

INFLUENCING POLITICIANS

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- Interacting with politicians is only a small part of an advocacy campaign. Successful and sustainable advocacy campaigns change public opinion which can't be done just by talking to politicians. Strong campaigns engage a broad section of the community in a conversation about why things should change. Since politicians are interested in votes and public opinion reflects voting intention, influencing public opinion is an effective way of influencing politicians.
- Politicians will not spend a lot of time with an individual or group of people advocating for a particular cause, so you need to use the time well.
- Politicians see a lot of different people who are all advocating for a particular cause. To stand out and make a positive impact on a politician requires substantial preparation.
- 30 minutes is probably the maximum time you would get for a meeting with a politician.
- Don't feel offended if you end up meeting with an advisor rather than the MP (advisors influence politicians).
- Politicians have more time to hear from you when Parliament is not sitting so send information and request meetings with politicians in their electorate when Parliament is not sitting. The websites of federal and state parliament (www.aph.gov.au and www.parliament.nsw.gov.au) have downloadable calendars of when Parliament is sitting.
- Politicians are more likely to respond to the concerns of their constituents so involving the local community in your advocacy campaign improves your campaign and helps build community spirit.
- **Ask politicians to do a specific, achievable task.**
- Do research on what is a reasonable ask
For example: Asking your local MP to help arrange for the Housing Minister to meet with African families who will describe the difficulty they have had fitting their large families into public housing accommodation and asking that he ensure the redevelopment of social housing at Bonnyrigg includes larger properties is more effective than writing to your local MP saying there needs to be more affordable housing in Western Sydney.
- Before contacting politicians work out:
 - Which level of government is responsible for your area of concern?
 - How are decisions made in relation to this issue?
 - Is there legislation that needs to be changed to get the outcome you want?
 - Is there a review taking place that you can make a submission to?
 - What are the likely timeframes for a government decision on the matter?
 - Is a decision and announcement on the issue likely to be part of the budget? (11 May 2010 for the federal government and 8 June 2010 for the NSW budget)

- How will the upcoming election impact on the timing of a government decision on the matter? (federal election most likely in the second half of 2010 and NSW election 26 March 2011)
- What has the politician said on the issue previously? This tells you whether they will be supportive, hostile or already informed about the issue.
- What will you ask your local MP to do for you?
 - Forward your letter to the Minister
 - Raise the issue in caucus
 - Help you get a meeting with the Minister
 - Raise your issue in a relevant parliamentary committee inquiry they are chairing
 - Find out through the Minister's office which public servant you can work with to present a solution to government to resolve a problem...
- What issues is the politician passionate about?
 - What did they do before entering parliament?
 - What did they talk about in their first speech?
 - Is there a union that they listen to that you can ask for support?
- Senators and Members of the Legislative Council in the NSW Parliament (MLCs) from minor parties or independents can be the key politicians who determine whether or not the law is changed. It is particularly important to find out what they have already said on the issue and what the best approach for influencing them is, before you contact them.
- Senators and MLCs from major parties have responsibility for certain parts of NSW. Liberal Senator Marise Payne has responsibility for Western Sydney and the ALP website tells you which electorates ALP senators have responsibility for.
- Don't leave lobbying to 'experts'. Hearing your clients' stories and why their ideas for change will work is likely to have more influence over a politician than for them to meet with a lobbyist they know well.
- It can be empowering for everyone involved to include clients in all aspects of your advocacy campaign. It is important to ensure that they have realistic expectations of what can be achieved so they are not disenfranchised from speaking out in the future.
- **Be well planned, clear, concise and compelling.**