

Communicating with policymakers

Principles for effective engagement

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OXFAM

Know your purpose

“When you need a friend in government it is too late to find one”



What are you trying to get out of this interaction?

- Education
 - Is this issue unknown or misunderstood?
 - Does the policymaker need to be up to speed on this issue for their work?
- Specific Policy Action
 - Adopt a clear position
 - Enact a specific policy/vote on legislation
- Relationship building
 - Could this person be helpful on other issues we work on?

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Know your audience

“Here is a joke for all the mind readers out there.....”

Who are they and what can they do?

- Are they senior or junior?
- Decisionmaker, supporter, or opponent?
- Are they in the weeds or just the headlines?
- Are they new to the issue or are they experts?

Who do they need to hear from?

- Policy expert?
- Government affairs specialist?
- Celebrity ally?
- Local constituent?
- Community representative?



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Craft an effective message

“I have only made this letter longer because I have not had the time to make it shorter.”—Blaise Pascal



How to do justice to important/nuanced issues with limited space and time?

- Summarize written materials
 - 1-2 pg policy briefs
 - Infographics
- Accommodate schedule changes
 - Plan for less time than allotted
 - Be prepared to communicate in different ways
- Manage expectations of partners
 - Outline all possible outcomes
 - Securing a meeting can be a win

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Be prepared

“Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.”—Abraham Lincoln



Attention to detail is key

- Timing
 - Is the request timely?
 - How do I get to the meeting on time?
- Logistics
 - Building entry
 - Transportation
 - Virtual platforms
- Choreography
 - Who is speaking first?
 - How is time being managed?

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Know the rules

“Ignorance of the law does not excuse!”



What are the rules or protocols you need to follow?

- Are there laws around lobbying or ethics that apply?
 - Are you talking about legislation?
 - Are you providing anything of value to the policymaker?
- Are there certain customs that should be adhered to?
 - Cultural norms
 - Professional practices



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