

Transparency International EU

The global coalition against corruption

Keep your head. Lobby responsibly.

Yannik Bendel · Monday, October 3rd, 2016

Responsible lobbying is in the interests of society at large, as well as the lobbyist themselves. Regulation can help ensure this, but more important is the buy-in of those who lobby. Below are some pointers to help companies limit the risk of falling into irresponsible lobby practices.

Interest representation, or lobbying, is a vital part of any healthy deliberative democracy. When it is practiced openly and honestly, lobbying can play an important role in informing government policy and making sure that legitimate points of view, including those of business, are heard during a public debate.

So, it is in companies' best interests to lobby responsibly. Despite this, [54% of European businesses](#) do not report on their lobbying activities and there is no alignment of policy positions with their own CSR strategy. In addition, very few businesses provide for or require their staff to undertake training on responsible lobbying standards.

As with all risks, businesses and other organisations have a self-interest in managing potential negative effects of their engagement in public affairs. The following three steps can help limit these risks.

KNOW: Intransparent and unethical lobbying is a risky business

Before businesses are capable of managing risk in political corruption, they need to have an assessment of their current activities and engagement with the public sector and their risk exposure. One tool that would facilitate this is a '[legislative footprint](#)', which is a way of quantifying the impact of a lobbyist on the final text of a law. In order to determine this footprint, publication of some basic details of the actors involved, their input and the final outcome is needed. Currently, not enough information is published for us to accurately build up a picture of the legislative footprint.

SHOW: From risk management to corporate citizenship

In the digital age, more and more information is publicly available, some of which businesses cannot control. Proactive publication can help companies stay in control of their data. For this corporate reporting plays an essential part, be it financial or sustainability reports. An example can be taken from the environmental field where it is common good practice among businesses to not only assess the ecological footprint of the business operations, but also to show proactive, responsible behaviour to communicate these impacts externally. This provides the

opportunity to communicate the measures the company is currently undertaking to mitigate potential negative effects and advertise to the positive ones.

ACT: How to make transparent and responsible lobbying happen

There are a number of concrete things businesses and other organisations can do to put in place a strong ethics' framework to guide transparent and responsible lobbying towards decision-makers.

1. Provide a complete and up-to-date entry in the [EU's Joint Transparency Register](#). Ideally, this would include not just the basic information, but also proactive publication of further, optional information.
2. Publish online position papers and other direct inputs to the decisions-making process. Being transparent about lobbying is essentially about being transparent about the interests and position an organisation represents. For this reason, the written input a lobby organisations submits to influence an important decision should be made public. [This is already best-practice for many public consultations](#).
3. Publish dates, participants, and topics of meetings with public officials and other decision-makers, just as some EU institutions already do. This would not only enable an accumulation of quantitative data on the organisation's influence but would additionally serve as an accountability mechanism for the declarations of decision-makers. Leading by example, [we have been doing this ourselves](#) for some time now and little, smart helper-software like [LobbyCal](#), which is open source software, can limit the burden to two clicks.

Conclusion – The global business case for transparency

The digital age has revolutionised the flow of information. A lot of information is already publicly accessible, whether we want it to be or not. The rise of corporate espionage through hacking only increases this information flow. This means two things for businesses and lobbying: First, stakeholder interest in business operations has significantly increased. Stakeholders from all over the world might have a legitimate interest to check the operations of a business. Lest we to forget: the litigation for Volkswagen came from the US. Second, the chances that undue influence and other malpractice is revealed sooner or later have significantly increased. As the emissions scandal has shown, the internet does not forget. For businesses to manage these risks, it makes good sense to take a proactive stance and embrace more transparency by adopting strong public disclosure policies, especially in regard to lobbying activities.

Collection of material on transparent and responsible lobbying

Transparency International's resources on ethical advocacy:

- [Responsible Lobbying Guide published by Transparency International Ireland](#)
- [Transparency International's standards aimed on promoting ethical advocacy](#)
- [LobbyCal](#)

Other:

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- OECD Lobbyists, Governments and Public Trust Volume 2: Promoting Integrity through Self-regulation

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