

NORML

Citizen Lobby Guide

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Introduction

Organizing a Lobby day can be intimidating if one does not know what to expect. Having a plan in place will help you and your fellow activists stay focused and organized while maximizing your time with representatives and/or staff. We at NORML hope this guide will serve as your number one resource as you engage your representatives on the local, state, and federal level.

NORML's Mission

NORML's mission is to move public and political opinion sufficiently to legalize the responsible use of marijuana by adults, and further, to serve as an advocate for marijuana consumers to assure they have access to high quality marijuana that is safe, convenient, and affordable.

About NORML

Since its founding in 1970, the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws (NORML) has provided a key voice in the public policy debate for those Americans who oppose marijuana prohibition and favor an end to the practice of arresting and discriminating against marijuana consumers. As a nonprofit consumer-interest advocacy group, NORML represents the interests of the tens of millions of Americans who use marijuana responsibly.

NORML continues to lead the fight to reform state and federal marijuana laws, whether by voter initiative or legislatively. NORML serves as an informational resource to the national media, providing a perspective to offset the anti-marijuana propaganda from the government and special interest groups; lobbies state and federal legislators in support of reform legislation; and serves as the umbrella group for a national network of citizen-activists committed to ending marijuana prohibition and the full legalization of marijuana for adults.

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What is Lobbying?

Lobbyists seek to influence lawmakers, plain and simple. But who are they? Too many people, it's an ominous group of high-powered lawyers and ex-politicians that only seek to destroy programs that you like and cut taxes for rich people. And while that is part of the story, it goes much deeper.

The origin of the label "lobbyist" comes from people who sought to have their voices heard and would literally wait in the hallways and lobbies of government buildings in order to meet face-to-face with elected officials and their staff. Every day, legislators from city councils to the US House of Representatives have people trying to get them to do X, Y, or Z, and as human beings, they can only pay attention to so many things.

By creating a physical and consistent presence in the halls of state capitals and the district offices of those elected, we will make sure that the issue of marijuana liberalization is consistently on their agenda.

NORML Lobbying Goals:

- Educate elected officials about the issues that are important to you
- Identify lawmakers who support, oppose, or are undecided on your issue
- Empower supporters to become champions and persuade undecided lawmakers to support your issue
- Soften or neutralize opposition

"Be so good that they cannot ignore you."

- Steve Martin



Why “Lobby” for Marijuana Law Reform?

One thing is clear in the United States: You’re not going to achieve any significant political change without demanding it. By lobbying elected officials, we will continue to build our two most important assets: access and influence.

Unlike most organizations that engage in lobbying efforts, NORML chapters are 100% citizen organized and lobbying goals are set by those involved in the chapter's efforts.

One of the biggest challenges that we face is complacency with the status quo of marijuana prohibition. Often, elected officials do not hear the stories of those who are adversely affected by prohibition. They may not have ever met a medical marijuana consumer, or heard the life story of someone who has benefitted from its therapeutic properties. Conversely, they also may be unaware how the denial of marijuana access may adversely affect the health and welfare of their constituents. Your meeting may be the first time that an elected official has ever met someone who self-identifies as a responsible marijuana consumer, or who can explain – first-hand – the damage and stigma caused by a simple marijuana possession arrest. Lobbying gives you the opportunity to tell your story.

Long story short, putting someone you've met face to face in jail is hard, especially for something as innocent as marijuana consumption.

Why Organize a Lobby Day?

Organizing a lobby day can provide your organization with an exciting opportunity to recruit new members, earn media exposure, and, of course, meet with and influence lawmakers. There is little to no cost involved in lobbying, but it does require research and planning. It is our jobs as representatives of NORML to make ourselves available to lawmakers as trusted, credible resources.

Benefits of a Successful Lobby Day:

- Build your organization’s political clout and respectability in the eyes of elected officials
- Expand your NORML network and recruit more members and volunteers
- Earn media exposure
- *Eventually: Win*



Who can “Lobby” for Marijuana Law Reforms?

Anyone can approach an elected official in hopes of influencing them one way or another, but the most powerful voices will come from those whom reside in the district that the legislator represents. In addition, being affiliated with a nationally recognized advocacy group like NORML adds an additional layer of credibility to your lobbying efforts.

Know your Legislators

Knowing where your representatives stand on the issue of marijuana law reform will allow your organization to refine your lobbying strategy and talking points. To assist in this process, NORML provides scorecards on our website for all state Governors and members of Congress based on their statements and votes specific to marijuana law reform.

Further, it is vital that you seek to cultivate and maintain relationships with your representatives prior to your lobby day. Attending town hall meetings, fundraisers, and other political events will help encourage conversations around reforming marijuana laws. Even something as simple as liking and commenting on your legislator’s Facebook page and Twitter account can help create dialogue about the issue.

Know the Political Landscape

In addition to NORML’s focus on consumer advocacy, marijuana industry groups are regularly meeting with representatives to advocate on behalf of industry interests such as access to banking and 280E tax reform. Although they do a wonderful job advocating for the interests of marijuana businesses, make no mistake, they are not necessarily looking out for the needs of consumers (e.g. fighting for lower taxes, home cultivation, or expanded access). That’s why it’s important for NORML chapters to engage in their own citizen lobbying efforts; so that the voice of marijuana consumers can be heard.

Know the Issue and your Goals

In the world of marijuana advocacy, there are several subcategories that we can choose to focus our time and energy on. From advocating for medical or adult-use marijuana access, to decriminalization and expanding access for patients, it's imperative that you determine what your chapter’s **specific political goals are** well in advance of your organization's lobby day.

This will give you time to hone the group's message and develop talking points as you continue to educate yourself and others on the issue.

Lobby Day Planning

As a citizen lobbyist, here are two options regarding how best to structure your lobby day activities. The most common format is a **traditional lobby day** where you and others from your organization schedule individual meetings with each your representatives or their offices to discuss opportunities for reforming marijuana laws in your state. If your organization isn't comfortable with organizing a full-fledged lobby day, please consider organizing a "**Meet and Greet**" type event with your legislators.

• **Traditional Lobby Day**: This option provides an opportunity for discussions heavily focused on policy related to a specific piece of legislation. If you decide to go with a traditional lobby day, you and your colleagues must be diligent with regard to scheduling meetings with lawmakers well in advance of your lobby day. Getting started:

- Make sure to reach out to the offices of your lawmakers **at least two weeks** in advance of your lobby day; Electeds and their staff are very busy people and the more advance you give them, the more likely you will get your meeting, keep your meeting, and keep their attention.
- Call the office and ask for the name and e-mail address of the appropriate staffer to talk to about marijuana policy.
- Send the staffers a detailed email of what you want to talk about during the meetings (specific legislations or policy issues), and give them a general time frame to choose when the meeting will take place.
- If you don't get a response right away, be sure to follow up regularly (by e-mail and phone) and be persistent.
- Stay organized. Keep a spreadsheet of all your scheduled meetings and attendees sorted by district.
- Keep your attendees organized and prepared. It helps to make a personalized schedule for each person, so they know where they need to be and when.
- Track when you last corresponded with each staffer. This way, you'll know when it's time to follow up.
- Send a confirmation e-mail a few days before the meeting (including time, date, and location) to ensure that you are locked into their calendar.

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• **Meet and Greet:** This is a great option if your organization has never organized a lobby day. The reception-style format is less intimidating than one-on-one meetings. This will also allow you and your members to become more comfortable with the idea of lobbying state lawmakers next year, and you will begin the process of cultivating valuable relationships for the next legislative session.

- Reach out to a reform-minded elected officials office and request information as to how to reserve a room at the capitol for a period of time.
- Book that day and time, preferably at a time when you can have key validators and allies join you.
- Prepare your materials relevant to the agenda that you are pushing in the legislative session.
- Do a round of invites to members offices at least **one week in advance** (*it helps if ethics rules allow you to provide snacks, snacks bring the staff and elected officials*).
- Do another round of invites the day before the scheduled meet and greet.
- Set up the room with a/two “greeter(s)” to hand out information about pending legislation in the state and general Q&A.
- Have a brief program prepared, with remarks by each speaker be between 2-5 minutes.
- Most of the time should be dedicated to one-on-one conversations with staff and lawmakers who attend.

Lobby Day Goals

Establishing goals for your lobby day is vital to your overall success. Keep a running tally of the number of meetings scheduled, the number of lobby day participants, and the number of commitments your members receive from lawmakers. This will allow you to measure the effectiveness of your organization’s lobby day so you and your team can celebrate your victories while also addressing any shortcomings.

As citizen lobbyists, and experts on the issue of marijuana law reform, we must be patient; everyone may not be in agreement at first. It’s our job to gain their support through education and persuasion. And remember, if you don’t know an answer to a question, or are not sure of the facts, you or NORML staff can follow up at later time.

Connecting with your Representatives

Before you meet with your representatives, consider a couple of ways that you can connect with them on a personal level. Strive to find common ground. Something as simple as a brief

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acknowledgement of their work on a specific issue or offering a personal story (e.g. your experiences collecting signatures for a petition or volunteering for a local organization) can help establish common ground and ease tensions.

It's also a good idea to meet with others who are planning to attend your organization's Lobby Day meetings so you can go over your message, rehearse talking points, and practice responses to likely questions. This will also provide a chance to determine the flow of the meeting by dividing up what you are going to say between yourselves (this gives everyone a chance to talk, and ensures that everything important gets covered).

Dress for Success

Lobby day participants should be neat and well-groomed in appearance. With some lawmakers still considering marijuana law reform as a fringe issue, we cannot afford to play into these tired stereotypes. In official settings like a state capitol, **business attire is strongly encouraged**. In addition to being taken more seriously, dressing like a professional is a must.

Effective and Efficient Meetings

First, introduce yourself, and your colleagues to the person who you're meeting with and briefly explain why you requested the meeting. Then articulate what legislative action you're seeking. This will help move the conversation forward. After introductions have been made, give a copy of your agenda, white paper, questionnaire, and any other important documents to the representative and/or their legislative aides. This will allow them a chance to take notes and revisit your policy positions at a later time.

A thoughtful, yet conservative approach seems to be the trend. Sometimes this can seem like a learning curve so remember to be patient, and strive to educate. **And remember, always be assertive, polite, and respectful, regardless of the circumstances.**

Meeting tips:

- Immediately state the purpose of your visit
- Stay on message. Keep the conversation focused on your issue
- Be concise and factual
- Offer to serve as a resource in the future
- Leave detailed information for review at a later date
- Schedule a date and time with legislative staff to follow-up on commitments your representative made during the meeting

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Post Lobby Day

One of the most important, but often overlooked, aspects of organizing lobby day meetings is the follow-up that should take place afterward. Sending a brief, but thoughtful thank-you letter will provide an opportunity to clarify issues, ask a question that will elicit a response, or cultivate long-term relationships with lawmakers and staff.

In addition to sending a thank-you letter, attending town hall meetings, participating in community forums, walking in parades, and having a strong presence on social media are all great ways to further your relationships with lawmakers and staff.

FAQ's

1. I'm new to the legislative process. Do I have to be a policy expert or professional lobbyist to meet with lawmakers?

No. One of the advantages of being a citizen lobbyist is you have a chance to connect with your representative on a personal level by sharing a story about how you or someone you know has suffered as a result of your state's outdated marijuana laws. Painting a picture of how their district is being impacted is an easy way to quickly gain the attention of almost any elected official.

2. What can I accomplish face-to-face that I can't do on the telephone?

Calling your legislator is actually more effective once they've met you face-to-face. When you speak in person, you are able to convey many things that a phone conversation simply cannot.

3. How will I know what to say to my legislators?

NORML leadership will carefully plan the day so you are fully briefed on the issues before you arrive to your legislative visits and you'll have time to ask questions beforehand. You'll also receive a complete set of handouts and a legislative questionnaire to pass along to legislators.

4. Is there anything I can do to prepare?

It's helpful to know your legislators before going into a meeting with them. Most elected officials have a website. Do some investigating online to learn some background on your legislators and check out their voting record on past marijuana-related legislation as well as other policy areas.

5. I didn't vote for my representative, will they still listen to me?

Yes! They are not concerned with past votes or political affiliation. As a constituent in their district, your representative was elected to serve you.

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Use the checklists below to stay organized before and after your lobby day!

Pre-Lobby Day Checklist:

- Establish Goals
 - Meetings scheduled
 - Lobby day participants
- Logistics
 - Meeting points
 - Establish lobby teams
 - Write out schedule for each team complete with room numbers, contact names, phone numbers
- Schedule meetings with your group's targeted elected officials between 1 and 4 weeks out from the lobby day (call ahead day before the lobby day to confirm meetings).
- Prepare state/regional specific talking points
- Create leave behind materials (position paper/legislative questionnaire)
- Conduct a lobbying training that includes:
 - Personal story development
 - Elevator pitch technique / hard asks

Lobby Day Checklist:

- Lobby Guide
- Contact list with names and phone numbers
- Confirm meeting location
- Lobby materials for participants
 - Position papers
 - Talking points

Post-Lobby Day Checklist:

- Follow up day after with email/letter
- Follow up before pending legislation comes up for debate, a hearing or vote
- Follow up after they vote (a thank you or an I'm disappointed in you)
- Follow up after the legislative session to engage during breaks
- Set district meetings with new, different NORML members
- Feedback from other activists to share with the group



Principles Governing Responsible Cannabis Regulation

NORML is a consumer-oriented lobby and educational outreach organization, representing the interests of adults who choose to consume cannabis in a responsible manner. NORML supports legal reforms that permit the responsible use of cannabis by adults. This use includes cannabis consumption for therapeutic, spiritual, and social purposes.

NORML believes that cannabis consumers, like the consumers of other goods, desire a product of high, standardized quality that is safe, convenient, and affordable to obtain. Retail cannabis products should be subject to standardized testing by a licensed lab prior to sale to assure that the product is free from harmful pesticides, molds, or other unwanted adulterants. Furthermore, products need to be labeled accurately so consumers are aware of cannabinoid content. Commercial producers and retail sellers should be licensed and regulated, as are producers/sellers of other commercial goods, and their facilities should be safe and secure.

NORML further supports the establishment and licensing of legal clubs or similar licensed establishments where cannabis consumers can socialize with others in a secure environment outside of their homes, similar to alcohol.

NORML does not oppose the imposition of reasonable taxation and regulations on the commercial production and retail sale of cannabis, similar to that of tobacco or alcohol.

The commercial production and retail sale of recreational cannabis in legal jurisdictions is presently subject to both excise taxes and sales taxes, similar to other commercial goods. The taxation of these goods remains popular with elected officials as well with the general public — particularly among those who do not personally use cannabis, but view the plant's legalization positively as an alternative source of state revenue. The imposition of fair and reasonable taxes on these commercial activities generates support from members of the public who may otherwise show little interest in cannabis law reform.

Such taxation ought not to apply to noncommercial activities involving cannabis. Most importantly, taxation on commercial activities should not be so excessive that it incentivizes consumers to obtain cannabis from the black or grey market. In jurisdictions where cannabis is produced and distributed exclusively to qualified medical patients, such taxes and/or fees ought to be governed in a similar matter to medicine.

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Any legal product or commodity that is produced and sold on the retail market will be subject to some level of regulatory oversight. Regulations allow for state and local governments to establish legal parameters for where, when, and how markets operate. Regulations also provide oversight regarding who may legally participate in said markets, and provide guidelines so that those who do so can engage in best practices. Regulations provide clarity to the public, elected officials, as well as members of law enforcement who have to navigate the enforcement of new laws, and provide objective criteria so that one can differentiate between these the two groups.

Virtually all commercial markets are subject to some level of government regulation and the commercial cannabis market will be no different. The role of consumer advocates is to ensure that these regulations are sensible and practical for the individual consumer and that lawmakers do not use the threat of over-regulation to stifle the industry and/or maintain an environment of partial prohibition.

Several states presently impose caps on the number of licensed cannabis producers and distributors that may legally provide cannabis to either the medical or the retail market. Few states do not impose such caps. These caps vary widely from state to state and market to market, with some states limiting the number of producers to no more than two (Minnesota) or three (Delaware). While NORML believes that a free market promotes both competition and lower prices, both of which inherently are of benefit to the cannabis consumer, NORML's immediate priority is to foster a legal environment where the plant, at least in some specific circumstances, is no longer classified as contraband so that adults who engage in its use responsibly no longer face arrest, incarceration, or a criminal record. NORML is neutral on policies that propose caps limiting the initial number of licensed cannabis producers.

NORML is generally supportive of legislative proposals that meet these immediate criteria. Other regulatory changes in retail production and distribution will likely follow incrementally. NORML believes that advocates are in a better position to leverage for more sensible (and for fewer) regulations in an environment where the adult use of cannabis is codified under the law as opposed to an environment where cannabis is illicit and all users of the plant are criminals.



NORML supports the need for home cultivation

Criminalizing the personal cultivation of cannabis is an arbitrary prohibition that has absolutely no basis in public safety. NORML supports the right of individuals to grow their own cannabis as an alternative to purchasing it from licensed commercial producers. NORML maintains that the inclusion of legislative provisions protecting the non-commercial home cultivation of cannabis serves as leverage to assure the product available at retail outlets is high quality, safe and affordable. That said, as stated previously, NORML's immediate priority is to foster an environment where cannabis is no longer classified as contraband so that adults who engage in its use responsibly no longer face arrest.

In general, NORML is supportive of legislative proposals that meet these immediate criteria, even if they do not include, or severely restrict, the ability to cultivate cannabis at home for non-commercial purposes. If and when such measures are enacted restricting personal cultivation rights, NORML believes that lobbying efforts to restore and enact these rights be among advocates' highest priorities.



NORML Policy on Personal Use

NORML supports the right of adults to use marijuana responsibly, whether for medical or personal purposes. All penalties, both civil and criminal, should be eliminated for responsible use. Further, to eliminate the crime, corruption, and violence associated with any "black market," a legally regulated market should be established where consumers could buy marijuana in a safe and secure environment.

Millions of Americans use marijuana; few abuse it. Arresting these otherwise law-abiding citizens serves no legitimate purpose; extends government into inappropriate areas of our private lives; and causes enormous harm to the lives, careers, and families of the more than 500,000 marijuana smokers arrested each year in this country.

Marijuana smokers are no different from their nonsmoking peers, except for their marijuana use. Like most Americans, they are responsible citizens who work hard, raise families, contribute to their communities, and want a safe, crime-free neighborhood in which to live. They are not part of the problem and should not be treated like criminals.

Responsible marijuana use causes no harm to society and should be of no interest to state and federal governments. Today, far more harm is caused by marijuana prohibition than by the use of marijuana itself.

Decriminalization

NORML supports the removal of all penalties for the private possession of marijuana by adults, cultivation for personal use, and the casual nonprofit transfers of small amounts. NORML also supports the development of a legally controlled market for marijuana.

Harm Reduction

All drugs, including marijuana, can be abused. Our marijuana policies should discourage irresponsible use, including use by adolescents. The best way to prevent drug abuse is with honest, credible, and factual drug education. Only in a climate in which marijuana is viewed from a public health perspective, instead of a criminal justice perspective, can prevention efforts be effective.

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Reasonable Restrictions

As with alcohol consumption, marijuana smoking should be limited to adults. Driving or operating heavy machinery after smoking marijuana should be prohibited. NORML's "Principles of Responsible Cannabis Use" defines acceptable conduct (available upon request).



NORML Policy on Medical Marijuana

NORML supports the right of adults to use marijuana responsibly, whether for medical or personal purposes. All penalties, both civil and criminal, should be eliminated for responsible use. Further, to eliminate the crime, corruption, and violence associated with any "black market," a legally regulated market should be established where consumers could buy marijuana in a safe and secure environment.

Marijuana prohibition applies to everyone, including the sick and dying. Of all the negative consequences of prohibition, none is as tragic as the denial of medicinal marijuana to the tens of thousands of seriously ill patients who could benefit from its use. This includes cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy, AIDS patients suffering from "wasting syndrome," glaucoma patients, and those suffering from chronic pain, rheumatoid arthritis, and a variety of spastic conditions such as multiple sclerosis, paraplegia, quadriplegia, and epilepsy. Marijuana should be immediately made available by prescription to seriously ill patients.

NORML first raised this issue in 1972 in an administrative petition asking that marijuana be rescheduled so it could be prescribed as a medicine. After 16 years of legal battles and appeals, the Drug Enforcement Administration's Chief Administrative Law Judge Francis Young found: "Marijuana, in its natural form, is one of the safest therapeutically active substances known to man.... Marijuana has been accepted as capable of relieving distress of great numbers of very ill people, and doing so with safety under medical supervision.

It would be unreasonable, arbitrary, and capricious for DEA to continue to stand between those sufferers and the benefits of this substance in light of the evidence in this record. Judge Young further recommended that marijuana be made available as a legal medicine. The DEA Administrator overruled Judge Young, and the Court of Appeals allowed that decision to stand, denying medical marijuana to seriously ill patients. Much of NORML's efforts focus on lobbying both state legislators and Congress to correct this injustice.

NORML also supports the legalization of hemp (non-psychoactive marijuana) for industrial use.



NORML Legislative Questionnaire

The debate on marijuana policy benefits from diverse and thoughtful perspectives that will assist our organization in responding to issues with the most pragmatic and balanced solutions. Therefore, we will assess each representative to identify their strengths through the lens of marijuana consumers by providing a series of questions that are important to marijuana law reform efforts.

Marijuana Policy Questions:

1. Please indicate your position toward eliminating criminal penalties for the responsible use of marijuana by adults.
2. Please indicate your position toward legalizing the medical use of marijuana for seriously ill patients.
3. Please indicate your position toward legalizing and regulating the responsible use of marijuana by adults.
4. Please indicate any marijuana-related legislation you have sponsored, co-sponsored, or publicly supported.
5. Please indicate your position toward marijuana's current classification as a Schedule I substance within the Controlled Substances Act.