

6 Tips for Lobbying your Member of Parliament (MP) or Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA)



Every voter has the right to talk to their elected representatives at the federal or provincial or municipal level. In general terms, the same tips should work at both federal and provincial levels. Whether you lobby your MP or your MLA or your municipal councilor depends on the issue itself and which level of government has the greatest power or jurisdiction over that issue.

It's your right to talk to your elected representative!

Lobbying is really just having a conversation with your MP or MLA, but with a clear objective. It is very likely that your Unifor local union has done plenty of lobbying of MPs and MLAs. Who has lobbied before? What tips would they share with you?

These tips are intentionally general. Just keep in mind that the actual subject you want to talk to your MP or MLA about must largely determine your strategy.

Summary of six tips for lobbying:

1. Know what you want.
2. Send a letter.
3. Encourage your supporters and join forces with others.
4. Prepare, prepare, prepare.
5. Set out an agenda for your meeting.
6. Evaluate and follow-up.

TIP 1 Know what you want

- You must be specific and focused about what you want your MP or MLA to do.
- If yours is a local union initiated campaign, clarifying what your objective is will be the most important first step.
- Discuss this within your local union or broader group of supporters.
- If your lobby is part of a national or province-wide campaign, your objectives should follow those set out by that campaign.

TIP 2 Send a letter

Here's what your letter should have:

1. Your MP's or MLA's correct name and address.
2. The name of your organization.
3. The subject you are writing them about.
4. A request for a meeting.
5. What you are asking them to do.
6. A summary of the issue in short paragraphs.
7. How the issue affects the riding the MP or MLA represents.
8. A list of supporting documents you are enclosing.
9. The names of the people who are likely to be part of your delegation and what organizations they represent.
10. A list of other organizations supporting your position with their letters.

You can go on line to the **Parliament of Canada** and find the directory for the Members of the House of Commons or to the **Legislative Assembly** of your province and find a directory for its Members.

TIP 3 Encourage and join forces with others

The more ways your MP or MLA hears about your campaign, the better. They should be opening their newspaper in the morning and seeing letters to the editor in support of your position.

You should ask members of your local union, their family members and members of other allied groups to support your lobbying efforts. Distribute area MPs or MLAs phone numbers and

email addresses in messages to members of your local union. Say you want your MPs or MLAs to hear directly from voters in their riding. If yours is a local union initiated campaign, distribute your lobby kits to other supportive local unions or organizations and ask them to lobby MPs or MLAs in their ridings.

Your MP or MLA will likely be more influenced by the support you have organized than by you alone – no matter how brilliant you are in your argument. No local union, no matter how committed, can carry the load all by itself. Assemble a delegation of constituents and other organizations in the MPs or MLAs riding that represents a broad cross section of support for your position.

The allies you gather together could be the beginning of an ongoing coalition around the issue. Forming that coalition could be your most lasting achievement.

MPs or MLAs want to be re-elected. They are elected or re-elected by voters in their riding. A meeting in the constituency with a delegation of constituents would be most effective. MPs and MLAs are most influenced by letters and petitions from their own constituents. Include research that shows how their riding will be affected by the issue.

TIP 4 Prepare, prepare, prepare

- Arrange a pre-lobby meeting to organize your delegation.
- Be clear on what your objectives are.
- Go over the points or briefing notes with everyone.
- Check that everyone knows what is in the lobby kit.
- Be clear on who your chief spokesperson is. This is the person who will keep the meeting on track, introduce everyone and call on others to speak as agreed to in advance.
- Assign roles. Each member of the delegation should speak to the area they know best.
- Make sure everyone understands that you need to give the MP or MLA time to answer. Ask everyone, therefore, to be clear and concise.
- Someone should be assigned the task of taking notes.

TIP 5 Set out an agenda for your meeting

1. Introduce yourselves.
2. Restate the reasons why you asked for the meeting.
3. Briefly review the materials you sent the MP or MLA.
4. Present the issues – each member of the delegation takes part of the presentation as you have agreed to in advance.

5. Give the MP or MLA time to respond to your arguments, ask you questions, and state what they are prepared to do.
6. Listen carefully and take notes.
7. Ask the MP or MLA what they expect of you. Be prepared to take on tasks that will help them help you. For example, if they say, it would be helpful to them if you lobbied the other MP in the area, commit to doing so. If they ask for more information on a certain subject, take note of the request and follow through.
8. Conclude the meeting by going over what they have agreed to do and what you have agreed to do. Make sure they know how to contact you.
9. Thank them.

Make it human and personal → Collect constituents' stories

Make sure your facts are supported by credible sources, but personal, first hand accounts from constituents are just as effective as a pile of statistics, and can be more so if the statistical research has already been done.

Your meeting will be more focused and productive if the MP or MLA already has a good grasp of why you want to meet with them.

Work your meeting into their schedule. You can be flexible and so can they. MPs and MLA are generally in their riding offices for meetings with constituents on Fridays.

TIP 6 Evaluate and Follow-up

- Hold a meeting as soon as possible after the lobby to evaluate how you all thought it went.
- Make sure you all know what tasks everyone agreed to or delegate new tasks – each according to their ability to do them.
- Send a report to the Unifor Membership Mobilization and Political Action Department at: politicalaction@unifor.org
- After a few days or weeks (if time is less critical), make a follow-up call to your MP or MLA on the things they agreed to do.
- Stay in touch.
- Don't let your meeting be a flash in the pan. Keep up the pressure with follow-up letters, phone calls, letters and phone calls from other groups.
- The issue you lobbied on may be one that will take months and years of work.
- Keep in mind you are also preparing for the next time you need to call the same MP or MLA.