

## OPINION GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

# How to make lobby days more effective

Old-fashioned lobbying uses the number of meetings or number of MPs attending a reception as the measurement of success. That won't cut it in 2016.



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Lobby days still play an important role in advocacy. However, meeting with 10 or 20 Members of Parliament over a couple of days can waste time, resources, and political capital if it continues to be done in the same old-fashioned style of who-you-know lobbying.

Let's look at a single week as an example: from April 18-21, 34 associations descended on Ottawa and held 303 meetings. That doesn't even count the dozens of associations and companies that each held one-off meetings during that time. Associations were competing against each other for decision-makers' attention. Moreover, some of these associations would have been advocating for conflicting positions.

With that level of competition between groups, the successful ones rely on a close working relationship between their association board members and their executives. Board members must support the executive team, and deliver consistent and compelling messages while in meetings with MPs. Another part of that close working relationship includes asking the hard questions: What analytics are we using to identify the MPs we are meeting with? What did we do to make our meetings stand out? How are we measuring effectiveness?

## Identifying the MPs that matter

There is more data on legislators readily available than ever before; yet, only some associations make use of it. Members of Parliament have tremendous social media footprints that can be analyzed. MPs' statements in Question Period and House debates can be aggregated and subjected to a rigorous content analysis. A host of other variables including MPs' participation in issue-based matters and regional caucuses, as well as the geographical location of their ridings, can be weighted and factored into calculations. The output must be a list of MPs to meet with who hold actual influence on the issues the association cares about and who matter for the association.

## Making meetings stand out

With 300-plus meetings happening in a four-day period, meetings need to stand out. The most

successful association executives follow the simple "Rule of Ones:" one main ask across all meetings, one sub-ask that is specific to that MP, the one-pager delivered to the MP in advance, a debrief from board members within one day, and the follow-up with the MP within one week.

Members of Parliament need to meet with groups and understand their issues in order to perform their foundational duties: representing constituents' interests while passing legislation and providing oversight to budgets. However, there is heightened concern over the perception of being lobbied. As such, associations need to find unique ways to present information in ways that MPs find beneficial, which could include the effective use of social media or other alternative delivery vehicles.

## Measuring effectiveness

The hallmark of old-fashioned who-you-know lobbying is using the number of meetings or the number of MPs attending a reception as the measurement of success. This can no longer be relied upon in 2016.

Some of the same information sources used to identify MPs can be used to establish measures of effectiveness. Association board members need to work with their executives to ensure that clearly defined measures of effectiveness are developed before a lobby day is conducted, and that observable changes are being measured and tracked back to the lobby day.

David Chilton, author of *The Wealthy Barber*, has a tremen-



Conservative MP John Barlow speaks to a lobbyist in his Hill office last year.  
*The Hill Times photograph by Jake Wright*

dously fitting analogy. (Admittedly, he is commenting on how rarely people measure their stock brokers' performance; however, the effectiveness of lobby days fits just as well.) An NHL franchise owner is asking the team's general manager about the coach's performance, saying "what's our record relative to expectations? To objectives? To other teams? To our last coach's?" The general manager replies: "Those are great questions. I haven't really looked at our win-loss situation, though. I don't want to get caught up in all of that—I'm sure everything is fine. And he's a heckuva nice guy."

Owners (i.e. association board members) need to ask the hard

questions and work together with their general managers (i.e. association executives) to deliver results. Only then are lobby days an effective tool to inform MPs and to advance the group's advocacy goals.

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