



NMA Citizen Lobbying Tool Kit

For members who want to take their advocacy work further by serving as a citizen lobbyist in their community and/or state. Also, for NMA designated state activists.

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THE ADVOCACY GUIDEBOOK WAS WRITTEN EXPRESSLY BY THE NMA NATIONAL STAFF FOR MEMBERS TO USE AT THEIR DISCRETION. THE BOOK AND THE THREE ACCOMPANYING NMA TOOL KITS (CITIZEN LOBBYING, LOCAL ORGANIZING AND MEDIA) HAVE BEEN WRITTEN AND DISTRIBUTED BY SHELIA DUNN WITH ASSISTANCE FROM GARY BILLER, KELLY ENDRES, AND THOMAS MILLER WITH ADDITIONAL PROOFREADING ASSISTANCE BY NMA MEMBER JOSH MCKAY. THIS BOOK AND EVERY REVISION HAS BEEN COPYRIGHTED © BY THE NATIONAL MOTORISTS ASSOCIATION.

NMA CITIZEN LOBBYING TOOL KIT

INTRODUCTION TO CITIZEN LOBBYING

Definition of lobbying: The process of attempting to influence the passage, defeat or content of legislation by individuals or groups other than elected members of legislative bodies.

In terms of the NMA guidebook, however, lobbying will be defined as the direct face-to-face contact with elected officials and other influencers. If you are interested in serving as a citizen lobbyist (non-paid volunteer), on any motorists' rights issue at the local or state level, it is important to ascertain your time commitment and availability. If you want to directly lobby your local municipality or state legislature, research and know the lobbying laws in your local area and state.

Cities/towns/villages and counties/parishes have their own lobbying rules and you must search for them on the local municipality's website. A google search might also help you find the information.

If you want to directly lobby your state legislature, the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) has information on [how states define lobbying and lobbyists](#).

According to the NCSL website, the definition of a lobbyist usually revolves around compensation. Most states define a lobbyist as someone who receives any amount of compensation or reimbursement to lobby. All states recognize certain exceptions for activities that might otherwise be construed as "lobbying." These activities include testifying at committee hearings, meetings, writing letters and casual conversations.

If you have interest in lobbying directly, we encourage you to apply to become an NMA state activist volunteer to receive additional support and training. Contact activists@motorists.org to receive more details.

If you participate as a citizen lobbyist (non-paid volunteer) please understand that the National Motorists Association cannot compensate or reimburse you to lobby and you do so on your own time and expense.

The National Motorists Association has developed the Community Support Program (CSP) grants to, in part, possibly offset some out-of-pocket travel expenses for lobbying/testifying on behalf of the NMA or a motorist issue supported by the NMA. A CSP grant request (<https://www.motorists.org/nma-community-support-grant-program/>) can be made after the expenses are incurred but it is always a good idea to notify the NMA National Office in advance of a trip to check if anticipated expenses are eligible for reimbursement by grant.

Generally, as a citizen lobbyist, the best thing you can do is become a staunch advocate for motorists' rights by continuously writing letters, making phone calls and meeting with your own elected officials. After a period of consistent correspondence, policymakers and other influencers will then see you as a reliable source of information. The NMA Citizen Lobbying Tool Kit will give ideas on how to prepare for any citizen lobbying situation.

PREPARING AN ELEVATOR ISSUE PITCH

Unexpectedly, you might find yourself face-to-face with a policymaker or influencer. In a case like this, you will have less than a minute to make an impact. To make the most of this moment, it is crucial that you are prepared in advance. One of the best ways to do that is to develop an elevator pitch on several issues and motorists' rights in general. Places you might be able to use your elevator pitch include: elevators, grocery stores, buffet lines, airports, conferences, and receptions.

Here are some general tips and strategies for creating an elevator pitch:

- Be passionate, concise and succinct.
- Don't overstay your welcome.
- Use plain, simple English. No jargon. No Acronyms.
- Be courteous, respectful and don't forget to smile when appropriate.
- Center the pitch on a problem that a policymaker or influencer can help you solve.
- Thank the person for the time that he or she gave you.
- Practice your pitch until you know it without thinking.

General Outline for an effective Pitch

- Introduce yourself and quickly describe who you are and why you are committed to motorists' rights.
- To make the greatest impact, state the case you want to make by using details that are important and that are easy to remember.
- Suggest how the person you are pitching can help resolve the problem.
- End with a call to action—a future meeting, a phone call or the sending of background information.
- Ask for a business card and supply one, as well.

Having an effective elevator pitch for motorists' rights in general or a specific issue is a great icebreaker to help those you want to influence understand the issues.

PREPARING A ONE-PAGE BRIEF

Unfortunately, elected and non-elected officials have little time to read all the information related to one specific policy question. To make informed decisions, a policymaker or influencer relies on succinct, tightly written documents referred to as briefs or one-pagers. Before you meet in

person, write an issue one-pager which can be used to hand over in a face-to-face meeting. Leaving behind this kind of document will allow the policymaker or influencer to have information he or she can refer to in the future.

Feel free to use information from the NMA's one-page fact sheet for each of the core issues (such as Speed Limits, Red-light Cameras, Tolling, and Lane Courtesy) presented at <http://www.motorists.org/issues/>. The NMA Fact Sheets can be downloaded and printed directly from the site. The main arguments for or against an issue are presented in clear, concise terms. The advocate may need to add a policy recommendation specific to a particular situation.

What should a Brief or One-Pager Include:

- A policy recommendation
- Brief background information on the issue discussed
- A brief analysis section that is backed up with facts and data on why the policy recommendation will help solve the question as discussed
- Your contact information and a short list of relevant websites such as the NMA's www.motorists.org

A Brief or One-Pager should not include:

- A lengthy analysis of all available research; and
- A list of all arguments for or against the policy recommendation

General Outline of a Brief or One-Pager for Policymakers

Overall, the brief or one-pager should be visually appealing and easy to read. Include bullet points instead of long paragraphs. Use titles for different sections. Create a graph or other visual element to anchor the document. Here is what you should include in your brief or one-pager:

- Clearly state your policy recommendation at the top of the page.
- Give a brief overview of the policy issue with a statement of the objective you hope to achieve.
- Outline your thesis or key points using bulleted graphical elements.
- Give background by briefly explaining the history of the policy issue.
- Persuasively outline why your policy recommendation will achieve the objective stated earlier.
- Briefly give reported solid facts and data to support your policy recommendation.
- Conclude with a summary statement and a call to action.

CULTIVATING RELATIONSHIPS AND NETWORKING WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS AND OTHER INFLUENCERS

Developing a long-term productive relationship with individual legislators is without a doubt the most effective form of grassroots lobbying. Making a direct connection with an elected official who can draft, support or oppose legislation that affects motorists' rights is invaluable.

The best time to network with an elected official and other influencer is before a legislative session or important meeting. Do your homework. Be prepared!

As a grassroots volunteer motorists' rights advocate and citizen lobbyist, you are in this for the long game because you are passionate about your cause. The long game though needs preparation, a bit of strategy and your comfortability with the political process. You need to remember that sometimes getting what you want takes time and is based on relationships, your credibility and your tenacity to continue.

Most of us are not natural networkers, which means the cultivating and networking process needs some thought. Find out information about the elected official or influencer by checking out his or her LinkedIn profile, googling him or her, and check out any other pertinent websites to understand how they voted, and what they might think about your particular issue. Sign up for their email newsletter if they have one.

After you have done some footwork, figure out which problem an elected official can help you solve and how best to encourage them to do so. Before the legislative session or in a down time in between council or board of supervisor meetings, ask if you can meet with the elected official or influencer.

Then prepare your elevator pitch, write your one-pager and practice what you want to say and how you plan to say it.

MEETING ONE-ON-ONE ELECTED OFFICIALS AND OTHER INFLUENCERS

Without question, meeting face-to-face and to cultivate relationships with elected officials and influencers is the biggest step to take and, for some, a bit intimidating. Remember though, elected officials and influencers rely on people like you to give them information and ideas for solving problems. You just need to make this meeting count.

If the elected official is from your district, try to meet with him or her when they are in the district, especially if you are introducing yourself for the first time.

If you are bringing a group of people, then meeting either in the district or at the legislature or city hall would be appropriate and effective for getting the message across and demonstrating your political strength. Generally, the more people, the more likely you will meet with the elected official rather than his or her staff member.

Be professional, on time, dress appropriately, and be courteous to staffers and the elected official. Prepare for a 10 to 15 minute meeting and bring your elevator pitch and your one-page

document with you. Discuss no more than two to three points so that you can have time for a fruitful discussion and time to answer questions that might arise. Remember, not only are you asking the legislator to support or oppose a bill, but you are also building credibility for yourself and the National Motorists Association.

Sometimes schedules change and you may only meet with a staff person at the last minute. Don't get angry, instead be grateful for the opportunity. Meet with the staffer just as you would have with the elected official.

Other pointers to keep in mind:

- If you or someone in your group is a registered voter or a constituent in the elected official's district, make that fact known. Elected officials always want to meet constituents because elections are always coming up and they need your vote.
- Show the problem or issue that you are addressing is local. Demonstrate how this problem or issue connects to the elected official's constituency.
- Show the issue or problem is personal. Communicate your concerns on a personal level. Let the elected official know how the passage or defeat of the bill will have a direct impact on your community.
- Remember to give the legislator a chance to express an opinion and ask questions. If he or she is supportive, don't be afraid to ask for help in advancing your issue and in contacting other like-minded legislators.
- If he or she opposes your position, don't be discouraged. Leave your one-pager and ask for a reconsideration.
- Be positive—never lose your cool, argue or threaten, even if the legislator or staff person is rude or uncooperative. If your meeting is unsuccessful, try your best to leave on a positive note. Never burn your bridges. The next time a related issue arises, the same legislator might be needed to support your cause.
- After the meeting, write a thank you note with points made in the meeting and again include the one pager.

Meeting an elected official can be intimidating at first but with preparation and practice, you can make a difference with your presentation. Even if the elected official does not support your issue at the time of the meeting, he or she may support a different issue in the future. It is important to keep the channels of communication open.

PREPARING AND GIVING TESTIMONY BEFORE A LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE

One of the most effective ways to educate legislators and policymakers is to testify either by speaking or submitting written testimony for a hearing on a bill. Providing testimony, clearly and

professionally, can change an elected official's mind or at least educate him or her on the issue from a motorist's perspective.

Here are some guidelines for you to follow if you have an opportunity to testify.

You will need to prepare a written statement before testifying. This statement should be typed double spaced on only one side of the paper and copied 50 to 60 times for distribution to all the elected officials, their staffs and any media present. The written testimony should be nearly the same as your spoken presentation which should be no longer than three to five minutes.

Here is a practical outline for the written and spoken testimony:

- a) Identify yourself and the National Motorists Association.
- b) State position as "for" or "against" the proposed bill and don't forget to identify the bill by name and number.
- c) Summarize your recommendations first before you add an explanation.
- d) Restate your position at the end of your testimony.
- e) Thank the committee for the opportunity to testify and, for oral testimony, offer to answer any questions.

Before the hearing, practice in front of a mirror or with a friend and time your testimony. Anticipate any questions and practice answering them.

Day of hearing:

- Arrive early and register. Follow procedures that have been published and indicate you wish to testify. Generally, speakers will testify in the same order as their name appears on the registration sheet. Some committees, however, use a lottery system to determine order.
- Follow the instructions on how copies of your testimony can be distributed to the committee. Be sure that the committee clerk has at least one copy for the official record of the hearing.
- If there is a microphone for your use, make sure you adjust the mic for your height, keep it about 6 inches away from your mouth and speak directly into it. It is vitally important to be heard or your testimony will not be effective.
- Do not repeat points already made by speakers ahead of you. If all the points you wanted to make have already been stated, then tell the committee you agree with the preceding testimony and urge the lawmakers to take appropriate action.
- If your testimony is rather technical, ask the clerk to hand out copies of your testimony before you testify.

- If questions are asked, answer as clearly and succinctly as possible. If you cannot answer, offer to find the answer to a question and then promptly find the answer and send to committee members after the hearing as discussed.
- Do not argue or get angry with any members of the committee or any other people who are giving opposing testimony.
- If committee members were not present at the hearing, ask for directions to the legislative mail room and put copies of your testimony into their mail boxes or put their name on the sheet and ask the mail room clerk to do so.

Testifying before legislative committees is an important lobbying tool even for citizen lobbyists like yourself. If you have the drive and passion, you should also be the one to testify. Don't think that someone out there will do it because they, more than likely, will not.

PARTICIPATING AS A MEMBER OF A GOVERNMENT ADVISORY GROUP

Volunteer citizen advisory groups are an integral part of local government. Transportation type of advisory groups are frequently found on a local, county, regional or state level. Their focus can be more general or on specific issues such as parking, zoning, mobility and safety. This unelected but appointed group's purpose is to generally provide advice from a citizen perspective.

A transportation advisory board, commission or committee may be a permanent board or a group brought together to tackle a specific issue of the moment. Activities may include study of critical issues, conduct or analyze independent research, take public testimony, and review staff reports/recommendations for a city council, county commission or the governor.

Most members of permanent boards, commissions and committees are generally treated legally as public officers. Members of ad hoc citizen advisory groups that have a limited term, such as task forces, may not be considered public officers. If you volunteer for any kind of group, understand your legal obligations and commitment.

How to get appointed to an Advisory Group

Generally, an elected head such as a mayor or governor has authority to appoint volunteers. Elected bodies such as city councils, county commissions or legislators can also appoint members as well. Many times, especially at the state level, a seat on an advisory commission may also be a political appointment.

In order to be considered for a local commission or committee, you will probably need to fill out an application, whether you're recruited or not. On the application, you will need to show your interest in the group and both your personal and professional qualifications. For example, a parking commission might need to recruit business owners who are affected by street parking in their area of town.

Please feel free to contact the national office at nma@motorists.org for a letter of recommendation in serving in an advisory capacity.

If you have time and interest in serving on a transportation oriented advisory board, commission, committee or ad hoc group, make the effort. The NMA strongly encourages any member who has interest to perform this important civic duty.