



NCOSS

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Flirting with Politicians¹

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Tips and insights to help you work effectively with members of parliament at State and federal level

MEETING WITH A PARLIAMENTARIAN

A. Make an appointment with the right person

1. Do your homework

- Know who you want and why.
- Visiting a politician successfully is highly dependent upon what you want to achieve.
 - If you are lobbying on behalf of a personal case or a limited case such as one family facing deportation or one person losing access to Medicare then you should restrict your lobbying to one or two parliamentarians, make sure that you alert them to the fact that you are dealing with someone else.
 - If you are lobbying on behalf of a group for a change in legislation then you should visit as many politicians as you can.
- Find out the politician's full name and title, party electorate and any committees they're on or positions they hold that might be relevant to your issue.
- Find out what their position is on the issue you need to approach them about.

¹ NB: This was the topic I was given.

2. Maybe you really want to see the adviser

- All members of Parliament have advisers. In some cases it may be better to speak to the adviser or the Member may wish you to speak to the adviser. This does not mean that your issue is being sidelined sometimes it means that you then in direct contact with the person who knows the most about your issue and can influence the opinion of the politician.

3. Make an appointment

- When you call don't explain the whole issue to the first person who answers the phone. Don't ask to speak to the politician directly. Ask for Diary Secretary or Personal Assistant.
- Tell the diary secretary what issues you want to discuss, how long you need and how many people will be with you. Two or three people are more than enough.
- Be specific about the amount of time you will need to spend most politicians will be comfortable with half an hour for an appointment time.
- Be punctual but then again be flexible! Be prepared to wait for your appointment or to have your appointment cancelled at short notice.
- Be prepared to wait for an appointment, as members of parliament have to schedule their lives around sitting weeks.
- Consider whether you can be flexible – most members of parliament have an electorate office (sometimes more than 1) as well as a Parliamentary office.

B. Prepare for the meeting

- Be clear about what outcome you are seeking - What sort of support do you want?
- It is OK to go for advice on what you can do about an issue but it is easier if the advice is based on an outcome you want to see such as:
 - Such as changes to legislation,
 - Senate inquiries raise the issue;
 - A parliamentary speech; or
 - Advocacy on behalf of your group or issue.
- Many people practice what they are going to say, rehearsing the issue and playing the scene out in their heads, this can lead to a situation where you are so nervous about forgetting all the things you wanted to say or so intent on the meeting going the way you planned that it can end in a bad way.

- For instance you must be prepared for the fact that the researcher or the member of parliament may be:
 - Well across the issue and don't want to go over it again;
 - That they know nothing about it and need to know the whole issue or
 - That they may want to go over it chronologically.

Hence they may not respond the way you wanted it to happen or envisioned it would happen.

Instead know your issue:

- Have dot points; don't go over and over the same ground,
- Have any articles that can be photocopied available, as the Member of Parliament can do it for you, but don't insist on going over everything in the documents,
- If at all possible have something that clearly and briefly outlines what you want. (I have heard advisers say they will only read the first paragraph of any document so make sure you get their interest early) This is a good tool for whoever it is who will be following up your issue.

C. FOLLOW UP

- The politician will generally have someone with him when he speaks to you. This is usually the person who will be doing the follow up so get their name and ensure that you chase them up.
- Find out whom they want you to liaise with and how: email or phone?
- You will ensure that your issue stays at the top of the pile if you gently stay in contact.
- If you have agreed with the politician on the issue you are concerned about and agreed on something they may do about it, then assisting them to do the task will ensure that you are successful.
- Staff are not going to work on your issue full time instead you may be able to continue on research, keep informed of latest developments and inform staff /politician.

D. If you are inviting them to attend a meeting

- Do let the politician know the correct address
- Do run on time
- Do let the politician know who will be present and if they are attending a formal or informal meeting

- Don't tell a politician they will be first speaker and then move them down the list as other speakers arrive and attempt to prove they are more important.
- Do inform the politician if lunch is included
- Don't fill the room with people who are examples of your problem or who will lobby individually

SIMPLE DO'S AND DON'TS

Do

- Remember to comment on positive things that they have done. Good legislation, speeches in parliament, comments in the media. Everyone likes to be acknowledged. This is especially important if you have asked for something and it has been done.
- Be aware that they may well have internal pressures within their party to conform to a particular policy direction. You may be able to help them.
- Check the status of information they tell you, or you tell them. You don't want them to use confidential information in a public forum or vice versa – so you must have the conversation.
- Be on time – even if they are not.

Don't

- If you criticise a member of parliament – make sure your facts are right and that you are sure of your position. Be aware of the implications.
- Be careful not to agree to something you can't deliver on. If you are representing a group and a pressured to accept a compromise that you are not sure of, make sure you check back with your group.

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

Party websites

www.democrats.org.au - The Australian Democrats

www.alp.org.au - The Australian Labor Party

www.liberal.org.au - The Australian Liberal Party

www.greens.org.au - The Australian Greens

These all have links to NSW sites. Party websites all include speeches and media releases, policies and other information. These are a good place to find out what the party has been doing.

The Prime Minister has his own website www.pm.gov.au

Some Ministers at State and Federal level have their own websites. These can usually be reached from a link on the parliament house website. Look for a list of members of parliament – either in Senate or House of Representatives (federal) or Legislative Council or Legislative Assembly (State). There will usually be a link from their personal page to their Ministerial page. This is always the case at the federal level, but not necessarily at the State level.

Bookmarks

www.aph.gov.au The website for Parliament House (federal). The library pages, Hansard and information and resources are very useful. There are good search facilities. Hansard is the record of parliament and committees and is usually published overnight. You can tell if a member of parliament has asked the question you wanted or made a speech or how they voted on a particular issue.

www.parliament.nsw.gov.au The NSW parliament website. Similar to the federal one above.

www.aec.gov.au The Australian Electoral Commission. Maps and info about federal electorates.

www.austlii.edu.au This is a huge site that contains lots of legislation. Best to know what you are looking for before you go looking.