

# HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY WITH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT

## ARRANGE ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS

The single most effective way to communicate your message to an elected official is through a face-to-face meeting, but it may be with an assistant, not the MP. Most assistants are experts in their areas, and MPs depend heavily on their expertise to help keep them informed. The assistant can give you an idea of where the MP stands on the issue, let you know what additional information might be needed and tell you what action the MP might be able to take.

The rule for one-on-one meetings with an assistant or the MP is to plan ahead: know your facts, know your MP, and know the arguments the opposition will be using against your position.

## SCHEDULING A MEETING

Such a meeting can take place in the MP's Ottawa office or in the MP's riding office. If you know your MP is going to be home for a Parliamentary recess, take advantage of this time by planning a meeting in the riding. It is usually much easier to schedule a personal appointment with an MP (even one who is a Cabinet Minister) in her or his constituency office than in their Ottawa office. Virtually all MPs have regular constituency office appointment hours. Otherwise, you may call the CPA Head Office staff who are always willing to work with you to set up such a meeting when you are in Ottawa.

Contact your MP's Appointment Secretary, state your affiliations and the subject you wish to discuss, and ask for 15 to 20 minutes of your MP's time. If it is clear that the MP is unable to meet with you, then a very good substitute is a meeting with the assistant in charge of the issue area you are interested in discussing. **DO NOT FEEL DISCOURAGED IF YOU CANNOT MEET WITH YOUR MP.** In fact, public officials have demanding schedules and depend on their assistants to research issues and report on constituent concerns. Call to confirm your meeting a few days before it is scheduled to occur.

## ONCE THE MEETING IS SCHEDULED

Do your homework. Learn as much as you can about the MP's record as it relates to your issue. Be prepared to talk in detail and directly about the issue you wish to discuss. Know the opposing arguments as well as those in favour of your view. Have your information ready in a digestible, concise form, just as you would when writing a letter or making a telephone call. Have personal stories ready – case studies that illustrate the human side of what you're talking about. Be able to answer specific questions on how the issue affects you, your community, the province or the country in general.

If possible, find out about the MP's record on the issue you wish to discuss – public statements, legislation, etc. It's much better to know if the legislator doesn't support your position before you go in than to find out during the meeting. Supply fact sheets. It's important when you go that you leave something (e.g., a one-page synopsis describing the issue in bullet form) with the assistant or the MP.

# HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY WITH MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT (CONT.)

## DURING THE MEETING

Be on time. But don't be surprised if they are not. Parliamentary schedules are hectic and being a visitor to Parliament Hill often requires patience and flexibility.

Establish ties. Introduce yourself, convey information about your affiliations, and exchange pleasantries briefly.

Don't waste time. Get right to the issue you wish to discuss. Don't get bogged down in small talk. You will have a precious few minutes with the MP, and you have a purpose for the meeting.

- Be inquiring. Ask your MP if he or she is familiar with your issue. If the answer is negative, take the opportunity to inform him or her. If the answer is positive, ask him or her to state his or her position. If he or she is unable to do so, then say you will check back later.
- Be assertive. Know what you want in advance and ask for it.
- Be respectful. Be tolerant of differing views and keep the dialogue open. State your points clearly and firmly, but don't argue. Never speak badly of other legislators or organizations. Always be polite but don't let politeness make you timid.
- Be responsive. Try to answer questions. When you can't, offer to get back to your MP with the information. It is much more important for you to provide accurate information than to give an answer which may be incorrect.
- Be appreciative. Always end the meeting on a courteous note. Thank him or her for the time spent with you and leave promptly. Follow up with a thank-you letter, capitalizing on the opportunity to restate your points.

## FORM COALITIONS

Coalitions are an integral part of successful grassroots campaigns. They help us extend our reach and broaden our message. Strong coalitions are made up of individuals or groups with similar interests.

Excerpts from "How to Communicate Effectively with Members of Parliament"  
An Advocacy Guide for Psychologists  
Canadian Psychological Association  
[http://cpa.ca/documents/advocacy\\_p5.htm](http://cpa.ca/documents/advocacy_p5.htm)