

Grassroots are essential to successful lobbying

By CAROLYN ROSENBERG

"As soon as several of the inhabitants of the United States have taken up an opinion or a feeling which they wish to promote in the world, they look around for mutual assistance, and as soon as they have found each other out, they combine. From that moment, they are no longer isolated men, but a power seen from afar, whose actions serve for an example, and whose language is listened to."

Alexis de Tocqueville

The rise of controversial issues, such as nuclear power and PBB, has prompted many zealous individuals to ask how they can organize action groups, and lobby. Though motivation and energy are necessary ingredients for establishing a group, by themselves they are not sufficient. Movements are successful only if they can attract, inform and persuade others to join their efforts. This requires an understanding of basic grass roots organizing techniques.

Defining the goals of the group is the most important initial task. "Specificity" and "feasibility" are key words to remember. The group's efforts should focus on select, pertinent issues, be it changing prevalent attitudes concerning the issue, opposing legislation, or providing a service.

Consideration must also be given to the type of group that is to be established. Depending on whether or not the group decides to lobby, there are different filing procedures with the Internal Revenue Service. Section 501(c)(3) of the IRS code covers all non-lobbying organizations. These include service groups, health care and adoption agencies. Filing under C3 means the organization is not allowed to lobby, but contributions are tax-exempt.

GROUPS THAT INTEND to lobby must file under Section 501(c)(4). Contributions to C4 organizations are not tax-deductible.

Once the goals of the group have been established, the actual organizing process begins. Communication is crucial at this stage of development. Unless people are aware of a potential movement, the group will never gain support.

Recognition can be accomplished through a combination of introductory bulletins, and word-of-mouth advertising. An introductory statement should be concise, clear and catchy; explain the group's purpose, and give information about the initial meeting. The bulletins can be posted everywhere—on walls, supermarkets, offices and dor-

mitaries—to provide maximum exposure.

Try to personally contact faculty members, religious leaders, politicians, and other social action groups. Speak about the meeting to classes, civic groups and friends. The idea is to evoke as much curiosity as possible about the new "brainchild."

Donald K. Ross, author of "A P.I.R.G. Organizer's Handbook," describes the type of people to inform the recruit: those with 1) experience and contacts and 2) energy and potential. If the push has been strong to advertise, these treasured individuals will appear at the first meeting.

THE MEETING itself is extremely important, for it conveys the image of the group. Thus, the meeting should proceed in a logical, controlled fashion. Briefly introduce the leader of the group, cite the purpose, express appreciation to those present and attending, and then get down to business.

Internal communication among members of the group is at the top of the list. A committee should be in charge of setting up a phone tree—where person A calls B, C, D, E; person B calls F, G, H, I; person C calls J, K, L. In this way, everyone stays informed and is responsible for informing others about the group's activities.

All members should decide the group's actual projects to achieve optimum representation. To make a wise choice, the group should have the most recent and accurate information on the subject. This requires the time and effort of all members.

If the movement relates to legislation in any way, relevant bills ought to be monitored. The "Congressional Record," published every day when Congress is in session, is the best source of information on bills and congressional actions. Directed efforts can also inform groups of potential legislative efforts, as well as provide contacts with sympathetic politicians.

The Freedom of Information Act is an additional resource. The act outlines the guidelines for obtaining access to federal documents, and should be carefully studied.

SINCE MEMBERS of Congress are instrumental in passing legislation, the records of key Senators and Represent-

atives should be examined. Make it a habit to check the voting records of state representatives as well. When upcoming legislation is to be debated, the group will have an idea of which representatives they can count on for support. Lobbying "targeted" individuals is more feasible than trying to contact every representative.

Specific projects of the group can take a variety of forms. Committees can be set up to assist individual efforts. Making phone calls, writing letters, and visiting influential officials are some suggestions. Send representatives of the movement to speak to unions, service clubs, and other action groups; contacts with potential alliances may be very rewarding. Sponsoring public meetings with informed guests can perform a useful service and increase support for the group. Through questions and answers, the hesitant and uncertain can be persuaded to join.

All avenues of media should be pursued. Press releases to major newspapers can inform many subscribers. A witty guest editorial can attract widespread coverage. A press confer-

ence in an exceptional tool for communication if a prominent individual or politician can endorse the group. Advertising on television, though effective, is very costly.

As exposure increases, the group must be able to adapt to expanded membership. A nucleus of industrious and devoted staffworkers can help maintain the basic framework of the organization. A full-time nucleus requires salaries. Funds must be raised to support the group of core organizers and to finance various projects.

SEVERAL fundraising options can be employed. Requiring each member to pay dues is both simple and equitable. Walk-a-thons and solicitation efforts can add extra funds. As the group becomes popular, contributions may provide the bulk of operating expenditures.

With a stable and continuous source of funds, the group is secure to explore other avenues of advocacy. Public hearings (legal and administrative) are excellent opportunities for a representative of the movement to testify.

Since all testimony becomes public record, it should be well-prepared. Extensive research is necessary, as well as a concise articulate presentation.

Organizing a group requires energy

and hard work. There are no shortcuts or success formulas. But, the potential for achievement is immensely rewarding if the ideas are solid, the publicity widespread and the members committed.

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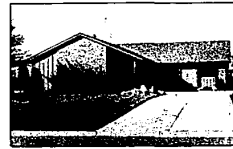
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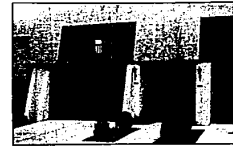
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Melody Musicale will meet at 8 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 14 at the home of Esther Cutler, 20252 Tapert in Southfield.

The meeting will be followed by a musical program featuring Zella Keil, concert pianist, who will play composi-

tions by Bach, Chopin and Beethoven. Refreshments will be served and guest are welcome.

For further information call Esther Cutler at 356-0810 or Louise Lazarus at 547-0168.

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