

*For many of us, lobbying is something other people do—people who wear fancy clothes and buy politicians lunch at expensive restaurants. But lobbying, or more simply, trying to influence those who make policies that affect our lives, is something anyone can do. And it is something all of us should do if we believe in a good cause and in a democratic form of government. Read on to find out why.*

### **1. You can make a difference.**

It takes one person to initiate change. Gerry Jensen was a single mother struggling to raise her son in Toledo, Ohio, without the help of a workable child support system. She put an ad in a local newspaper to see if there were other moms who wanted to join her in working for change. There were. Over time, they built the Association for Child Support Enforcement, or ACES, which has helped change child support laws not just in Ohio, but across the country. One person—a single mother—made a difference.

### **2. People working together can make a difference.**

Families of Alzheimer's patients working together, through the Alzheimer's Association, convinced the government to invest resources into research for a cure. Other individuals formed Mothers Against Drunk Driving and convinced dozens of states to toughen up their drunk driving laws. As a result, the numbers of drunk driving deaths are lower. Additionally, many people find healing from tragedy by telling their stories and working to prevent it from happening to others.

### **3. People can change laws.**

Many of us think that ordinary individuals can't make a difference. It *is* hard to change laws and policies. But it can be done. It has been done, over and over again in our history, in the face of great obstacles. People lost their lives fighting racist "Jim Crow" laws. They won. Women didn't even have the power of the vote—as we all do today—when they started their struggle for suffrage. Our history is full of stories of people and groups that fought great odds to make great changes: child labor laws, public schools, clean air and water laws, social security. These changes weren't easy to achieve. Some took decades. They all took the active involvement—the lobbying—of thousands of people who felt something needed to be changed.

### **4. Lobbying is a democratic tradition.**

The act of telling our policymakers how to write and change our laws is at the very heart of our democratic system. It is an alternative to what has occurred in many other countries: tyranny or revolution. Lobbying has helped keep America's democracy evolving over more than two centuries.

### **5. Lobbying helps find real solutions.**

Services provided directly to people in need, such as soup kitchens, emergency health clinics, and homeless shelters, are essential. But sometimes they are not enough. Many food pantries, for example, needed new laws to enable caterers and restaurants to donate excess food so the kitchens could feed more people. Family service organizations working to place abused children into safe homes needed changes in the judicial system so kids did not have to wait for years for a secure place to grow up. Through advocacy, both changes were implemented. People thinking creatively and asking their elected officials for support can generate innovative solutions that overcome the root-cause of a problem.

## **6. Lobbying is easy.**

Many of us think lobbying is some mysterious rite that takes years to master. It isn't. You can learn how to lobby—whom to call, when, what to say—in minutes. While there are a few simple reporting rules your organization needs to follow, it isn't complicated. Countless numbers of people have learned how. Lobbying is easier and more effective when many committed people work together. One person does not have to do everything or know everything.

## **7. Policymakers need your expertise.**

Few institutions are closer to the real problems of people than nonprofits and community groups. They see problems first-hand. They know the needs. They see what works and what doesn't. They can make problems *real* to policymakers. They *care* about the problems. Their passion and perspectives need to be heard. Every professional lobbyist will tell you that personal stories are powerful tools for change. People and policymakers can learn from your story.

## **8. Lobbying helps people.**

Some people become concerned that lobbying detracts from their mission, but quite the opposite is true. Everything that goes into a lobbying campaign—the research, the strategy planning, the phone calls and visits—will help fulfill your goal whether it be finding a cure for cancer, beautifying the local park, or helping some other cause that helps people. You may not personally provide a direct service, but through your advocacy work, you enable thousands of others to do so.

## **9. The views of local nonprofits are important.**

Increasingly, the federal government has been allowing local governments to decide how to spend federal money and make more decisions than in the past. This change gives local nonprofits even more responsibility to tell local policymakers what is needed and what will work. And because more decisions are being made locally, your lobbying can have an immediate, concrete impact on people in need.

## **10. Lobbying advances your cause and builds public trust.**

Building public trust is essential to nonprofit organizations and lobbying helps you gain it by increasing your organization's visibility. Just as raising funds and recruiting volunteers are important to achieving your organization's mission so is lobbying. You miss out on an important opportunity to advance your cause if you don't think as much about relationships with local, state, and federal government.