

Concern # _____ :

Desired Outcome:

Obstacles:

Coordinator:

Partnership help:

Steps to achieve/timeline:

State Legislative Team

State Legislative Chair

State President

State Director

Hints for Home Run Hits

- Introduce yourself with a SMILE and a business card.
- Keep appointments.
- Write thank you notes.
- Approach topics in a POSITIVE cooperative manner.
- Be visible and available.
- Include allied partners that have a vested interest.
- Be patient, good things come with time and persistence.

Hiring a State Association Lobbyist

There are many things which have contributed to SNA's successful legislative efforts over the years. The fact that we are speaking for children and nutrition, an issue that no one can argue against, is important. The active involvement and hard work of thousands of SNA members building relationships with their representatives in Washington has opened doors and convinced legislators to do the right thing when it comes to feeding America's children. And certainly having an experienced, well-positioned lobbyist who's known principally as an advocate for child nutrition is a key part of our success.

For the last several years there has been much discussion about re-centering government programs closer to the local level. SNA's long-range policies address developing collaborations and coordinated efforts among federal, state and local authorities on matters of policy and funding. America's child nutrition programs start at the federal level, but they are administered at the state level. And while there are federal statutes and regulations governing the programs, each state has its own way of interpreting and applying the rules. Each state contributes to the programs in some way, financially, programmatically and/or administratively.

The involvement of school food service professionals in influencing state policy can be as important as the work we all do at the national level. In fact, on some issues, what you do locally can have a more direct effect on your program than any federal law. The states that are most effective in their state activities are those that hold state legislative conferences and have representation in their state capitol.

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 and determining what it is you want to achieve. 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?
- 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?
- Can our lobbyist represent other clients? Do we care who they are? What would constitute a conflict of interest for our lobbyist?

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 in your state capital. It would be good to include some of the following in your solicitation:

- What is your background in the Capitol? Have you worked in the legislature?
How are you connected to the legislative process?
- 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 legislation and how you were instrumental in achieving the result your client desired.
- Please provide some examples of where your efforts were not successful.
- Why do you want to represent us. Are our issues philosophically compatible with your own belief set?

Once you have selected a legislative representative, you must prepare a contract and administer it. Like all contracts, this one must be mutually acceptable - it must be negotiated. It should include specific tasks and expected outcomes. Most of all, like any good personnel relationship, it should have measurable outcomes that define success. For example:

- The Legislative Representative (LR) will have one piece of legislation developed by the Association introduced during each legislative session.
- LR will inform the Association within five working days of any legislation introduced that effects the Association or school food service.
- LR will provide one educational session at our annual conference.
- LR will document at least X number of visits with key legislators or staff each month.

The list of requirements is limited only by the desired outcomes and what is mutually accepted. The contract is not one sided. The Legislative Representative 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.

The decision to hire a state lobbyist reflects a commitment by the Association to an active role in legislative activity. It should not be undertaken half-heartedly. Association economic resources are too scarce to invest without the commitment of human resources to make the investment pay-off. It is unreasonable to hire a lobbyist and expect that person to carry the full weight of the Association's legislative effort. The right LR can facilitate achieving the legislative goals of the organization. But, as SNA's effectiveness over the years attests to, it is the grass roots work of committed school food service personnel that carry the day.

Good Luck!