



## Hiring a Lobbyist for Your State Association

From mandating breakfast after the bell to encouraging local procurement, state legislatures continue to move forward with legislation that will have a lasting impact on school nutrition finances and operations. Your association may feel that hiring a lobbyist to represent your needs in your State is an appropriate path. Please find below some helpful tips or questions to consider when hiring a lobbyist for your state association.

Determining if it is worthwhile to hire a state lobbyist, selecting the right person and establishing goals and objectives are critical to having a successful, positive experience. The key to success is really thinking through the decision, determining specifics of what you want to achieve, and holding the person accountable for results. So first, here are a few questions to consider when deciding if hiring a state lobbyist is a good use of association resources.

- Why does our state need a lobbyist?
- What do we want to achieve? What are our legislative goals?
- How much are we willing to spend? Is this a realistic amount? Is this what other non-profits in our states have spent?
- Do we want our own representation or do we want to collaborate with another association or group with common interests? If so, who would be our natural allies?
- Does our lobbyist represent other clients? Do we care who they are? What would constitute a conflict of interest?

After analyzing your association's answers to these questions, you can develop a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a lobbyist or firm to represent you at your state capitol. It would be good to include some of the following questions in your solicitation:

- What is your background in the capitol? Have you worked in the legislature? How are you connected and to whom?
- Who do you currently represent? Do they have non-conflict clauses in their agreements? Would working for us pose a conflict for you?
- Please list some of your successful legislative efforts, both proactive efforts (introduction of legislation on behalf of a client) and reactive (helping achieve passage or rejection of specific legislation). Provide specific examples and how you were instrumental in achieving the result your client desired.
- Please provide some examples of where your efforts were not successful and if you would have done anything differently.
- Why do you want to represent us? Are our issues philosophically compatible with your own beliefs?

Once you have selected a lobbyist, you must prepare and negotiate a contract. It should include specific tasks, expected outcomes and measurable outcomes that define success. For example, the contract can include specifying how many pieces of legislation are to be introduced on behalf of the Association per legislative session, how many education sessions should be held for Association members, or the number of visits to key government officials and staff that are expected per month. Also, find out and include whether an additional fee would be charged for certain actions or if the contract will be multiple years or just for a certain potent issue. The list of requirements is limited only by the desired outcomes and what is mutually accepted.

Also, the contract is not one sided. The lobbyist may (and should) require certain things from the Association: a commitment to build relations with representatives; to generate a certain number of documented letters/faxes/calls when an issue is pending; having association leadership be available to testify before committees; clear direction and unambiguous positions on issues; etc.

Finally, do ensure that the contract includes the ability to reassess the relationship between the lobbyist and Association. If the status quo is not amenable to both parties, the ability to address or terminate the contract should be in place. It is standard practice in the policy world to assess certain contracts every few years to ensure the needs of the members and Association are being met.

The decision to hire a state lobbyist reflects a commitment by the Association to play an active role in legislative activity. It should not be undertaken half-heartedly. Association resources are too scarce to invest without the commitment of human resources to make the investment pay-off.