

## **INFLUENCE AND PERSUASION: GETTING IT RIGHT WITH POLITICIANS**

Got an issue you care about and want to make a difference? Join the club! Politicians meet with hundreds of groups each year, every one of them convinced their issue is the most important and must be acted upon. Who are the successful ones? Those groups/advocates that understand about political quid pro quo and have a clear, focused strategic plan.

### **Steps to Success:**

1. Develop your strategic plan. (as discussed in this workshop).
2. Know the strategic players in government that have decision-making authority on your issue: is it local, provincial, federal? The person in opposition offers different benefits than the person in government. Depending on the nature of your strategy, this may or may not be the right approach for you.
3. Get to know the bureaucrats who have responsibilities in your area of interest. They have an insider's knowledge of government priorities and current work plans, and often have better information about legislative or policy review cycles than politicians do. These folks can be your best allies.
4. Understand the policy cycle process and time your presentations accordingly. Don't lobby an MLA about a legislative change you want in April: you need to have a minimum of a one year lead time. The legislative planning cycle begins in the fall, so be ready for that window of opportunity.
5. Make your case compelling, sympathetic, or winnable. In other words, how is this important to the public/community? Does it solve a problem? Is there a way of tying your project to an issue of high public currency? For example: new infrastructure announcement for bridges and roads in the interior; high gas prices.
6. Have lots of allies that support your work. Get letters of support from other levels of government (a politician often loves to write these kinds of letters), community groups, agencies, family or sport groups: any one that might have an interest in your issue. Creating a broadly based community "win-win" is something a politician loves to be a part of. Make clear how your project will help many constituents who will be very grateful.
7. Figure out a way to make sure the politician will get some visibility or credit for the project/proposal/policy change. Can you invite them to be the keynote speaker at your AGM? Host them for breakfast during a meeting with community supporters and the media? Issue a press release that acknowledges their interest in your issues? Special event/ leadership opportunities?
8. Understand your opponents: does the local running club have a problem with bikers on the local walking trail? Are mountain bike riders destroying the grassland trail by riding out of season? Know your liabilities, and make sure you have alternatives/answers you can present. This is particularly important if the politician makes contact with bureaucrats and staff prior to your meeting with them. Staff often have their own biases and beliefs, and can give advice that will shut down full consideration of your ideas.

9. Get to know the local constituency/riding office staff. These people can be great allies. Ask their advice about meetings, events you are planning, ways of getting the politician involved. If your work is perceived as having a decent community profile and will bring credit to the MP/MLA, they will make sure you get as much access as you need.
10. When you set up a meeting with this person, come prepared.
  - Don't bring more than 2 or 3 people
  - Ask for 45 minutes: present for less than 30 and offer a chance for discussion at the end of the meeting
  - Be clear on why this is a powerful opportunity for working together and what it offers in the way of a community profile
  - Include how it fits within their priorities, goals, campaign pledges, values or beliefs
  - Be polite: don't allow a strong proponent to become an aggressor
  - Watch for non-verbal cues/signals about when you might need to slow down, provide different information, speed up your presentation, or stop.
  - Show appreciation for their time and effort
  - Make it clear you will do the leg work, research and follow-up: don't assume they have the time or resources to do this for you
  - Have a written summary that includes your goal, actions you hope can be taken
  - Listen to their perspective: try and find ways of accommodating their concerns and approaches. Be as flexible as possible.
  - A small win is better than no win: don't go in with a shopping list. Take incremental steps and celebrate successes. Give credit when credit is due.
  - At the end of the meeting summarize outcomes, agree on next steps
  - Don't try and force a response: many times they will need to check in with others about possibilities. They won't want to make a commitment if they don't feel they can keep it. Agree on a time when you can call back or expect to hear from their staff person(s).
  - Check in on progress, but don't be a pest. Ask how you can help if delay seems to become a pattern.
  - Be patient: internal contacts can take time. Politicians often need to use their own internal networks to figure out how to act on an idea; if it's a larger scale item, they too may need to do some lobbying. Understanding the complexity from their perspective helps.
11. Meeting follow up: a brief letter of thanks is always polite.

Good luck!

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