Advocacy for Our Honey Bees

by MICHELE COLOPY, Program Director, Pollinator Stewardship Council

Local and state beekeeping associations, even though they are registered nonprofits, are permitted to advocate for their members for beekeeping and honey bees to their state and federal legislators. This is the only way legislators will know what issues their constituents are facing, and the impact of legislation upon constituents and their livelihoods. Nonprofits are permitted by the IRS to lobby or advocate about their concerns to their legislators. No more than 20% of the bee club’s budget can be dedicated to advocacy/lobbying. Beekeeping Associations must advocate for their members and honey bees, as well as native pollinators, to their city, county, state, and federal legislators and policy makers. Until more beekeepers run for public office, it will be necessary for beekeepers to educate their legislators about issues which impact our honey bees and beekeepers.

Information about how to advocate to policy makers is readily available. It is important to plan advocacy activities, to understand the issues(s), and have prepared talking points and educational materials to provide to legislators and policy makers. Whether you are educating the local zoning board to permit beekeeping in your community, or participating in a lobby day at the state house, preparation is the key to success. Lobby Day: Tips for Small Associations states “There is no replacement for face-to-face interaction between association members and lawmakers. The goal of a Lobby Day is to facilitate brief meetings with lawmakers and share one or two of the most important policy priorities concerning your association’s membership or industry. Small associations should absolutely organize Lobby Days, as this type of legislative activity will make your association seem “bigger” in the legislative space, despite the size of the membership.” Advocacy for your members need not seem daunting. Beekeepers must simply share their personal story. How will a policy or legislative action affect you, your bees, your beekeeping? Keep personal stories short and direct, get to the point, and leave information with the legislator about your story, your beekeeping association, and how to follow-up with you for additional information. Beekeepers can research their state for advocacy training groups such as the Advocacy Institute in New York state. “Membership includes ongoing training days, dedicated one-on-one consulting time, and the Legislative Directory with research and campaign management tools. The Advocacy Institute works to develop “talent, build networks, and provide tools & information to support successful legislative advocacy. We produce powerful trainings, creative visual aids and cutting-edge, interactive resources making it possible for organizations to become self-reliant in navigating key government contacts.” Not every state has an “Advocacy Institute.” However, beekeepers can and should align themselves with groups working on similar issues. There is strength in numbers! Often larger nonprofit groups have staff focused upon advocacy and support of lobby day activities. If the missions of those groups align with beekeepers, then join with them, learn from them, and everyone will benefit from the collaboration: including legislators and policy makers.

Beekeeping Associations need to plan ahead to educate their legislators. Even if you have no pressing issue, beekeeping associations need to know their legislators. We can always educate others about honey bees, beekeeping, and native pollinators. State beekeeping associations, especially want to be the organization policy makers call when there is a “bee related issue.” Beekeepers know bees! Do your state legislators know your state beekeepers?
Outreach
1. Inform volunteers of the date, time, and other event details. If they do not already have a county bee club representative suggest they designate a point person for this project. It is never too early to start informing your members and community. Send save the date emails or postcards, and continue to publicize in your newsletters through the planning process.
2. Make phone calls to personally encourage attendance (this is a necessary step that must go along with written communication in order to attract participants.)
3. Remember to ask for RSVP’s so that you know how many people will be attending, the amount of food and materials necessary, and the level of advocacy expertise.
4. Hold an issue briefing and advocacy training prior to your lobby visits. Invite experts and coalition partners to brief on issues and train the group on the basics of how to advocate.
5. Plan a call in date or other virtual participation program for those who cannot attend.
6. Invite the media if appropriate.

Materials
1. Create lobby day packets for participants and for state legislators. Include the state or local beekeeping association resolutions, as well as talking points, background papers, and any other relevant information.
2. Relevant coalition issue information may also be used.
3. Designate who will be the person to provide a lobby day packet to state legislators or their staff during each visit.
4. Have issue materials and any other related information available in advance so that participants can become familiar with the packets they will be using on their visits.

Wrap up and Evaluation
1. Design an evaluation for participants to gauge what worked, what did not, and how state legislators responded to the beekeeping association’s “asks.” This information can help in planning future days and other advocacy or educational activities
2. Send thank you notes to those you visited and to the legislators. Reiterate your issue message with legislators.
3. Share your views and any concrete outcomes from the day with the beekeeping association Board and membership.

You can find additional information on planning advocacy activities from these resources:
Aspen Institute.org for State Education Policy with questions that can be adapted for any group to help determine policy initiatives https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/content/docs/pubs/DocumentDetail.pdf
Advocacy Institute http://hi.advocacy-institute.org/
Washington Low Income Housing Alliance for an example of marketing your advocacy day http://wliha.org/housing-and-homelessness-advocacy-day
Tips on organizing a lobby day for small associations http://www.muster.com/blog/tips-on-organizing-a-lobby-day-for-small-associations