So you’ve got 30 minutes with the minister...now what?
Sharpening your message for maximum impact

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ONTARIO NONPROFIT NETWORK

Maytree
Poverty • Rights • Change
Moderator

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1. What you need to know about Ministers
What motivates Ministers?

• Every politician wants to be a hero – Successful advocates help them advance their priorities and solve problems and obstacles in their path

• Politicians fall along a spectrum – Wonks at one end (show me the data), politicos at the other (let’s make a deal). Decide which you’re dealing with and tailor conversation accordingly.
What motivates Ministers?

• Politicians relate to people – Evidence is important, but should always be paired with compelling stories that put a human face on the issue.

• Politicians want to say “yes” – But you need to give them something they can say ‘yes’ to. This means building a strong case and support among internal and external stakeholders before you meet the Minister.
Ministers are powerful, but only to a point

Ministers can make policy, program and spending changes that:

• Are within their mandate alone (don’t involve other ministries/depts.)
• Align with govt’s general direction to date
• Entail no new costs
• Can be funded through internal reallocation of $ (within ministry/dept.)

Anything else needs to be negotiated with others (e.g. other ministries/departments, Finance, office of the Premier/PM) and, in some cases, approved by Cabinet
2. Setting your objectives
What is your target outcome for this meeting?

• Knowledge sharing?
• A funding commitment?
• Program change?
• Administrative change?
• Policy/regulatory change?
• An agreed on process (e.g. for research, consultation, negotiation)?

A clear objective helps determine what you share and how you do it.
3. Preparation
Before the meeting, you should know the following about your ‘ask’:

- **Fit with political priorities/values** of the Minister/government
- Where there is **common ground** you can build on
- **Benefits** to citizens and to the government
Mapping the lay of the land

- Associated **costs and risks** for the government

- If ministry/dept. officials support or oppose it and why

- If other relevant stakeholders support or oppose it and why

- Your response to potential critiques

Refine your idea and build support beforehand. Meeting the Minister is the last step in the advocacy process – not the first!
Prepare a 1-2 page briefing note

You may use this in your meeting or a similarly structured PowerPoint, but it is a good leave behind and ensures you have answered all the key questions:

• **Recommendation** – Precise statement of what you are recommending in 1-3 lines
• **Rationale** – Key arguments in favour of recommendation with supporting analysis and facts/data
Prepare a 1-2 page briefing note

• **Context** – Optional, but sometimes helps to provide historical context (e.g. what’s been done to date and why more action is needed) and/or descriptive facts and figures that help to underscore why recommendation is important and necessary

• **Benefits** – Benefits to individuals, relevant stakeholder groups and the government
Prepare a 1-2 page briefing note

• **Cost** – Total cost over specified time period and who will pay it. Include annual costs if not equally split. Add a high-level budget if relevant and indicate other matching cash/in-kind resources that would be leveraged.

• **Other considerations** – This is a catch-all to address potential impacts and risks the government may be concerned about and how these can be mitigated.
If possible, align messaging with officials

- ‘No surprises’ is the best policy

- Build a long term relationship with officials to help ensure commitments outlast individual Ministers and governments

- If you have a friendly working relationship, share briefing notes with officials beforehand to get their feedback
If possible, align messaging with officials

- A good briefing note may be reproduced, in part, by officials briefing the Minister and shared with other relevant parties in government

- It also reduces likelihood of anyone inadvertently mischaracterizing your ‘ask’
4. The meeting
Great advocacy is built on aspiration, hard evidence and a compelling story

1. Be positive
   • Use an opportunity frame – it is more motivating than focusing on problems
   • Be bold and aspirational – it inspires
Great advocacy is built on aspiration, hard evidence and a compelling story

2. Use evidence to make your case
   - **Fact base** – Rigorous and supports your case
   - **Comparative data** – Appeal to desire to measure up and be the best
   - **Authorities/think tanks** – Use analysis from organizations the government respects
   - **Polling** – Data that demonstrates resonance with public
Great advocacy is built on aspiration, hard evidence and a compelling story

3. Tell stories
   • Human face – Captures people dimension and engages the emotions
   • Success stories from other jurisdictions – Build proof of possibility and sense of efficacy
Delivering your ‘ask’

- **Thank the Minister** for seeing you
- **Do introductions** (get card from Minister’s staff person for follow-up)
- **Tell them a little bit about your organization(s)**

- **Verbally present your ‘ask’** following the briefing note or a companion powerpoint (bring copies for everyone in the meeting)

- **Invite questions and feedback.** Listen and take notes on:
  - What they like
  - What they have concerns about
  - What they need more information on

- **Discuss next steps.** More information? Follow-up meetings? Further refine the idea and/or build necessary support?
  - **Thank everyone for their time and feedback**
5. Follow-up
Follow-up is critical to ‘keeping your ball in play’

Follow-up is a necessary next step to:

• **Consolidate** gains

• **Document and hold people accountable** for agreed on actions

• **Signal seriousness** and professionalism

• **Establish a positive rapport** and effective communications

• **Keep your ‘ask’ alive and moving** and prevent it from falling to the bottom of the priority list
Stop and reflect on what you heard

• Does the Minister agree that there is a problem/opportunity?
• Do they agree on what it is?
• Do they think it's important?
• Do they agree with your recommended course of action?
• If not, why not?
• Do you need to explore these questions more?
• Do you need to do more research or consultation - On the issue? The solution?
• How do you plan to do this?
Follow-up can be quick but is more often a longer process with twists and turns along the way. Start by:

- **Debriefing on the meeting** and decide how to proceed

- **Sending an email within 24 hours** to political/civil service staff to:
  - Thank them for a productive meeting
  - **Document items of agreement, feedback, and follow up actions** with individuals responsible and agreed on timelines
  - **If appropriate, suggest a future check-in** (email or meeting) to see how things are progressing. If you’re not clear on who to follow up with, ask them to advise.
...but it can be a long and winding road

• **Identifying steps you need to take** to further refine your recommendation and/or build support.

• **Developing an action plan** with designated leads and timelines and periodic check-ins if necessary.
6. Conclusion
Relationship building is critical

Few ‘asks’ are successful right out of the gate. Most require a longer, iterative process of engagement.

When done right, this builds mutual understanding, trust and support that make future ‘asks’ much easier.
Relationship building is critical

Success is enhanced when you:

1. Link to the government’s priorities
2. Frame your ‘ask’ in language they can embrace
3. Listen to feedback, learn and adapt
4. Acknowledge tradeoffs/issues and help to work through them
5. Focus on building a long term relationship with civil servants and political level
6. Acknowledge and publicly recognize progress
Resources


Thank you!

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Next Webinar

Collaborating for change in today’s political environment

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