

HOW TO RUN A LOBBY DAY

Lobby days can be an incredible way for students to make an impact with their local, state, or federal governments. If your student government wants to run a lobby day, keep in mind that it takes a lot of time and effort to pull off a fun, impactful, and recruiting lobby day, but it's well worth it. However, remember that lobby days are only a starting point, and as students, most of your power comes from your grassroots base -- the student body. Lobby days are great at the beginning of the campaign to gather information or for the end of the campaign to make a final push to get your bill to pass. Lobby days work best when they are paired with other efforts, such as petition gathering, social media, and calls into legislators' offices that you can deliver or reinforce in your meetings.

Picking a Date

There are a few variables to keep in mind when scheduling a lobby day. First, there are internal factors for your students coming to lobby. Booking a lobby day on an existing break or lull in exams is ideal to make sure that students are less stressed, and dedicate adequate prep time ahead of time. You also want to make sure that students have as big a window as possible to book meetings, so that they are not too rushed and have decent breaks. When in-person, flying them in for a full weekend of trainings, sightseeing, and meetings, plus a full business day Monday for the actual hill day, is ideal. Unless you have multiple teams, 5 meetings is generally the maximum that you should schedule for one day.

Second, you need to balance your group's needs with how Congress or the state legislature operates. Congress is only actually in session for about half the year - you'll want to pick dates that congress is in session if you want to get a member meeting. However, most of the time you will want to meet with staff instead, so this doesn't become a problem unless they are traveling with their boss that weekend. Each office operates slightly differently, but most have an all-staff meeting each morning and have more availability in afternoons. Mondays and Fridays can be iffy, as staff may need to be ready to dive into a meeting with their boss just before they leave for the district / as they arrive back in DC. You'll also want to keep an eye on the chamber's calendar to make sure there aren't major committee events that are going to keep your target staff's attention that entire day (ie, don't schedule a lobby day to meet with environmental staffers when the environment committee is marking up bills).

Virtual Lobby Days

The pandemic has opened us up to some new opportunities as both the academic and political worlds have had to explore new ways to function in the virtual world. Virtual lobby days can provide opportunities for more students to get involved because they don't need to travel to Washington D.C. or the state capital. They can also allow you to meet with more offices because of the increased capacity for back-to-back or odd-hour meetings. Here are several tips and pitfalls to avoid for virtual lobby days.

1. Avoid using Zoom - having the same central host for multiple Zoom meetings at once does not work, unless the host of each Zoom meeting is someone who is actually in that lobby meeting. Google Meet would be preferable for centrally-scheduled meeting links.
2. Make sure that the students who register for the virtual lobby day are as enthusiastic and committed as if they were going to the lobby meetings in person. The students who come to a virtual lobby day should be able to tell your campaign story and talk to the staffer professionally.
3. When scheduling meetings, keep in mind that most legislative staff are in DC, so you should be mindful of timezones if you are not on the east coast.
4. Don't let the online format (and the ability to have notes up on your screen) detract from the importance of team practice and roleplays. Do at least 2 roleplay sessions to build confidence and make student's talking points seem more natural.
5. Be **bold** in your relationship building asks to members, as our current remote setting makes their attendance at events easier. Instead of something simple like an endorsement, ask them to attend a campus-wide event as a guest speaker!

Roles

There should be approximately five attendees of each lobby meeting, and each should have a different, pre-assigned and practiced role. Here are some roles that you can use. If you have bigger or smaller teams, these roles can be combined or split up.

1. Team Lead - this person should be in charge of introducing the team, your organization, and your campaign. This person should also be paying attention to what the staffer says and asking prying questions where necessary to get more information about the member's priorities. At the end of the meeting, this person should wrap up, say thank you, and send a follow-up email.
2. Personal story - one member of your team should have a personal story that relates to your campaign. The more poignant the story, the better, but being truthful is the most important aspect of the story. The person who tells the personal story serves to humanize the campaign and connect with your audience. This is the centerpiece of the meeting
3. Problem - one person should lay out the problem that your campaign seeks to address. This is the problem addressed in the personal story.
4. Solution - this team member should clearly and concisely talk about the policy handle and how it solves the problem that you just spoke about
5. Policy Ask - think about what you want from this staff member. Do you want them to cosponsor a bill? Vote a certain way? Or something else. The ask should be strong and direct and as much as possible force an answer one way or another
6. Relationship-building Ask - Ask the staffer or member to speak on your campus or do something else to help maintain a relationship. The lobby meeting should just be the first step of a longer conversation and relationship between your student government and this office!

Professionalism and Preparedness

You are representing your organization and your college or university on a national stage. Whether you're talking to the Speaker of the House herself or the lowest level staff for a freshman member, you should always act with respect and professionalism. You should make sure that whoever is running the lobby day does all of the following to make sure all students are prepared before you arrive at the Capitol, either in person or virtually:

1. Schedule at least two separate hour-long practice sessions during the week with all attending students at least 3 days in advance of the meeting.
2. Confirm that all students will be attending every training and every lobby meeting. Attendance at trainings should be mandatory. If students cannot attend, you should make sure that they are still adequately prepared ahead of time.
3. Make sure that all students have prepared their speaking roles and, where applicable, their personal story. Focus most of your feedback on helping them knit a strong narrative that touches on the member's motivations/history and transitions between speakers smoothly
4. Take notes on what the congressional staffer says, if they're with us on the issues, and how you should follow up after the meeting.
5. Send thank you emails to staffers by the end of the day and facilitate any follow-up inquiries or interest on future events
6. Be active on social media to promote your involvement on your campus

Realms and Tasks

This is the ideal timeline if you are coordinating the lobby day mostly alone. You can definitely accelerate this timeline if you have multiple members of your team working on different realms. Make sure to be as organized as possible and consider making a calendar so that you don't forget any of these details.

1. Talking points
 - a. 3 weeks out: Draft talking points bullet points, get internal approval
 - b. 3 weeks out: Pitch alumni and top coalition partners on your campus on participating
2. Scheduling meetings
 - a. 4 weeks out: Confirm attendees (including their home zip codes). Build target list for scheduling, with a ranking of priority/essential meetings, nice-to-have, and filler meetings. Good meetings to consider are the senators for your state, the rep for your campus, and reps for attending students' home districts. After going through all those, you can consider other reps from your college's state
 - b. 3 weeks out: First round emails to offices you want to meet with, or meeting request forms where applicable. You should ask for meetings with the legislative assistant for the issue area of your campaign. The initial email should include the names of your attendees, what you want to talk about, and a brief agenda.

- c. 2 weeks out: Second round emails, goal of scheduling at least half of meetings and first round phone bank, goal of scheduling at least three-quarters of meetings
 - d. 1 week out: Second round call to front desk / scheduler, close schedule for new requests
 - e. 3 days out: *If virtual, send google meet calendar invites to staffers as soon as you have each meeting scheduled, and to all attendees on an ongoing basis and completely by the time you “print” the schedule.*
 - f. 1 business day out: Final flag of cancel/reschedule requests
- 3. Prep meetings
 - a. 1 week out: Hold student prep call to review talking points, lobby training, and meeting roles
 - b. 4 days out: Hold second prep call to review personal stories and meeting roles
 - c. 1 day out: Hold a briefing on logistics and latest intel and then have team huddles to run roleplays, review materials
- 4. Materials (print and assemble folders 1 business day out. *If virtual, decide on a single document to email ahead of time.*)
 - a. Map and schedule on single sheet of paper (only if in-person)
 - b. Materials like a one-pager describing your student government’s main campaign or important events on your campus
 - c. Printed note taking sheets (*if virtual, a central notetaking google sheet*)
- 5. Run of show
 - a. 1 week out: Create Group Me with all students to share problems, updates, and photos. Also, pick someone to do an instagram takeover documenting the day of your organization’s account
 - b. 1 day out: Send out sample tweets to attendees
 - c. Day of: Have lobby day coordinator monitoring email for last minute cancellations, have designated person in office to be on call for emergencies
- 6. Follow up by the end of the day
 - a. Do any necessary research and send follow up emails thanking staff
 - b. Upload and share photos on social media
 - c. Send a press release to campus newspaper

Although the amount of work that goes into a lobby day may seem daunting, if you have a strong team and are motivated to use this incredible opportunity to make change beyond your campus, organizing a lobby day is likely the right decision for you and may even become an annual event that helps build relationships and strengthen your impact over time!