



Steps to Political Influence

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My experience as a Washington advocate working with fellow professionals and a variety of organizations has led me to conclude that in order for the Hungarian American (“HA”) community to have its voice better heard, the following steps (or a combination thereof) could be considered:

1. **The community’s members need to become more politically active** by, among other things,
 - a. voting AND letting their representatives know that they are voting;
 - b. contributing to candidates; and
 - c. mobilizing fellow voters;
2. **Establishing more political organizations.** There are individuals who have more political clout than some organizations have. Also, many of the community’s organizations are tax exempt, educational entities or foundations. While these organizations perform a valuable function of disseminating educational information, their political activities are restricted by laws and regulations. To the extent political organizations are formed, they will require leaders and/or paid, full time staff who are experienced in politics, including campaign financing. Washington-based political organizations also will require leaders and paid, full time staff who are well versed in the ways of Washington, have academic and/or professional training and experience in politics, media relations, advocacy, community outreach and international relations, and know what government bodies, committees, subcommittees, etc., to focus on;
3. **Institutionalizing their organizations**, regularizing procedures for reaching a broad-based consensus on issues of common concern and mobilizing grassroots (along the lines of your Bela Liptak’s “Lobby”). While several organizations representing different constituencies can exist side by side as long as they consult, share and coordinate their efforts, national umbrella organizations that are able to attract active members from various generations can serve as a forum for discussion and act as a catalyst for the necessary changes;
4. **Success will require greater cooperation**, genuine coordination and a willingness by the leaders to share information, consult with each other and involve more than a small inner circle of decision makers of any one organization – the broader the base, the better. (This means that decision making and “credit” will have to be shared also – it will have to be a democratic process);
5. **Setting a political agenda**, enlisting allies (often outside of the HA community) and seeking to exercise actual political influence with the aim of achieving concrete results and realizing well-defined expectations;
6. **Setting sights higher** by moving beyond merely gaining access to decision makers and reacting to developments to actually setting the agenda and framing the issues. This, by definition, involves an effective monitoring function as well;
7. **Focusing on the political process here and on Washington, D.C.**, and media here, as opposed to institutions, media, etc., overseas. In other words, the effort must target and mobilize the community here;
8. **Independent evaluation and analysis.** To the extent the assessment and evaluation of the strength of the HA community needs supplementation, it should be performed by an independent American institution, not the Hungarian government and/or organizations with an interest in the outcome as Charles Fenyvesi correctly points out. This survey should assess: (a) the overall HA community; and (b) those who are interested in politics and likely to become involved. A credible survey – and in order to be credible it will have to be conducted by an independent and respected institution – will support items 1 – 7 above.