

MOBILIZING FOR CHANGE. A BASIC GUIDE TO LOBBYING.

DRAWN UP BY THE NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR THE ARTS (NCFA)

What Is Lobbying?

Lobbying is the practice of influencing decisions made by the government either individually or as part of a special interest group. Lobbying activities include any oral, written or email/electronic communication that attempts to persuade the thinking and opinions of TDs or any government administrator involved in legislation. Learning how to communicate with elected and appointed officials in writing, through e-mail, by phone, and in person is essential to any grassroots campaign.

REASONS FOR LOBBYING ON BEHALF OF THE ARTS

By lobbying your local politicians you can place arts and culture firmly on the national agenda. TDs and Councillors generally want to help and please their constituents. However, they can only do this if you make them aware of the issues that are of concern to you. The more we lobby our local politicians, the greater our voice and our chance of getting matters surrounding arts and culture prioritized in government. Remember, TDs and Councillors are our public representatives therefore our interests need to be their interests!

HOW TO LOBBY

1. You need to know who your local TD is. You can find these details out on the following websites:

http://www.citizensinformation.ie/categories/government-in-ireland/national-government/houses-of-the-oireachtas/dail_eireann

<http://www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/tdssenators/>

Or you can ring the reception and information area of the Dáil (01) 618 3000 and they will be able to supply you with the relevant information.

2. You need to be prepared.

– Do some research. Find out if your TD has a stance on arts and culture and, if so, what it is.

– Before you make contact with your TD make sure you know what it is you want to ask them (including what result or outcome you're expecting), know all your key facts

and figures and show that you have wide local and national support (i.e. know the number of members in your local Arts Worker Constituency Group and the number of NCFAs members nationwide).

3. Decide how you want to communicate with your local TD or Councillor. You can email, phone, write or meet. Writing letters on specific issues can and will lay the ground work for a more effective face to face meeting

Offaly Arts Workers kindly prepared a case study on what they did in Autumn 2009 which should be useful (attached).

E-Mail

Email your local TD. In this way you can introduce your Arts Worker Group and yourself individually and its demands and/or request a follow-up meeting to discuss specific issues. Keep your email polite, brief and to-the-point. In terms of kick-starting communication with your local representative, email is one of the easiest channels to use, particularly for those who have never lobbied before and need to relax into it.

Writing a letter

Writing a Letter is also a good way to introduce your Arts Worker Group and the issues that you are concerned with. Keep your letter short and focused. Don't forget to sign your name if the letter is typed and remember to add a return address in your letter rather than on the envelope. Always, always identify yourself as a constituent first and a member of the NCFAs or arts community second. Experience has found that letters from local groups rarely rate any action but letters from constituents nearly always get some. Phoning your local representative is a good thing to do as a follow-up to your email or letter. Wait a few days and then call to ensure that they received your details/request for a meeting, etc.

Meeting

Meeting with your TD is probably the most effective method of communication. Personal visits always establish the strongest, most lasting bond.

Every member of the Dail has at least one advice clinic in the constituency they represent, and some have several. TD's advice clinics are generally staffed with volunteers whose job it is to communicate with constituents like you.

It's all set up for you. Just call the clinic to set up an appointment to meet with your elected representative when they are back in the constituency. Don't feel put off if you meet with a staff member. They are essential advisors to legislators. If you are in Dublin, set up an appointment and visit your elected representative in their Leinster House office.

Time with TD's is extremely valuable, especially if meeting them in Leinster House. Have an agenda so that you don't just "chat" until the clock runs out. Ask staff ahead of time how much time you will have and plan accordingly.

Be prepared and know what you're going to ask them and what your expected outcome is. Keep your questions short and specific. Bring relevant literature so that they have something to refer back to when the meeting is over. If the meeting is not as satisfactory as you'd like it, don't despair! Let your TD know that you'll keep them

updated on your group's progress and that you'll be in touch to organize a further meeting at a later date.

In all your communications with TDs and other government officials, don't be worried about language or format. Speak or write from the heart using words that you're comfortable with. Be concise, precise... and passionate!

When To Lobby

We are facing into a tough year and, with Budget 2011 now only 9 months away, any time to meet your local TD is a good time. However, in saying that, there may be particularly pertinent moments during the year - times when Budget decisions are approaching, or when there is a particular public focus on the arts e.g. Culture Night - when a meeting with your TD or Councillor would be most productive. Keep in touch with both the Theatre Forum and NCFA website for regular updates.

We want every Arts Worker Constituency Group to have met their local TDs and Councillors at least once before August 2010.

Other Ways To Make Your Voice Heard

The main aim of lobbying is to influence government decisions. As the government is elected by the people, influencing the people is a proactive part of lobbying. Below are just three ways that we can do this.

'Letters to the Editor'

A 'letter to the editor', in publications like The Irish Times, Irish Examiner or any of the Sunday papers, is a way to reach and inform a vast variety of people (many of whom are not involved in the arts) on important government decisions affecting the arts and the people who work in them.

Make sure your letter is succinct, specific, factually correct and carries a strong point. Include your name and address as most newspapers will not publish anonymous correspondence, and highlight your involvement with the NCFA or your local Arts Worker Group. To ensure your letter is received on time, ring the paper's reception area in the morning and find out the deadline for inclusion in the Letter's Page and the accurate email address at which to send your letter. Don't worry if it doesn't appear the following day – National newspapers receive a huge amount of letters daily so often your piece may not be printed until one of the following days. If it doesn't end up in print at all don't be disheartened – try again with another letter at a later stage.

Radio Talk Shows

If issues, which are of concern to the NCFA or your particular Arts Worker Group, are being discussed on air, don't be afraid to ring up or text to respond to the points being made. Again, for your own sake, make sure you understand the issue, be clear on your position and have all the facts to hand.

Social Media

Link to the NCFA online (<http://www.facebook.com/pages/The-National-Campaign-For-The-Arts/135604445372> and <http://www.ncfa.ie/index.php/blog/>) and encourage other people who work in or support the arts to do so too. If you have your own personal blog, update it with details of how your Artists Worker Group is progressing and / or what changes are happening on the political scene that affect the arts.