

Chris Micheli: Hi this is Chris Micheli with the Sacramento governmental relations firm of Aprea and Micheli and an adjunct professor at McGeorge School of Law in its Capital Lawyering program. Today's podcast is on utilizing lobbying coalitions.

You know a vital aspect of lobbying in California, as with other jurisdictions at the federal and state levels, is to join forces with other similarly situated parties so that a larger group is often more powerful and effective than a single voice or even just a few.

These lobbying coalitions can also be used so that one organization is not the sole voice on a particular issue or bill, or issue, or regulation - particularly if it happens to be a controversial issue or bill, in which many other groups have an interest.

I think that all lobbying organizations utilize some variations of lobbying coalitions, either jointly lobbying a bill or issue, or at least signing a coalition or coordinating efforts with other interested groups that share the same or similar position.

These organized efforts often draw more attention to an advocacy position and allow decision makers to know that many groups share the same perspective on a pending bill or issue. And quite frankly, in most cases, a collective voice is more effective than just a single voice. I think the key to running a successful lobbying coalition is to keep the group cohesive when working for or against an issue or measure.

Lobbying coalitions can also provide other benefits such as: that individual companies or interest groups may not want to be the only ones publicly involved in the bill or issue. As such, a lobbying coalition provides cover, if you will, for others to be more public and vocal with their position. A lobbying coalition can also provide funding. For example, hiring a grassroots firm or a media relations company to work on different aspects of a lobbying campaign.

Lobbying coalitions are most often run by trade associations who are familiar with coordinating activities with multiple players and interest groups. Coalitions can be a critical component of effective lobbying because, you know, elected officials and their staff are more interested or persuaded in an issue or bill when there are multiple voices weighing in on a particular issue or measure.

For example, is an entire industry united in its support or opposition to a bill or just a couple companies care about it? Lobbying coalitions are also important because allow a diversion or a division of labor among their participants by ensuring that all legislators are being lobbied on a bill or issue. In other words, a lobbying coalition and its

participants will more likely ensure that all Senators or Assembly Members are lobbied on a measure.

That may not always occur if just one individual or group is responsible for lobbying a particular measure. While it's often said that two heads are better than one, it's equally important to keep in mind that too many cooks spoil the meal. In other words, both of these clichés are sometimes equally valid when applied to a lobbying coalition so it's important for an organization's leader to be able to assess which one applies. But the benefits are that the goals of a lobbying coalition are more likely be achieved together than independently.

I've found that most lobbying coalitions are informal in nature, in other words there's usually an individual or group that convenes interested parties. Their effort will be to educate the diverse groups and solicit them to participate in the lobbying efforts of the coalition. The convener of the coalition usually schedules meetings, coordinates advocacy efforts, spearheads letter writing, media or grassroots efforts and basically ensures that the groups and individuals are working together cooperatively.

There are limited instances when a formal organization for lobbying coalitions is needed. If those circumstances warrant, then a separate entity might actually be created, usually it's some non-profit lobbying entity in which financial contributions are often solicited and those funds are used for media, grassroots, or additional lobbying efforts. In these more formal coalitions, they may actually continue even after the legislation was enacted into law or defeated. You know such as to protect the reforms that were achieved or to pursue further regulatory efforts for example.

However, in most instances I've found that lobbying coalitions are informal or semi-formal. In these cases there's no formal staff or budget for the coalition, instead an individual or group convenes interested parties on an ongoing basis generally to coordinate lobbying activities. In these coalitions, the participating organizations utilize their own resources and staff to participate in the lobbying efforts of the coalition. The sharing of resources, talent, and expertise is quite valuable in lobbying, especially when groups are often called upon to engage in numerous public policy issues.

The activities of these lobbying coalitions usually involve development of the strategy and tactics to be used by the group in lobbying for or against the particular issue, or legislation, or regulation. The coalition's leader or co-leaders usually are charged with coordinating the lobbying activities as well as efforts to tap into media or grassroots support. It's important that this individual be well versed in the subject matter and have at his or her disposal the resources to contribute to the lobbying coalitions' efforts.

These individuals often possess good organization skills, advocacy skills, but they find that they need additional people power, if you will, to communicate their messages with elected officials, staff, and others.

I've found that coalitions also enable diverse groups to resolve any potential issues and ensure better collaboration and coordination, especially among those who may be competing in a particular industry sector, for example. Very rarely can one group speak on behalf of an entire industry if the issue affects a broad range of interests.

Lobbying coalitions, I've found, also serve to get everyone on the same page, if you will, on a particular issue or bill, as well as to be coordinated on their key messages and whom they are targeting for their lobbying efforts. Ultimately these lobbying coalitions also provide important credibility with elected and appointed officials and their staff. And by speaking with a unified voice a coalition will be more likely to achieve success in their lobbying activities.

Thanks for joining this podcast. I hope you've learned something.