



AONTAS Community Education Network

Sixth Meeting, Wednesday 13th May 2009

This meeting of the community education network incorporated the final day of the lobbying training programme in order to ensure that the learning could be shared with the rest of the network. The event was organized in collaboration with the DHR Communications who were contracted to deliver the lobbying training.



The aim of the meeting was to further develop the network's knowledge of lobbying through the sharing of participants' lobbying plans, a question and answer session from politicians, an input from a representative from the European Commission and a media workshop.



The following outlines the main points raised by the lobbying work of Women of the Northwest, D8CEC, Limerick Community Education Network (LCEN), Longford Women's Network, MAIN and Target.

Experience of lobbying activities from the participants

Making Connections, Building Relationships

- Invite local council staff and the local politicians to your centre and demonstrate the outcomes from the funding achieved so far and thank them for their commitment.
- Invite funders to see the work of your organisation and outline what could be achieved with further funding.
- Send all politicians and members of the local council an invitation to your events and any publications which you produce.
- Use the media: local radio and television to cover your political event.
- Use the personal contacts of the participants in your centre to gain access to politicians.
- Research your issue, be clear, offer the issue and the solution and host a questions and answers session with politicians and key members of the local council.
- Thank politicians and local council staff for visiting your centre.
- Encourage involvement of learners in your lobbying campaign.
- Have a core group within your organisation that is responsible for creating the lobbying plan and a manifesto if applicable.

Promoting your Organisation

- Host a World Café event: members of the public/participants attend an open meeting and un-facilitated tables are set up whereby individuals write their issues on tablecloths. A number of points on each issue are decided;



afterwards local election candidates are invited to attend the meeting and to interact with participants at their table. This builds the capacity of participants to identify their issues and to create a space for personal contact to occur which is key to building relationships.

- Tie in a number of your events with European/International days. For example, European Neighbours' Day (May 26th) can be used to open your centre to the community and local politicians.

- Incorporate lobbying into your classes, e.g. participants in a computers class learn how to use email by writing to local councilors.

- Try to identify key high profile people who are sympathetic to your cause and ask them to launch/promote your event.

- A number of key areas for lobbying were identified by Mary Banotti, Pronsias De Rossa MEP and Cllr Sarah Ryan, a summary of which is detailed below.

**Key points:
Personal approach,
collaborative lobbying,
building long-lasting
relationships.**

Tips for Effective Lobbying at European & Local Level

European Level

- **Identify the committees that Irish MEPs** are involved in and lobby them through your local councilor, TD and directly to the MEP: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Committees_of_the_European_Parliament

- **Identify the Commissioners** who are responsible for areas relating to community education: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/European_Commissioner.

1. Employment, Social Affairs, & Equal Opportunities (EMPL) Vladimír Špidla, Czech Republic
2. Education, Training & Culture (EAC) Ján Figel, Slovakia

- **Use the European Committee on Petitions** to influence European policy and ensure Ireland meets its obligations. The petition may present an individual request, a complaint or observation concerning the application of EU law or an appeal to the European Parliament to adopt a position on a specific matter. Such petitions give the European Parliament the opportunity of calling attention to any infringement of a European citizen's rights by a Member State or local authorities or other institution. This could be used to raise the voice of community education. The most effective way to use petitions is to identify clearly the issue and how it relates to EU Law and identify how Ireland is in breach of this law. More information is available on the European Parliament website: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/>

- **Ensure Ireland's EU Commissioner has an interest in social affairs**, it is possible to lobby the European Commission if the person chosen by the Irish Government is deemed unsuitable.

Tip

Another effective way to lobby is through collaboration with other organisations that have similar issues from within your country, crossborder and possibly with other organisations across Europe

Local Level

- **Invite local councillors to your events;** possibly host an event in collaboration with other community education groups in your area. It is worth noting that if you invite a number of councillors from various political parties there may be competition between them, it is beneficial to meet them separately also.
- **Ask a local councillor to meet** for a coffee, meet them individually and build up the personal relationship.
- **Build collaborative lobbying partnerships** with other community education organisations (and link to the Community Education Network).
- **Thank councillors** for attending your event and ensure that they are treated with dignity, lobbying is about facilitating good relationships with politicians. Ensure the event does not lead to confrontation with the invited politicians.



Actions for Community Education Network Members

Lobbying at European Level

1. Visits by Commissioners are often arranged; ensure a member of the community education network is involved. Information on upcoming visits are organized by the Irish European Commission, information can be received from Joan Flanagan: joan.flanagan@ec.europa.eu.
2. Stay up to date on relevant funding available, Joan Flanagan can assist with directing us to the relevant website in this regard.
3. Ensure Ireland's EU Commissioner has an interest in social affairs, lobby the EU Commission when the Irish Government appoints our Commissioner if they are unsuitable.
4. Investigate, research and prepare a submission to the European Commission Petitions Committee regarding the needs of community education in Ireland.





Lobbying at Local Level

1. Create links with other community education organisations on your collective issues and work together to create a long-term lobbying plan. Ensure this work links into the national work of the Community Education Network.
2. Host an event to invite politicians to your centre after the elections, give them the opportunity to learn about your centre, the work and your needs.
3. Initiative and maintain contact with your local councilors from the different political parties throughout the year.
4. Follow up with all local election candidates that attend your event and thank them for their participation. Use this opportunity to update them on your current situation and needs.



Further Information

For more information go to our website Stay up to date with the CEN: <http://www.aontas.com/commed/network.html>

Sign up to our discussion forum today: <http://groups.google.ie/group/aontas-community-education-network>

Any questions please contact Niamh O'Reilly on noreilly@aontas.com



AONTAS
National Adult Learning Organisation
2nd Floor, 83-87 Main Street, Ranelagh, D6
Ph: 01 4068220/1 Fax: 01 4068227



www.aontas.com