

Hi, this is Chris Micheli, with the Sacramento governmental relations firm of Aprea & Micheli, and an adjunct professor at McGeorge School of Law. Thanks for joining today's podcast on grassroots lobbying. Grassroots lobbying is an important component of any successful lobbying campaign because it's complementary to direct lobbying of elected officials and their staff, in an effort to influence their decisions. Grassroots lobbying is often referred to as indirect lobbying, as opposed to direct lobbying, which is generally conducted by lobbyists and industry-specific groups and individuals at the California State Capitol.

Grassroots lobbying involves members of the general public, as opposed to those who are directly impacted by a particular bill or issue. In essence, those involved in grassroots lobbying are those who attempt to get the general public to contact their elected officials, so that members of the public are lobbying the decision makers directly. Those involved in grassroots lobbying intend to influence decision makers by cajoling the general public to get involved in the legislative or regulatory processes. This type of lobbying requires educating large groups of individuals, and then mobilizing them in a so-called call to action.

It usually involves efforts to get specific organizations or community groups or a wide variety of individuals to get involved in the efforts to pass or defeat legislation or regulations. Educating the general public can take multiple forms, including direct mailing, social media, paid or free media, press conferences, press releases, and other forms of indirect and direct communications. Outreach efforts are key to successful grassroots lobbying campaigns, and the media often play a critical role in that outreach effort, but it first begins with educational efforts so that the general public understands the issue or the bill or the regulation.

Now, mobilizing the general public is the effort to get the members of the public to act in the desired manner. Whether this results in making phone calls, or writing letters to elected officials, perhaps boycotting a business or demonstrating at the Capitol. There are multiple forms that grassroots lobbying can take. It depends largely on the audience, and what is intended to be accomplished that usually determines the outreach efforts to be conducted. In addition to the news media, the use of social media has become more prevalent in grassroots lobbying efforts.

The potential reach of the Internet and websites is much larger than the traditional forms of media. This is an easy communication tool that enables organizing and interacting with those on social media, and the ability to grow your potential group of supporters is greatly assisted by those who have a social media presence. It can also be a much less costly form of organizing your grassroots campaign. In addition to the general public, many large businesses often undertake their own forms of grassroots lobbying.

Some refer to this as an action plan, in which employees of a large business are asked to participate in lobbying efforts by contacting their local elected officials by telephone, or usually by letter. Although sometimes this can occur with personal visits as well. As such, these businesses can form a strong perception that there is a groundswell of local support for the company's position among elected officials. Grassroots lobbying is rooted in utilizing the public, to conduct messaging for or against an issue or a particular bill or regulation.

Examples could include publishing letters to the editor, creating a petition and gathering signatures, organizing a rally, making coordinated phone calls, or sending mass emails or other forms of communication. All of these grassroots activities are made easier with the advent of social media. Including the means to communicate, such as email, Twitter, and Facebook. There are benefits to grassroots advocacy, including the education of citizens in the electorate, and their involvement in the democratic process.

Helping citizens to understand pending legislation or regulations, or a particular public policy issue, as well as the respective legislative and regulatory processes, is invaluable for a thriving citizenry who can also serve as a check and balance on elected and appointed officials. The value of grassroots lobbying is having citizen participation in government, and the decision makers often want to hear from their citizens, their constituents, and their voters. Having the general public contact legislators and other officials and their staff, creates a different dynamic than what often occurs with direct lobbying.

Fundamentally, education and mobilization are required for a successful grassroots lobbying campaign. Another component part could include media lobbying, in which the media is utilized in order to extend the reach of your advocacy efforts. Of course, social media has become the most valuable tool in grassroots lobbying, as it potentially reaches across the world. Social media has the potential to allow the greatest number of public outreach, or the greatest amount of public outreach in the least expensive manner.

Federal law does not require the disclosure of grassroots lobbying activity but more than 35 states, including California, regulate grassroots lobbying based upon the state's particular definition of what constitutes lobbying. For example, about two dozen states include both direct and indirect communications with public officials as to be lobbying, and another dozen or so states defined lobbying broadly to include any attempt to influence a public official. I hope you enjoyed this brief look at grassroots lobbying. Thanks for joining.