

Lobbying 101: How to Network for a Cause

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SPEAKERS

Emily Loui, Divya Bhatia, Quang Dao, Ian Daly, Martin Casas-Maya, Daniel Alfaro, Rey Lautenschlager

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Ian Daly 00:00

What was the first time you ever lobbied for something?

Emily Loui 00:04

Oh, this is a very long story. I don't think this should go—I'll just start with where it doesn't...So

Ian Daly 00:14

Hello, and welcome to Triton Tools and Tidbits. My name is Ian Daly and today we're going to talk about civic engagement and break down one of the most important pieces of civic engagement: lobbying. Lobbying is a loaded word, like sales and advertising. It conjures up things that are slimy, and a little uncomfortable.

Divya Bhatia 00:36

Lobby for, like, certain drugs to be used at, like, hospitals or something like that.

Ian Daly 00:42

Or...

Rey Lautenschlager 00:43

Try to get tax breaks for their corporation.

Ian Daly 00:45

It makes me think of a bunch of fat old white guys and smoke-filled backrooms. Like a whole sea of Chris Christie's sitting around and laughing with politicians about how they're going to cut taxes for rich people.

Emily Loui 00:57

Yeah, I think that lobbying has—is a loaded word. I wish—I think I like the word advocacy more.

Ian Daly 01:04

That's Emily Loui, the program coordinator for Alternative Breaks at UCSD. And last year, she led a group of undergrads to Washington DC to lobby the Congress.

Emily Loui 01:14

So, the way that it happened was that associated students at UC San Diego had the—had approached me about the possibility of doing something civic engagement related, we—they were able to offer a number of travel grants for students. And that lowered the cost enough so that it was accessible to a diverse audience, which was my primary intention.

Ian Daly 01:40

Among that diverse audience was a man named Martin. And Martin is an undergraduate at UC San Diego. But he's also an undocumented student. Would you have been able to attend the Alternative Breaks program if it hadn't been subsidized?

Martin Casas-Maya 01:54

Um . . . I don't—I don't think so. Um, personally for—for me being low income, it's . . . it's never been an option to like, you know, be able to travel less—you know, but wait—not even for vacation or anything like that.

Ian Daly 02:17

This was a completely new experience for Martin. And in fact, this was a completely new experience for everyone on the trip. So how do you—an undergraduate—go about lobbying to an authority figure for some change that you would like to see? Well, the steps are astonishingly similar to those taken by Emily, she breaks down what you need to do first.

Emily Loui 02:37

I would say the first step is to find your allies. So, you will be more powerful as a team than you will as an individual.

Ian Daly 02:44

Allies come in a lot of shapes and sizes. As Emily says it, there's only really one thing that they have in common.

Emily Loui 02:52

Allies can be anyone who cares about what you care about. So, it can be fellow students, it can be professors and be staff members, it can be your neighbor, it could be anyone who just cares.

Ian Daly 03:03

Caring is a theme that comes up a lot for Emily,

Emily Loui 03:07

Then the next thing is definitely not the most sexy stuff—but necessary—which is to organize and to gather as much information as you can.

Ian Daly 03:15

One of the students on the trip, Quang Dao, can speak to this:

Quang Dao 03:18

All of us had to put in our work to know what the bill entails, like the details of it and knowing that and passing the bill, but—

Ian Daly 03:27

Emily wasn't just talking about researching the effects of the bill:

Emily Loui 03:32

The four things that you need to know are, what has been done in the past and what was successful, who you're going to target with this lobbying campaign, how are you going to use your resources, and who you can network with?

Ian Daly 03:45

The students had a pretty good idea of who they were going to lobby, because the obvious answer is anybody who represents San Diegans. And so that is the two senators from California, as well as three representatives, including:

Quang Dao 03:58

Mike Levin's office, and Duncan Hunter's office.

Ian Daly 04:04

Now, Mike Levin and Duncan Hunter are two very different politicians. They represent opposite sides of the political spectrum. Mike Levin is a Democrat and Duncan Hunter is a Republican. And in addition to that, Mike Levin was already a supporter of the Dream Act, whereas Duncan Hunter was already an opponent. I think Quang has some words of wisdom on this topic.

Quang Dao 04:26

When you spend your time with people that, you know, oppose your very, like, foundational values, like, I can understand why this can be tiring and can fill you with fatigue, but I mean, that's the only way you can make progress. And—and I think for me, personally, it's going to those offices or anti-immigration or—goes against my values. Just being there would give me a chance to further understand why.

Ian Daly 05:00

Quang wanted to understand what the reasoning was for opposing these bills. This legislation that he held so foundational. It is easy to preach to a choir. But Quang said it best when he says:

Quang Dao 05:15

This is what lobbying is.

Ian Daly 05:16

Because the truth isn't that you are going to make the changes when you are telling someone something that they already believe. That's the Allies phase. And the only way that you're going to

make changes is by convincing someone of something that they don't currently believe. All of this made Duncan Hunter an obvious choice for someone to target with this lobbying campaign. So now they had their information straightened out. And the next step was:

Emily Loui 05:48

Once you know who, there are three things that you need to do: make an appointment, let them know what you want to talk about, create an agenda that lists everyone participating and a summary of your ask.

Ian Daly 06:02

"What's an ask?" I hear you saying. Well, here's Rey Lautenschlager, who is a student on the trip and someone you heard earlier talking about their opinion of lobbying before they left for Washington.

Rey Lautenschlager 06:15

Yeah, so anytime that you're lobbying, you really want to have kind of an Ask prepared, which is basically, you know, what you're asking them to support, to not support, and then why you want them to do that. So, it's kind of a template, basically, to ensure that, you know, when you go into there to meet with them that you know what you're going to say, you know, everyone has a part assigned, and it's going to be something fluid, because these people are very busy. You know, you may think you have half an hour, and then they have to go after 20 minutes. And so, you really want to have, you know, something prepared that details your points and why you want them to support it.

Ian Daly 06:51

So that asked is a pretty key piece of a lobbying campaign. And it is not supposed to be long. Usually it is only one page but that doesn't mean it's easy to write. Either way, that'll be what you take when you walk in to start lobbying.

Emily Loui 07:08

In the room, there are a few things to remember. First, thanked them for their time. Second, who are you? Third, what is the problem and why do you care? Fourth, what exactly can they do to help you out? Try to engage them in conversation and build a relationship, and then on your way out, thank them for their time.

Ian Daly 07:30

Trying to build a relationship might sound a little daunting. But the truth is, a lot of these politicians got to where they are because they're good at this skill. They're excellent networkers. And one of the students on the trip, Divya Bhatia, talks about something that Mike Levin did that made her feel very welcome.

Divya Bhatia 07:49

He did this thing where, you know, we were ready to give him our formal pitch and our Ask, and he spent 30 seconds each probably for the 10—10 to 12 people that were in that room with us, having us introduce ourselves and our majors and our backgrounds. And he commented for at least 15 seconds on each person's introduction.

Ian Daly 08:14

But Divya wasn't the only person who felt the love in Mike Levin's office.

Martin Casas-Maya 08:17

It is—it is so surreal for me, I couldn't believe that I was telling my family's story to a politician—to someone who actually took the time to meet us, being that he—he represents our district. He wanted to be there, he told us that he wanted to be there, he did not—he would not have missed this. And even though he didn't have that much time, of course, he was very—he's a very, very busy individual. It was really, really reassuring for someone like that, to take the time to listen to us, especially because he represents us. It really showed that he cared. It really showed that what he had said after I remember after me telling my story he was speaking has to have some people that he works with. I remember her name, her name was Lucero, and she's a DACA recipient. She works for Mike Levin and just hearing him say that—hearing him say that it's very, very important for us to continue to work hard for these individuals. And for him to be able to know, and like, the names of the individuals we worked with and who are directly benefited from these programs meant a lot.

Ian Daly 09:23

This is not a Mike Levin puff piece. I'm including their statements, not because I want you to think Mike Levin is such a great guy. But because I want you to remember that even if you are an outsider for any reason, you have people who probably support you who are already in power. The trick is finding them. And then the second trick is convincing the people who don't support you yet.

Quang Dao 09:49

When we had to go to Duncan Hunter's office. I think he was only office where Duncan Hunter opposed a bill and he's one of the politicians have a very interesting history.

Ian Daly 10:04

And in spite of Duncan Hunter's opposition, if Quang had to go back to Washington, he knew who we would seek out.

Quang Dao 10:11

As much as our group loves Mike Love and whatnot, it's not going to be productive because it's kind of like there's nothing to be done, but with Duncan Hunter, because our session with him was disappointingly not productive, we—I think, for me, personally—the goal was to kind of push this office to get a response of why Duncan Hunter doesn't support the H.R.6 bill.

Ian Daly 10:41

He would go back. Lobbying and a lot of civic engagement work can be very thankless. Here's Divya again:

Divya Bhatia 10:50

You know, standing in a line at a polling place for hours, you know, it's definitely not glamorous, but I've learned that activism really isn't. You just realize that the issue makes you feel some sort of way, and you're ready to do, you know, whatever it takes to help that cause.

Ian Daly 11:12

And that matters a lot. Because people are going to say no to you, whether you're lobbying at the local level, whether you're lobbying just at your school level, but especially if you're lobbying at the federal level, you will get told no, a lot. And you can't take it personally. Because even if it's the 1,000th, time, you've heard, no, you're probably going to hear it again. Once you've left their office, there are still a couple of important things that you have to do.

Emily Loui 11:56

Again, third time you're thanking them! The big take-away from this is that you definitely do want to thank them. Because again, as a part of relationship-building expressing gratitude is always a very important thing. So, thank them, but you know, you can be strategic with your thank you. So, when you're thanking them, you can always ask for follow up, say like, what other information could I give you?

Emily Loui 12:16

You know, so an example could be, Thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate it. I enjoyed speaking to you about X, Y, and Z. It was wonderful to learn your perspective on blank. And, you know, as a reminder, in very, very short terms, I'm asking for this, here are a few reasons to keep in mind, what follow up information could I give you? Or what additional information can they give you? Or are you open to another conversation about this topic? Or if you're not going to have a conversation on this topic? What are you open to having a conversation on, on—that we can vent—you know, is somewhat tangentially related? Or is there any way that we could compromise? The other thing to ask is, who else should we be talking to?

Emily Loui 12:59

And so sometimes, you know, you're advocating for something and they're like, yeah, that sounds great! It's like, okay, well, that's, that's, that's wonderful. Mission accomplished; we're done. But you're not done, because you know who else is out there that needs to hear your message. And so, make sure to follow up. And always—the other thing that you can do is, publicize a visit. And a really—that's one way of gathering more allies. So, there may be other organizations and people doing the exact same thing fighting in the exact same fight that you are. But you all need to connect with each other. So, publicizing the visit is great. The other thing to keep in mind is that this person that you're speaking with, is more likely to be willing to do another visit with you if you do publicize that visit.

Ian Daly 13:49

This podcast doesn't exist to publicize that visit, but we can call it a happy accident.

Emily Loui 13:56

And you do--. Make sure there's no like--. Look, this person was willing to talk to me, that they care about their constraints, they care about these issues. So, any sort of positive PR you can give them will lead to more future meetings.

Ian Daly 14:14

So that's it. There are four phases. The four things you need to know beforehand are: what's been done in the past and how is it successful; who are you going to target with this lobbying campaign; how are you going to use your resources; and who can you network with?

Ian Daly 14:33

Once you know who you're going to lobby you have to make an appointment, let them know what you want to talk about, and write up an agenda that lists everyone participating, including a summary of your Ask. In the room, you thank them for their time. Tell them who you are, what exactly the problem is and why you care about, and what exactly they can do to help you out. And then afterwards, you send a final thank you and a follow up and you publicize your visit.

Emily Loui 15:05

But, you know, advocacy isn't just a site. So absolutely you need data, you need to back things up with numbers. That is important. But there is absolutely an art to advocacy, where, you know, you want to lead the person that you're speaking to, to the conclusion that you have, but on their terms,

Ian Daly 15:29

Civic engagement is hard. And lobbying is one of the hardest versions of civic engagement. So just in case you've decided that lobbying is not for you, we've got some suggestions of things that you can do instead.

Divya Bhatia 15:41

You know, vote. That's a huge thing. Register to vote.

Rey Lautenschlager 15:46

So just kind of like spreading awareness and, you know, putting pressure on some of these lawmakers.

Quang Dao 15:52

Reading the news, honestly.

Ian Daly 15:54

Or joining student orgs.

Divya Bhatia 15:57

I started a student organization with a couple of my friends from the trip called Triton's VOICE, VOICE stands for Volunteering, Organizing, and Involvement for Civic Engagement.

Ian Daly 16:09

Is that something that other students out there listening to this podcast might be able to join?

Divya Bhatia 16:14

Absolutely, you can look up, Triton's VOICE, and you'll find our email info at UCSD's website. You can also email us at UCSDTritonsvoice@gmail.com. Follow us on Instagram at Tritonsvoice. And we actually just came up with the idea to start a podcast. We're working on editing the first one right now

and I'm so excited for it. It is called Activist In Progress. And it's basically a podcast for the civically challenged.

Ian Daly 16:47

Okay, can we play a little bit of it right here?

Divya Bhatia 16:49

Ooh, sure.

Rey Lautenschlager 16:51

For me, at least being civically challenged, looks like really caring about the issues and wanting to make a difference. But just not knowing how we've decided to call our podcast Activist in Progress, you know, like a work in progress. I think that it's so important for us to keep in mind that activism isn't an end goal. It's a journey and it's a state of mind.

Divya Bhatia 17:14

Our podcast is centered around the ideas of civic engagement, because we believe that it should be accessible to everyone. Civic engagement is about promoting the quality of your community, whether it's achieved through political or non-political avenues. It's about seeing something that you want to change and doing what you can to inspire that change. For our next episodes, we'll be tackling sidelined issues like how COVID-19 disproportionately affects various groups in the global community. We'll be talking with experts on their experiences in lobbying and fighting for justice. And using this unique quarantine time to figure out how we can all be activists from a social distance.

Ian Daly 17:55

And that's a fact. We all are dealing with the new reality now. And the lobbying plan laid out here doesn't necessarily work when we're all social distancing. But...

Emily Loui 18:08

COVID are no—not—without COVID, you can always advocate for things that you believe in. So, we live in this amazing society where we can use technology. Again, you can always email you can always call, you can request meetings. I believe congressional representatives are offering zoom meetings similar to this. So, there are more, you know, if anything, it's almost easier now and because there is so much free time to reflect upon the changes that you want to see, and we can still continue all of the ways of advocating that—that we've always have been doing.

Ian Daly 18:50

Currently there is a case before the Supreme Court regarding the DREAM Act. And we might have a decision as early as the Thursday that this episode posts. So, if you are undocumented, here is the Director of Undocumented Student Services, Daniel Alfaro, telling you what he would recommend:

Daniel Alfaro 19:09

The thing we're recommending our students to do now is to renew their DACA. So, if they're—if they—if they have had the program, and they haven't renewed their DACA, it is important that they do so

immediately. Because as soon as the decision comes out, if it's a negative decision, we're concerned that our students won't have the opportunity to renew their DACA anymore.

Ian Daly 19:31

But whether you have DACA or not . . .

Daniel Alfaro 19:34

The recommendation, the biggest recommendation that we have is for students to come and meet with us. If it's for DACA renewal, we can give them that support right now. And if they don't have DACA, we still want to talk to them. We want to see if there's anything else that can be done for them, or if we have any other program that applies to them.

Ian Daly 19:53

But if instead you just want to help out . . .

Daniel Alfaro 19:56

Or the way someone can support is by advocating for our undocumented students. We need people to tell Congress, we need people to tell the President that we need a permanent solution for not only our undocumented students but their families as well.

Ian Daly 20:11

In other words, lobbying.

Daniel Alfaro 20:14

One of the biggest things that people can do is to contact their Congress representative. Let them know how they feel, let them know that we need to protect our families.

Ian Daly 20:22

Because this is not something just in the abstract. And it isn't something that is just relegated to people who already have power and influence. Anyone can do this. But if you're still not convinced to lobby, the other thing that we need . . .

Daniel Alfaro 20:37

Is a need for support that's not restricted by an immigration status. So, our students are concerned that if they're unemployed, they won't have access to unemployment benefits, that their family members won't have access to unemployment benefits. And we're seeing a lot of nonprofits step up and offer financial relief options to those families. We need the support of our communities. By donating money to those organizations, by—by volunteering, donating funds, anything they can do to support those organizations that are on the frontlines supporting our undocumented communities.

Ian Daly 21:12

Is to donate money. We'll put a list of organizations that then you'll have provided. There's a lot in this episode. And if you are affected by the decision in some way, Daniel has a few more words for you.

Daniel Alfaro 21:29

We feel their pain, we know that we're facing very difficult times. We, we're with them. We have families who are contacting us for support, and we want to let them know that we're going to continue to be here through the end.

Ian Daly 21:49

As a coda to this episode. In December of 2019, Duncan Hunter pled guilty to one count of misusing campaign funds. On January 7, 2020, he submitted letters of resignation to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and on March 17, 2020, he was sentenced to 11 months in prison.

Ian Daly 22:14

I hope you took something away from this episode. I hope you enjoyed it, and I hope it energized you. For Triton Tools and Tidbits, I'm Ian Daly. Thank you.