

## Preparing Your Lobbying Plan

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Successful lobbying involves more than just making the sales pitch that would convince you to vote in favor of your own project. When the vote of every politician counts, you need individualized lobbying plans that outline exactly what to say and how to say to meet the emotional and informational needs of each public official.

Lobbying plans start with an assessment of the politician's personality, decision-making style, and political behavior. You can gain insight into a public official by observing the individual's behavior, by consulting with people familiar with that official, or even by using psychometric personality assessment tools. With a basic understanding of each official's motivational and communications needs, you can then tailor advocacy messages to convince each politician to cast a "yes" vote for your project.

## INTRODUCING SUPERVISOR GRANT

Lets take a look at Supervisor Grant. After sitting through a few meetings of the County Board of Supervisors and talking privately with people who are familiar with Supervisor Grant, you have gained some general impressions about him. Mr. Grant is a tax attorney who has worked for several law firms during his career. He wears baggy suits, drives an old car, and carries an overstuffed briefcase with him wherever he goes. His resume indicates that he has served as president or chair of several civic committees and organizations. Supervisor Grant is known for his blunt and aggressive style. He is not afraid to speak up and often criticizes county employees when he thinks their work is incomplete or otherwise deficient.

Supervisor Grant frequently makes the motion to terminate board debate and vote immediately on agenda items. When it comes time for the Board to make a decision, Mr. Grant is often the only dissenting vote, particularly when he believes that a project sponsor has failed to demonstrate that a proposal meets the technical approval standards. Supervisor Grant appears to have few close friends at City Hall and is not comfortable engaging in social chit-chat.

## THE LOBBYING PLAN

**Decisiveness:** Supervisor Grant has an obviously forceful, direct personality. He has a blunt, assertive style. He is impatient with mistakes and does not defer to the county's professional staff. Supervisor Grant is a get-it-done guy: once he has heard enough to make up his mind, he is ready to act. That can be good if he has decided he likes your project, but you may need to encourage him to slow down and look more carefully at the facts if his initial response to your project is less than favorable.

As an outcome-oriented politician, Mr. Grant will want to know how your project will help the community achieve its immediate and long-range goals. As an ambitious leader with a string of chairmanships and presidencies behind him and possibly greater civic leadership in front of him, Supervisor Grant will also want to know how voting for your project will affect his personal goals for future civic service.

When dealing with strong decision-makers like Supervisor Grant, you need to be concise, specific, and logical. It is essential to get to the point and not waste time. Rather than telling Supervisor Grant what to do, you are best served by asking his opinion. If staff is delaying your project or insisting on additional, more detailed review, Mr. Grant could be a good ally to have on your side because he would rather take action than study something endlessly. Even if the county staff is opposed to your project, Supervisor Grant sees himself as the final arbiter.

**Interpersonal Style:** Supervisor Grant is not a sociable, warm kinda guy. He is not an easy-going conversationalist, and he is not a particularly persuasive speaker, even when he wants to be - if he were, then he would not end up as the sole dissenting vote on so many issues. Supervisor Grant's unimpressive suits and beat-up old car indicate that he is not out to impress anyone. He does not particularly care if he's popular, and he does not particularly care if your project is popular. What he cares about is whether your project is good enough to merit approval.

This tax attorney is a fact-oriented person, not a "people" person, so emotional appeals and human interest stories will not prove as effective on your behalf as the documents, reports, and evidence stuffed into Supervisor Grant's briefcase. In fact, that heavy briefcase suggests that Mr. Grant is a visual thinker who best absorbs information by reading it rather than by hearing it. So, in addition to making an oral presentation about the merits of your project, you should provide him with a written summary of the evidence and arguments about your project's merits.

Unlike his Board colleagues who prefer some personal interaction before talk turns to more serious subjects, Mr. Grant would rather that you get right down to business without getting too cozy or asking too many intrusive questions. Be respectful of his sense of privacy and his private sense of space. Supervisor Grant probably does not care to be touched and may even feel anxious if you sit too close to him or touch him too frequently.

**Procedures and Rules:** Supervisor Grant believes in rules. After all, look at what he does for a living. He interprets and applies a highly arcane set of tax laws and regulations. Before voting "yes" on your project, Mr. Grant will want confirmation that you have played by the rules and properly checked all the boxes. Anything that smacks of loopholes, evasions, or special treatment will make Supervisor Grant uncomfortable. Therefore, it is up to you to point out how the rules themselves anticipate and allow exceptions, variances, rezonings, or amendments. If you can show that you have followed the appropriate process and that your project complies with the adopted approval standards, then Supervisor Grant will be reluctant to deny your project merely because it is politically unpopular.

Mr. Grant will carefully review the evidence to determine whether your project meets legal and policy standards for approval. He is especially likely to give weight to the opinions of licensed engineers, certified planners, and other technical experts with procedurally validated qualifications. When making your pitch to Supervisor Grant, highlight both the expertise and conclusions of your technical experts.

P.S. Be on time for your meeting. Once Supervisor Grant has set an agenda or schedule for himself, he is will feel disconcerted or even angry if it is disrupted.

**Risk Tolerance:** Mr. Grant's employer-hopping resume suggests that he is comfortable with change. This is consistent with his action-oriented decision-making style: when Supervisor Grant sets a goal, he is willing to accept change and some risk to achieve that goal. While some of his colleagues may vote against projects that seem to threaten the status quo, Mr. Grant is not afraid of land use proposals that offer untried concepts or even a redefinition of the community's future.

For Supervisor Grant, a decision does not have to be perfect. While some of his colleagues may believe that it is better to make no decision at all than to a make a flawed decision, Supervisor Grant believes that it is better to make a big-picture decision today, even if that decision is imperfect, knowing that there are procedural safety nets and opportunities to correct problems tomorrow. Tools that can help reduce risks associated with voting "yes" on an imperfect application include requirements that the sponsor continue working with the professional staff after the public hearing to refine grey areas, the imposition of permit conditions, and reliance on monitoring and reporting procedures.

## **YOUR MESSAGE PLAN**

Once you have outlined Supervisor Grant's emotional and communication preferences, you can tailor your messages to meet those preferences. For example, messages about how your project will create new jobs in the community can be pitched to respond to Supervisor Grant's own personality and decision-making style.

- Presentations that focus on how your project will help the county achieve its goals for youth employment or for higher-paying jobs will resonate with Supervisor Grant's goal-oriented decision-making style.
- Mr. Grant has an introverted, fact-oriented style, so it would be a mistake to rely solely on anecdotal emotional appeals to get your message across. Rather than simply lining unemployed citizens at the microphone to testify about the need for jobs in the community, a better strategy would be to provide written, factual evidence about unemployment and job creation in the county. You should also enlist the assistance of technical experts to refocus attention away from emotional anti-project attacks and back to pro-project facts that support your messages.
- Rules rule for Supervisor Grant. You need to demonstrate that you have followed every step of the application and review procedure. To show how your project complies with the legal standard for "necessity and desirability," for example, you can describe the needed and highly desirable jobs your project will bring to the community. If you need a rezoning to put an employment center in the middle of a residential neighborhood, point to the code section that gives the county the flexibility to adapt zoning in unique circumstances.
- Supervisor Grant is comfortable with change, so he will respond positively to messages about how a project will attract new types of industry to the community or different types of jobs than are currently available to local residents.

No single lobbying strategy will work for every politician because every politician has a unique personality and decision-making style. By crafting individualized lobbying plans for each public official, you can better meet the psychological and interactive needs of each decision maker to get the big "yes" vote you need for your project.

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