

This is Chris Micheli with the Sacramento Governmental Relations firm of Aprea & Micheli, and Adjunct Professor at McGeorge School of Law in its Capital Lawyering program.

Today's podcast is on finding a lobbying job. If you want to find a lobbying job, how should you go about doing so?

Members of the third house, the lobbying core, are often asked for advice by individuals who are interested in finding a job as a lobbyist. My advice to these prospective lobbyists is usually similar to job seekers in many other professions.

Nonetheless, I'll try to give some specific advice on obtaining a job in lobbying at the state level.

In my mind, there are three initial issues that an individual seeking a lobbying job should consider. First, understand the types of lobbying jobs that are out there.

Second, understand what you want to do in the lobbying profession. Then third, target potential lobbying jobs that suit your interests and your strengths.

What are the types of lobbying jobs? There are essentially four of them, contract, in-house or government relations, association, or government. Although most lobbying jobs are easily understood by their titles, let's take a look at each one of these types of lobbyists.

A contract lobbyist is someone who is contracted by one or more lobbyist employers to work on behalf of that lobbyist employer. There are over 2,500 lobbyist employers at the state level.

A contract lobbyist could be employed by a company, a union, a trade association or a number of other entities.

These individual contract lobbyists must register with the Secretary of State, take a Lobbyist Ethics Course every two-year session and be bound by the laws regulating lobbyists, such as the \$10 gift rule. Contract lobbyists are those who are employed by a lobbying firm.

An in-house or government relations position is one in which the lobbyist is a full-time employee of a business. For example, car manufacturers, high-tech companies, healthcare insurers, and many others employ in-house lobbyists.

This type of individual may have a title, such as Director of State Government Affairs, Vice President of Government Relations, etc. Many of these jobs are located at the company's headquarters.

Some of these jobs may or may not be based in Sacramento. Some of these in-house individuals do local, state, and/or federal lobbying on behalf of their employer. A number of these GR or in-house lobbyists also employ contract lobbyists to work on behalf of the business.

Now, assuming these individuals meet the legal definition of a lobbyist, they too must register with the Secretary of State and be bound by the rules regulating lobbyists.

The third type of lobbyist is an association lobbyist, who's a full-time employee of a trade association or of a union. Groups, such as the California Chamber of Commerce or the California Labor Federation, employ full-time lobbyists to advocate on behalf of their association's members.

These individuals have titles, such as Policy Advocate, Legislative Director, perhaps, Vice President of Government Relations. These individuals too must register with the Secretary of State as a lobbyist and be bound by the laws and regulations affecting lobbyists.

A government lobbyist is someone who fills the role of working as the Governor's lobbyist. He or she is a full-time employee of a particular state agency, a department, or even a board or commission. They are similar in many ways to a private sector's in-house lobbyists.

These individuals lobby on behalf of the Governor's administration. They often hold the title of Deputy Secretary or Deputy Director in charge of legislation.

These individuals appear before the Legislature. They advocate on behalf of the administration, based upon the jurisdiction of that particular state agency or department.

For example, the Deputy Director for Legislation at the Department of Toxic Substances Control will advocate for or against legislation before a committee, such as the Assembly Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials Committee.

They do so after an approved position has been granted by the Governor's office. These individuals, because they're state employees, do not register as lobbyists with the Secretary of State.

The second area is figuring out about working in the lobbying profession. The point here is, whether you want to advocate on specific bills before the Legislature, or perhaps, particular regulations at a state agency or department, or do you like to analyze bills and regulations, perhaps, writing policy papers or advocacy documents.

In other words, there are some jobs in the lobbying profession that are behind the scenes, while others require daily interaction at the State Capitol or regulatory bodies around Sacramento or elsewhere.

Many lobbyists spend much of their time attending meetings and hearings, monitoring bills and amendments, writing analyses and advocacy papers, and writing updates to their clients.

While other lobbyists walk the halls of the State Capitol on a daily basis, these individuals meet with legislators and their staff. They testify before policy and fiscal committees, etc.

Now, what role suits your strengths and interests the most? Do you want to work behind the scenes or out in front? How can you narrow your job search in the lobbying profession?

Once you determine what type of lobbying job you might want to pursue, then you need to think about ways to narrow your search, such as, do you have an area of interest or subject matter expertise?

Is there a subject matter or particular cause that interests you? For example, perhaps you've long supported environmental efforts, or you enjoy the natural resources public policy area. You might want to seek a job with the Sierra Club, for example.

Do you have substantive background in a particular policy area? Maybe, you previously worked as a certified public accountant, and you might have interest working at the Revenue and Taxation Committee.

Perhaps, you would be a lobbyist with the California Society of CPAs, or you might work for a particular business or a business trade association that handles tax and fiscal issues.

Whether you work for a business, or as an in-house lobbyist, or even at an association in a lobbyist capacity, you need to obviously decide which of these opportunities you'll pursue.

Now understand that most in-house positions do not turn over very often. However, in recent years, more businesses are located in California, or even out-of-state companies have begun employing in-house lobbyists for the very first time.

While some of these companies will often promote from within their current employment ranks, each year there are a handful that recognize the value of hiring an experienced capitol staffer.

Trade associations generally see more employee turnover than individual companies, but even those don't occur with great frequency.

Finally, if you want to work as a contract lobbyist, you'll need to consider whether you want to work in a small firm or a large firm.

Most lobbying firms are sole practitioners, or ones that have two or, at most, three lobbyists. There are a handful of very large lobbying firms in Sacramento that have a dozen or more lobbyists and that often hire individuals on a more frequent basis.

Where do you find those lobbying jobs? Once you've decided on the type of lobbying job you want to pursue and the likely employer, then the next step is finding that particular job.

There are many routes to take, the most obvious of which is word-of-mouth or the recommendation of a colleague. That traditional route is most often taken because the lobbying community is a rather tight-knit group in Sacramento.

Letting folks know that you're looking for a position or talking with individuals currently in the lobbying profession will help you get your name out into the community.

I've always found that the more eyes and ears that are open looking for a position, then the better off you are in, hopefully, finding your desired job. More often than not today, potential employers looking for a lobbyist will advertise for that position.

There are open job listings that are regularly posted on websites found in Capitol Morning Report, Capitol Weekly, The Nooner, and the Capitol Daybook.

These days, almost every lobbying job that's open can be found in one or more of these job postings. It's important to look at these each and every day. Some jobs are posted for several weeks while others may be there for just a few days.

How do you go about getting your lobbying job? Once you have that ideal lobbying job in mind, you need to make yourself an attractive job candidate to get your foot in the door.

First, thoroughly understand the profession, the players, and what you'll do as a lobbyist. Research and know your prospective employer.

Second, have a solid resume and good references. Potential employers in the lobbying community will appreciate your work experience, and individuals that they know who can vouch for your abilities.

Third, know how best to advocate your employment attributes to potential employers. Engage with friends and colleagues and walk through several mock interviews.

How can you be a solid candidate? As attorneys and individuals who got their first lobbying job as a member of the State Bar, a law degree is often helpful, but it's definitely not a prerequisite to any lobbying job.

Most often, lobbyists get their positions because of their contacts and their particular experience.

The vast majority of lobbyists have previously worked in California state government. Of course, there are many exceptions to this general rule. We often hear that the lobbying community in Sacramento is a small tight-knit community. In other words, everyone knows most everyone.

It's your work that will distinguish you most often. The more people who have seen and know of your work, and it's respected, of course, then the more likely you'll have an easier time finding a lobbying job that fits you.

Many times, individuals who are working in and around the State Capitol will actually be recruited by a lobbyist employer.

It's critical to have solid work experience where you've developed an area of expertise or particular experience, even multiple areas and where you've made important contacts. It will then help you be an effective lobbyist.

Many lobbyist employers are looking for lobbyists who are experts in their field, or they've practiced law in a particular area, or they've worked in a particular legislative committee or a state agency or a state department.

Finally, having the right temperament and good written and verbal analytical and advocacy skills are always very important.

Some have described lobbying jobs as being an advocate versus an analyst. Perhaps, an analogy in the legal profession is a courtroom attorney versus a research attorney. Again, you need to figure out which position best suits your strengths and interests.

For those individuals not currently employed in the Legislature or in the executive branch of state government, we have always strongly advised those individuals to get a staff position in the Legislature or in a state agency.

This will enable you to develop one or more areas of expertise in public policy areas to thoroughly understand the legislative or regulatory processes, and to develop working relationships with individuals both inside and outside the State Capitol.

For those individuals who are already employed in the State Capitol, you generally have an advantage in the job search. Of course, there are distinctions between working on a member's personal staff versus working for a legislative committee.

There's also a difference between those working in the executive branch in a legislative position, versus an executive or legal position with the state agency or department. These positions can provide distinct benefits for a potential lobbying job.

Again, determining whether your potential employer is seeking a lobbyist with a particular background is helpful.

Lastly, it's always valuable to talk with lobbyists who are working as a particular type of lobbyist, or at a particular firm, or company, or association, so that you can understand how that person got his or her position, what he or she does in the particular role, and how might you get a same or similar position.

We've always found that most lobbyists are happy to talk with prospective colleagues to share their insights and experiences and help you in your job search.

I hope you found this podcast helpful. Good luck with your job search.