

## HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY LOBBY ELECTED OFFICIALS

My Girl Scout troop began a campaign to reduce single-use plastics in our town when we were in fourth grade. Soon, we realized that getting people to really change their behavior required our town to pass an ordinance. So, we lobbied our town council. It took longer than we expected: three years. No town in the state had yet passed a plastic bag ordinance, but we were finally successful, triggering a domino effect across the state.

Here are tips to successfully lobby your elected officials about issues that matter to you. What we did worked. You can do it too.

### GETTING STARTED

If you want to get involved in an issue, start by doing research. What is the latest information on the problem you want to solve? What are other people already doing to address this issue? What opportunities already exist for you to get involved? Identify the change you want to see. What solutions are working elsewhere?

### LEARN FROM EXPERTS

Reach out to experts and organizations that are already involved in the issue in your area. They can teach you more about the problem, give you advice, and help amplify your message. Develop your personal experience with the issue, and your ability to talk about it with authority.

### EDUCATE THE COMMUNITY

Organizing educational events in your community is a great way to get more people involved in your campaign. The more people that are involved, the more power you will have, and the more energy you'll have dedicated to making the change you want to see.

### IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE NEWS, MAKE YOUR OWN!

Connect with reporters at local news organizations, like newspapers, bloggers, and television stations. Tell them about what you're doing and why. Take photos of what you do and send the photos to reporters and news editors. Getting mentioned in the local news will help amplify your message, get more people involved, and may open up more opportunities. Write Letters to the Editor of your newspaper. Eventually, you may get a full article -- especially if you have good photos.

### MEET WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS

My troop connected with our town's Mayor and members of our town's Environmental Commission. Making these connections can be as simple as visiting the town website or going to the municipal building and asking the Town Clerk where to find people. Ask if anything has been done on your issue yet and ask for advice about how to proceed.

### GET ON THE AGENDA

In our town, at every meeting, anyone can speak for two minutes to our town council during the "Good and Welfare" section. However, if you want to be on the official agenda to propose something, request an application with the Town Clerk. Ask to make a presentation (often up to 10 min).

### PRESENT THE FACTS, OFFER A SOLUTION!

During our presentation, we presented the facts relating to our issue, and proposed what we wanted to see happen. Then, we listened to the Council's concerns and tried to address what we could.

### BE POSITIVE

Always stay calm, positive, and respectful. Do not argue or get agitated. You will be surprised how many people respond well to a thoughtfully presented idea. Even those who disagree now might change their mind later if people are respectful. Being able to work together means you will have more people and perspectives working to find the best outcome for everyone!

### DRAW ATTENTION

We continued to attend educational events around the county and made a "Plastic Bag Monster" costume which we took turns wearing at community events to draw attention to our cause.

### HOST AN EVENT

We hosted a community event that we called the Bring Your Own Bag Summit at a community center in our town. We invited Council members, local activists, merchants, and residents to attend and speak. To advertise it, we put up flyers around town and wrote letters to the editor of our local paper about it. Our goal was, once again, to draw attention, educate, and address concerns.

### KEEP THE BALL ROLLING

Our town council told my troop that their main concern regarding a plastic bag ordinance was the merchant reaction. To address this concern, we made a merchant-specific survey and petition to draw support. We also continued to have scouts from the troop speak during "Good and Welfare" at every council meeting to keep the issue on the agenda.

### BE PERSISTENT

All the effort pays off. Three years after our first presentation to the town council, and five years after we first started our educational campaign, Teaneck became the second town in New Jersey to pass a plastic bag ordinance. Three years after that, New Jersey passed the strongest plastic waste reduction legislation in the country, setting a national precedent.