the legislator chooses to prolong the meeting. Remember to send a brief letter thanking your official for his or her time and recap the meeting. Prepare the letter prior to your meeting and drop in the nearest mailbox as soon as your meeting is over. This is both memorable and impressive. It will also show you are serious.

You are the Expert

In most cases you will find that you know more about your topic than your local government official. If they like you and trust you, they will rely on your advice and knowledge. It's important that they know that your governing body supports your cause and you have other experts backing you up. Don't bluff or pretend you know everything. First you don't, and second the term "I don't know but I'll find out" will keep the trust between you and the legislator(s). Your credibility through the process is of utmost importance. It's alright not to have all the answers and it's important that you have the resources to find out and you follow up as soon as possible.

Final Tips

- Aides are influential: Don't be offended if you need to meet with a government aide. Treat them just as you would treat the legislator because the aide is in a position to advance or sink your cause.
- Be Patient: It could take many attempts to "sell" your cause
- Say Thank You: A thank you letter really makes a difference
- Follow up is vital: Keep asking, politely, until you get an answer

Other issues in the community

Many times, communities or schools are in a budget crisis and the “powers to be” are considering closing the pool. The budget deficit didn’t happen overnight. Almost every pool faces these 2 challenges daily:

- Operational cost – money going out. Increases every year
- Programming income – money coming in. Competitive swimming can only generate about 25% of the pool rental income needed to operate pool(s). The other income needs to come from Total Aquatic Programming and upper level program options.

There is an educational process for the pool owner that needs to occur. They only see \$ signs and don’t like the color RED. To be effective here is some advice:

List of DON'Ts:

- Many swim clubs think they can put their team shirts and sweatpants on and through solidarity influence the “pool closing”. Competitive swimmers are a niche group. With all groups included there are about 3 million competitive swimmers in the USA. That is less than 1% of the population. Being in the “protest mode” seldom gets the result desired.
- Using social media to make the pool owners out to be the bad guys. Ask yourself where are they supposed to get the \$ to solve the problem?
- Don’t publicly talk about a problem unless you have at least one viable solution – otherwise you are just complaining.

List of DO's

- Do your research and see how others have solved similar problems.
- Focus on practical revenue generating solutions not passionate pleas.
- Be in collaborative mode – “us versus them” simply doesn’t work short or long term.
- Expand your focus outside competitive swimming and include adult health & wellness and all ages learn to swim – in other words Total Aquatic Programming. Now you have close to 150 million advocates.