

# 4 INFLUENCING POLICYMAKERS

*Convincing policy makers often requires a combination of approaches. Take time to consider which approaches are more likely to influence policy makers and help you pave a way towards objective wins. Study other organizations and how they achieved a breakthrough on an issue with their campaign, both here and abroad. Each action can help move the ball forward. Each objective met is an incremental win towards the final goal.*

## IDENTIFYING WHO TO INFLUENCE

### Government Departments/Agencies

Identify what government agency or department is responsible for your issue – there is always a primary lead. Then list the secondary departments, too. Identify the policy “hook” – the policy reason – for why a given agency would care. Describe how implementing your objectives and goal can support their various agendas (like: economic development, national security, international relations and tourism, for example).



### Agency Officials and Civil Servants

Your given policy goal will most likely be overseen by agency officials, also known as civil servants. Often they will be in their position longer than politicians and know their topics well. Don’t underestimate their power. Identify the officials both working on and leading your issue. Reach out to them and try to build a relationship.

### Elected Officials

Depending on your strategy, identify and create relationships with elected officials from both sides, if possible. Few large wins are won in a corner so walk across the aisle. Form a loose “coalition” of elected officials (like Members of Congress) to champion your cause, open doors to other influencers, and drive legislation through introductions, committees, floor votes, and needed reconciliation with another chamber, (House or Senate, State or Federal). Often, there is no strong resistance to IRF issues – the challenge instead is simply getting the attention of lawmakers to take action, including moving a bill through the process. Most importantly, good working relationships with staff are crucial. They are the real actors behind the scenes who cause things to move forward or not. Know their names and be respectful of their influence.

### Share Information

Compile and disseminate information on the issue to officials including reports and relevant materials. Share knowledge on developments and policies on your

issue. Contribute to relevant national consultations, action plans and committees that could support progress on the issue in your country. Offer expertise, suggest talking points, and provide encouragement for progress.

## BE A TRUSTED RESOURCE

*Time and again policy makers report their appreciation for information and resources on an issue – be the expert that helps your lawmakers. You will quickly knock yourself out of the game if you tend to overstate or provide unreliable information. Be strict with yourself on this point and preserve your credibility, which is a key asset.*

## PREPARING FOR AN ADVOCACY MEETING (whether an official or their staff)

- Clearly identify your meeting objectives, such as getting information or changing the person's position.
- Determine your main message. What are you asking this decision maker to do? IF YOU CAN'T SAY IT IN ONE SENTENCE - YOU DON'T HAVE A TARGETED MESSAGE.
- Prepare and rehearse your arguments and answers to possible questions.
- Study previous stands your official has taken on your issue. Know them and repeat, especially if favorable.
- Know key facts and figures, with the ability to describe the impact on issues important to the official.
- Prepare specific questions, for example on a decision-making process or timeline.
- Consider preparing a one-pager or briefing note to share as a “leave behind.”
- Be polite and respectful, even if disagreeing, and thank the officials for their time.
- Take notes during the meeting including action points, and share with your staff and campaign colleagues. Know when not to take notes if the discussion is off the record.
- At the end of the meeting, take a picture with the official and share on social media with your message, if appropriate.
- Take a business card and send a thank you email after your meeting.



## APPROACHES TO INFLUENCING POLICYMAKERS

Once you have crafted your overall **campaign strategy**, identified who you need to influence and **crafted your messages**, there are some key approaches you can use to influence decision makers for support and action. Analyze the stages of decision making within your political system, and consider which tactics can help influence change at each stage.

### Developing partnerships

If possible, forming partnerships between government and civil society actors is integral to promoting policy reforms.

Building positive opportunities with policy makers and their staff is key. Consider appealing both to a sense of right as well as to self-interest. Inspire action by offering valuable exposure to media stories and photo opportunities, chances to speak at public events or co-organize events, participation in days of action, or attending important meetings or field visits.

Be efficient and do not take too much time - officials are busy and will have multiple portfolios. Be reliable and help them make the case to other decision makers. Do research for them. Provide timely assistance.

### Advocacy meetings

Engage policy makers with face-to-face advocacy meetings.

Try to secure a meeting with high level officials occasionally but meet frequently with staff. Consider who in your campaign allies is most likely to get an in-person meeting, and who is influential in face-to-face conversations. Prepare your verbal case well and bring a concise, effective written document, or “1-pager” to leave behind.

Take notes and document the results of your meeting for follow-up and track progress. Share insights with your staff and partners.

### Informal lobbying

Sometimes it might be too difficult or not desirable to organize a formal advocacy meeting in a government building. Instead you might want to try to talk to an official outside of a traditional policy arena like a reception or other less formal occasions. But be professional and not intrude on personal time.

### Letter writing

Writing letters to policy makers is a surprisingly good way to persuade them to prioritize an issue. Letters can empower staff to discuss the issue with superiors. Identify who to write to and the best time to send a letter. Individual but coordinated letters arriving at the same time, such as on an anniversary or during important policy junctures, can have a large impact. Or ask members or partners to co-sign one letter to give it more weight.

Having diverse groups from multiple sectors is helpful. ***Communications by constituents from a given voting district or a politically important constituency are most helpful of all.***

### **Round tables and workshops**

Invite policy makers to take part in public or private round table discussions or workshops on your issue. It can build ongoing, positive relationships with supportive officials, and give them a platform for learning and sharing their views, while building their sense of positive involvement with the issue.



### **Field visits**

Seeing the problem and solutions firsthand can have big impact. Coordinated visits to communities or countries is an effective way to educate and persuade decision makers to advocate for your issue. Field visits also provide officials with positive media coverage and experiences they can share afterward, which can further strengthen their commitment.

### **International visits/missions**

Visits by international allies can be good opportunities to advance the issue in your country. They provide additional chances to meet with and influence key policy makers and garner media coverage.

### **Working with international partners**

Working with international partners may help you gain access to and influence decision makers. In some cases, it is helpful to collaborate with the embassies of supportive countries or influential allies. Knowledgeable UN agencies or international NGOs often have good relations with other officials. Coordinate your advocacy strategically with a range of key partners to increase impact.

### **Regional and international events**

There is a regular schedule of international meetings that provide opportunities for influencing policy. Consider regional and inter-governmental meetings where decision makers are meeting on related issues where you could organize advocacy activities such as networking, hosting side events, launching reports, and more. They are also key milestones at which your country's government could announce and receive positive attention for steps forward on an issue.