



OpenSource Leadership Strategies, Inc.
762 Ninth Street, #534
Durham, NC 27705
919-824-3914
www.opensourceleadership.com

10 Tips To Build Your Capacity – And Win in the Legislature

© Copyright OpenSource Leadership Strategies, Inc.
All rights reserved.

BASELINE: Know the **rules** and comply with them! Don't get diverted from your campaign because you have to defend your actions to elected officials.

1. Form a **peer network** of nonprofit lobbyists who can keep your eyes and ears open for each other. This only works if it is reciprocal.
2. Work in **coalition** for strength in numbers and diversity. Remember, no permanent enemies, no permanent friends.
3. Nonprofits' strength is **grassroots** – treasure those relationships. Maintain credibility with grassroots stakeholders. Be choosy about what you ask of them. Give clear instructions on what you want them to do and educate them about advocacy in the process. Form a policy committee so that members help formulate your advocacy agenda. Stay focused on your mission and advocacy agenda.
4. Use **technology** strategically – and know its limitations. Online tools are effective and efficient for mobilizing members. The personal touch is always better for reaching decision makers.
5. Cultivate **champions** in the legislature. Know who has power to make or break your issue – e.g., committee chairs. Also make sure to have relationships on both sides of the aisle. Become a resource to legislators, but be careful to promise only what you can deliver.
6. Remember the power of legislative **staff** – they decide whether you get to meet the decision maker, whether you know what's happening, and whether your message gets heard.
7. In short written communications, put the **value** you provide in dollar terms. Show how you are saving money, doing things more efficiently, or serving more people than government could. And put a human face on the issue to show its real impact. This is nonprofits' key asset.
8. Leverage **executive branch** relationships. Often, if your nonprofit is under attack, your funding state agency is under attack, too. Instead of fighting each other for remaining crumbs, work together to make your case.
9. Hire a **contract lobbyist**. This is the only tip that requires a cash outlay, but it can be less expensive than hiring staff. Also helps to maintain relationships and institutional memory through staff turnover. Find someone who understands the nonprofit sector, your issue, and the legislative process.
10. Know when to stay **below the radar**. Not every negative comment needs to be rebutted. Some things will die quietly if you don't stir them up. Always keep your eyes and ears open, but not always your mouth.

BONUS: Say **"thank you"** in writing and every opportunity you get. (Remember to also thank staff.) Tell the decision maker and staff what happened as a result of their help (again, in dollar and human terms).