

PROMOTING YOUR MUSEUM: LOBBYING AND INFLUENCING

As committed Friends of museums we often assume that others, particularly those responsible for our museum services, understand why museums are important. Unfortunately it is often a crisis situation such as cut in museum budget, closure of a branch museum or threats to sell off collections, which makes us realise that promoting our museum is one of the most important things that a Friends' organisation can do.

How can we nurture support for our museum service, lobby effectively on its behalf or react quickly to a crisis?

1: A Plan

Have you got a plan for the situation? What are your objectives? e.g. Do you want to quickly lobby local councillors before an important budget meeting? Do you want to improve communications between Friends and Trustees over a long period? Do you want to react thoughtfully to proposals for local government reorganisation?

2: The Facts

Do you know the facts? Do you know how to get the facts? e.g. Number of visitors, number of group visits, number of school groups, outreach work, visits by researchers, use by local artists and crafts people, impact on tourism, use by the community, quotes from museum users, quotes from BAFM, what are the intangible benefits, why is this museum important?

3: Communication

Are you in touch with: museum staff, Area Museum Council, BAFM, local councillors, local government officers, local MPs, other museum Friends' groups, other organisations in your area - local history, archaeology, art institutions, adult education, civic society, your members, local media?

4: React

Can you react fast if you need to? Can you call a meeting by making a few phone calls or do you have to wait 2 months for the next Friends' committee meeting? Can you mobilise wider support?

5: Contacts

Do you have addresses to hand for local councillors, local media etc?

6: Finance

Can you pay for a campaign, including a special mailing to all your members, if necessary, or do you need to set up an appeal for funds?

7: Lobbying

Lobbying local councillors: Letters from the Friends' group, from Friends' committee members, from individual Friends.

Letter writing sessions - make it fun!, provide coffee, paper, pens, envelopes, the facts, but make sure that people use their own words.

Who else can write on museum's behalf? Donors/lenders of objects, other groups who use museum, schools, children?

Send groups of Friends to local councillors' 'surgery' sessions.

Attend council committee meetings. Try to understand how your local authority works - identify key people.

8: Report

Produce a report on the issue, take photographs, present it well and circulate it widely?

9: Petitions

Produce a clear statement of your petition, including who is organising it. Number the lines for signatures, names and addresses (so that they are easy to count up) and copy it single sided. On Friends' noticeboard or send out to your members to collect names?

Campaign outside museum collecting names?

Get media attention - special event, banner, linking hands around museum, march, handing in petition?

10: The Media

Do you know the most sympathetic local media people?

Do you cultivate them, feed them news and photos?

Do you know how to handle the media: news releases, news conferences, photo-calls, publicity stunts, letters to the editor, radio interviews?

11: Networking

Can you persuade the people you want to influence to look at the museum - invite them for a drink, supper, visit behind the scenes, chat, meeting, conference? Some Friends' committees have an annual dinner with their museum trustees which builds up contact.

12: Information

Let museum staff know what you are doing. They might not be able to be personally involved in a campaign because of their job position but they could supply you with information.

13: Caution

Are you doing anything which could have an adverse effect on the museum?

14: Evaluation

How well have you achieved your objectives?

15: Praise

Saying thank you: always show your appreciation to your supporters.

16: Politics

Charities may do some things of a political nature as a means of achieving the purposes of the charity, however they must not be political organisations. Friends' organisations should have no problems with their charitable status.

If you have any doubts or require further information contact:

The Charity Commission (England & Wales)

St Alban's House

57/60 Haymarket

London. SW1Y 4QX

Tel: 0171 210 4477

There is an excellent free booklet available:

CC9, Political Activities and Campaigning by Charities, guidelines by the Charity Commission, published July 1995.