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The Lobbying Efforts of Non-profit Interest Groups at Queen's Park: *Using Non-Partisan Receptions as a Tool to Gain Access and Influence in Ontario*

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Introduction

When I began the Ontario Legislature Internship Programme in the fall of 2004, a personal goal was to observe and better understand the behaviour of interest groups and their interaction with policy makers, particularly not-for-profit interest groups, as there tends to be less literature on them and their behaviour. In an era of cutbacks to charitable and non-profit organizations, with requirements by governments for them to do “more with less,” apply for project-based rather than steady and secure operational funding, become more accountable for their actions, and depend less on government funding for their overall activities, they are facing many challenges and are trying to become better at managing their relations with governments to press for the regulations and funding they need to survive. I had been involved with the non-profit sector in the province, and thus I wanted to gain an insider's view of their attempts to gain access and influence in the context of Ontario provincial politics and to suggest ways to increase their chances of success.

Once the fall session began, what most struck me was the quantity and variety of non-partisan “receptions” held for all MPPs and their staff. As interns are generally considered staff, we were able to attend most of these receptions. Within a very short period of time, my whole perception of the role of receptions and the lobbying process began to change. For me, many myths were soon dispelled. I found that most receptions are non-partisan, a policy quite strictly

enforced by Legislature. I was surprised by the extent to which staff are invited to attend and often welcomed. Receptions are not only held by rich interest groups, and nor is money the guarantor of success of a reception. Non-profits & charities, despite limited resources, can hold effective receptions and are in fact quite a useful way to gain access and to try to gain influence. Moreover, I was previously unaware of the sheer frequency of receptions, particularly in the Fall session. I noted that there are often 2-4 receptions per evening, with several lunchtime and breakfast receptions held throughout the week as well.

I realized that by studying receptions, I could better understand one aspect of the interaction between non-profit groups and legislators that is often overlooked or misunderstood by the media, the general public and many academics. Thus, this essay is designed as an in-depth study of receptions from mostly a first-hand perspective. To draw general conclusions I attended several dozen receptions over the course of 2004 and 2005, both held by for-profit and non-profit groups. I compared and contrasted the receptions and the behaviour and strategies of organizers, as well as tried to speak to those in attendance to gauge the “success” of these receptions. I also had informal conversations with reception organizers, MPPs, staffers and frequent lobbyists to understand both strategies and outcomes of receptions, and to uncover what makes a reception successful- or not.

Based on these observations and discussions, I designed this essay with the following goals in mind:

- Explain the conventions surrounding receptions at Queen’s Park primarily for those who are not familiar with the, explaining how they happen and function. Compare these conventions with other jurisdictions.
- Explain the goals of receptions from the point of view of reception organizers.

- Dispel myths and affirm theories about receptions and the effectiveness of certain strategies.
- Discuss best-practices for receptions in order to offer strategies to the non-profit sector, or non-profit and charitable organization that serve the public interest or other charitable causes.
- Explain how to use receptions as a lobbying tool, as a way to become “insiders” and gain trust, as a way to gain better information about MPPs, and to use “insider” strategies to lobby.
- Offer next steps to further research on this topic.

Definitions and key terms

In this essay, the abbreviation MPP stands for Member of Provincial Parliament. I also frequently make reference to “staff” or “staffers” who are those who work at Queen’s Park for the various MPPs- MPPs generally have between 1 and 3 full and part-time staff at Queen’s Park, while the various Ministers have additional political staff.

Throughout my study, I have attended receptions held by many different not-for-profit organizations which have different characteristics and goals. For the purpose of clarification, I have classified these organizations into three main categories:

- Non-profit or charitable organizations that serve the public interest or a charitable interest, such as environment groups, groups serving populations with particular challenges or diseases, and other foundations or research groups, among others
- Professional associations: groups that regulate or advocate for professions or professionals such as the Chartered Accountants, Ontario Medical Association, or the Dental Hygienists.

- Organized business interest groups: groups that organize or advocate for the business interests of their members and of their sector, such as the Deer and Elk Farmers, Grain and Oilseed Producers, or Auto Manufacturers associations.

In this essay, I refer to all three categories by several terms including “non-profit organizations,” “non-profit interest groups” and other similar terms. I based my study on all three groups, recognizing that the second two groups tend to be better organized in terms of receptions. The overriding purpose of my essay is to analyze receptions and interest group behaviour for the benefit of the first group, who in my opinion could benefit from this information the most.

I have used the terms not-for-profit and non-profit interchangeably, although I recognize that some prefer to keep the terms distinct. In this essay, these terms imply organizations that do not return a profit to their leaders; if they do make a profit in the course of their activities, it is re-invested back into the organization.

I refer to receptions as being non-partisan, meaning that no particular partisan stance is generally taken at receptions. In fact, receptions are actually multi-partisan, meaning that members and staff of all parties can attend. However, I have used the term non-partisan to encompass both these concepts.

In this essay, I use the words lobbying and government relations interchangeably. Often the word lobbying has negative connotations for certain readers, assuming back-room deals and negotiations between organized interests and government. The term “government relations” is preferred by those who are consultants in the field or who are practitioners of this technique from within an organization.

Literature review

There is very little academic material that discusses the role that receptions play in the political process, particularly in regards to non-profit groups. This is also true of the print media. I was able to locate one article in the left-leaning Toronto weekly, NOW Magazine, by Josh Matlow, that discusses the role of receptions at Queen's Park and discusses what Matlow sees as the unequal playing field between for-profit and non-profit groups. Matlow denounces receptions, believing that they are undercover fundraising events. I would argue that the strict enforcement of the non-partisan nature of receptions by the Legislature would make fund-raising rather difficult if not impossible. Matlow uses the example that environment groups cannot afford wine and cheese events, while the environment "industry" in the lobby group ONEIA can afford to schmooze. Clearly, he has not been at other receptions held by creative yet poor environment groups such as Environmental Defence.

One useful theory is based on Walker's analysis of American interest groups (Walker, 1991) which classifies lobbying strategies as either "Inside" or "Outside." Inside strategies are those strategies that involve meeting with key decision makers to press issues and lobby, such as cabinet ministers and upper levels of bureaucracy. Outside strategies are those attempting to gain influence from the outside, such as by using the media to gain public support and put outside pressure on the government. Walker and most others argue that inside strategies are the most effective, especially when interest groups are able to align themselves with governments and offer something in exchange for the government's ear. Inside strategies are less obviously "opposition" and less embarrassing to governments, hence it is argued that government is more likely to listen.

The important question to ask here is this: are non-partisan receptions held with Opposition members in presence as well as Government members classified as inside or outside strategies? They more closely resemble inside strategies, especially as they are inside the legislature and members of the interest group are talking directly to MPPs and staff. However, the opportunity to frankly discuss interests and issues are severely limited by the non-partisan or multi-partisan nature of such events. I would argue that receptions are a middle or third category of lobbying. A reception held to press a certain issue can be used to persuade government members of an issue or initiative, yet is less likely to be successful than a direct inside lobbying effort. However, hosting a more informal “get-to-know-you” type of reception can help an interest group in their efforts to secure a meeting at a later date with a cabinet minister or other person they are trying to influence using insider strategies. Putting a face to the name of an interest group is always a good place to begin in the business of government relations.

Context

History

Those who have been around Queen’s Park for a while have noted that the frequency and scope of receptions has increased in recent years. In the past, it was often more established and more business-oriented groups who held receptions. During the most recent period of Conservative rule, from 1995-2003, relations with interest groups were more strained, and interest groups, particularly professional associations and public interest non-profits are now looking to rebuild relationships with a government that has appeared to be more open to engaging with such groups or is at least not outright hostile.

Other Legislatures

It is useful to place the Ontario Legislature and its receptions in the context of other provincial legislatures and the federal parliament. Interns travel to several legislatures across the country, and as such I was able to make such comparisons first-hand by speaking with both staff and politicians at different legislatures. Certainly at the federal level, the sheer number of MPs and staff makes it very difficult to host all-party receptions that staff are also invited to. Receptions there are infrequent, while more partisan or industry-ministry-specific receptions tend to be held off-site around Ottawa. In Ottawa there tends to be less day-to-day interaction between staff of different parties as there are few occasions to socialize during and after work at receptions. On the other hand, in Alberta, the main reason all-party and staff receptions are not frequently held is that the Legislature is so strongly skewed presently in favour of the governing Conservatives, there is little interaction between them and the small Liberal, NDP and other party caucuses. Staffers from different parties rarely interact, and interest groups tend to only lobby the Conservatives using mostly insider methods, as the Opposition is rather weak. In fact, one staff member to a Minister looked at me in shock when I explained the non-partisan interaction that occurs at Ontario interest-group sponsored receptions. In both Ottawa and Alberta, for the most part, the only non-partisan receptions were not hosted by interest groups, but rather by elected members, such as holiday parties in December, or by officers or staff of the legislature such as the clerk's office, the speaker's office for more official events such as "Semaine de la Francophonie." In the North-West Territories, formal lobbying efforts by non-profit interest groups are rare- the small size of the legislature makes it conducive by more informal "discussions" between elected representatives and interest group members.

Goals and techniques of receptions

Through interviews with reception organizers and my own observations, I was able to ascertain several key goals or purposes of receptions. These goals can then be used to judge the efficacy of a reception- ie. whether the reception was able to meet these key goals.

Promote a certain policy issue or initiative

- Create allies and strategize with MPPs or staff who support the issue or initiative
- Convince other or new MPPs or staff of the issue or initiative
 - This is achieved by giving speeches.
 - Often, the group will ask a supportive MPP, often a Minister, to give a speech in support of the issue or initiative.

Show appreciation for favourable legislation passed

- This is made easier when all MPPs, from all parties, voted in favour of a particular bill.

Maintain contacts and work on relationship-building

- This allows you to build a profile and contacts with MPPs and assists with securing a meeting at a later date as needed.
 - This is generally the purpose of “annual” or other regular receptions.

Use reception as a press event

- This is often done by issuing a press release in conjunction with or immediately following a reception.
- Some groups will use highlights from a reception in a subsequent press release.

Myths and theories

While little definitive literature exists on receptions, there is certain assumption in the literature on lobbying, and other commonly held beliefs in academia, the media, among interest groups,

and the general public, about the role and best strategies for receptions. Throughout this paper, I will attempt to challenge or affirm these myths and theories.

- Not all interest groups are able to hold receptions at Queen's Park.
- Interest groups that cannot spend significant amounts of money on food and drinks will not hold successful receptions.
- The most important goal is to have Ministers and MPPs in attendance.
- It is more useful to engage in one-on-one lobbying with key decision-makers, according to the "insider" theory of lobbying.
- The best receptions have short, effective speeches.
- Receptions that respond to or engage with hotly political topics, such as the SARS crisis, will bring the most MPPs from all sides to show that they are "on side."

How to hold a reception at Queen's Park

This first section provides some background information about organizing a reception that will also dispel the first myth I mentioned, that not all interest groups are able to hold receptions at Queen's Park.

Receptions are organized through the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms, as he or she is the officer responsible for the legislative facilities. Any established or at least loosely organized group can hold a reception at Queen's Park, providing they can find an MPP from any party who will be their "sponsor." The sponsor is little more than a reassurance that the group is legitimate—the sponsor does not need to share the views or be closely connected to the group.

The sponsor and the group then work with the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms to find an available date and room to hold the reception. Receptions can take place in the dining room or any of the committee rooms. Dining room receptions are the preferred choice, as the room is

large and has a nice bar, and the committee rooms can, even at the last minute, be occupied by a legislative committee on the discretion of the Speaker, which would have the effect of shutting the reception out of the room. In-house catering is provided for all the rooms, however is only required in the dining room- in the committee rooms, organizers are free to bring in outside caterers, however the costs of doing so are often higher. There is no charge for the reception itself, although there are charges to pay for extra security, cleaning staff, catering facilities, and any staff needed to serve drinks and food. Apart from catering, these costs are not excessive and usually cost less than \$200, especially if no extra security is needed (as is the case if the House is in session for a night sitting).

Finally, before the reception proceeds, a full guest list is required with 24 hours notice to the Office of the Sergeant-at-Arms. Organizers are not allowed to post advertisements throughout the building except directly inside the room occupied or on a table outside the room if they have been granted permission for that table.

First impressions

When it comes to receptions, it remains true that first impressions are crucial to success. This next section outlines the various steps needed to create a positive first impression and also guarantee a good turnout to a reception.

Invitations

The very first step in planning a reception is to distribute invitations to all MPPs and their offices. It is important that these invitations have certain key features. The invitation should be concise and contain all relevant information in an easy-to-read format. In my experience, the best invitations are sent by mail, and feature an invitation “card” that has only the necessary information, an invitation letter from a senior person in the organization or the manager of

government relations which outlines the reasons for the reception and is a more personalized invitation, and relevant additional literature about the organization where necessary. Invitations need not be expensive pieces of art- it is more important that they be clear and efficient. In most MPP offices, the MPP does not ever see the invitation- the staff person who opens the mail will read it and simply input the details into the shared calendar. Thus, to make a good impression, it is important that the invitation state that staff are welcome too- there are very few if any receptions where staff are not invited, and including them on the invitation will increase the chances of them putting in a good word with their MPP and encouraging him or her to attend the reception.

While all invitations usually request that attendees RSVP, organizations should not stress excessively over this matter- some offices are better than others at replying to invitations, and others will simply not want to commit to a reception given members' busy schedules. Staff at the Assembly who help plan receptions, including the catering service, can usually help provide an estimate as to number of expected attendees.

However, this is not to say that reception planners should not follow up with MPP offices to confirm attendance. Given the amount of invitations MPPs receive, a reminder is never inappropriate. One group that excelled in this area was the Chicken Farmers. The reception organizer with their group sent reminder emails to all offices both about a week before the event, and also on the day of the event- the most important day to send reminders. This strategy excelled because email is less intrusive than constant phone calls, is cheaper than sending out repeated letters by mail and is sure to at least be glanced at by staff in the MPP office. One important tip is to put the essential details in the subject line of the email, as quite frequently this

is all that staff read. An example of this would be “REMINDER: Chicken Farmers Reception TONIGHT, Dining Room, 5:30.”

Greeting

The best way to start a reception on the right track is to have a friendly “welcoming table” at the front doors of the reception room, either inside the room or just outside it. Most groups print off nametags for all MPPs and for all those who have sent RSVPs, with blank nametags for other staff or guests who arrive. This enables organizers to keep track of the attendance, but also ensures that attendees are well greeted and received. The Public Affairs Association did an excellent job of greeting people at their reception, including collecting business cards to later follow-up with guests and by ensuring that everyone was thanked personally for attending.

From planning to the actual event

This next section outlines a select few of the important considerations for organizers both when planning and running the reception. As mentioned previously, these ideas are compiled from my own observations during numerous receptions, and discussions with MPPs, staff and reception organizers and interest groups.

Showcasing products or initiatives

For some groups, the most simple and effective technique to achieve a successful reception is to showcase the product or initiative at hand, whether the group is trying to lobby for funding to develop or promote that product or other goals. This technique has the added effect of making the reception more interactive, as discussed above. Certainly, showcasing products is a natural for lobby groups such as the Wine Growers or the Deer and Elk Farmers, both examples of groups who bring samples of their products for attendees to try, with education on the

products as they are given away. The Deer and Elk Farmers convinced many reception guests of their goals simply on the basis of their excellent product. However, other groups can showcase initiatives in creative ways even when the initiatives are less tangible. One group that was thanking the government for school funding dollars brought in computers and elementary school children working on those computers, to show how a particular sponsored program benefited these children. Creativity can go a long way, particularly for cash-strapped interest groups- showcasing interesting products or initiatives can counter a lack of wine or expensive food.

Interactivity

Interest groups that find creative ways to make their receptions interactive often impress the audience and thus help further their cause. This takes the reception beyond simply a wine-and-cheese social with small speeches and clapping. Interest groups can set up displays explaining their products or issues, displays that can be interactive. For instance, a group representing medical laboratory technicians brought in microscopes and bacteria samples for everyone to look at, while

Good use of people

Certainly, an important question for interest groups to consider is which of their members they will invite to Queen's Park for the actual reception. It is of utmost importance to bring the senior people from the organization to legitimize the efforts and the event. Another important factor that many groups overlook is that it is important to bring a wide range of people from the organization to the event, all of who have different skills and experiences. For instance, in a professional association, it is a good idea not only to bring members of the group with those professional designations, but also members of the communications, marketing and public or government relations team who are often quite successful at getting messages and images across.

They may be more at ease with “schmoozing” and hence will be able to make a great impression on MPPs and staffers.

Another strategy is to designate some people as “floaters,” who rather than talking to others within their own membership, will “work the room” and approach staff or MPPs who are on their own or who have not yet spoken to anyone from the hosting organization. This can help foster a more welcome and inviting atmosphere, and having group members approach attendees directly and personally will help them to leave feeling both important and that the reception was worth their time. In all, this strategy can help create a positive lasting impression on staff and MPPs, which is useful for future lobbying efforts.

One example of a group that was creative in their choice of hosts was the Deer & Elk Farmers. This non-profit organization, which promotes deer & elk farming and presses for favourable agricultural and financial policies, asked their members to bring their entire families, including their children, to Queen’s Park for their reception. The children in attendance made the reception much more lively. Many staff reported that it made them feel more comfortable because children are always easy to talk to and more approachable, and having them there and talking with them directly helped put a human face on the issue. Staff and MPP reported having increased sympathy when they could see how families were affected by government policies. Interestingly, I noted surprise among many when the Deer & Elk Farmers joined the Lanark Landowners group, a quasi-agricultural association that viciously opposed government policy through protest. Many staff wondered how could their “friends,” the deer and elk farmers, could betray them by joining this association- a clear example of how hosting a successful reception can build a positive image of a non-profit interest group.

Staff

One definite way to ensure a successful reception is to treat staff as well as MPPs are treated. I would argue that it is a myth that a reception cannot be successful without significant amounts of MPPs and Ministers in attendance. Staff often attend on behalf of their MPPs, and are quite often busy people themselves, especially those who work for Ministers or those who are the only staff person in the office. Organizers sometimes put little emphasis on treating staff well at receptions because they assume that they are simply there to enjoy the free food and alcohol. While some staff certainly are there for these reasons, many among them are usually receptive to learning about the sponsoring organization and their issues, and if they are impressed with the reception and their treatment, they will tend to report back favourably to the MPPs they work for.

Lasting impressions

Successful reception planners understand that leaving a lasting positive impression is crucial to the success of a reception and to ensure positive government relations. Certainly, much of this lasting impression begins with the invitation, carries through the initial greeting and is cemented through the course of the reception. However, there are many tricks to employ to make the final moments of a reception a success and to ensure that attendees come away from the reception with positive feeling towards the event and the hosting organization.

Good-byes

Reception organizers should ensure that the top people in their organization make a point to thank all those who attended, particularly the MPPs. It is equally important that members of the organization be near the door to thank attendees for coming, to hand out any materials or gifts, and to be on hand to answer any questions that quite frequently staff may have. The best

way to do this is to have a table placed near the door, which is used both as a welcoming and sign-in table, and as a farewell table- the same group members can be assigned and positioned there for the whole night to promote continuity.

“Goodie Bags”

One trick that reception organizers (or their marketing strategists behind the scenes) use to try to make a lasting impression after a reception is by handing out “presents,” either to MPPs or to all guests. These usually consist of literature about the organization, often with a present- a t-shirt, a pen, or a business card holder, all neatly packaged. However, this trick is not necessarily always worth the effort. Most of the time, packages are simply discarded or tossed away, since MPP offices receive many of these gifts. That is not to say that gifts or reading material should be overlooked. There are some staffers who diligently bring back such packages to their MPP, particularly if the MPP was unable to attend the reception. Others will read through it themselves to better understand stakeholder issues and relations. In order to induce these types of behaviour, it is suggested that interest groups include useful items inside the package. Examples would be literature that highlights the interest group’s position on a contentious issue, or a useful or appreciated gift, such as food or a bottle opener.

Literature

The above discussion leads to another important point- what to do about literature that is distributed during or after a reception. It is best to include such literature, perhaps with a gift, at the end of a reception, as during the reception attendees are too busy drinking, eating and mingling to carry papers with them. Literature should be brief and be designed to efficiently convey key messages, and include important contact info such as websites and telephone numbers. One effective method is to place several one-page documents in a nice binder or

folder, with a page explaining the organization, a page or two describing their interests, issues or suggestions for government policy, and other pages with promotional material and contact information. Literature should not be overly partisan and the tone should not be excessively confrontational, yet should clearly state the issues and the group's position on them. Whenever possible, interest groups should try to align themselves with government and offer them proactive solutions, to work with rather than against the government. This should be reflected in materials handed out at a reception.

Follow-up post-event

Finally, it is sometimes worth considering following up with guests after the reception to thank them for their time and to ensure that a lasting impression endures. Some groups keep business cards for this purpose, although sorting through them afterwards can be quite labour-intensive. Other groups simply send out a mass email to all those who sent an RSVP to the event, or to all MPPs and staff at Queen's Park. This is a simple and inexpensive way to keep an organization's name, purpose and issues on the minds of busy politicians and staffers.

Countering a lack of resources

Much of the literature and some interest groups cite the supposed high costs of hosting receptions as a barrier to having them at all. While it is true that many receptions are extravagant affairs with open bars and flashy prizes, other receptions are just as successful even though the group has been frugal. Creativity and planning can go a long way to keep costs down; this next section outlines some of the ways non-profit groups can counter a lack of financial resources.

Co-hosting a reception with other groups

An often-overlooked strategy to keep costs down is to ally with other like-minded groups to co-host a reception. For instance, members of different adoption organizations have co-hosted

receptions to collectively lobby for the opening of adoption records in Ontario. Resources go a lot further when groups join together, and this can also be useful as there are more group members to both plan and attend the reception. Moreover, this tactic often proves successful, as the government prefers to see interest groups working together. Also, an issue or initiative being argued or promoted will be more forceful if several groups are united in pressing the government on it.

Creative and uniqueness

A little creativity can go a long way when trying to plan a cost-effective reception. The group Environmental Defence held a reception at Queen's Park to push for the protection of endangered species in Ontario. Rather than spending lots of money on food and drinks, the public interest group got creative- they found volunteers to dress-up as endangered species and assigned each MPP a species to protect (some tied to personality) and distributed "protection certificates" that they printed on their own computers to each MPP. This initiative was effective because had fun with a serious topic, rather than preaching. They also included all MPPs and provided entertainment for both MPPs and staff. Interestingly, Environmental Defence later discussed the reception in a news release calling on the government to protect endangered species.

Forget the open bar

A simple trick to keep costs down is to simply host events in the morning (before 9:00am) or at lunchtime (before the afternoon sitting at 1:30pm). At these events, it is less noticeable if wine is not served. However, it is not bad form to simply offer juice and soft drinks rather than wine, especially if the reception is interesting and creative in its own right.

Other problems

There are several other “faux-pas” that organizers of receptions tend to make. Certainly, these problems are often overcome as organizers gain experience or when they are fortunate enough to receive feedback from staff or MPPs in regards to their event.

Bashing the Government or Opposition

One tactic that inevitably backfires and ruins relations with government is using a reception to denounce or bash the government, former government or opposition party. Interest groups should realize that at these receptions, they are guests of the Legislature and as such must remain non-partisan and respectful. A reception is certainly not the space for a protest or even a protest speech. Speeches must be tempered and a positive spin must be put on problems, to show that the group is attempting to work with elected members to help solve any issues they face. I have noted that at receptions where a speaker or the group speaks negatively about a government decision in a non-constructive matter, everyone in the room feels uncomfortable, and tends to leave much earlier than usual. This was certainly true at a reception where prize-winning wine growers brought in their wines for all guests to sample and rate, with the wine receiving the most votes becoming the official “Ontario Legislature” wine. At the event, a wine grower who had recently won a prestigious competition was asked to give a speech. To everyone’s horror, she began to “bash” the government by denouncing its Greenbelt Act, Bill 135. The atmosphere of the room went remarkably sombre and I observed that no one was sure what to say or how to stop her- and even Opposition MPPs who were against the Bill were quietly commenting on how inappropriate the comments were.

Speeches

Another problem that often occurs is that speeches by members of the host organization simply run too long, and guests lose interest. Speeches should be short and concise, and get key messages across without explaining all the detail behind an issue or about the organization. As well, organizers should try to limit the number of speakers to 3 or 4 at a maximum. Groups often forget that most of the convincing happens one-on-one when group members discuss the issues with MPPs and their staff. As mentioned previously, speeches should also be positive and solution-oriented, remaining non-partisan at all times.

Key recommendations

Here are some of the conclusions I have reached throughout the course of this essay, simplified in point-form.

- Ensure that guests are adequately greeted, made to feel included during the reception, and personally thanked at the end.
- Find creative ways to keep costs to a minimum, such as hosting lunchtime events without alcohol, showcasing your products at an interactive reception, or co-sponsor the event with other organizations.
- Remain non-partisan and ensure that MPPs feel as though the group is willing to work with them in a constructive manner, and has something to offer them. Refrain from denouncing government policies.
- Welcome and include staff, as they are just as important as MPPs and Ministers- they can be allies or enemies when attempting to secure a meeting after the reception.
- Limit both time and quantity of speeches.

- Give out literature and useful presents at the end of a reception, but do not spend unnecessary time and resources on such take-home items. Follow-up with a thank-you email.

Next steps

A useful next step will be to obtain the list that the Sergeant-at-Arms Office keeps of all the receptions that are held at Queen's Park to compile and analyze data, which should contain the name of the group that hosts each reception, along with MPP that sponsored it, the room it was held in, and the date. This will establish the number of receptions/year and also the number of receptions by organization type (non-profit public interest group or charity, business interests, professional organization).

As well, it will be useful to conduct more in-depth interviews with interest group leaders and event planners to determine their budgets for particular receptions and their government relations overall, and to find out the attendance of receptions including staff, MPPs and members of the organization. Another method of investigation will be to conduct further interviews with staff and MPPs who have attended many receptions, particularly those who can provide more historical context and explain how the nature of receptions has changed over time at Queen's Park, if at all.

Conclusion

In my short experience at Queen's Park, I have discovered that a relatively easy and cost-effective way to gain access to MPPs and their staff is to host a non-partisan reception at the Ontario Legislature. These receptions can serve many goals, among them promoting an organization, its causes and its issues; building relations with legislators and their staff to become trusted stakeholder or "insider"; and using a reception to bring attention to an issue both through

the media and among the people at Queen's Park themselves. The prevailing myth that receptions are only for well-connected and organized groups with significant funds is simply false. In fact, there are many opportunities for non-profit interest groups of all sizes and purposes to host receptions at Queen's Park that will be well attended. Certainly, a fair amount of creativity and attention to protocol and detail is required, and it is not always easy for small charitable and public interest non-profits to be aware of these factors. This essay should serve as a first step for those wanting to better understand the nature and practice of receptions at Queen's Park, and should be of benefit particularly to small non-profits and charities who are looking to influence government policies in Ontario from the inside.

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