

---

# **GOVERNMENT RELATIONS**

## **What it is and how to do it**

**Chuck Rachlis, Vice President**

---

**MS Society of Canada, Ontario Division  
Government Relations and Social Action  
Training Workshop**

**April 2007**

---

# What is Lobbying?

- Many people who aren't sure EXACTLY what lobbying is are pretty sure it's something negative
  - They're pretty sure it involves activity of dubious propriety or legality, "big money" and they associate it with some combination of alcohol, expensive food, and playing golf
  - They're wrong
  - I'll give you an example, and then explain what lobbying is, how governments work and how organizations lobby government effectively
-

---

# What is Lobbying?

- ▶ **In 2001, the Ontario government was preparing legislation to create a new Ontarians with Disabilities Act (ODA), following the disastrous failure of earlier legislation introduced by a previous minister. SAMCI arranged a meeting to introduce the MS Society to the new Minister and participated in the meeting with Deanna Groetzing and one of the Society's wonderful volunteer activists**
  - ▶ **The Minister was very candid. He noted that his consultations with the principal advocacy organization, had reached an impasse. Further discussion was fruitless, as the group only wanted to debate high-level principles, rather than discuss specific measures**
-

---

# What is Lobbying?

- ▶ **The Minister made it clear that the proposed legislation was a difficult “sell” in his own caucus. He said if there was no major disability group willing to support the legislation, the government would not move the bill forward. In other words, having introduced a bill and determined there was not sufficient support for it, the government would declare that it had delivered on its commitments and abandon further efforts**
  - ▶ **SAMCI advised the MS Society that this was an opportunity for it to take leadership. We worked with the Ontario Division staff to invite representatives of major charities to a meeting to discuss how they could work together to cooperate with the government on the development and advancement of the draft legislation**
-

---

# What is Lobbying?

- ▶ **Our rationale, which was agreed to by other major charities, was that it was important to achieve legislation that would be a precedent in Canada and build a foundation for future improvements**
  - ▶ **The legislation was introduced in November 2001. It was warmly received by major elements of the disability advocacy community, who acknowledged the precedent-setting nature of the bill and lauded the government for leadership, even as they pressed for improvements. The MS Society worked with government and opposition MPPs on amendments to improve the government bill and were successful in focusing opposition criticism around its key concerns**
-

---

# What is Lobbying?

- ▶ **In advance of the 2003 election, both opposition parties committed to improving the Act. In October 2004, the McGuinty government introduced the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA), which improved on the original legislation and moved accessibility issues substantially forward. Again, the MS Society and SAMCI worked with the government and opposition parties to support and improve the draft legislation**
  - ▶ **The AODA is now law and the Society participates actively in a number of standards-setting committees**
-

---

# What is Lobbying?

- ▶ **In both cases – the original ODA and the new AODA – the MS Society engaged in effective lobbying, or government relations**
  - ▶ **Everything it did was scrupulously proper and legal. You know as well as I that the only big money in the MS Society organization is its research and services funding. I'm also pleased to report that there was no golfing involved**
  - ▶ **So, what IS lobbying?**
-

---

# What is Lobbying?

**Lobbying is advocacy to influence government ...**

- **To change policy, legislation, or regulations**
  - **To increase awareness and understanding**
  - **To build support or secure funding**
  - **To create joint initiatives or pilot projects**
  - **To establish positive working relationships with politicians and civil service officials**
-

---

# What is Lobbying?

- **Lobbying can be done at all levels of government - federal, provincial or municipal**
  - **Federal examples: income support (DTC and CPP), charitable giving rules, accessibility**
  - **Provincial examples: ODA, AODA, drug program approvals, long-term care legislation**
  - **Municipal: accessible transportation, traffic regulation, access to local services**
-

---

# What is Lobbying?

## - techniques

- **Written communication: letters, briefs, submissions, unsolicited proposals**
  - **Oral communication: phone calls, meetings, presentations to committees**
  - **Grass roots campaigns targeting MPs, MPPs, councillors**
  - **Working with opposition parties**
-

---

# What is Lobbying?

- ▶ **Effective lobbying is politically informed, non-partisan advocacy. Much of the interaction is with civil servants**
  - ▶ **Our style of effective lobbying is based on getting government to move in directions that meet your needs and also serve the public interest by resulting in good policy**
  - ▶ **Governments are not motivated solely by partisan self-interest – the key is finding the overlap between the government's political priorities and agenda, your goals and the public interest**
-

---

# What is Lobbying?

- ▶ **You must build a case. This means demonstrating the benefits of a desired outcome, addressing concerns, and correcting mis-information. Governments avoid risk. It is critically important to identify and take away sources of anxiety**
  - ▶ **Politicians, political advisors AND civil servants – this applies to all levels of government. Politicians rarely act without advice from civil service officials – technical expertise, knowledge of machinery of government**
  - ▶ **Contacts will vary according to issue – brief officials in key departments/ministries. Include your local representative. Cast your net widely**
-

---

# Building an effective plan

- ▶ **Primary task is identifying priorities, goals and associated actions**
  - ▶ **Identifying goals and working backwards is often effective**
  - ▶ **Understand how the government thinks about your issues. Frame your issues - what do your goals mean from the "other side of the desk"? To the extent possible, position your issues in terms of the government's priorities and consistency with its direction - show that you are part of the government's preferred approach. Ideally, you can use the government's own language to advance your cause**
-

---

# Building an effective plan

- ▶ **What are the opportunities for change and the challenges to overcome? How well does your solution fit with the government's time constraints - e.g., is an election imminent?**
  - ▶ **Understand government decision-making. Building a case involves obtaining support at both political and bureaucratic levels. Determine where key decisions will be made**
  - ▶ **Identify potential allies in related departments or ministries – ask advice on who else to meet**
  - ▶ **Grassroots organizing - building support with MPs/MPPs, councillors in their constituencies - is an effective source of influence - "all politics is local"**
-

---

# Building an effective plan

## - key messages

- **Key Messages are the distillation of your concerns into "sound bites" - a statement of your case in easy-to-digest chunks**
  - **They are the foundation of all communication with government**
  - **They must be few in number and provide answers to the questions "why should the government care" and "what do you want government to do"**
-

---

# **Building an effective plan**

## **– briefing note**

- ▶ **Your briefing note introduces you, defines your issue(s), outlines your case, explains the actions/decisions/outcomes you are seeking and provides contact information for follow-up. Use plain language, do not exaggerate**
  - ▶ **Use it (1) to accompany a letter seeking a meeting; (2) as the agenda for discussions with politicians and officials; and (3) a "leave-behind" at the end of your discussion**
  - ▶ **Send it by e-mail ahead of time, to enable it to be circulated to other potentially-interested officials**
-

---

# Building an effective plan

- **Don't assume the person with whom you're meeting understands the issue – outline the problem and the solution simply and directly. Illustrate your case with familiar examples**
  - **It's critical to provide context. Most politicians deal with many issues. They need to grasp your ideas quickly and effectively**
  - **Relate your concerns to familiar situations: ability to get to work, do the shopping, special expenses**
-

---

# Meetings

- ▶ **You can contact politicians at their legislative or constituency offices. If their constituency is far from the legislature, you may only be able to see them there on weekends**
  - ▶ **Ministers or mayors' time is very scarce. It may take weeks to get an appointment. You may have to meet with a staff assistant instead. 30 minutes is usual**
  - ▶ **Carefully rehearse the key messages before the meeting. You will not have very much time and it is important to convey the essential points**
-

---

# Meetings

- ▶ **Remember why you're there – it's about the issue, not you**
  - ▶ **Be respectful. In our experience, few politicians are motivated by power, self-interest or money**
  - ▶ **Try to keep emotion out of the discussion. Good advocates are passionate, but if you lose your temper, that's what will register – the message will be lost. Convey your concerns calmly**
  - ▶ **Identify solutions as well as problems. Explain what you want them to do. Highlight recommendations. Try to be precise without being inflexible – there are probably many ways of achieving the result you are seeking**
-

---

# Meetings

- **Identify solutions as well as problems. Explain what you want them to do. Highlight recommendations. Try to be precise without being inflexible – there are probably many ways of achieving the result you are seeking**
  - **Position yourself as a resource. Offer to work to develop your suggestions**
  - **After the meeting, send a thank you letter**
-