



# The Cat Fanciers' Association, Inc.

*"World's Largest Registry of Pedigreed Cats"*

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## Unraveling the Mysteries of Grass Roots Lobbying

Grass roots lobbying is the foundation of the American political system. Through this medium, our lawmakers learn what the will of their constituents is, and the manner in which these lawmakers respond is the basis on which they are held accountable. Unfortunately, knowledge of how this system works has allowed small, but well-organized and vocal lobbying groups to exert undue influence, and thus, bad laws are sometimes passed. Once passed, the recourse is limited to the bank-breaking court system or the time-consuming and expensive task of accomplishing legislation to overturn those bad laws. When bad laws are in place, beaurocracy takes over to implement and enforce them; and they then become entrenched in mainstream society.

The animal rights movement has made itself a master of grass roots lobbying – of motivating people to write letters and to call their lawmakers stating positions on an issue. Despite the small numbers of "true believers," the movement has exerted a tremendous influence on local, state and national laws. Often these laws are passed based on spurious or downright false data and rationale ... but without opposition, and without a means to educate lawmakers to accurate information, the laws are going onto the books all across North America. Pet owners and breeders can, and must, learn to organize their own grass roots groups for effective lobbying. In cities and states where this has been accomplished, the animal rights legislation that would severely limit the responsible breeding and showing of animals has been defeated.

Usually, the first clue animal fanciers have that the dreaded restrictive ordinances or laws have come to town is a headline in the local newspaper, buried on about page 23 under "Local City Council News." If history is any indication of the future, local fanciers will be caught unprepared with only a week or two until the council will vote, and panic ensues – What to do? Who to call? Who to write?

Establishing a grass roots lobbying organization in advance will give fanciers a hundred-fold advantage in dealing with such situations. The type of organization should be customized to the particular locale, with its specific needs, and is dependent on many diverse factors. In some areas of the U.S., grass roots organizations are already proving effective. Some of these organizations consists of just a handful of fanciers who have the knowledge, telephone trees and contacts, and can muster support as needed for specific campaigns. Others are conducted largely through the CFA club system. And yet others are larger, more formal organizations with meetings, treasuries, and in some cases Internal Revenue Service 501(c)(3) designations. What follows are some hints for forming the grass roots organization best suited to your specific area.

**Identify your allies.** In addition to fellow club members, look to other animal fancies that will be affected by restrictive breeding ordinances. Each fancy has individual and separate needs and interests. Become sensitive to those needs by opening dialog. Most dog fanciers do not realize that cat fanciers must breed their cats when Mother Nature becomes insistent, else they may lose that cat for breeding. Most cat fanciers do not realize the federal transportation limitations imposed on bird fanciers or the work entailed in hand-feeding baby birds. Each fancy has individual needs, and each has the potential to unintentionally sell the others "down the river" if those needs are not shared and understood.

Even the smallest community is likely to have several dog and cat breeders, and here is the place to start. Identifying the people in the sister fancy can be accomplished by any number of means, including visiting a show, talking to local groomers and veterinarians, or purchasing one of the publications that is likely to carry advertisements by show breeders. In a large city, a mailing list might be compiled; in a smaller community, just making contact with one or two breeders by phone is possible. Cat fanciers should ask whether there is an existing federation or coalition of dog clubs, and if so, should inquire about expanding that organization to include the cat fancy and other fancies. The CFA Legislative Group can help you to make contact with those existing organizations.

**Set up a meeting.** If no such organization exists, gather representatives of as many different fancies as can be identified, and have a get-acquainted meeting. The objective is to share each other's needs and interests, and to identify what may be key people in a lobbying effort. The ferret breeder may live next door to a city councilman. A dog breeder may attend church with a state legislator. The mayor may relax in his or her office with a tank of tropical fish.

**Choose a name for your local organization.** While your organization may be as formal or informal as the group may desire, the importance of a name choice is greater than it seems. The name by which your local or state lawmakers will recognize the spokespersons for this grass roots effort should reflect your true purpose, without sounding either too "cutesy" or too radical. Envision how you would feel approaching a state legislator or a city council, identifying yourself as representing "Bow Wows and Meow Meows" or "Power to The Animal People." The name should reflect the goals of animal welfare, sound professional, and if possible, lend itself to a handy acronym. This name will be the foundation on which your credibility as the experts in animal husbandry and issues will be built.

**Develop a treasury.** Any lobbying effort will entail, at the very least, printing and postage costs. Whether the group chooses to depend on donations or on dues is not important so long as those members who volunteer their time and effort are not unduly taxed by out-of-pocket expenses. A separate bank account is a help so that checks can be deposited and a financial accounting can be available to members. Receipts should be kept, and the organization should set guidelines for reimbursable expenses. The CFA Legislative Fund matching fund grant program can help for specific projects.

**Do your research before it becomes necessary.** Whether the organization is local or statewide, at least one person should have a complete file of all applicable laws and ordinances, as well as a current and up-to-date list of lawmakers with their mailing addresses, telephone numbers and fax numbers. Accurate data regarding animal control statistics, incidence of rabies and other zoonotic disease, and animal control budget figures should all be maintained, as well as the results of national studies that will effectively debunk erroneous claims. Most fanciers are amazed to learn that in almost every instance when a restrictive breeding ordinance or law is proposed, there are entirely adequate laws already on the books to deal with any perceived problem or need. The CFA Legislative Group can point you in the right direction for assembling this type of information. The work of compiling it can be divided among several people, or conducted as a club project, so that the task is not too burdensome.

**Set up a schedule of meetings.** Whether for full membership, or for a board or steering committee, occasional meetings can be scheduled. Regular monthly meetings are usually not necessary or realistic, but because of the diverse nature of the fancies, people can drift into their own interests and lose touch. These meetings can be entertaining as well as informative because animal fanciers are usually fascinated by information about other animals and their husbandry and shows. The meetings can also double as fund-raisers of one sort or another.

**Establish early contact with lawmakers.** Once organized, the lobbying group should make some contact with the lawmakers. An introductory letter stating that this organization has been formed to aid lawmakers when they are considering any animal issues is effective. Be sure to provide a contact name and telephone number. Some of the more articulate people in the group should schedule personal visits with the lawmakers. Ask for only a 15-minute appointment, and prepare a packet of information to leave behind. Periodic letters can keep your organization's name recognizable.

**Establish contact with the various animal agencies.** In your local jurisdictions, animal control departments should be contacted. Certainly your organization should be thoroughly conversant with the animal control ordinances, but additional information about policies and procedures in the department can also be vital. At the state level, contact agencies that are involved with rabies control, or other state laws that might affect breeders. These could be, depending on the individual state, the Health Department, the Agriculture Department, or perhaps even another department entirely. If a personal visit to these agencies is impossible, then a letter on your organization's letterhead (you were planning on having letterhead printed, weren't you?) is appropriate.

**Establish contact with the media.** Grass roots lobbying is more than contact with lawmakers, and involves influencing public opinion as well. In the same manner that contact is made with lawmakers and agencies, an introductory letter and packet of information should be provided to the media, usually the city editor. The purpose of this contact is to establish credibility as a viable organization dedicated to animal welfare and social issues involving animals, and as a source of accurate information.

When issues come before city councils and state legislators, the media will be looking for people to interview. Make sure that your group is the one that will be contacted. Radical rhetoric has no place in lobbying. No matter how extreme they may actually be, the animal rights activists have mastered the art of appearing professional and reasonable. An angry, emotional fancier will alienate lawmakers, who will be unable to make the connection between the seemingly "perfectly reasonable" ordinance presented to him by "local animal welfare groups" and the extremist animal rights agenda to end breeding and pet ownership. Your lobbying efforts will succeed or fail on the foundation of sound information and reasonable logic. Always make sure of your facts before you speak or write; if a question is asked that you cannot answer, promise to check and return to the questioner with the correct answer. Your credibility and that of your organization depends on absolute 100% accuracy.

**Share strategy and information with other like organizations.** Grass roots lobbying organizations are springing up in cities and states throughout the country. Maintain contact with these groups. If yours is a local organization, consider affiliating with a state organization and a national one.

**Maintain an open communication line with your CFA Legislative Group.** By signing up as a Grass Roots Liaison, you will receive both a regular newsletter about political activism for your fancy and specific alerts should the Group learn of legislative activity before you do. Communication goes both ways, though, and you should never assume that the Group is aware of a potential bill or ordinance. Make contact as soon as you hear of something.

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**To correspond with the CFA Legislative Committee, please email [Legislation@CFA.org](mailto:Legislation@CFA.org)**