

WHEN AND HOW TO CHOOSE A CONTRACT LOBBYIST

HOW TO DETERMINE IF YOUR ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN WOULD BENEFIT FROM A CONTRACT LOBBYIST

1. Do you have the expertise internally to know when, where, and with whom you need to act to make the best case to secure appropriations for your issue?
2. Do you have the capacity internally to monitor the executive and legislative budget and appropriations processes?
3. Do you have relationships with the lawmakers and other key decision-makers who have the most influence over the state budget and appropriations bills that matter to your organization?



TIP: If you respond “no” to 2-3 of these questions, you should consider the pros and cons of hiring a contract lobbyist to support you in securing funding for your issue.

PROS OF HIRING A CONTRACT LOBBYIST FOR APPROPRIATIONS

- **Expertise.** Hiring a contract lobbyist who has extensive experience in the budget and appropriations process ensures that you will have the benefit of their knowledge of the timeline, essential players, process, levers of power, and influence.
- **Capacity.** Appropriations is a technical and wonky process that requires a substantial investment of time to track the movement of the governor’s budget, appropriations bills and amendments, hearings, and other critical pieces of changing information.
- **Relationships.** Contract lobbyists spend significant time in the capitol building with lawmakers on behalf of their clients. As a result, they generally have both strong and long-standing relationships with lawmakers and their staff. They can guide your organization on which lawmakers need to hear from you and who influences the lawmakers with power in the appropriations process.

CONS OF HIRING A CONTRACT LOBBYIST

- **Expense.** Typically, the con of hiring a contract lobbyist is that it requires your organization to set aside funding to hire and staff time to manage a contract lobbyist.
- **Long-term relationships.** While a lobbyist’s relationships are a clear value-add, relying on someone else’s relationships to open doors and gather intel means you are not cultivating those relationships in-house over time.
- **Other priorities.** Contract lobbyists typically have multiple clients and discuss multiple issues when they meet with lawmakers. This dynamic may mean that your top priority for a lawmaker or a Committee isn’t the lobbyist’s top priority in their meeting - your issue could be the third or fourth thing on their list, which means the lawmaker might not feel the level of urgency you want communicated.

HOW TO CHOOSE A CONTRACT LOBBYIST

1. **Identify contract lobbyists.** You can check with your state's registry of lobbyists and ask partners, lawmakers, and their staff for recommendations.
2. **Research the lobbyist's other clients.** Depending on the situation in your state, you may want to consider:
 - **FAMILIARITY WITH YOUR ISSUE.** Do they have other clients that work on child care, SNAP, etc.?
 - **POTENTIAL CONFLICTS OF INTEREST.** Do they have clients whose interests directly oppose your goals or even who have the same goal but a different strategy? Are their values aligned or do they work with clients who oppose equity-centered policy?
 - **POLITICAL LEANING.** Do their clients lean heavily progressive, and/or do their clients lean heavily toward one party over the other? If you live in a state with a Republican trifecta, it could be helpful to have a lobbyist with relationships with Republican lawmakers. In high-stakes campaigns, it is advisable to have a lobbyist with deep connections on both sides of the aisle.
3. **Conduct interviews with more than one lobbyist**
 - Ask about their experience with your issue, their experience with the appropriations process, and especially their relationships with lawmakers, staff, and communities with jurisdiction over your issue.
 - Don't forget to ask about their work/communication style.
4. **Ask for references and do your own homework.**
 - Call the references provided by the lobbyist.
 - Ask partners and lawmakers or staff you have relationships with about the reputation and effectiveness of the lobbyist.

