

Sample Letters and Activities for Lobbying Efforts

1. *Your First Assignment: A Phone Call*

Here is a simple primer on phone calls to lawmakers. Your first call, however, will not be to advocate policy. In the next month, make a call to each of your legislators. Congratulate them on their (re) election, if appropriate. Invite them to visit your facility, perhaps to make a few remarks at a meeting of your board. Tell them that you will be sending invitations to openings and other events. If you are unable to reach a lawmaker by phone, talk to an aide. Your relationships with key staff will be no less important than your relationships with legislators. Always take notes of conversations.

Effective Lobbying by Phone

1. Understand that you may be speaking to an aide, not the legislator. Write down the name, since you will need it for follow-up conversations. The legislator's aides are the key people with whom you will be dealing most of the time.
2. Be clear on what you want from this phone call. You are calling simply to register your informed opinion on a pending issue. You are successful if the lawmaker's office understands that a concerned citizen has weighed in with a strongly held opinion.
3. Introduce yourself and give your address, ***making clear you are a constituent***. If you have any special credentials, state them (just the fact that you're associated with a nonprofit organization is a credential, but you may have other qualifications to support your opinion.)
4. Say why you are calling: assuming you are calling about pending legislation, state the bill number and explain what the bill does (don't expect the lawmaker to have every bill memorized). Get right to the bottom line. You are calling to urge a ye or nay vote and asking them to support funding for nonprofit organizations.
5. Pause briefly for a reply but be prepared to continue without feedback (the legislator or aide is likely taking notes and may want to hear you out before commenting).

2. Your Second Assignment: A Letter

You already know how to write a letter. These points will help you turn your letter-writing skills into effective lobbying.

Your first letter, however, will be about relationship building, not advocacy, a follow-up to your first phone call. In the next month, write each of your legislators. Thank them for their time (or find something complimentary to say about the staff person you talked to). Congratulate them on their (re) election, if appropriate. In coordination with the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits, request a meeting with one of your legislators. Also, use this letter to suggest a date for a visit to your facility, perhaps to make a few remarks at a meeting of your board, or extend an invitation for an opening or other event.

When you write your letter:

1. Use a formal address and salutation. Use your organization's stationery, which should include a list of your board members. Type or write legibly. If you are a constituent, include your home address as part of the letter format.
2. In the first paragraph, reference the bill number/issue and its popular name. In the same sentence, make clear that you are writing to urge a ye or nay vote. Focus on a single issue.
3. In the second paragraph, tell why this bill/issue matters to you personally. Provide one or two compelling points to make clear how it affects your organization, and the quality of life in the district—e.g., how many people, or families, are affected. Remember, you are protecting not merely the interests of your organization, but the quality of life for the entire community.
4. In the third paragraph, if the legislator supports the bill, be grateful and ask how you can help to improve its chances of passage. If the legislator has supported related legislation in the past, be grateful and suggest this bill deserves the same support. Otherwise, stress the broader implications of the bill, beyond its value to your organization, and your district.
5. Close with thanks for hearing you out, and ask how the legislator will vote. Offer yourself as a resource in explaining the bill's importance to colleagues (for example, at hearings) or to other constituents.

Sample Letter 1

January 15, 2002

The Honorable Jan B. Smith
Senate
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Senator Smith,

I am writing to urge a vote of NO on SENATE BILL 2024, which would reduce nonprofit funding to a level of less than half the appropriation for last year.

This legislation would do real damage to the nonprofit organizations in our district. Last year the entire community benefited from the quality of services offered by the performances of the Connecticut Dance Company, and four exciting exhibitions at The Performing Arts Center. Over 9,000 theatergoers attended the 2001-2002 season here at the Sparkplug Theatre. All these activities depended, in part, on funds received from the Connecticut Commission on the Arts. The quality of life, and the educational opportunities for our students, would be adversely affected if the legislation should pass.

Your record of support for economic development initiatives in our district encourages me to believe that you understand how these arts activities are also important as economic assets. Nonprofit dollars are not charity; they are an investment that pays dividends back to the public, many times over.

I look forward to your reply; in the expectation that you will be a clear voice in support of the public benefits realized by public support of nonprofit organizations.

Sincerely,

Sample Letter 2

January 15, 2002

The Honorable Jan B. Smith
Senate
Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Senator Smith,

My name is _____ and I am a manager of a group home in _____ run by _____. We support two people with significant developmental disabilities. The direct care staff earns approximately \$18,500 a year working full time and all are forced to work two jobs to make ends meet. Some have even worked an additional full time job.

Recently, one of the people we support came very close to death due to a medical problem. If it were not for the superb care rendered by the staff, that could have been the outcome. The level of responsibility that this staff accepts is enormous, and sometimes overwhelming. They assist them with bathing, feeding, taking them to doctor appointments and in many other ways. Those employed by the Department of Mental Retardation earn far more for the same responsibilities and this has led to much frustration for the staff at the group home.

The Support Staff at the group home are not working a second job for the frills. One staff member has a 10-year-old son that she raises on her own. She recently got off welfare; she drives a nine-year-old car, and lives in a three-room cottage. Another staff member works 90-100 hours a week to support herself. Recently her 10-year-old car broke down after an accident and she was unable to come to work for several weeks because she had no money to purchase another. These are just a few of the staff stories from my group home. There are many throughout the agency.

My group home has endured enormous rates of staff turnover caused by a lack of pay for a stressful job with numerous responsibilities.

Raises of 2.3% and 1.5% are unacceptable. At the end of two years, they will only be earning \$19,242. Additionally my company has endured health care cost increases of 10% over the past two years. There is no way that my company can continue to pay for these increases without instituting co-pay in the near future. We have also just received a 25% increase in our workman's compensation insurance. Another loss in earning power is another sign of the crisis in human services.

These long-simmering problems of unequal pay rates, low pay, and un-reimbursed medical cost increases must be confronted. These problems are close to crisis proportions, and now is the time to do something about them.

Sincerely,

- Keep your letter to a single page. Remember this is not the place to debate the issue, or even to present every argument. You are showing the lawmaker that yet another constituent holds an informed opinion, and cares enough to write an original heartfelt letter.
- You should get a reply from your legislator. If it is a form reply, or a mere status report on the legislation, write a second letter. Use the above format but ask again—politely but persistently—how they will vote.

Sample Action Alert

Sometimes a short note or postcard is sufficient when the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits issues an Action Alert. This short sample note could help make your point.

Dear Senator Smith,

I am writing to urge a vote of NO on the SENATE BILL 2024, which would reduce nonprofit funding to a level of less than half the appropriation for last year.

Nonprofit organizations are important for our education, our economic development, and our quality of life. Please vote NO on the amendment, and insure that nonprofit funding will be maintained.

Sincerely,

3. Your Third Assignment: Meet with Your Legislator

Personal visits are important not only to making your point, but also to cultivating a relationship with your legislators. These points are helpful in planning your visit to the district office or the Capitol.

You will also want to visit with your legislator on your home turf for a tour of your facilities. Ask legislators to attend annual meetings of your organization, and similar significant events.

When they attend, be sure to recognize them from the podium. If appropriate, ask them to make a few remarks. Always schedule them early in the program, or announce that you will suspend your agenda to accommodate a brief visit. (Lawmakers' schedules are often jammed and they will appreciate your flexibility.)

1. Research your legislator, so you know their voting history and other relevant facts. Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CAN) can assist you with this.
2. Decide on a team to make the visit, for example, an artist, an administrator, and a key board member. Ask around; you may have a particularly appropriate board member for this particular legislator.
3. Convene to be clear on your message. Assign the points you want each member of the team to make, so that you can loosely follow your game plan without over-rehearsing it. Touch all the bases outlined in Item #7 below.
4. Write the legislator to suggest a range of dates and times; your legislator often relies on a scheduler to juggle a busy agenda.
5. Arrive a few minutes early, and be prepared to wait; legislators' schedules are tight, and unavoidable delays are common. Again, do not consider the visit unsuccessful if you end up meeting with a top aide. They are usually the ones who do the serious follow-up anyway.
6. Legislators have to deal with a wide variety of concerns. Do not assume familiarity with your issues; rather, expect to have to explain the details. After all, part of the reason you are there is to offer your help in monitoring these issues.
7. A sample game plan:
 - a. The administrator describes who you are, roughly how many people in the district your group reaches, and your association with The Connecticut Association of Nonprofits
 - b. The board member names the bill you came to discuss, or (for your first visit), your general concern for this session's legislation, and how you hope legislators will vote;
 - c. The artist discusses the importance of the bill to the mission of your organization, and to the well-being of the entire community, or (for your first visit) the economic, educational and cultural importance of the arts/program services in your district,
 - d. The administrator provides a fact sheet on the bill (for your first visit, an information kit on your organization).
8. You are not required to be an expert, and if you do not have all the answers, say so, but offer to find out. This will give you an opportunity to follow up the visit with an informative letter.
9. Write a thank-you note, providing any information you promised to send, along with an invitation to visit your facilities.