

Local Members of Parliament - Advocacy Kit

Influencing Members of Parliament

There are two main rules for influencing MPs

- **Point 1: MPs perform best when they are engaged with their electorate. A single MP can't be expected to know what's happening if they're not told.**

MPs must be supported by voters to be able to stay in office and achieve their goals. As a local voter this provides you, your mentors and other program stakeholders with a great opportunity to have your interests taken seriously.

- **Point 2: In order to influence policy you have to get the right information (a compelling problem and an effective solution) to the right person (an individual who has the power to get you what you want) at the right time (before a formal decision needs to be made).**

You must clearly communicate the needs you are working to meet (eg. keeping young people engaged with school), as well as evidence that your program is an effective solution to that problem (evaluation data and feedback from participants about the impact of your program).

Communicating Your Message to your Local MP

- Make phone calls, send emails or hard copy letters to your local MP requesting their support (see the sample letter attached).
- Mobilise mentors, young people and even their families, to advocate on behalf of the program, by communicating the request to their own MPs. You could arrange a petition or ask a key stakeholder to write directly to MPs about the impact of your program.
- Set up face-to-face meetings with your local MP. The most effective way to communicate with MPs is at your program site or in the MP's electorate office. These meetings typically run 15-30 minutes, with a focus on making the case for why your youth mentoring program is so important and then asking the MP for his or her support.
- Engage the media by sending letters to the editor and press releases to your local paper about the support you require.

Tips for Meeting with Your Local MP

1. Be aware that MPs are constantly meeting with people who are desperate to gain support for their cause. Make sure you engage your MP in a low key way first without a 'hard ask'. It is always better to ask for something when you have an existing positive relationship and especially when you've given them an opportunity to be in a newsletter or celebrate at an event.
2. Make friends with electorate officers. The person who answers the phone may be the MP's eyes and ears in the electorate and an adviser on which events/ people the MP should engage with.
3. Don't feel that an initial meeting with an electorate officer is a brush off, especially if the electorate happens to belong to a senior Minister. In those areas the electorate officer is sometimes the de facto MP attending the local events the MP can't make. They may also want to be a mentor or put the organisation in touch with potential mentors.
4. Have a plan for what you would like to accomplish by the end of the conversation and most importantly what you want them to do for you (as they know that's why you're meeting). Time is a valuable commodity for MPs, so it is important to be prepared.
5. Who you bring into the meeting matters. Bring staff or a mentoring match who can speak directly and personally to the positive impacts of participating in your program. Because MPs care most about what is going on in their own electorate, it is helpful if your spokespeople are voters or, at least residents, in the MP's area.
6. Stay on message. Be clear about what you want your MP to know about your program, and most importantly, what you would like them to do for you. Although you will rarely get a commitment on the spot, it is critical that you have a specific ask.
7. Bring materials that clearly present your case for support. Include any relevant data on the outcomes of your program and the value that your program brings to the electorate. Incorporate visual aids, such as tables and charts, that help you communicate your case more effectively.
8. Bring a camera. MPs are always interested in good publicity, so take pictures and use them in press releases in the local media and your own organisational newsletter. Just make sure you ask their office in advance.
9. Leave information behind with staff that clearly communicates your request and the reasoning that supports it.
10. Thank your MP and follow-up with their staff. Be sure to send thank you notes after meetings and get the contact information for staff so that you can follow-up on any action items discussed.
11. Ensure your MP is on appropriate mailing and invite lists. Even if they don't attend your event, their staff will see the correspondence and be reminded of your program.
12. Keep the long term relationship in mind. Your ultimate goal is a positive long-term relationship with your local MP and his or her staff. Be professional and polite, and let them know you understand their perspective, even if their position does not currently align with yours.