

Front Line



Bev Kirby
ALIA President

**Your lobbying effort must
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commitment to change
and to action.**

IT WILL be possible for me to meet with many of you as I visit the states and regions and at the Biennial Conference in Albury-Wodonga. I hope that you are all looking forward to the conference as much as I am. The conference program is looking great. For those of you who can't meet me in person (and for those of you who can) my Front Line articles in 1992 will provide an opportunity for you to get to know the President.

The power of communication

In my Front Lines this year I intend to take up a number of main themes—my Presidential themes. The first of these is 'Communication and lobbying,' which I would like to explore with you in relation to the ALIA Strategic Plan. Through the Strategic Plan we communicate the mission and objectives of the Association. I will explore communication as it relates to marketing, promotion, training and professional development, standards, lobbying, the role of the Association in our lives, networking and the 'I' in ALIA, to name just a few. The order of the articles will be decided by the order in which the issues are presented to me. I will try to open up avenues for discussion while helping yours truly to come to terms with the reality of a Presidential year.

Before the sheet music of *Auld Lang Syne* was out and dusted in preparation for saying goodbye to one year and hello to the next I had my first request for lobbying: 'Please write or please just do something and please do it now!'

The issue was fortunately dear to my heart and I could relate to it and understand it. The decision to help out is easy on those occasions. I avoid the other sort of issues I call 'ducks.' There are lame ducks, dead ducks and 'better duck.' Every President is sooner or later faced with ducks. I have no intention of lobbying on behalf of ducks.

A lame duck is a lobbying issue which has no backbone. Behind a lame duck issue is a job badly handled, an opportunity lost or a challenge ignored. Behind a dead duck is an unrealistic dream, an undeniable failure and an unwillingness to accept change when change is needed. 'Better duck' is incorrect information, hidden agendas and anything that makes the lobbyists look silly and gullible.

I can't totally ignore the ducks and I may offer some direct counselling but not lobbying.

Of course I am now talking about the kind of lobbying that responds to crisis. This is reactive lobbying. Proactive lobbying will be covered in a later article. Proactive lobbying is an ongoing commitment to change and development and is essential to the growth of the profession. The more proactive we are the less reactive we need to be.

Getting into lobbying

As I write this article there are groups of our members all over Australia collecting, writing and collating materials you can use in your lobbying efforts. This is great and ALIA's efforts will be directed towards communication about initiatives and how and where you can get hold of the information.

Lobbying appears as one of the key areas in the draft Strategic Plan prepared by ACT Branch. This draft appears in this copy of *inCite*. I have put together some thoughts that occurred to me about lobbying. This is not about what we should say but how we should say it. I have some real concerns about the amount of effort that should go into lobbying and how to ensure that the effort is well placed. Let us consider lobbying strategies in three parts:

- the technique,
- the plot, and
- the conclusion.

The technique of lobbying

When someone presents an issue which calls for lobbying action one of the first decisions is the form the action should take. On rare occasions it may be sufficient to correspond. Remember that the most likely place for your letter is the bottom of a large pile of comments to be filed and forgotten. It may end up in a pile of items that are just 'noted'. Your lobbying effort must stir someone into some commitment to change and to action. Seriously consider the value of asking for an audience. Ask to see the chief, the boss or even the Prime Minister. So! You only see an underling. Underlings may be useful. An appointment with an underling is a move forward because you have opened up the dialogue with someone and you are out of the filing cabinet.

Tell the object of your letter what the meeting is to be about but don't make your demands in your first correspondence and give away the plot. This gives them the opportunity to bob you off with a written reply and makes it very hard for you to get back in there.

You may be burning up with frustration, disappointment, disillusionment, anger and outrage. Cool it! Talk of expectations, hopes, objectives, strategies, tactics and points of agreement you hope to reach in the meeting with them.

The plot for lobbying

Resist the urge to line up the cavalry in lobbying meetings. I have seen what can happen or doesn't happen when we trot along the President, Vice-President, Secretary, Treasurer and Continuing Education Officer because there seems to be strength in numbers. Lobbyists must

be able to speak with one voice and observers are as useless as bar codes on a bowling ball. This means that there is little point in choosing your representatives because they are a sight for sore eyes or know the Executive Assistant. An observable and undeniable commitment to the topic is essential.

Take only those people you need to win. If you were a group of one or two wouldn't you feel ill at ease and want to cut short the onslaught of a cast of thousands? This is one occasion where volume has little to do with value.

Another reason for taking competent and expert people with you is that you need to respond to even the sniff of a positive outcome. Lobbyists need to be able to think on their feet. If they are in with a chance of winning they must be able to sense victory and seize the occasion. If there is a chance of success they must be ready to haggle or to tough it out, to debate, to redefine and if needed to retreat and regroup.

When making your case be well prepared with the kind of arguments they are likely to offer. Their response will probably sound something like 'we can't afford it in the present economic situation.' You must be ready to respond with 'this is why you can't afford not to.'

I always make it a rule not to hand anyone a problem without handing them a little part of the answer if not all of it. When you lobby you have a problem to dump on someone else. If the problem seems unsolvable they will dump it back. You need to package it carefully, identify their ownership of the problem and lead them into making a positive response.

The conclusion to lobbying

You must keep the issue on the boil until you achieve your objective or decide that the fight is lost. You do this by setting objectives and letting them be known to the person you are lobbying. They will sound something like, 'we will keep contacting you to review the situation and eventually to work with you to achieve some progressive changes in policy for the benefit of...' or 'our group has decided to make this issue the focus of our activities for the year and we will keep you informed of our concerns.' Establish a calendar for action and keep making contact until you decide you have achieved your objectives or you wish to leave the matter behind.

And of course you will have followed up your meeting with some accurate notes about the agreements made and some new objectives for the future. This gives you some definite steps to take and some strategies for moving on.

Who are the lobbyists?

Most people think that lobbyists are only a group of people employed for their special skills. We may seek the services of a special lobbyist when their special skills are demanded. We would expect an Executive Director to know where to lobby and who to lobby. We would expect the professional lobbyists to respond quickly to a lobbying opportunity which may not be obvious to us. We would expect them to know a wide range of influential people.

I observed my predecessor working as a lobbyist during his term of office. I heard other talk of his skills and the high esteem in which he is held by those he worked with and for. John Levett stands beside me as Past President and for that I am very grateful.

I am now engaged in lobbying exercises and some of you will want to make requests for assistance in this area. I will be pleased to consider lobbying on your behalf but please remember about the ducks.

When my first lobbying engagement is completed I will use a lobbying to see if I met the objectives of the exercise.

- Did I let represent the interests of ALIA and explain why we should be involved in the issue?
- Did I represent the issue to the best of my ability? Was this a truly professional presentation?
- Did I attract a commitment from the person/s I was lobbying. Did I get an undertaking that they would work towards a resolution?
- Did something concrete happen as a result of my involvement?

The lines of communication

This has been the first opportunity to communicate with you in 1992. I would like to have your feedback and to continue the dialogue with you.

Looking back and looking forward

I wish to take this opportunity to pay a tribute to John Levett for his leadership in 1991. John would say that he had a good General Council and this is true. You may be well pleased with your representatives, our Chairman of the Board of Education and with the contribution made by the people who attended General Council as observers and participants. But I believe that it was John's excellent leadership which made 1991 a good year for ALIA General Council and a good year for ALIA. On behalf of the members I thank John for his wisdom, tact, good sense, strong chairmanship, fine oratory, excellent and inspired writing and the friendship and professional example he provided to us all.

I look forward to 1992 and I think I am looking forward to trying a bit of lobbying. I hope it appeals to you too.

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International Council on Archives

The Executive Secretary of ICA, Dr Charles Keckskemeti, has invited Alan Ives to try and form a new Section of ICA—a University and College Archives Section.

A meeting will be held as part of the ICA Congress in Montreal in September 1992 to discuss a short draft Section constitution. A time for this meeting has been allocated formally by the Congress Organizing Committee.

A working paper will be distributed in February 1992, canvassing the reasons for and the advantages of such a Section of ICA. This working paper will be available from Alan Ives, CSU Regional Archives, PO Box 588, Wagga Wagga, NSW 2650. All interested persons should contact Alan directly.