

NFU Briefing: Guide to Lobbying 2018

Introduction:

This briefing provides a quick overview of key techniques tools for lobbying parliamentarians. It sets out a few key golden rules to follow, options for engaging with politicians, and some effective tools to use when doing so.

Five Golden Rules for engaging with politicians:

Be clear and concise in all communications with MPs. Thinking through the following questions in advance can help to focus our messaging on any issue:

- What is the issue/problem?
- Why is the issue important? (a.k.a. the 'so what?' question – why should they care)?
- What is your proposed solution?
- What do you want them to do?

General conduct:

- Be polite and professional. Try to focus on our own messaging rather than being critical or rude about others.
- Do your research, and know your stuff. Preparation on understanding the MP's views and voting record in advance of the meeting is useful, as is ensuring that we're clear about our own positions and messaging. www.theyworkforyou.com can be a useful website for finding an MP's voting and speech history. Please feel free to contact the London office if you require any support.
- Try to build a relationship – not all meetings will end with a politician being converted or agreeing to do something for us. The bigger picture is to build long-term relationships with politicians who may help us on other issues too
- Follow up – an email to say 'thank you' will go a long way to cementing a relationship

What can a parliamentarian do for us?

When it comes to backbench MPs and peers, there are a number of things we can ask them to do for us, for example:

- Write a letter to a specific Minister, or ask a parliamentary question.
- Secure a Westminster Hall debate (30-90 mins), or table an adjournment debate (30 mins).
- Vote for/against legislation and specific amendments, and introduce their own amendments.
- Raise an issue in the media, or promote a cause through social media.
- Take part in, or form, an All Party Parliamentary Group.
- Sponsor or sign an Early Day Motion to demonstrate support for a particular issue.

Techniques and tools for engaging with politicians:

There are a number of ways the NFU colleagues and members can communicate with their elected representatives.

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- **Letter/email writing** – Writing a letter to an MP about a particular issue can be useful, although in general the letter should be brief and include a call to action e.g. a request to meet to discuss the issue in more detail, or a request that an MP mentions an issue in parliament, etc. The letter must come from an appropriate person, it must be addressed correctly (spelling, title if any and address) and the message and proposed actions should be clearly set out (see *golden rules* section above). Letter writing is often partnered by one or more of the other tools in this section. It may be appropriate to attach an up to date briefing on a relevant subject (see below), but in general aim to keep attachments to a minimum. If this is part of a coordinated letter-writing campaign organised by the NFU, consistency of message is crucial.
- **Briefings** – providing a written briefing to MPs can be a useful way to communicate our key asks, particularly when we want to brief a number of MPs quickly on a particular topic, for example before a debate. The External Affairs team, working closely with colleagues in the Policy Team, can help to draft and distribute briefings quickly to the write target audiences.
- **Face-to-face meetings** – Meetings are particularly valuable in private campaigns where we seek to quietly influence decision-makers. The correct member/staff mix can be key to the success of such meetings and as with letters, the messages must be clear and well thought through.
- **Farm visits** – Inviting politicians on-farm on a Friday (or during any weekday during recess periods) can be a useful way to build relationships, inform and educate on particular issues, and also take photos which can be useful for the local media (for both us and the politician). This could include a 'kitchen table' chat as part of the visit, to provide an introduction to the farm and the issues to be discussed, or to recap on what has already been discussed on the tour.
- **Policy launches, dinners and receptions** – These events provide NFU members and staff with a useful opportunity to lobby, although in general discussions at such event should be 'softer' and more informal (e.g. making contact and build relationships with politicians, and seeking to follow-up for a more formal discussion soon after).
- **Use of media** – Media activity can back up more direct lobbying. For example, placing an article or even just a supportive quote in a local, regional or national publication can help to reach a wide audience of politician's constituents. Writing letters to papers can also be useful for getting issues noticed, although it is perhaps least impactful method. Taking photos of farm visits with MPs and providing MPs with template press releases for their staff to issue when they've attended an NFU event can be a really easy way to get coverage and help a local MP too.

Social media – social media can also be a useful way to engage with politicians, particularly on twitter on which most MPs have accounts. For example, if we are running a campaign we can tweet at MPs to ask for their support using appropriate hashtags, which help to join the campaign up online e.g. #glyphosateisvital. In general though we should be careful not to get drawn in to arguments online, and to stick to the golden rules above about conduct.

For further information please contact:

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