LOBBYING PARLIAMENT:
A GUIDE FOR NGOs

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INTRODUCTION:

Lobbying parliament is a way for non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to play a role in the process of democratic governance. In countries with democratic traditions, NGOs (including, neighbourhood organizations, chambers of commerce, trade unions, environmentalists, human rights groups) spend considerable time and resources lobbying their elected politicians in an attempt to make their voices heard.

Through lobbying parliament you can:

- Inform individual law-makers and political parties in parliament about community needs and impacts of policy decisions;
- contribute to new and innovative ways of developing policies and providing new services,
- bring an important public issue to the attention of parliament;
- defend existing rights; and;
- work toward improving your own and/or others' situations.

Effective lobbying of parliament depends on being well-prepared and well-informed and have a clear goal and purpose. It requires knowing how to communicate your views clearly and effectively. It also requires understanding why it is your role to take this issue to your elected representatives.

This guide provides an introduction to approaches and tactics for lobbying parliament, including:

1. Overview of lobbying campaigns;
2. Lobbying individual MPs;
3. Lobbying a Party Caucus;
4. Submissions to a Parliamentary Committee;

1. OVERVIEW: LOBBYING PARLIAMENT

Lobbying is a planned effort to influence political governance and decision-making. When planning a political lobbying campaign you can think about two types of lobbying: direct lobbying and indirect lobbying.

A. Direct lobbying.

- A direct lobby involves meeting with MP(s), discussing an issue, arguing your cause and making concrete recommendations. There are three main venues for direct lobbying that you should consider:
1) Meeting face to face with individual MPs;
2) Presenting a brief to a party caucus of parliament;
3) Making a submission to a public hearing of a parliamentary committee.

B. **Indirect Lobbying:**

- Many groups that lobby parliament also develop an indirect lobbying campaign. This involves informing the broader public of an issue, which, in turn, indirectly puts pressure on MPs and political leaders.

- Indirect lobbying is often done through the purchase of media such as newspaper and radio advertisements and TV commercials and billboards. These are very effective tools to get your message out, however, they are very expensive.

- There are less expensive indirect lobbying methods, these include: informing your fellow citizens through town hall meetings, organizing protests, door to door canvassing and surveys and the use of booths and posters, etc. You may be able to get free media attention through such activities.

C. **Direct lobbying vs Indirect lobbying:**

- NGOs with limited financial resources should learn how to be effective at direct lobbying of parliament. This guide will help you learn these techniques.

- You should considering following up your direct lobbying with some indirect lobbying. You can reach some of the public with the inexpensive techniques listed above.

- Doing public outreach (indirect lobbying) shows you believe your issue is an important public issue. It will impress the MPs with whom you are meeting. In addition, you may be able to attract the media and get some free publicity.
Planning

The focus of this guide is on direct lobbying but below are some pointers to help you plan and run your entire lobby campaign. You can use this list to develop an overview to assist with designing your campaign strategy.

**Lobby Campaign Checklist:**

- get to know the facts and the legal constraints, if any, on your issue;
- think about what you want to achieve, and agree on any compromises you are prepared to make;
- understand your opposition, their point of view and where they may be prepared to compromise;
- identify MPs who may be interested in championing your issue
- identify MPs who may be sympathetic to your campaign;
- identify how different political parties will react to your campaign;
- identify influential people in the community who may be willing to support you;
- involve as many members of your group as possible;
- know the political process and get your timing right in relation to it;
- be polite; be concise; be realistic;
- do not be afraid to ask for advice;
- contact the Media/Press Gallery and let them know who is involved, what your case is, what you are looking for and when your campaign events are (such as a parliamentary committee presentation);
- keep up the campaign until you have achieved your purpose - or failed to;
- back up your direct lobbying with indirect lobby such as events, publications, media appearances and other forms of publicity;
- make sure there are no open disagreements within your campaign - everyone should be well briefed on the issues; and
- have regular meetings to brief and debrief people and co-ordinate the campaign.