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NC Conservation Network

Tip Sheet #2: How to plan and win a legislative campaign

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February 4, 2008

How to plan and win a legislative campaign

Many of our affiliate organizations work on legislative campaigns in the NC Legislature. Your group could be fighting defensively against a bad bill or working hard to pass a good bill. Either way, there are a few key things you should know that will help make your legislative fight easier and more likely to succeed.

Below are a few of our tips for winning a legislative campaign. Keep in mind that the 2008 short session of the NC Legislature begins on May 13 at noon. The sort session usually lasts 2-3 months and conventional wisdom says that legislators want to be finished no later than mid-August (when many begin to truly campaign for the November general election). If you haven't already begun to plan your legislative campaign, now is the time to do it. This leads us to first tip:

Tip #1: Start early (as in now). If you set up grassroots and insider support for your issue before the session even begins, legislators will have a harder time ignoring your issue.

Tip #2: Know your issue and create a goal. What is your goal? Is it to prevent landfills from being sited in low-income communities and communities of color? Is it to get recycling mandated in all public schools? Is it to pass comprehensive water rules? It's best to have a clear goal with clear bottom lines before you start planning your campaign.

Tip #3: Pinpoint your targets. Who can give you what you need to meet your goal? A target should never be the entire body such as the legislature (because we don't have the resources to try to win each legislator over) but rather a group of people who you need on your side to win. These targets may be committee chairs, legislative leaders, or simply the "undecideds." It's always important to know who has the power to help you reach your goal.

Tip #4: Plan your campaign. You already know your goal and your targets. Now what's your plan to influence your targets to help get you to your goal? What kind of actions (or education) will you do? And, how will this campaign plan build your organization? Will you recruit new members using your goal? Will you raise funds through an email appeal? The sky is the limit in your tactical choices – although you are limited within the boundaries of your organizational capacity.

Tip #5: Start talking to decision makers. Once you've determined who your targets are, start talking to them. Educate them and gauge their knowledge and interest on your issue. You'll also need to have an inside champion (a friendly legislator in the General Assembly) who can help guide your bill through the session. Talking to decision makers can be overwhelming at best and frustrating at worse. Remember that it's important to not burn any bridges with most legislators because you might be able to find common ground on future issues.

Tip #6: Think outside the box. The more creative you are with your tactics the more likely your campaign is to grab the attention of media and your targets. Your creative tactics shouldn't cross the line in which you turn away the very targets you are trying to win over.

Tip #7: Know your organization's strengths. Do you have a large, active membership that can be mobilized to talk to decision makers? Do you have a state lobbyist? Does your Board have healthy ties to good businesses? It's just as important to know where your organization isn't as strong so that you can...

Tip #8: Collaborate with partners. Often times, collaborating with other groups is the best way to increase the public presence of your campaign and influence your decision makers. It's also helpful when your partners can carry different messages that result in asking for the same outcome. Unusual alliances leave lasting impressions on decision makers, such as when hunters and environmentalists agree on a policy.

Tip #9: Be patient and keep the big picture in mind. There will be bumps and turns along the way, but don't let them frustrate you. Rather learn from them and re-evaluate your plan. Many of these bumps can even be predicted, so be prepared and remember your plan. Most meaningful campaigns are not won in months but in years.

Tip #10: Celebrate! So often the progressive community forgets to celebrate our wins. Whether it was a great turnout at an event or passing the bill you've been fighting for two years...celebrate. And, celebrate with your partners, your Board, and your members. If they feel good about the work you did then they are likely to keep coming back to help win future campaigns and possibly even donate money to your successful organization!

A couple of helpful links:

ICL's campaign strategy chart as a pdf:
with instructions:

(<http://ncconservationnetwork.org/documents/CampaignStrategyChart.pdf>).

and blank:

(<http://ncconservationnetwork.org/documents/Campaign%20Strategy%20Worksheet%20%28blank%29.pdf/>).

What not to do: *Top Ten Ways to Kill a Citizen Movement:*

(<http://eddyburg.it/index.php/article/articleview/8249/0/239/>).

Now that you've read our tips, we'd like to ask you to please take two minutes to complete a very short survey (http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=oNlisdGJliwDRKCRA47xr4w_3d_3d) to let us know if this was a useful tool. Your feedback will allow us to better meet your needs as an affiliate of the NC Conservation Network.

Please visit here:

http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=oNlisdGJliwDRKCRA47xr4w_3d_3d to
take this short survey.

Thank you!