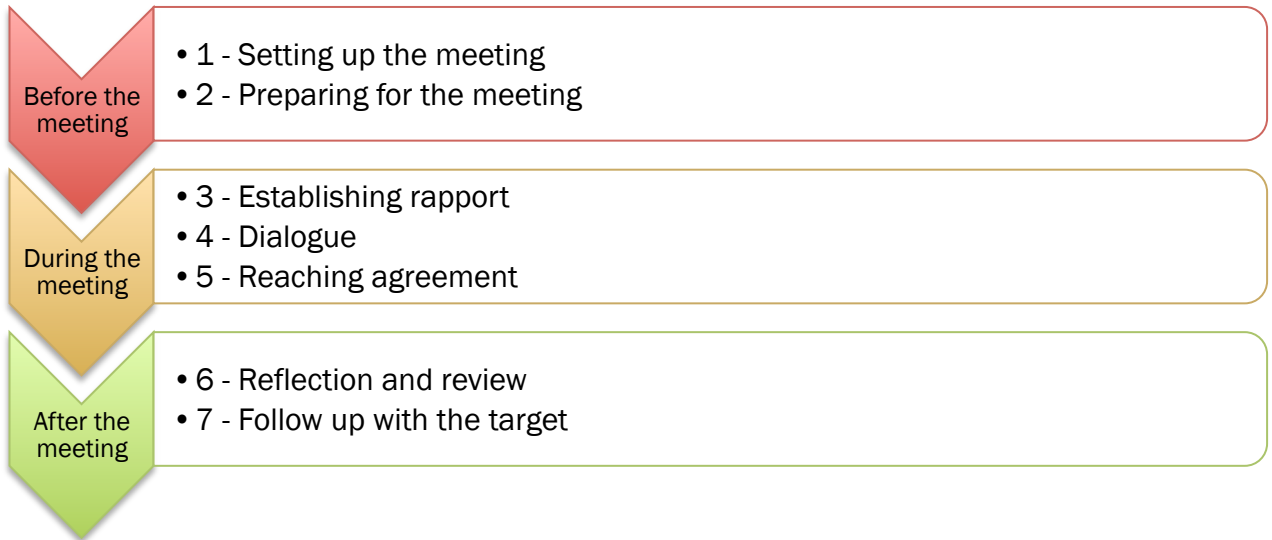


Lobbying

Lobbying is the process of influencing an individual (the decision-maker or some other influential person) through directly engaging with them, usually through a face-to-face meeting but sometimes over the phone. The key feature of lobbying is it involves a two-way dialogue.

Not all advocacy/campaign strategies will include direct targeting of high-influence individuals, but when they do it is likely that lobbying will be one of your influencing tactics with that target. The stakes can be high in a lobbying meeting, so it is important that they are planned and conducted effectively.

There are seven steps to effective lobbying:



Just as lobbying is only part of the advocacy process, so an individual lobbying meeting is only one part of the lobbying process. Here we look at what is involved with a single lobbying meeting; it assumes that the overall objectives for your advocacy are clear, and that you have an influencing strategy that sets out a rationale for targeting this individual

Before the meeting

1) Setting up the meeting

The meeting could be arranged in advance or it could happen by chance.

- Pre-arranged meetings will often happen at the office of the lobbying target, although other locations may be possible such as in the fringes of a conference or at an official visit to one of your projects.
- Chance meetings could be at a social event, in the buffet queue at a conference, at an airport or in an elevator. The meeting might not be completely accidental – if you know where your target is going, you may try to be there at the same time and create a ‘chance’ meeting.

Knowing who and when to meet

As stated above, lobbying is just one part of the advocacy process. To get agreement from the target for a lobbying meeting will usually be as a result of other advocacy activities that you have already done – activities that have put your issue on the agenda and established your credibility and power.

If lobbying a government ministry, it is usually easier to get agreement to meet first with more junior officials, and then gradually work your way up the hierarchy by getting each lobbying target to help arrange meetings with the next level up. In this way you can build understanding

and support from sympathetic officials as you move up so that, by the time you get to the political decision makers and controllers of budgets, you have a broad base of institutional support behind you.

However, if the Minister already regards you as an influential actor, it may be better to arrange a meeting with the Minister at an earlier stage to get them to direct their officials to work with you. The danger with this approach is that if your direct influence is not as strong as you thought it was, the meeting with the Minister may simply be as protocol meeting that has little meaningful dialogue and not action coming out of it. Many lobbying meetings fail because they take place too early in the advocacy process, before real power and widespread support has been established.

Making the appointment

Whoever you are trying to meet, when you request a meeting you will also have to explain the purpose – the topic for discussion, why you want to meet them and why it would be valuable for the target to meet you. This will probably require you to highlight your credentials and sources of power.

The more senior the target, the more likely it is that they will only meet you with their subordinates present to support them. It is helpful if you can find out when making the appointment who they will be. Try asking the target's secretary who else has been invited. If you are meeting more than one person, you need to decide whether you should go alone or take one or two other people with you.

Creating opportunities to meet

If you are trying to engineer an 'accidental' meeting with someone with whom it would be hard to arrange a formal meeting, you need to identify potential scenarios where you and your target will be at the same place at the same time. If possible, arrange for a mutual friend to introduce you at that place.

2) Preparing for the meeting

The key to successful lobbying is preparation:

Be clear why you want to influence this person

- What could they do, and what do you want them to do?

Decide what you want from this meeting

- Ideally, you will want them to agree with all of your demands, but this is unlikely to be achieved in one meeting, so you need to be clear about what your priorities are as well as your bottom line – the minimum response from the lobbying target that is needed for you to continue the process.
- This might involve, for example, a second meeting, an agreement to visit your project, or a commitment to take some intermediate action.
- You might also want to set yourself goals of gathering information from the target on their position and priorities and the positions of others.

Know your target

- What do they know and believe about the issue and you?
- What are their priorities?
- What type of personality do they have?

Prepare and rehearse your arguments

- Identify your sources of power.
- What are the arguments most likely to succeed with the targets? What evidence do you have to support these arguments?
- What counter-arguments are they likely to put forward and how will you respond to them?

Agree your roles and who will say what

- Don't feel that everyone in your delegation should have an equal say, even if they come from different organisations within your network. One person should take the lead, with others there to respond to specific questions or issues. Too many speakers means not enough time for listening.
- Agree what you will wear so that you are dressed appropriately.

During the meeting

3) Establishing rapport

You must arrive on time for the meeting, even if the target then makes you wait.

When you are invited in to meet the target, greet them warmly and politely, ensuring that everyone is properly introduced (exchanging business cards is helpful) and that their credentials (sources of power) are subtly referenced.

You then need to follow established protocol and quickly establish some form of rapport. How this is done varies widely from culture to culture.

- In some societies, it is expected to drink tea and talk about mutual contacts or unrelated events for some time before it is considered polite to start talking about the subject of the meeting.
- In other contexts, this 'grounding process' is expected to be much quicker, and a lengthy pre-amble will be regarded as time wasting.

If you are an outsider to the culture of your target, take advice from an experienced local.

If you are confident in your ability to do this, you can try using some NLP (neuro-linguistic programming) techniques such as pacing and mirroring to deepen rapport.

The purpose of this rapport-building process is to ensure that everyone is relaxed and comfortable and thus more likely to listen openly and engage in genuine dialogue.

At some point, the target will probably indicate that the formal part of the meeting is to begin by either addressing the topic directly themselves or by inviting you to speak.

4) Dialogue

The meeting should all be about dialogue, so you need to listen to the targets as much as you speak to them.

- The main thing to remember is that you are not trying to win an argument; you are trying to influence the target and reach an agreement. If you try to prove yourself cleverer or better informed than the target by winning an argument, it is likely that you will lose in the long run by creating an enemy.
- Targets will only change their viewpoints if they know that they are being heard and their motives are respected. Lobbyists need to be assertive to ensure that their arguments are put forward, but not aggressive.

If invited, you can begin by briefly stating your case – a summary of the issue and what you want from the target. You shouldn't spend long doing this – a minute or two at most – as the target probably knows all this (or they wouldn't have agreed to meet you in the first place). The purpose is to set the scene for the dialogue to follow.

Listen to their response (including any non-verbal signals). Probe them for more details if you don't understand their position or arguments.

Answer their objections, but keep focussed on your priorities and what you want them to do (don't get distracted or side-tracked).

Keep calm.

Pick up on any openings they are offering you.

Explore different options.

If it is appropriate, take notes of what is said.

Be ready to counter the blocking tactics used by the officials you are lobbying: delaying, disputing evidence, passing the buck, challenges to your legitimacy or objectivity, divide-and-rule, side-tracking, distracting, intimidating and provoking. And don't be taken in by flattery and empty promises.

5) Reaching agreement

It is important that you before you leave the meeting, something is agreed that will enable the lobbying process to continue. If nothing is agreed, then the process is over and you are back to square one (or even worse, as it will now be harder to get another meeting).

So, when you are half-way through the scheduled time for the meeting, you need to ensure that the focus of the conversation is on what you want the target to do and agreeing the next steps.

This may involve exploring and negotiating some compromises, using “if...then” language – ie, “if you agree to visit our project and meet the people affected by the current policies, then we can arrange for some journalists to be present” or “if you instruct your team to review the current policy, then we can bring in some of our experts to support them”.

At the end of the meeting, sum up what has been agreed. If your bottom line hasn't been reached and nothing agreed, then you need to take the action that you had planned to take in this circumstance.

After the meeting

6) Reflection and review

The first step is for your delegation to de-brief among yourselves:

- De-brief immediately (before you go back to your offices)
- Review what was said and gauge potential for further movement
- Plan your next steps
- Give each other feedback

Then you should write up the notes of the meeting and circulate them to your colleagues and network partners as appropriate (balancing the needs of confidentiality and transparency).

7) Follow up

You should also write straight away to the people you met, thanking them for the meeting and confirming in your letter what was agreed at the meeting. In this way, you are putting the agreements on the record and making it harder for the targets to change their minds.

If you agreed at the meeting to do something, make sure you do it promptly and well.

You can then plan your next meeting or influencing activity.

This is #6 of a series of Advocacy & Campaigning Guides by Ian Chandler. This version was published in January 2015.

Each guide aims to clearly and concisely show how progressive non-profit groups can make greater impact in their advocacy and campaigning. They can be downloaded for free from www.thepressuregroup.org

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