



COLLEGE STUDENT ALLIANCE

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A STUDENT LEADER'S GUIDE On Advocating Effectively with Government Leaders

Having a good working relationship with government leaders is crucial for successful advocacy to produce impactful change, which will enhance students' educational experience. Collaborating with government leaders can increase your potential influence and success through mutual understanding. Developing dialogue, common ground, and trust between your team, ministerial staff, and government leaders are key to achieving positive working relationships and win-win solutions.

01 Begin Developing Your Strategic Plan

This is the first process your organization needs to address: define your strategy. Ask yourself questions on your strategic plans: have you prioritized your key issues? Where does the government stand on those issues? How do you best make use of your own constituency? Once you have explored your strategy, then you need to decide how you will allocate your resources to pursue that strategy. Know what you can afford to do, and what you can't. A helpful tool is using SWOT analysis, to identify your strategy's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

02 Engaging Your Objectives with the Government's Priorities

Engagement begins by connecting your objectives with the government leader's priorities. Where possible, try and mention their party's election platform. Make sure your "ask" resonates with the government's priorities, which may include: economic stability, job creation, health, and education. Frame how your "ask" advances their agenda, and show that it's a win-win scenario.

03 Organize for Success

One key aspect in today's landscape is effectively engaging with government leaders in the digital space. Use mainstream & social media to amplify your messages/issues. Keep in mind the power of social media in engaging with the right audience. In particular, many policy makers, politicians and journalists use Twitter as a platform for engagement. Know your audience and cater your social media output and messages to this audience. Also, when it comes to organizing your efforts, ensure that your association has provincial/local spokespeople to effectively and consistently deliver that message.

04 Measure Your Success

A key aspect of attaining actual results is using metrics to measure your success. You will need to ask your team difficult questions. Are you making progress on your issues, legislatively and publicly? Is your relationship with the government improving, and if so, how? Do you have known political champions for your issues? Make sure that you establish these metrics so that you can track your progress.

05 Get to Know Key Political Advisors in a Minister's Office

It's important to realize that government leaders and politicians have a number of political staff in their offices. These staff serve as gate-keepers to the politician, and are especially important for Ministers. It's important that you establish positive and candid relationships with these people. Keep in mind that most organizations will only have limited "face-time" with a Minister, and that in order to get your chance, you need to build a relationship with their staff. If you have positive connections with political staff, it's much more likely you will gain access to a particular politician or Minister.

06 Plan Out the Logistics to Achieve A Successful Meeting

In order to effectively plan out your meeting, you need to first do your homework on the politician: what activities were they involved in before public life? What role do they play now? What are the local issues in their riding? Is their riding a swing riding? Consider that these meetings will be relatively short, and make sure you don't overstay your welcome. Plan out short introductions right at the beginning of the meeting. Ensure that "ask" for is very clear. Keep your materials simple to reinforce your ask and represent good public policy. Lastly, make sure you show them the human side of your key issue, make sure you show them you have a positive solution, and keep in mind the costs.

07 Ensure Your Voice is Heard at the Constituency Level

When it comes to having your voice heard, you need to ensure your ask speaks to issues at the constituency level. Any provincial issue, no matter how big, can be made relevant at the local level. Take stock of your presence within a target constituency, and look at connecting with an MPP for that region, and target your efforts towards them.

08 Practice, Practice, Practice

Remember, the key to a good meeting is practice. Make sure you practice well in advance with your meeting attendees. Know which person is going to speak to which issues. Have someone assigned to lead to ensure the meeting does not get off track. Listen closely to what the politician says; note areas that you will get back to them on. The better you practice, the more likely you are to influence positive policy changes on behalf of students.