

Tips for meeting with your MPs

Meeting with MPs is one of the best ways to make progress on a public policy issue. The benefits of developing the relationship are well worth the extra time and effort it takes to prepare for a meeting. We've developed the following guidelines to help you connect with MPs.

- 1. Select an MP strategically.** The more MPs that you can connect with, the better. Of course, you may only have the time and resources to contact one or two. Here are some things to consider when deciding which MP(s) you should contact.
 - **Location.** Which constituency is your office in? Do you carry out more of your activities in a particular constituency than in the others? Will you have to travel to meet with them? Choose the MPs who are most relevant to your organization.
 - **Existing relationships.** Do you, or any of your board members or volunteers, have an existing relationship with any of the MPs? It is often easier to get a meeting with an MP if you or someone working with your organization has previously met or spoken with them
 - **Political affiliation.** If there are MPs representing more than one political party, are you able to reach out to them? Engaging with MPs across the political spectrum is important — both to remain non-partisan, but also because someone in opposition today could be sitting on the government side next year. The more cross-party awareness of and support for our issues we can generate, the more likely we are to succeed.
- 2. Choose your timing wisely.** MPs are likely to be in their constituencies until Parliament resumes on September 15. They also have constituency time scheduled for the weeks of October 13 and November 10. Many of them are also available in the constituency on Fridays and weekends. If you can't arrange to meet your MP locally, consider setting up a meeting with them the next time you are in Ottawa.
- 3. Schedule the meeting well in advance.** If you want to set up a meeting, the best way is usually to pick up the phone as a first step. It is best to do this at least a couple of weeks before you'd like to meet with your MP. You can find the contact information for your member of Parliament on our campaign hub at imaginecanada.ca/thestretch. You may be asked to follow up with an email request.

When asking for a meeting, be prepared to tell the MP's office why you want to meet. MPs are generally very open to meeting with constituents and community leaders. It's up to you how specific you want to be — you

may just want to talk about the federal budget and the Stretch Tax Credit, you may have other issues you want to raise, you may also want to introduce the MP to the work you do and the impact you have in the community

4. **Invite MPs to your events.** If you have any significant events of your own coming up — annual meetings or fundraising dinners, for example — consider inviting MPs. This will give you a prime opportunity to show them what you do and to raise issues with them.
5. **Prepare for your meeting.** Be clear in your mind about what you want to discuss in order to make the best use of time. Put together a package of material (Stretch Tax Credit information, promotional material about your organization, annual reports) to leave with the MP.
6. **Respect the MPs' time.** MPs are extremely busy people and have multiple meetings a day. You can generally expect a meeting to last up to 30 minutes, though if you are lucky it may go longer.
7. **Be flexible.** Things can change very quickly for an MP. Travel arrangements may go awry, particularly as winter approaches. Unscheduled debates or votes may require them to return to Ottawa. There may be a crisis elsewhere in the constituency they need to focus on. And they're human — they may simply have a sick child they need to care for. If your meeting gets rescheduled, *don't* take it personally. Do make sure that you follow up to reschedule if you haven't heard anything. Sometimes your MP may choose not to cancel your meeting but have you meet with one of their staffers instead. Keep the meeting. Staffers have more time to devote to specific issues and are able to help move your issue along. Building relationships with staffers is also an important part of the process.
8. **Always follow up** It's always a good idea to follow up a meeting with a thank you note either by email or regular mail. MPs have a lot of demands on their time, and it's worth acknowledging the time they spend with you. Depending on the range of issues you've discussed, there may be more follow-ups involved in terms of future meetings or providing supplementary information. And on your way out, don't forget to thank the scheduling assistant. They have a difficult job and are not always sufficiently appreciated.
9. **Share your experience.** Show your stakeholders that you've met an MP by sharing it on your website or social media. In many cases, it is appropriate to take a picture during your meeting, just make sure you ask your MP first. Also, let us know you've had a meeting by getting on the map via our website at imaginecanada.ca/thestretch.
10. **Dot your i's and cross your t's.** Most of you will *not* have to register as lobbyists. The federal lobbying legislation only requires you to register and report on meetings if:
 1. you are a paid staff member; *and*,
 2. lobbying takes up the equivalent of more than 20 percent of a full-time staff person's time.

Unpaid board members, if they meet with MPs on your behalf, do not have to worry about lobbyist registration at all.

If you are already registered as a lobbyist, you'll need to report meeting with your MP. If you're not sure about whether you need to register, a self-assessment tool is available at ocl-cal.gc.ca/eic/site/012.nsf/eng/00824.html.

Meeting with your MP to discuss policy issues does not constitute political activity for the purposes of the Canada Revenue Agency and your T3010. However, it *is* political activity if you ask others to contact their MP.

Last updated: 2014-09-09