

## Meeting the Candidates: A Lobbying Primer

### Why lobby?

*Government, in the final analysis, is organized opinion. Where there is little or no public opinion, there is apt to be bad government.*

-MacKenzie King

Lobbying is the act of educating and persuading those in positions of influence to exercise that influence in a manner that works for you.

An effective government relies on lobbying for the information it needs to make good decisions. Politicians expect to be lobbied. You are providing them with a service: the opportunity to discuss the concerns of their constituents, and your members, in a direct way. This is particularly true during an election period. Candidates want to appear open, accessible and interested in the views of the electorate.

Once candidates are nominated, there should be plenty of opportunities to meet with them. When the Legislature is in session, most MPPs are only in their riding on Fridays. However, during an election, they will be in their riding every day alongside the other candidates.

### Setting Up and Planning a Meeting with a Candidate

The easiest way to set up a meeting is to phone the candidate's campaign office and ask to speak with the scheduler. Finding candidate contact information is easy – just google their name to find their campaign website which will have all the information you need. When speaking to the scheduler or campaign manager, it is important to tell them who you represent and what you would like to discuss. If possible, be flexible when scheduling a date and confirm the meeting a day or two before.

Meetings are often more effective, and less intimidating, if you go in a small group of two or three. The composition of the group should reflect the diversity and the interests of your faculty association. If you have another association in your immediate area, you might consider teaming-up with them for the meeting. Your group should have one or two main spokespersons.

It is important to plan in advance the issues you want to address. You will probably only have about 30 minutes for a meeting. Attempting to address more than three or four issues will be very difficult in this limited time. You may want to highlight specific concerns about faculty hiring, educational quality, or tuition fees, which are OCUFA's election priorities. Or, you can raise issues specific to your university. It is always a good idea to emphasize the beneficial impact your institution has on the wider community. Through all of this, you can refer to the recent OCUFA support which indicates widespread worry over the cost and accessibility of higher education in Ontario.

### The Meeting

The meeting will have two primary components:

- The presentation of your position (as a representative of both your association and OCUFA; and

- The gathering of information and commitments from the candidate.

The key to a successful meeting is presenting your facts and ideas in a clear and concise manner. An effective lobby effort is essentially a good communications campaign. Don't forget, you will likely know a good deal more about the issue than the candidate.

Also, take a few moments to consider how to present your issues to candidates from different parties. While you should never misrepresent or depart from your priorities, individuals from different ideological perspective will respond better to certain types of messages (for example, for a candidate who is very interested in small business, you may wish to emphasize the economic benefits that flow from a well-funded and high-quality university).

Time management is crucial to a successful meeting. There is nothing more frustrating than running out of time before you have a chance to ask the candidate all of your key questions. Some candidates will try to steer the meeting towards the things *they* want to talk about (their friendship with the university president, their child in university, etc.). Don't be afraid to politely interject and steer the discussion back on topic.

Once you have outlined your position and concerns, ask the candidate to state their position and the position of their government if elected. Feel free to make notes during the meeting and make sure to write down their responses and comments to direct questions. If you plan to publish or make public the candidate's positions, you should disclose this prior to starting the meeting.

Leaving information behind is always a good idea. OCUFA staff can assist you in preparing material for this purpose. If the candidate asks a question you cannot answer, offer to forward the information to his/her office as soon as possible.

### **Follow Up**

After the meeting, send the candidate letter thanking them for their time and reinforcing the key points you made in the meeting. Don't forget to send them any information or background you may have promised.

OCUFA's success is greatly enhanced if coordinated lobbying takes place at the local and provincial level. It is crucial that OCUFA be made aware of the lobbying going on at the local level. To this end, please let the OCUFA office know as soon as you book a session with a candidate. This will allow us to structure our effort and to provide you with relevant background material on the candidate you are about to meet.

Please don't hesitate to use your resources at the OCUFA office. It is equally important that we know how your meeting went. Please send a copy of your follow-up letter and any response from the candidate to our office.

For advocacy-related questions and requests, please contact **Graeme Stewart** at 416 306 6033 or [gstewart@ocufa.on.ca](mailto:gstewart@ocufa.on.ca).