Five top tips for lobbying and advocacy

TIP 1: Prepare – know who you are talking to

If you can, find out:

* What is their role?
* What are they interested in?
* What activity have they been involved in recently (have they asked questions, taken part in debates, written articles in the media?)
* What angle is likely to appeal to them?

TIP 2: Prepare – know what you want to talk about

What are the top three messages you want them to take away? What interesting information, that they wouldn’t already know, can you give them?

* Prepare your top three messages in advance
* Practice saying them out loud
* Be succinct – you may only have 15-20 minutes in the meeting, get your messages across quickly and clearly
* Think about what the counter-arguments might be and be prepared to deal with them
* Don’t worry, you don’t have to know the answer to every question - you can always offer to get back to them.

TIP 3: Prepare – know what you want them to do

At least one of your key messages should be what you want them to do. Otherwise you could have an excellent meeting, successfully persuade them that your issue is important, but have no impact. You will only achieve something from the meeting if they go away and do something as a result. You can ask them what they can do to support you, but better still try and give them suggestions.

* Think about what is in their power to deliver
* Think about the positive consequences of them acting – for them and more generally e.g. “there are so many people in your constituency who support human rights – showing what you stand for will really appeal to them”, “If you write a supportive statement it could give you positive media coverage”

TIP 4: Be polite and stay positive

It is natural to want to raise criticisms or strong recommendations in meetings; this is what advocacy is all about. But many people respond badly to criticism – they become defensive and are less likely to listen to the value of what you are suggesting. So if you can, always start and end the conversation on something positive.

Remember that sometimes politicians can be very frustrating - you may even fundamentally disagree with what they are saying. The best lobbyists always remain calm, polite and friendly.

* Take the “oreo cookie” approach and sandwich your criticism between positive points
* Keep calm, smile and avoid being too argumentative or defensive. Press your point, think of different ways to get your message across, but remain polite at all times.
* It’s a little known fact, but myth-busting…doesn’t work! ‘Myth-busting’ can boost the morale of those already onside but they struggle to persuade others. On polarised issues use positive language rather delivering facts and try to appeal to the person you are speaking to

TIP 5: The start of a fruitful relationship?

The follow up after the meeting is just as important. You need to keep the relationship with the contact going. After the meeting, write/contact them to:

* Thank them
* Send a copy of your notes, including a record of action points (yours and theirs)
* Follow up on any points you agreed to