



Public Affairs Association of Canada

Submission to the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics (ETHI) Statutory Review of the *Lobbying Act* – April 2026

Introduction

The [Public Affairs Association of Canada](#) (PAAC) welcomes the opportunity to participate in the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy, and Ethics' (ETHI) statutory review of the federal *Lobbying Act*. PAAC supports the Act's fundamental purpose of promoting transparency, ethical conduct, and public confidence in federal decision-making. This submission draws on practitioner experience to assist the Committee in assessing whether the Act continues to meet these objectives in a clear, proportionate, and effective manner.

About the Public Affairs Association of Canada (PAAC)

The Public Affairs Association of Canada represents individuals and organizations engaged in public affairs, government relations, communications, opinion research, and advocacy across Canada with chapters in British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Ontario. PAAC members include consultant lobbyists and in-house practitioners working in the public and private sectors, non-profit organizations, unions, and industry and professional associations.

PAAC promotes high professional standards through its [Statement of Principles](#) (see Appendix B), education, and professional development. The Association has a long history of constructive engagement with Parliament and provincial legislatures, committees, and lobbying commissioners, with a focus on strengthening transparency while supporting responsible participation in public policy processes.

Survey Context

To inform this submission, PAAC conducted a confidential survey of its members to gather practitioner perspectives on the operation of the *Lobbying Act*. Respondents represented a cross-section of registration categories and sectors and reported direct experience with the Act's registration, reporting, and guidance requirements.

While the survey is not intended to be statistically representative of all registrants, it provides informed, experience-based insights into how the Act functions in practice and how its objectives are experienced by those subject to its requirements.

Key Findings

Survey respondents expressed broad support for the principles underlying the federal *Lobbying Act* and for Parliament's role in overseeing its effectiveness. Several consistent themes emerged:

- **Strong support for transparency and accountability**
Respondents generally agreed that public disclosure of lobbying activities is essential to maintaining public trust in federal institutions.
- **Uncertainty arising from ambiguous statutory language**
Key concepts continue to be viewed as unclear, leading to inconsistent interpretation and

compliance risk, particularly significant part of duties, arranged communications, and grassroots lobbying.

- **Concerns regarding proportionality of reporting requirements**

Many respondents noted that certain reporting obligations, especially monthly communication reports, can be an administrative burden without always offering commensurate transparency benefits, especially for smaller and non-profit organizations.

- **Concern with ‘chilling’ effect for smaller and non-profit organizations**

Some respondents highlighted that additional reporting obligations may discourage smaller and non-profit organizations from engaging with government and make it more difficult to attract volunteers board directors to participate in policy discussions.

- **Disconnect between statutory framework and modern practice**

Respondents highlighted challenges in applying the Act to virtual meetings, informal digital interactions, and hybrid engagement models that are now common.

- **Reliance on interpretive guidance rather than statute**

While guidance from the Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying is valued, respondents expressed concern that evolving interpretation, rather than legislative clarity, can create uncertainty for registrants.

Recommendations

In support of ETHI’s examination of the *Lobbying Act*, PAAC respectfully offers the following recommendations:

1. **Enhance legislative clarity**

Clarify key definitions in the Act or regulations to reduce ambiguity and improve consistent compliance.

2. **Modernize the Act to reflect contemporary communications**

Explicitly address virtual, digital, and hybrid communications to align the statute with current engagement practices.

3. **Reassess proportionality of reporting requirements**

Review whether existing reporting obligations, including monthly communication reports, consistently advance meaningful transparency.

4. **Emphasize substantive transparency over technical non-compliance**

Encourage an approach that prioritizes intent, disclosure, and public understanding rather than minor or inadvertent administrative errors.

5. **Strengthen consistency between statute and guidance**

Improve alignment between legislative language and interpretive guidance to enhance predictability for registrants.

6. **Promote consistent interpretation and enforcement**

Support clear, predictable compliance expectations through consistent advisory opinions and enforcement practices.

7. **Ensure proportional application across sectors**

Recognize differences among consultant, in-house, non-profit, and volunteer-based activities when applying registration and reporting requirements.

8. Support education and compliance capacity

Continue to develop training, tools, and plain-language resources to assist registrants in understanding and meeting their obligations. PAAC is prepared to work closely with the Office of the Lobbying Commissioner to provide opportunities to promote awareness, training, and ongoing feedback on the effectiveness of the registration and compliance process.

9. Focus enforcement efforts on unregistered lobbying and support registrants who are committed to compliance and transparency.

Ensure any reforms to the lobbying framework place equal emphasis on addressing illegal or unregistered lobbying activity, alongside compliance obligations for registered lobbyists. The Committee should encourage enforcement and oversight measures that target non-compliant actors, while ensuring reforms do not disproportionately burden those who are already operating transparently and in good faith.

10. Maintain regular parliamentary review

Affirm the importance of periodic reviews to ensure the Act remains responsive to evolving public policy practices and technologies.

Conclusion

PAAC appreciates the ETHI Committee's leadership in undertaking this statutory review and supports the Committee's objective of ensuring the *Lobbying Act* remains an effective tool for transparency and public confidence. PAAC welcomes the opportunity to provide further input or clarification in support of the Committee's work.

Respectfully submitted,



Dan Hurley, MJ, APR, MCPRS

Board Director and Treasurer

On behalf of the Public Affairs Association of Canada

Appendix A

Selected PAAC Member Survey Quotations

The following anonymized excerpts from PAAC's member survey illustrate how current and proposed lobbying requirements affect daily operations, compliance capacity, and participation in public policy processes. Quotations are grouped by themes relevant to ETHI's statutory review of the Lobbying Act.

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"I have not lobbied federally for years and don't in my current work; I am not familiar with current or prospective regs."

"We are preparing to register federally based on the Commissioner's recent redefining of the word 'significant.'"

"There is a lack of clarity on what is actually required to be reported... we have had three different answers to the same question from three different people who work at the Lobbying Commission."

"Challenging to assess what is 'advocacy' versus 'informing' the current federal government."

Proportionality and Administrative Burden

"The requirement around eight hours is very limiting for a non-profit who does not have full-time staff dedicated to government relations work."

"This would massively increase the administrative burden on our GR team, and I also question if the OCL has the capacity to even process or track this."

"Significantly more work to undertake reporting for little federal engagement."

"Increased compliance costs associated with expanded registrations and reporting will be impossible for non-profit organizations to bear."

Scope, Oversight, and Legislative Intent

"It goes beyond the scope of the lobbying regulations."

"The recommendations from the OCL... would give the OCL massive overreaching powers that would shift power away from the Lobbying Act and from Parliament."

"There has been very little evidence that these expansions are needed."

Impact on Civil Society and Democratic Participation

"This could significantly chill non-profit board volunteerism... there is stigma associated with lobbying and we already have a hard time recruiting volunteers."

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PAAC Statement of Principles

The **Public Affairs Association of Canada** (PAAC) is a gathering place for the interchange of ideas and ideologies, professional development and practical networking. As the established national organization of Public Affairs Professionals, the PAAC helps define appropriate conduct.

Public Affairs professionals work with corporate, charitable and political clients to engage various audiences. The Public Affairs profession is recognized increasingly for its high standard of practise and expertise, as well as the impact practitioners have on the development and debate of issues. It is acknowledged for the value and diversity of its contributions to Canadian society.

Public Affairs practitioners will:

- **Avoid acting in such a way as to bring harm or disrepute** to the profession, colleague, employer or client.
- **Respect regulatory statutes and meet in full their obligations** for disclosure in particular the Charter of Rights, the federal and provincial lobbyist registration acts, privacy legislation and municipal codes as they apply to the jurisdiction of practice.
- **Provide advice, guidance and an informed opinion** as to the nature of the business, policy or legislative issue in a manner that is forthright and credibly reasoned.
- **Avoid personal and professional conflicts of interest** and inform clients and employers as soon as the potential for conflict arises.
- **Ensure that any new engagement is subject to full disclosure** with respect to regulatory requirements, the firm and the client.
- **Be transparent in the management of financial accounts**, contractual matters, obligations and client/organizational interest.
- **Respect interpersonal confidences and confidential information.**

Association canadienne des affaires publiques

Mémoire présenté au Comité permanent de l'accès à l'information, de la protection des renseignements personnels et de l'éthique (ETHI)

Examen législatif de la *Loi sur le lobbying* – Avril 2026

Introduction

L'Association canadienne des affaires publiques (ACAP) se réjouit de pouvoir participer à l'examen législatif de la *Loi sur le lobbying* mené par le Comité permanent de l'accès à l'information, de la protection des renseignements personnels et de l'éthique (ETHI). L'ACAP appuie l'objectif fondamental de la Loi, soit la promotion de la transparence, de l'éthique et de la confiance du public à l'égard du processus décisionnel fédéral. Le présent mémoire s'appuie sur l'expérience concrète de praticiens afin d'appuyer le Comité dans son analyse visant à déterminer si la Loi continue d'atteindre ces objectifs de manière claire, proportionnée et efficace.

À propos de l'Association canadienne des affaires publiques (ACAP)

L'Association canadienne des affaires publiques représente des personnes et des organisations œuvrant dans les domaines des affaires publiques, des relations gouvernementales, des communications, de la recherche d'opinion et de la défense d'intérêts partout au Canada, avec des sections actives en Colombie-Britannique, en Alberta, en Saskatchewan et en Ontario. Les membres de l'ACAP comprennent tant des lobbyistes-conseils que des praticiens internes travaillant dans les secteurs public et privé, les organismes sans but lucratif, les syndicats, ainsi que les associations industrielles et professionnelles.

L'ACAP fait la promotion de normes professionnelles élevées par l'entremise de son Énoncé de principes (voir l'annexe B), de ses activités de formation et de perfectionnement professionnel. L'Association possède une longue expérience de collaboration constructive avec le Parlement fédéral, les assemblées législatives provinciales, les comités parlementaires et les commissaires au lobbying, dans une optique de renforcement de la transparence tout en favorisant une participation responsable aux processus d'élaboration des politiques publiques.

Contexte du sondage

Afin d'éclairer le présent mémoire, l'ACAP a mené un sondage confidentiel auprès de ses membres afin de recueillir leurs perspectives professionnelles sur l'application de la *Loi sur le lobbying*. Les répondants représentaient diverses catégories d'inscription et plusieurs secteurs d'activité, et ont fait état d'une expérience directe des exigences liées à l'inscription, à la production de rapports et aux lignes directrices associées à la Loi.

Bien que ce sondage ne prétende pas être statistiquement représentatif de l'ensemble des inscrits, il fournit des observations éclairées, fondées sur l'expérience, quant au fonctionnement concret de la Loi et à la manière dont ses objectifs sont vécus par les personnes assujetties à ses obligations.

Principales constatations

Les répondants au sondage ont exprimé un appui général aux principes sous-jacents de la *Loi sur le lobbying* et au rôle du Parlement dans la surveillance de son efficacité. Plusieurs thèmes récurrents se dégagent :

Appui marqué à la transparence et à la reddition de comptes

Les répondants reconnaissent largement que la divulgation publique des activités de lobbying est essentielle au maintien de la confiance du public envers les institutions fédérales.

Incertitude découlant d'un libellé législatif ambigu

Certaines notions clés continuent d'être perçues comme imprécises, entraînant des interprétations variables et des risques de non-conformité, notamment en ce qui concerne la notion de « partie importante des fonctions », les communications organisées et les activités de lobbying populaire.

Préoccupations quant à la proportionnalité des exigences de déclaration

Plusieurs répondants soulignent que certaines obligations de déclaration — en particulier les rapports mensuels de communications — peuvent représenter un fardeau administratif important sans toujours offrir des bénéfices proportionnels en matière de transparence, surtout pour les petites organisations et les organismes sans but lucratif.

Effet dissuasif potentiel pour les petites et les organisations sans but lucratif

Certains répondants estiment que l'alourdissement des obligations de déclaration pourrait décourager la participation de petites organisations et d'organismes sans but lucratif aux échanges avec le gouvernement, et rendre plus difficile le recrutement de bénévoles pour siéger aux conseils d'administration et participer aux travaux de politiques publiques.

Décalage entre le cadre législatif et les pratiques contemporaines

Les répondants signalent des difficultés quant à l'application de la Loi aux rencontres virtuelles, aux interactions numériques informelles et aux modèles d'engagement hybrides, désormais largement répandus.

Dépendance excessive aux lignes directrices interprétatives plutôt qu'au texte législatif

Bien que les orientations fournies par le Bureau du commissaire au lobbying soient appréciées, plusieurs répondants craignent que l'évolution des interprétations, plutôt qu'une clarté législative accrue, engendre de l'incertitude pour les personnes inscrites.

Recommandations

Afin de contribuer aux travaux d'ETHI, l'ACAP soumet respectueusement les recommandations suivantes :

- **Accroître la clarté législative**
Clarifier les définitions clés dans la Loi ou ses règlements afin de réduire les ambiguïtés et de favoriser une conformité plus cohérente.
- **Moderniser la Loi afin de refléter les modes de communication actuels**
Tenir explicitement compte des communications virtuelles, numériques et hybrides afin d'arrimer le cadre législatif aux pratiques contemporaines.
- **Réévaluer la proportionnalité des exigences de déclaration**
Examiner si les obligations actuelles, y compris les rapports mensuels de communications, favorisent systématiquement une transparence significative.
- **Privilégier la transparence substantielle plutôt que la non-conformité technique**
Encourager une approche axée sur l'intention, la divulgation et la compréhension du public plutôt que sur les erreurs administratives mineures ou involontaires.
- **Renforcer la cohérence entre la Loi et les lignes directrices interprétatives**
Améliorer l'harmonisation entre le texte législatif et les orientations administratives afin d'accroître la prévisibilité pour les inscrits.
- **Favoriser une interprétation et une application cohérentes**
Appuyer des attentes claires et prévisibles en matière de conformité grâce à des avis consultatifs et à des pratiques d'application uniformes.
- **Assurer une application proportionnée selon les secteurs**
Reconnaître les différences entre les lobbyistes-conseils, les praticiens internes, les

organismes sans but lucratif et les activités menées par des bénévoles lors de l'application des exigences d'inscription et de déclaration.

- **Soutenir l'éducation et la capacité de conformité**
Poursuivre l'élaboration de formations, d'outils et de ressources en langage clair afin d'aider les personnes inscrites à comprendre et à respecter leurs obligations. L'ACAP est disposée à collaborer étroitement avec le Commissariat au lobbying afin de soutenir les efforts de sensibilisation, de formation et de rétroaction continue sur l'efficacité du processus d'inscription et de conformité.
- **Cibler les efforts d'application sur le lobbying non déclaré tout en soutenant les inscrits de bonne foi**
Veiller à ce que toute réforme du cadre de lobbying accorde une importance égale à la lutte contre les activités de lobbying illégales ou non déclarées, tout en évitant d'imposer un fardeau disproportionné aux acteurs qui agissent déjà de manière transparente et de bonne foi.
- **Maintenir des examens parlementaires réguliers**
Réaffirmer l'importance de révisions périodiques afin d'assurer que la Loi demeure adaptée à l'évolution des pratiques en matière de politiques publiques et des technologies.

Conclusion

L'ACAP remercie le Comité ETHI pour son leadership dans la conduite de cet examen législatif et appuie pleinement son objectif visant à garantir que la *Loi sur le lobbying* demeure un outil efficace au service de la transparence et de la confiance du public. L'Association demeure disponible pour fournir toute information supplémentaire ou clarification jugée utile aux travaux du Comité.

Respectueusement soumis,



Dan Hurley, MJ, ARP, MSCRP

Administrateur et trésorier

Au nom de l'Association canadienne des affaires publiques

Annexe A

Extraits sélectionnés du sondage de l'ACAP auprès de ses membres

Les citations anonymisées ci-dessous illustrent l'incidence, sur les activités quotidiennes, la capacité de conformité et la participation aux processus de politiques publiques, des exigences actuelles et proposées liées au lobbying. Les citations sont regroupées selon les thèmes pertinents à l'examen législatif de la Loi sur le lobbying par le Comité ETHI.

Clarté et prévisibilité du régime

« Je n'ai pas fait de lobbying fédéral depuis des années et ce n'est pas le cas dans mes fonctions actuelles; je ne connais pas bien les règles actuelles ou à venir. »

« Nous nous préparons à nous inscrire au fédéral en raison de la redéfinition récente du terme "important" par le Commissariat. »

« Il y a un manque de clarté sur ce qui doit réellement être déclaré... nous avons obtenu trois réponses différentes à la même question de la part de trois employés du Commissariat au lobbying. »

« Il est difficile de déterminer ce qui constitue de la "défense d'intérêts" par opposition à de la simple "information" auprès du gouvernement fédéral actuel. »

Proportionnalité et fardeau administratif

« L'exigence des huit heures est très contraignante pour un organisme sans but lucratif qui ne dispose pas de personnel à temps plein en relations gouvernementales. »

« Cela augmenterait considérablement le fardeau administratif de notre équipe, et je doute également que le Commissariat ait la capacité de traiter ou de suivre ces déclarations. »

« Beaucoup de travail de déclaration pour très peu d'interactions au niveau fédéral. »

« L'augmentation des coûts de conformité découlant de l'élargissement des exigences d'inscription et de déclaration sera impossible à absorber pour les organismes sans but lucratif. »

Portée, surveillance et intention législative

« Cela dépasse la portée prévue par la réglementation sur le lobbying. »

« Les recommandations du Commissariat... conférerait à celui-ci des pouvoirs excessifs qui déplaceraient l'autorité loin de la Loi et du Parlement. »

« Il y a très peu de preuves démontrant que ces élargissements sont nécessaires. »

Incidence sur la société civile et la participation démocratique

« Cela pourrait dissuader de façon importante le bénévolat au sein des conseils d'administration d'organismes sans but lucratif... le lobbying demeure stigmatisé et le recrutement de bénévoles est déjà difficile. »

« Les modifications à la définition d'"employé" et l'obligation d'inscription des administrateurs pourraient sérieusement décourager l'engagement bénévole. »

Résultats en matière de transparence et application de la loi

« Davantage de règles ne signifie pas nécessairement davantage de transparence. »

« En quoi une phrase mal formulée a-t-elle un impact réel sur la transparence de mes activités? »

« Il faudrait atténuer le ton concernant la menace d'emprisonnement pour une simple erreur de formulaire, surtout lorsque les règles sont floues et l'information difficile à obtenir. »

Annexe B

Énoncé de principes

L'Association canadienne des affaires publiques (ACAP) constitue un lieu d'échange d'idées et de points de vue, de perfectionnement professionnel et de réseautage pratique. À titre d'organisation nationale de référence représentant les professionnels des affaires publiques, l'ACAP contribue à définir les normes de conduite appropriées au sein de la profession.

Les professionnels des affaires publiques travaillent auprès de clients des secteurs corporatif, caritatif et politique afin de mobiliser divers publics. La profession est de plus en plus reconnue pour l'excellence de ses pratiques, la solidité de son expertise et l'influence significative de ses praticiens sur l'élaboration et le débat des enjeux publics. Elle est également reconnue pour la valeur et la diversité de ses contributions à la société canadienne.

Les praticiens des affaires publiques s'engagent à :

- **S'abstenir de toute conduite susceptible de porter préjudice ou de jeter le discrédit** sur la profession, un collègue, un employeur ou un client.
- **Respecter les lois et cadres réglementaires applicables** et s'acquitter pleinement de leurs obligations en matière de divulgation, notamment celles découlant de la Charte canadienne des droits et libertés, des lois fédérales et provinciales sur l'enregistrement des lobbyistes, des lois sur la protection des renseignements personnels et des codes municipaux, selon le territoire de pratique.
- **Offrir des conseils, des orientations et des avis éclairés** sur la nature des enjeux d'affaires, de politiques publiques ou législatifs, de manière franche, rigoureuse et fondée sur une analyse crédible.
- **Éviter tout conflit d'intérêts personnel ou professionnel**, réel ou potentiel, et en aviser sans délai les clients et les employeurs dès qu'une telle situation pourrait survenir.
- **S'assurer que toute nouvelle relation ou tout nouveau mandat fasse l'objet d'une divulgation complète**, notamment en ce qui concerne les exigences réglementaires, l'organisation concernée et le client.
- **Faire preuve de transparence dans la gestion des questions financières**, des ententes contractuelles, des obligations et des intérêts des clients ou des organisations.
- **Respecter les relations interpersonnelles, les confidences et les renseignements de nature confidentielle**, dans l'exercice de leurs fonctions.



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PAAC Statement of Principles

The **Public Affairs Association of Canada (PAAC)** is a gathering place for the interchange of ideas and ideologies, professional development and practical networking. As the established national organization of Public Affairs Professionals, the PAAC helps define appropriate conduct.

Public Affairs professionals work with corporate, charitable and political clients to engage various audiences. The Public Affairs profession is recognized increasingly for its high standard of practise and expertise, as well as the impact practitioners have on the development and debate of issues. It is acknowledged for the value and diversity of its contributions to Canadian society.

Public Affairs practitioners will:

- **Avoid acting in such a way as to bring harm or disrepute** to the profession, colleague, employer or client.
- **Respect regulatory statutes and meet in full their obligations** for disclosure in particular the Charter of Rights, the federal and provincial lobbyist registration acts, privacy legislation and municipal codes as they apply to the jurisdiction of practice.
- **Provide advice, guidance and an informed opinion** as to the nature of the business, policy or legislative issue in a manner that is forthright and credibly reasoned.
- **Avoid personal and professional conflicts of interest** and inform clients and employers as soon as the potential for conflict arises.
- **Ensure that any new engagement is subject to full disclosure** with respect to regulatory requirements, the firm and the client.
- **Be transparent in the management of financial accounts**, contractual matters, obligations and client/organizational interest.
- **Respect interpersonal confidences and confidential information.**