



Practical Advocacy Tips

Advocacy is standing up, speaking out and building multi-sectoral connections, to mobilize support and generate resources for a desired cause of action. It is “moving the few to move the many”, so the more connections and alliances you build, the better and more positive the results. Here are some basic tips on how to reach out to government, media and civil society organizations.

A. Making the Connection with Government

1. How to follow up on your initial letter

- Two to three days after you have emailed or delivered your letter, make a follow up call. Be friendly and warm. Convey the importance and urgency of the meeting you are requesting.
- If you are hand delivering your letter, use the opportunity to get to know the office staff and the process for scheduling appointments.
- Be persistent. If the minister is not available, inquire as to who would be the best person to meet up with instead. If everyone is booked solid, send a follow-up email or letter detailing what you would have wanted to discuss.
- Find another channel. If you are unable to make contact, you may send your letter to a popular newspaper in the form of letters to the editor or to a broadcast journalist.

2. How to make a personal visit to government leaders or policy makers.

One of the most effective ways to influence the policy-making process and make a lasting personal connection is to visit with your ministers (e.g. Health, Social Development etc.) and /or key legislators.

TIPS:

- If getting an appointment is proving difficult, try to find a “gatekeeper” – someone who can serve as a bridge to facilitate your gaining access to your minister or legislator. Gatekeepers are individuals who know you as well as have influence on the person you want to meet up with.
- Don’t be discouraged if you are scheduled to meet with a staff member commonly called legislative aide or for a minister, an executive assistant. While legislators/ministers make every effort to meet with their constituents, their schedules can be very unpredictable. Contrary to belief, staff plays an intricate role in research and information collecting for legislators on issues. Legislative aides are usually assigned issues in

which they become “experts” for the office; Executive Assistants are assigned focal areas. These staff members help to shape the legislator’s/ministers positions on issues. Building a relationship with these staff member can be just as effective as meeting with a legislator.

- Arrive early, at least 15/30minutes before your appointment. Security measures that are in place in most government offices and legislative buildings are usually rigorous and time consuming.
- Come with a team (no more than two or three, unless otherwise instructed). Strategize before the meeting and choose the 3 strongest points to support your position. Use examples and stories to illustrate and spice up your discussion. Assign each team member a particular point, depending on their experience, expertise and interest.
- Find a common ground with your minister or key legislator. Google them and find out about their position on this issue or related issues as well as other things they are concerned/interested about. Focus initial discussions on shared interest.
- Make it personal. Let the minister/legislator know why the issue matters to you and how it affects you, your organization and your community. Keep it local.
- Be brief and concise. Ministers and legislators are incredibly busy. They appreciate it when you get to the point and respect their time. Focus on major points. There will be other meetings/communications.
- Show respect . You may have a long list of complaints, but a first visit is not the time for criticism, sarcasm or cynicism. You must first build your credibility .
- Do not be defensive nor argumentative. You are there to cement relationships and build alliances, not to make enemies. You can be forceful without being antagonistic. When giving feedback, use the “sandwich approach” – recognize first the positive actions/programs that have been implemented before gently pointing out gaps and constraints.
- Leave behind a briefer on your organization and the issues you are seeking to gain support for. Make sure you have enough for everyone.

3. How to reinforce and solidify Initial gains made

- Within a week to at most two weeks after your meeting, send a letter of appreciation. Summarize the points of agreement and next steps. Reiterate your desire to pursue collaboration.
- Stay in touch. Provide them with periodic updates on what your organization is doing. Where appropriate, invite/involve them in your major events and activities.
- Praise. Praise. Praise. If you were provided resources or support, share this with your network and where media is involved, alert them to this favourable action and /or noteworthy assistance.
- Seek other opportunities to build continuing positive working relationships.

B. Reaching Out to Media

C. Building Alliances and Networks of Support with Civil Society Organizations

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