How to lobby an MP

With grateful thanks to former MP Tim Barnett, who developed the resource this document is based on.

# Ten things for the lobbyist to know about MPs

1. **Attention junkies**
MPs (electorate, list, opposition and government) are driven by media coverage.
2. **Expert on a few things**
Given the complexity of it all, most MPs specialise mainly on what they did (and possibly plan to do) in their life on the outside.
3. **Spectator**
Most MPs, from whatever party, are less powerful than they think they are.
4. **Friendless**
MPs work in a highly competitive atmosphere where friendships are not easy to make or maintain. All MPs realise just how unpopular their profession is and seek constructive lobbying relationships.
5. **Human, after all**
MPs are also women, men, Māori, Pākehā, queer, straight, single, coupled and looking to life after parliament. The average time as an MP is six years. MPs are often fearful of losing their job.
6. **Kangaroo**
MPs spend their days and lives hopping from one issue to another, from one place to another.
7. **Information overload**
MPs are overwhelmed by an endless stream of letters, emails, media notifications, social media, internal comms and phone messages.
8. **Who to believe?**
On many issues, MPs receive contradictory information arguing opposite points of view. The use of selective and alternative “facts” is not uncommon.
9. **The same vices**
MPs don’t demand that information comes to them in a different way to other people. But the pressures they are under do mean that if you are to make an impact, your presentation needs to have an extra edge.
10. **Out of their hands**
The party whipping/mustering system in Parliament, coalition and other agreements and general election manifestos, and even Party policy takes many decisions out of the hands of individual MPs.

# Ten planning tips for the lobbyist to follow

1. **Know your topic and what you want to say about it**
Collect sufficient up-to-date information on the topic and identify what is special about you and the message you want to deliver.
2. **Decide who you need to get to**
Specify your target group, and break it into its component parts and levels of authority. For example, do you want to talk to all MPs in a geographical area, or all education spokespeople?
3. **Analyse**
Where do they get their information about education? What are their beliefs on the topic you want to talk with them about?
4. **Know the opposition**
Research how rival interests working on the same topic manage to get their views across.
5. **Narrow your options**
Prioritise the most effective way of getting your message across.
6. **Select appropriate options**
Identify how compatible your message is with those ways of getting the message to the target, remembering what resources are available to you and how your cause is perceived publicly.
7. **The marketing mix**
Combine your strengths, your message and your access to the information sources and your selected lobby option. Prioritise as you go.
8. **Do it**
There’s no getting out of it now!
9. **Reflect on it**
Evaluate what you did; revisit the marketing mix. If things went poorly, work your way back through the process until you understand why that happened.
10. **Record and archive**
Maintain records of contact made and copies of material produced.

# Ten things to think about as you plan the meeting

1. **Know why you want to meet**
The meeting must fit into your plan. The type of experience which you generate for the MP will determine the impact you make. Factors include - how important are they or could they be one day; how much time they have available; what communication methods do they prefer?
2. **Notice given**
If humanly possible, avoid making the meeting so urgent that other things have to be moved to make way for it. Let the MP’s office know what you want to see the MP about.
3. **Location**
An MP’s office is their comfort zone. Decide whether you want them to be comfortable, or want to challenge them a little.
4. **Time**
Ask for what you realistically need but be prepared for a few minutes or even a postponement if chaos descends on their day.
5. **Do your homework**
Research the known views of that MP, both in general and specifically about that topic. Also any information in their background which can be a starting point for genuine communication.
Pay attention to MP’s staff you meet in their office/at the meeting.
Recognise the constraints on them, e.g. a minister has the additional constraint of collective cabinet responsibility.
6. **Person and numbers**
Don’t overwhelm the MP with too many people in your delegation. Make sure that everyone present has a task or role.
7. **A dry run**
If the message is complicated, if the task of persuasion is hard, if there will be more than a couple of you at the meeting, meet and run through things beforehand.
8. **Image**
Wear whatever you feel most comfortable in. Make sure that you know where the meeting place is, and that you are on time.
9. **Something to leave**
Never leave the MP empty-handed. Prepare something which fits in with your message and reinforces key points. Work through it at the meeting and leave it for the MP to consider.
10. **Check you have the resources to keep the relationship going**
Plan ahead what action you will ask the MP to undertake, and any commitments you will make to them. Ensure that you have the resources to deliver what you promise, and make use of whatever they may do for you.

# Ten things to remember in the meeting

1. **Not too long**
Ask at the start how much time the MP has got and/or check with their staff member beforehand. Plan your presentation accordingly. If it sounds as though they have lots of time, don’t use it all up unless necessary.
2. **Keep them involved**
You have come to discuss an issue, not lecture the MP about it. Make sure that you don’t let your enthusiasm for the issue become a one-sided conversation.
3. **Recognise tiredness and boredom**
The MP may well be tired. Pick up the signs (snoring, irrational comments) and focus on the key points. Maybe even suggest a further meeting if things seem to be getting nowhere. Learn to read signs that MPs have stopped listening. Change the focus onto them; introduce something lighter.
4. **Follow the lead but stick to the knitting**
If the MP wants to talk about something even irrelevant to the topic, humour them and then try and massage the conversation back to the topic.
5. **Illustrate and justify**
When possible, bring issues to life with stories involving people, preferably real people from the MPs electorate. Don’t make exaggerated claims which sound unbelievable and can’t be justified.
6. **Stay safe**
Avoid entering the MP’s danger zone/s. *(I’m not sure what Tim Barnett was suggesting here! Liz)*
7. **Know your stuff**
Only admit ignorance if comprehensively cornered.
8. **Cope with aggression**
The MP may simply loathe the message or the messenger. Do what comes naturally and you won’t destroy a potential lobby relationship forever. If possible, maintain your cool and follow rational argument, focusing on the most powerful and irrefutable facts.
9. **Leave your message**
Prepare something which fits in with your message and reinforces key points. Work through a pre-prepared document which reinforces key points and leave it for the MP to consider.
10. **Make a hit**
Leave the MP with some action to undertake.
Follow up the meeting with a thank you note or phone call.
Forward any information the MP requests.
Keep in touch with them from time to time.
Ask them to do something achievable for you; this will keep you top of mind and is an easy way for the MP to show support for your cause.