

## PRINCIPLES OF LOBBYING IN A FORMAL MEETING

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Seeing your local MP, a senior government official, a Minister or corporate CEO to represent your organisation in a formal meeting may seem difficult for the first time. Here are a few simple points that may help. As you become more experienced, you will gain confidence to adjust these to fit different situations.

- **Be yourself and believe in what you are doing.** You are an expert on your issue and your organisation. If you have to go to Parliament House, or an impressive office, do not be intimidated by the surroundings. These buildings are simply work spaces not really much different from the offices of your own experience.
- **Clothes.** The basic principle is to not let your clothing get in the way of the message. You have only a short time with the official. Wear something in which you feel comfortable, but which fits the surroundings.
- **Numbers.** The ideal number is at least two people and no more than three for most occasions. More than three makes communication difficult, but may occasionally be necessary if a number of groups are involved. Two people allows for you to agree on what took place; for one person to watch and feel the non-verbal communication; for each of you to have time to think while the other is speaking and, if you feel the need to keep a record, it allows for one person to take notes. Decide beforehand on who will lead the conversation or how you will share it.
- **What to take.** Visuals are useful. A map, photographs, or a couple of simple graphs can be really helpful to your message. A basic lobby document is a very good idea. However, it must be simple and short. Do not presume the person, particularly a Minister for example, will know all about your issue and do not try to talk about too many ideas. The document should be no more than one or two standard A4 pages, clearly set out, possibly in point form, stating (1) the issue, (2) the background to it, (3) the arguments and issues you want to put forward and (4) ending with the specific recommendations you are requesting. Detailed documents can be provided to support your argument, or you may have provided them in earlier communications. However, in most cases these are not read by the person you are seeing. Detailed reports or documentation are likely to be assessed by more junior employees advising the person you are seeing. They are relevant and worth supplying in order to keep a bureaucracy and its files up to date with all the issues you want them to consider.
- **Advisers.** It is almost certain that a senior policy person, such as a Minister or CEO, will have an adviser present. These are very important people for you. They often play a key role in controlling the advice to and from this senior decision-maker. The workload of a Minister or CEO in a large corporate is often too big for him/her to be informed about all of the issues for which they are responsible. You should note the name of the adviser, make sure that you keep them informed in the future and, if possible, develop a working relationship with

them. For government meetings, the same applies to any Departmental person present at the interview.

- **The interview.** Ideally, you want to hear from the senior official as much as you speak yourself. Listen carefully to what they say right from the beginning. This will give you important clues as to where to pitch your information, as to how much the person already knows, and on misunderstandings they have, which you need to correct. If you are unsure how to proceed, follow the format of your lobby document, which you can leave with them at the end of the interview. If it is a major policy issue on which you want a decision, you should provide all the basic background and information before your meeting, so that the decision-maker can consult with advisers and other parties beforehand. If the meeting is part of a continuing dialogue or developing a campaign, you can be introducing new material at the meeting.
- **Be clear, pleasant and professional.** Be yourself. Make your points simply and clearly. Do not get into an argument and never let a disagreement become personal. Stick to policy issues, but be firmly dignified if the official becomes difficult. You never know when you may have to work with this person again.
- **Listen for what they will do.** Listen very carefully to what the person agrees to do. Often Ministers/CEOs make statements that sound agreeable, but which really have no substance. If this is happening, you might like to try diplomatically suggesting some firmer action on their part. As soon as the meeting is over, check with your companion/s that you agree on what the official has agreed to do.
- **Keep a united front and do not exceed your mandate.** Always keep a united front with your partner/s. Do not give the official the opportunity to see any disagreements between you. If he/she wants to get you to agree on behalf of your organization/s to some new proposal, do not exceed your mandate. It is quite proper for you to say that you will take a new idea or proposal back to your organization/s for a decision.
- **Follow-up.** Always make sure that anything you promise to do is followed up as quickly as possible. If some key decisions are made, or if you feel the need for a formal record, you may like to follow up with a letter confirming the outcome of the meeting.

The world of governments and corporations is no different from ordinary human relations, about which you already know a great deal. Sometimes the language may be more formal and the settings different, but you already have many of the skills you require from your living experiences. Being able to judge what motivates a person and how they are feeling and reacting are very relevant skills in lobbying, and many of the above points may be worth thinking about for less formal meetings as well.

So, seize the opportunity to go lobbying, if you have the chance! We all make mistakes from time to time, but we can also learn from these, and the best way to develop your lobbying skills is to go and do it.

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