Business
Advocacy
Network

Public policy dialogue & advocacy

Introduction to advocacy

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This workbook has been written by the team of the Business Advocacy Fund and edited by David irwin

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Introduction to advocacy

1. Introduction

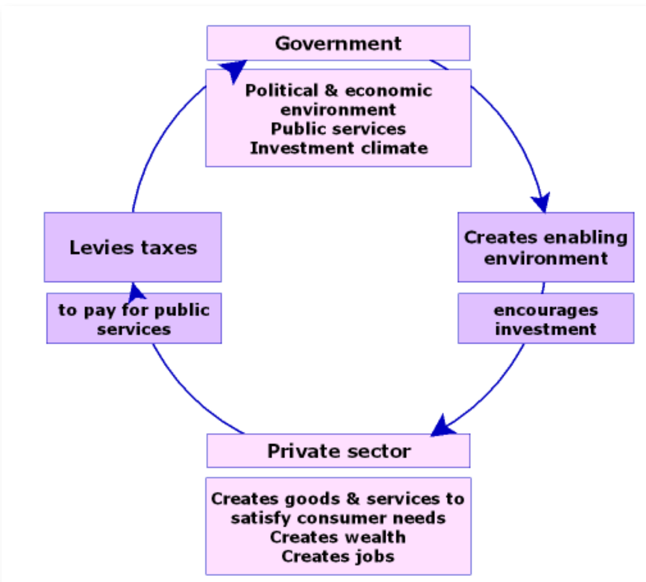
The Business Advocacy Fund supports business member organisations (BMOs) to engage in private public dialogue and to advocate an improved business environment. Grants are provided to support proposals which most closely meet the Fund's criteria and objectives and which are regarded as having the best chance of making an impact. This financial support is complemented by personalised capacity building and a range of training programmes.

The aim of this handbook is to introduce the concepts of public private dialogue and private sector advocacy as well as providing a general introduction to the further training available from the Business Advocacy Fund. By the end of the book you will:

- Understand what is meant by the enabling environment
- Understand the importance and purpose of dialogue and advocacy
- Be aware of each of the Five Steps in the advocacy process
- Have been introduced to a range of advocacy techniques
- Be able to identify an issue and prepare a concept note

2. Governments and regulation

Governments create the political and macro-economic environment. Governments are responsible for providing, or ensuring the provision, of a range of public services. And governments legislate and regulate.



Indeed, governments want to legislate – many politicians think that the specific reason that they have been elected is to legislate.

Regulations are a form of government intervention in the economy. While there are costs associated with regulation, benefits also accrue, though generally it is society that gains from the benefits whilst business pays the costs. For example, setting safety standards for nuclear power stations may impose costs on the operators, but aims to minimise the risk of radioactive pollution of the environment. Regulators, therefore, have to weigh up the advantages and disadvantages of every viable response to a situation that merits government intervention and recommend regulation when it is the best option. This involves balancing a number of priorities such as public health and safety, environmental protection and sustainable development, economic efficiency and performance, national cohesion and international obligations.

Governments generally recognise, however, that the private sector is the engine of growth, creating wealth and jobs and providing tax revenue to pay for the public sector. As a result, they are concerned to demonstrate that they are being responsive to business, that they are creating an enabling pro-business environment, and that, whilst regulation may be necessary from time to time, they are far more business friendly than other governments.

The problem for business is that regulations impose financial burdens – through the time taken to comply and to demonstrate compliance, through the initial cost and through recurring costs. Sometimes, it is the financial cost that is the objective (for example, the requirement to pay tax or some sort of levy), imposed in order to stimulate a change in behaviour. Sometimes, little thought is put into the administrative burden (for example, preparing the paperwork to demonstrate compliance). Inevitably these burdens are felt disproportionately by smaller businesses. Large businesses can afford to employ people – who then build up expertise – specifically to ensure compliance; in the smallest business it is usually the entrepreneur who has to do the work – on top of everything else required to generate sales and make a profit.

2.1 The enabling environment

You will hear the terms: ‘enabling environment’ or ‘investment climate’. This simply refers to the environment in which businesses operate and covers a wide range of factors which impact on the ‘cost of doing business’ and make it more or less likely that businesses, both domestic and foreign, will want to invest.

- Legislative & regulatory framework (including employment legislation, environmental legislation, consumer protection, health & safety, taxation, duties and tariffs, etc)
- Government policy & macro-economy
- Access to finance
- Protection of intellectual property rights
- Availability of skilled labour
- Commercial justice & contract enforcement
- Infrastructure (power, water, telecoms, etc)
- Transport
- Land ownership

Some of these will take time to change and even longer before there is an impact on business; others may be easier to influence in the short term. Regulation is amongst the easiest to change – and can have a big impact.

2.2 Regulatory reform

Regulation covers "the full range of legal instruments and decisions through which governments establish conditions on the behaviour of citizens or enterprises".[1] In this brief, 'regulation' is used to define all statutory requirements, whether enacted by Parliament or by local government or additional rules prepared by agencies such as the tax authority.

Businesses get particularly exercised by the regulatory requirements imposed on them. Ideally both the financial burden and the administrative burden should be mitigated, but focusing on the administrative burden can often provide the biggest dividends. There are a number of ways in which the burdens can be mitigated:

- Less new regulation;
- Improving existing regulation – to reduce the administrative burden, to reduce opportunities for corruption, etc;
- Providing guidance so businesses know what is expected of them; and
- Promoting a culture change so that inspectors are seen as 'coaches' not 'cops' and so that there are fewer inspections.

Improving the enabling environment can lead to a more vibrant private sector and, ultimately, to greater poverty alleviation. The private sector sees the results of regulation or, in some cases, the results of lack of enforcement of regulation, and is in an ideal position to advocate for change – provided they can research issues clearly and make compelling arguments for change.

3. Private sector advocacy

3.1 Effective influencing

Quite simply, advocacy is the act of influencing, or attempting to influence, the way that someone else thinks about, and acts on, an issue. So private sector advocacy describes attempts by the private sector to influence public policy in an effort to improve the business environment.

In practice, advocacy presents a number of challenges. The real issue is not always immediately obvious. There may be competing pressures, for example, from consumers or environmentalists. It is the task of government to balance these pressures whilst ensuring an environment that enables private business to start and prosper. This means that the private sector, when seeking change in public policy, or change in the way that regulations are implemented or, occasionally, enforcement of existing legislation, has to marshal the evidence and make cogent and persuasive arguments.

Effective advocacy, therefore, requires a clear vision of the desired outcomes, a thorough understanding of the particular issue being addressed, the ability to prepare evidence based policy proposals and the opportunity to meet with and

[1] OECD, "Improving the Quality of Laws and Regulations: Economic, Legal and Managerial Techniques", Paris, 1994

persuade policy makers and implementers to do something differently or, occasionally, not to do it at all. In addition to influencing and communication ability, advocates will require tenacity and persistence.

Whilst you can of course use the same techniques, it should be noted that the term advocacy is not normally used to describe activities that are really marketing or one sector seeking to gain a competitive advantage over another or dealing with one off problems for individual businesses (though it may be that many members coming forward with the same one-off problem is indicative a wider issue which could be taken up).

3.2 Public private dialogue

You should not wait until an issue springs up. It is far better for trade associations to aim for regular contact with key public sector people and not just when advocating change. Effective dialogue is a pre-requisite for effective advocacy. Dialogue implies regular contact between private and public – sometimes because the private sector wants to influence a particular policy or particular decision, but often just to ensure that each party understands the other. This is important not only because it can provide advance notice when the public sector is thinking of regulating but also because there are ready channels of communication already established which can be used to ensure that each can quickly understand the position of the other.

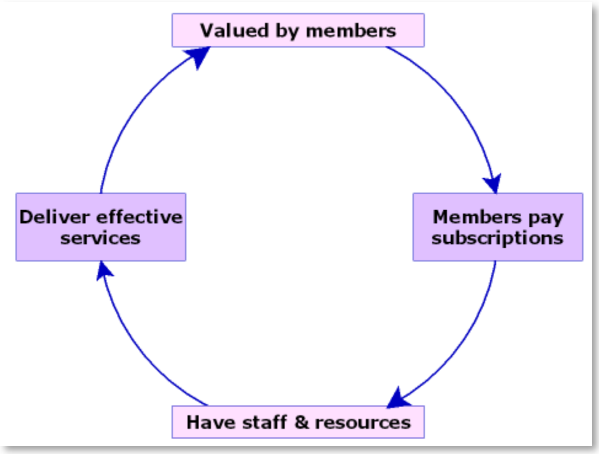
Effective dialogue builds mutual understanding between private and public sectors to address issues of concern such as the capricious nature of taxation, the opportunities for corruption in most regulatory requirements, and the need for consistency and transparency in the implementation of regulations.

4. What are Private Sector Organisations?

Private Sector Organisations (PSO, sometimes described as business member organisations, BMO) are voluntary associations bringing together businesses, usually though not always, from a specific business sector to pursue common objectives. Sometimes businesses in a specific geographic area come together to form an association, usually known as a Chamber. Typically, these include the provision of member services and representation especially on wider public policy and practice. BMOs are usually able to provide these services more efficiently or more effectively than the members could provide them individually. Typically this will include representing the sector and influencing opinion formers (including politicians, journalists, academics, research bodies, pressure groups, NGOs, other trade associations and consumer bodies) and well as influencing the climate of opinion. Services are likely to include information, statistics, market information and benchmarking information; seminars, conferences and training; and perhaps technical services such as legal, technical improvement, environmental consultancy, and training and development.

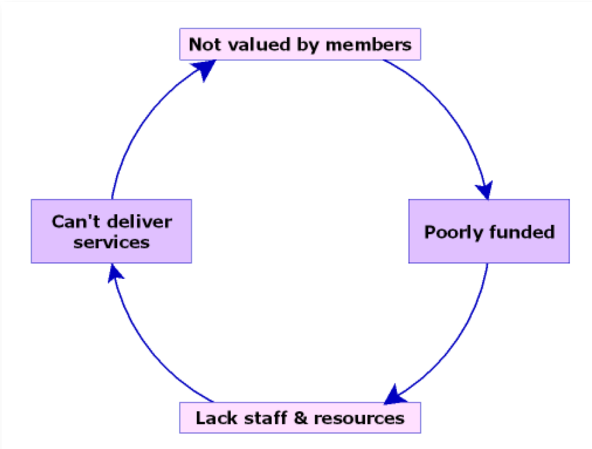
4.1 The big challenge

Many business membership organisations provide a good range of services for, and are valued by, their members. Better organised PSOs are more focused, enjoy greater membership participation and improve their public recognition and acceptance. They are able to fulfil their responsibilities and can therefore be regarded as genuine representatives of the private sector.



As a result their members pay their annual subscriptions, and often the services provided by the BMO generate additional income. The consequence is that the PSO can afford to pay professional staff and give them the resources to be able to keep on delivering effective services which are wanted and valued by the membership. Whilst it is probably the case that many PSOs originally form in response to the need to advocate on a particular issue, it is the services that they deliver to the membership that retains the membership. Advocacy, inevitably, becomes an 'add-on', because businesses do not have to be members to gain the benefit of any advocacy. However, generally, they do have to be members to gain the benefit of the other services.

The World Bank notes that BMOs in developing countries are more typically characterised by poor organisational capacity and technical skills, lack of proper accounting systems and governance, and lack of demand-driven orientation resulting in low levels of sustainability.



Low membership, a limited financial sustainability, and bad management practices reinforce each other, constituting a vicious circle of poor management from which they find it difficult to escape – with few members paying subscriptions, so no resources to deliver services, and so they are not valued by their members, who therefore refuse to pay their subscriptions.

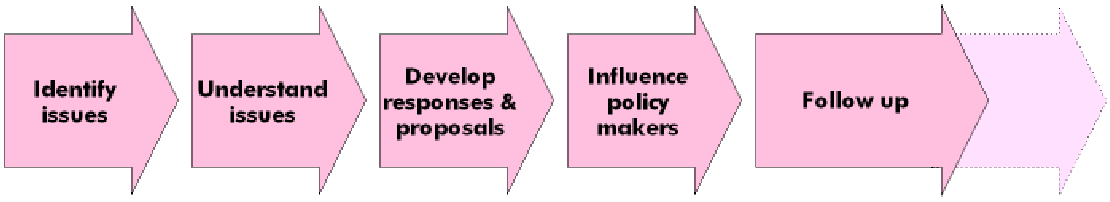
5. The five step approach

The process can be split into five steps:

- Identifying the issues – which may come from business, from government, from other stakeholders (such as consumers, employees, NGOs, etc) and may require effort before a BMO has an idea of the real issues and their priority;
- Understanding the issues – which requires excellent research, including a systematic gathering of views, the ability to draw logical conclusions and a process for developing consensus internally;
- Formulating 'evidence based policy' – which requires the distillation of objective evidence from reliable sources, the consideration of policy options and the preparation of a compelling argument for the chosen option;
- Reaching appropriate people in Government – to influence public policy; and

- Monitoring progress – to ensure that, when the public sector agrees changes, they are put into practice.

Figure 1: Steps in the advocacy process



Source: Irwin Grayson Associates

Now let us look at each of these in a little more detail:

5.1 Identify and frame the issues

Issues can be identified in a number of ways. Association members may raise a particular issue because they want help and support to address it and many will be possible issues to take further, though note that some businesses will identify issues specific to them, which the BMO may feel appropriate to address as part of its services, but are unlikely to lead to proposals for change in public policy. A good way to identify issues is to ask members – informally, say when they come to meetings, and formally, say through surveys.

Hopefully, when the Government has proposals for new regulations, it will want to consult. Sometimes, the Government may not consult, or may not believe that a proposal has implications for the private sector, but the BMO discovers it anyway, and then consults with its members to determine whether it is likely to be an issue.

Searching for issues is not a one off activity, but something the BMO should be doing regularly. However, it is also to important to remember that an association will not be able to fight on too many fronts at once, so will need to prioritise.

Communicating with members and issue identification are closely linked. Communication can be relatively low level and informal; it might be more regular but mainly one way – generally providing information to members; or it can be regular and two way – obtaining views and priorities from members. This is often the best way of discovering the issues that are currently exercising the minds of your members, though does not of course identify issues of which they are so far unaware.

You should ensure therefore that as far as possible, you put in place processes to seek members' views such as:

- Informal feedback from talking to members or gathered from members at association meetings;
- Contact from member(s) who have identified an issue and need association support;
- Formal survey of participants at meetings;

- Formal survey of all members and, possibly, non-members working in the same sector.

You need, in addition, to be proactive in identifying issues that are not yet widely known, so that you can seek feedback from members about whether there really is an issue and the seriousness of the issue, as well as being able to undertake research and start influencing from an early stage. You should therefore:

- Follow the press and media;
- Build relationships with other trade associations and keep in touch with each other;
- Monitor the activities of key public sector organisations;
- Forge relationships and talk regularly with relevant Ministries, Departments and Agencies

There will always be some issues that crop up unexpectedly and which require immediate attention. In general, however, associations should not take on too many issues at the same time. The danger is that none will get the attention that they deserve and all will fail. Issues require effort and resource in undertaking research and in preparing compelling policy proposals, not to mention the effort required to meet with and influence public officials and politicians. So take time to

- Research the issues that are important to members, and to businesses in the sector who are not members;
- Research the scale of impact of the issues (that is, how many businesses are affected);
- Research the depth of impact of the issues (that is, the financial impact on businesses).

Prioritisation will not require detailed research, but knowing the likely impact can help you to choose between issues. BMOs are known to prioritise issues to reflect the views of a small number of members, or according to staff preferences. It is better to take into account the preferences of most members in the association and better still, if possible, to consider the preferences of businesses in the sector, irrespective of whether they are members. Indeed, this might be a way of you promoting yourself to potential members.

It is sensible also to take into account which issues are most timely for the Government – if they are considering a new regulation, they will be more interested in your views on that than on an existing issue which could wait.

Framing the advocacy issue is probably the most important task in producing a powerful research report. If the issue is framed too narrowly then possible solutions will be unintentionally omitted. If the issue is framed too widely, or is too vague, then the research effort will be dissipated and the argument weakened.

To frame an advocacy issue you need to think about:

- The nature of the problem
- The possible causes of the problem

- Who is affected by the problem
- How businesses and people are affected
- How many businesses and people are affected by the problem
- The policy background for the problem area
- Possible solutions and their history

If you are new to advocacy, pick issues that you regard as easier first. This will provide an opportunity to learn about dialogue and advocacy. As you gain experience – and confidence – then you can begin to tackle the bigger, more complex issues.

5.2 Understand the issues

The next step is to research the issue, to ensure that the association has a thorough understanding of the implications. This might include, for example, assessing the regulatory costs (eg, the cost of a licence or levy) and compliance costs (ie, the administrative cost of compliance, including staff time, etc).

You might wish to consider covering the following as part of improving your understanding of the issue:

- Research the history and rationale for the public policy and understand the cause of the issue(s);
- Consider the breadth and depth of the impact on the private sector and on other stakeholders;
- Consider possible solutions to the issue(s) and research the implications (including considering whether it is the policy itself that is 'at fault' or whether the best way to ameliorate the problem is through 'better' regulation);
- Research the decision making processes for the specific issue;
- Research the current opinions and attitudes of policy makers;
- Identify who else is, or should be, interested in the issue and, potentially, in changing the policy or regulatory requirement;
- Consider how to frame the issue in language that is clear and appealing to the target audiences and that many encourage the formation of coalitions.

For existing regulation, it can be sensible to consider the potential implications if it didn't exist (especially if can be measured in financial terms and better yet if it can increase the tax take for government because businesses are more profitable).

For proposals for new regulations, it is important to think about the unintended consequences.[2]

5.2.1 Commissioning research

You may decide that your BMO does not have the skills, or perhaps does not have the time, to research an issue in depth. You may then decide to commission

[2] For guidance on techniques to measure regulatory costs, see "Thinking about regulating: the better regulation guide", KIPPRA special report no. 1, May 2002

a consultant or researcher to undertake your research for you. In these circumstances, you still need to be able to frame the issue clearly and be able to specify precisely to the researcher what you need. You also need to be able to review and critique the research prepared on your behalf.

Don't be afraid to spend a considerable amount of time thinking about the framing of your advocacy issue. The most common reason for weak research is a vague or unfocused brief.

5.2.2 Choosing the methods

You should choose the methods after you have identified the key research questions – and if you use consultants, you should encourage them to make suggestions for the methods. All methods have strengths and weaknesses so you might need several different, complementary methods.

It is important that the methods are credible, rigorous and valid. That is to say, they need to be impressive to the reader, replicable and to measure what they say they are measuring.

Think about the following issues in planning the methods:

- Who should the researcher interview or survey? It is best to ask questions directly of the person experiencing a problem rather than getting someone else to answer on their behalf.
- How should the researcher select interviewees? It is important that the researcher chooses enough interviewees to be representative of the wider group (population) and that the group (sample) is not biased (see fact sheet on setting sample sizes). For example, it is not a good idea only to interview large firms unless your report then says it only represents large firms.
- What method should the researcher use? Generally speaking, written or email surveys are appropriate where you want to ask the same questions of many people and the questions are relatively self-explanatory. Face to face interviews are appropriate where you have relatively few people, perhaps important people, and you want to be able to probe their answers to elicit further information.
- How will you control and monitor the quality of the research? Researchers should pilot questionnaires. They should also check the results of surveys early on, and make adjustments to the questions, interviewing technique or training of the interviewers if the results are incomplete.
- How should the researcher compile data? It is important that the researcher analyses the data systematically. Survey and interview data should be recorded in a spreadsheet or database so that statistics can be compiled precisely. Qualitative data such as comments might need to be classified before they can be recorded in this way.

5.2.3 Considering the analysis

There are three requirements for analysis:

- Analysis should be fair. The researcher should not distort the data.

- Analysis should be clear. The reader should be able to see from where the evidence has come.
- Analysis should be vivid. The researcher will need to spend time thinking about how to summarise the data, for example, which statistics or indicators to use. Generally it is better to present data graphically rather than in tables.

5.2.4 Considering the presentation

The final report should be clear, succinct and persuasive. Here are some ways you can ensure the quality of the final report:

- Keep the main report short. Identify the key points and put the full evidence in appendices.
- Keep the report focused. Think clearly what message you want to communicate. You might want to include recommendations, though it is usually better to describe options in the research report and to present the chosen recommendations in a separate policy paper.
- Have separate summaries or series of recommendations for different audiences.
- Have a mix of types of evidence. Include precise statistics showing the individual or global impact, but also include case studies or stories to personalise the impact.
- Make sure that the conclusions flow logically from the data.
- Ensure that the report looks good. Think about the formatting. Check that the report has no spelling mistakes.

5.3 Develop responses and proposals

Preparing policy proposals is usually the hardest step. You need to be clear, succinct and compelling. You need to stress the benefits. The proposals need to build on the evidence – for example, removing regulation X or enforcing regulation Y will lead to a Z per cent increase in income amongst poor farmers, or whatever. Do not just assume that everyone will accept your proposal because it seems obvious. You need consensus: proposals should not just be acceptable but positively desired by your members and, ideally, the wider private sector. Their support and encouragement will be necessary as you lobby. Proposals must not disadvantage other businesses – since they will lobby against you. Proposals should not be anti-competitive – for example, seeking to ban imports to give an advantage to local providers.

You will need, during this stage, to return to the question of whether to advocate at the policy level or whether to advocate at the implementation level. The Government may be totally committed to introducing a new regulation, for example. It may have a choice about the way in which the regulation is framed and enforced. So you may choose to accept the policy but to advocate for its introduction in a way that minimises the additional burden imposed on business.

If you have not already formed a coalition, now would be a good time to consider whether there are potential partners who would like to work with you on the issue.

5.4 Influence policy makers

It is important to think carefully about which policy makers need to be influenced. Often this will be senior civil servants or Ministers, but may not be if the real objective is to seek the enforcement of existing regulation, or to ensure that policy is introduced in such a way as to minimise the administrative burden.

Effective dialogue requires some effort to understand the public sector. Many public officials have never worked in the private sector. Indeed, many believe that the private sector are all crooks exploiting everyone else to maximise their profit and need to be heavily regulated to stop that exploitation. Similarly, the private sector sees the public sector as having little understanding of the importance of the private sector in growing the economy and generating tax revenues and whose only objective is to look for opportunities for personal gain. Neither of these views is accurate. Effective dialogue will help to break down these views.

It is all very well the private sector trying to engage in dialogue, but if the public sector is not listening, or is listening but not really understanding, then nothing will happen.

In engaging in dialogue, the private sector may therefore need to take some time to understand public officers, to understand what drives them, to understand what they need to do their job more effectively. This means that dialogue needs regular meetings, not just occasional meetings, if both parties are to begin to understand the other.

It may also help if you can begin to understand what public officers need to do to satisfy their political masters and help them to do it by, for example, ensuring that they always have comprehensive, accurate and up to date information about specific issues.

You may have started by advocating a change in policy but conclude that there are some issues where the public sector is going to regulate, irrespective of the evidence that you can provide. If that seems likely, it is better to accept it and move on – either to minimise the burden that might arise from that new regulation or to the next issue. It is more important to develop and maintain a good relationship than to fight to the end on every issue. Compromising, or giving in gracefully, will do more for you than always fighting. The challenge of course is to judge which issues are worth pursuing.

For some issues, it may be sensible, and add to your credibility, to build alliances with others including business membership organisations, professional institutions, civil society organisations and trades unions.

5.5 Follow up

Once policy makers have agreed to your proposals, you may need to make an effort to monitor progress and to hold decision-makers to account. If the agreement requires new legislation, then you may need to keep pushing to ensure that it goes through the process – and you may need to keep lobbying at various stages – with Parliamentary committees or Ministers or senior civil servants. If the agreement requires changes to the way that a regulation is implemented, then you may need to work closely with the relevant Ministry, Department or Agency to ensure that they do what is necessary. In both cases, cheer on success and encourage continuing action by issuing press releases and talking to the media. Do not let up until you are satisfied that what you agreed has been implemented. In so far as you are able, you should ensure that you communicate the results of your campaign to your members.

This stage should include an evaluation of the process, with a view to improving your advocacy competence:

- To strengthen your capacity to deal with future campaigns;
- To empower your members – to increase their skills, knowledge, and involvement, and to create more spokespeople;
- To understand and address any unintended consequences of your work, for example, regarding relationships with other organisations.

You may also want to think about whether to share lessons more widely, certainly with the Fund that provided you with financial support, but also with other business advocacy organisations to develop their capacity.

6. Advocacy techniques

There are a wide range of advocacy techniques, though you will not require all of them to advocate on every issue that you pick. However, most issues will require that you utilise a number of techniques and you will need to think carefully about the way in which they are used. Here are some techniques to consider:

6.1 Promote dialogue

The importance of public private dialogue has already been discussed. There may be task forces, committees and other fora where you can engage in discussion. If appropriate mechanisms do not exist, consider how you can bring them about. Arrange regular bilateral meetings with public officials and, ideally, Ministers.

Sometimes, issues will require input from more than one Ministry, Department or Agency. Aim to bring people together in larger meetings if this helps your cause.

If there is an All Parliamentary Group interested in your issue(s), engage with them. If there isn't, consider whether there is scope to encourage Parliamentarians to launch one; if necessary, offer to provide the secretariat. Having informed MPs can make an enormous difference when Parliament comes to debate issues – and influential MPs can make a big difference when you are attempting to influence public officials or Ministers.

6.2 Prepare evidence based policy proposals

As noted earlier, this requires good research followed by the consideration of options and a recommendation for public policy. You may find it helpful to adopt the principles used for regulatory impact assessments and to provide detailed cost benefit analyses for each of the options.

If you know that there are competing pressures on regulators, for example, from consumers or environmentalists or NGOs, then look for win/win solutions that match public policy agendas whilst minimising the burden on the private sector.

It can be sensible to frame the proposed solution with enough flexibility to allow for negotiation and compromise.

You may want to use your research and evidence in a number of ways. You may, for example, publish 'working papers', both as a way of generating some early publicity but also to encourage businesses and other stakeholders to contribute to your evidence gathering. Working papers may focus on the issue and the evidence and not begin to offer solutions.

As possible solutions begin to emerge, you might write 'opinion' pieces, for circulation amongst your members, and to begin floating ideas in public. In this way, you continue to gather evidence and simultaneously being to build support for your proposed solutions.

6.3 Identify your target audiences

It is usually fairly straightforward to identify your primary audience – but think about your secondary audiences as well. These are the people and organisations who may also be able to influence the real decision makers. Remember that you may need to tailor different messages for different audiences.

6.4 Meet with public sector policy makers

Having prepared your detailed research and proposals, you will want to meet with, and influence, Ministers or public officers. You may ultimately need to meet with both, depending on the issue. Meetings may be relatively informal, or may be quite formal requiring you to make a formal presentation. Wherever possible, present proposals positively rather than critically to public policy makers.

6.5 Negotiate

There will be many occasions when you find yourselves, not just presenting to policy makers and regulators, but negotiating with them. Indeed, if a presentation has been successful and persuaded policy makers to make a change, you may find that there is a need to negotiate the final agreement, perhaps in some detail.

6.6 Form coalitions

If you can bring together a coalition of interest representing a number of BMOs, or better still, a mix of BMOs with NGOs or trades unions or consumer groups, then your advocacy will carry more weight.

Communicate the issue in a way that encourages coalitions – build coalitions which support the issue even if the interests of individual organisations differ.

6.7 Mobilise grass roots support

Mobilising grass roots support can be effective in demonstrating to the public sector that you really do have widespread support for the proposal. Think carefully about ways in which you can use your members as advocates, even if only in a small way, perhaps through influencing appropriate secondary audiences. This can be in the form of written petitions or a letter writing campaign or even mass demonstrations – though not all approaches will necessarily be successful.

6.8 Organise a press campaign

Press campaigns – stories in the newspapers and on TV – can be effective provided they are used carefully. Do not rush straight to the press with a story – think through how you want to make use of the press. Take care not to offend Ministers, or public officers, or potential coalition partners as you might achieve an effect opposite to the one that you intended.

6.9 Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation is not specifically an technique, but is nevertheless important, both in terms of assessing the current initiative – what appears to be working, what is counter-productive and what needs to be changed – and also to provide lessons for what could be improved in the next advocacy initiative.

7. Managing your organisation

Undertaking an advocacy initiative is not something that happens in isolation. It requires that organisations are well managed and that the principles of effective management are applied to the advocacy project, as they would be to any other project that you are managing. This is likely to include:

- A current business plan
- Project plans with objectives, targets and milestones
- Financial forecasts for the whole organisation and for individual projects
- Understanding and successful implementation of the principles of team building, delegation and appraisal
- Procedures for monitoring progress on activities in the business plan
- Procedures to ensure effective financial control and financial reporting

8. Public relations and communications

8.1 Introduction

The Institute of Public Relations states that "public relations practice is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics", though increasingly recognises the need to nurture reputation. According to Wikipedia, "public relations is the art and science of managing communication between an organisation and its key constituents to build, manage and sustain its positive reputation". It is the term used to describe the issues and messages communicated directly between an organisation and its stakeholders. The role of PR is to enhance and build a good reputation, and to prevent or mitigate damage to that reputation. Essentially, the objective from public relations is to influence attitudes and behaviour.

Communication is always important, but advocacy needs a strategy – a public relations strategy – that can attract the attention of the target audiences. Plans should be made for internal communication (within the organisation or network) and external communication (with allies and opponents). The strategy must reflect the people with whom you are communicating, about what, and why. Effective communication can influence behaviour and can positively foster relationships with key publics.[3] Any organisation needs to have strategic communication in which:

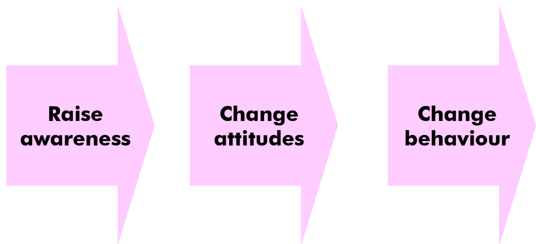
- The purpose of all communications is clear – sending a clear message is essential, despite the fact that often issues are complex, if you are to succeed in influencing decision-makers and winning public support;
- Target audiences are known, analysed and identified;
- Timing for is planned, in order not to conflict with other events.

Build and maintain personal and organisational relationships with a wide range of people – policy makers, opinion formers, influencers (such as party activist, journalists, etc). However, you need always to be seen as reliable and credible, so everything you say needs to be backed up with factual evidence. You will not be independent in the sense that you are advocating for the interests of your members but you need to be seen to be independent of other associations and not simply acting at their behest. This will ensure that you are taken seriously.

8.2 The process of public relations

Anne Gregory, in her book on planning and managing public relations campaigns, suggests that public relations objectives should be defined to address one of three levels, though for the purposes of private sector advocacy, it might also be sensible to consider this as a progression.

Figure 2: Steps in public relations



There may be a need to raise awareness, perhaps amongst members or the wider business community, about a specific issue. There will most likely be a need to raise awareness amongst public servants and politicians. There will be a desire to change attitudes amongst key publics so that they become supportive. Most important of all, there is a need to encourage public servants to act.

Be clear about your overall objectives. This will then be reflected in your public relations strategy. If you don't have clear objectives, then it will be very hard to put in place a good communications plan. So, think first about the campaign

[3] Anne Gregory, "Planning and managing public relations campaigns", Kogan Page, 2000

objectives – say, to persuade the government to change the business licensing requirements. Ask yourself specifically what is it that you want to achieve.

If you have not already done your research and preparation, working on a communications plan will quickly demonstrate that you need good evidence if you are to make a compelling case. Then think about the communication objectives – say, influencing policy makers and regulators so that they understand the gains to the economy that might come from fewer licensing requirements. Think about your different publics. The overall message will need to be the same, but you may need to reach them in different ways. Think too about the message – what is it that you want to say?

What mechanisms will you use to convey your message? Think about your PR objectives – say, write a report for the policy makers, seek coverage in the media, build up a coalition for change amongst stakeholders, influence public opinion.

Importantly, you have to monitor and evaluate what happens. Monitoring the outputs – say, one research report, one detailed proposal for changes to policy, 10 press releases issued, 200 column centimetres of newspaper coverage, 20 minutes of radio interviews – is fairly straightforward.

Changing attitude is only part of the battle. You want the policy makers and regulators to take action. If they do, then you have achieved your outcomes as well and succeeded with you campaign objectives.

9. Ethics and advocacy

It is important that you, and your BMO, act ethically and do not engage in corrupt practices – or even in practices that may be deemed by others to be corrupt. Bribery and other techniques may occasionally secure the change that you want in the short term but, in addition to being unethical, never achieve change in the long run. Instead, you should be transparent in all your dealings with government, aiming to deliver reforms through persuasion and the force of the evidence. You should act with integrity and honestly in all your advocacy.

In the UK, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, at the behest of the UK Government, has set up the UK Lobbying Register[4]. They set out ten professional behaviours that should be expected of lobbyists. These provide a good standard for all lobbyists and interest groups.

- Professional lobbyists tell you who they are and whom they represent – including the nature of their client's or employer's interests.
- Professional lobbyists do not intentionally mislead anyone in any way.
- Professional lobbyists provide information that is accurate and true. Lobbyists should make a reasonable effort to verify statements and should be clear about what they do not know to be accurate or true. Information should not be deliberately omitted or obscured from briefings or other material if it would potentially create a misleading impression.

[4] The CIPR's introduction to the Lobbying Register is available at baf.fyi/cipr

- Professional lobbyists do not offer bribes or inducements – which includes gifts or excessive entertainment, whether or not the intention is to solicit a favour or preference.
- Professional lobbyists manage and avoid conflicts of interest. It is not acceptable for a lobbyist to represent two clients who compete in the same market. A conflict of interest can also arise between the lobbyists' professional and personal political interests. Where this arises, a professional lobbyist will cease relevant lobbying until the conflicts can be resolved. This might arise when lobbying while holding elected or public office, pursuing a voluntary role in politics or working as a political adviser.
- Professional lobbyists respect confidentiality – this is more than simply keeping a client's commercial information confidential. Lobbyists do not misuse privileged information for commercial gain.
- Professional lobbyists respect the rules and regulations of the institutions of government and representation wherever they work, and the codes of conduct that bind other professionals.
- Professional lobbyists respect the public's right to know about lobbying activity – professional conduct requires lobbying to be carried out in plain view. Professional lobbyists should be willing to identify themselves publicly and disclose the interests on whose behalf they lobby.
- Professional lobbyists observe rules, resolutions, codes of conduct and statutes in relation to employing or contracting elected representatives, members of Parliament, holders of public office and public servants – this includes any rules covering the periods of time after they have left those roles.
- Professional lobbyists do not use access privileges to lobby – professional lobbyists who hold passes or otherwise have privileged access to the precincts of any Parliament, Assembly, Council or other elected body, or any Institution of Government, where that pass is not explicitly granted in relation to their role as a lobbyist, must not make use of it in the course of lobbying or otherwise abuse this privilege.

The Business Advocacy Fund requires that BMOs in receipt of grant funding have and observe a code of ethics. If they do not already have one, BAF has prepared a model code of ethics[5] which they can adopt or use as the basis to write their own.

Further reading and further information

- Ritu Sharma, "An introduction to advocacy", SARA/AED pdf.dec.org/pdf_docs/PNABZ919.pdf
- "How to advocate effectively: a guidebook for business associations", CIPE, 2003 www.cipe.org
- Benjamin Herzberg & Andrew Wright, "The PPD Handbook: a toolkit for business environment reformers", DFID/World Bank/IFC/OECD, 2006

[5] See baf.fyi/ethics

This series of advocacy competence handbooks – divided into modules and units – is intended to support business member organisations (BMOs) to engage in public private dialogue and to advocate improvements to the business environment. You are free to use the units and other materials provided that the source is acknowledged.

The Business Advocacy Network is an initiative of Irwin Grayson Associates and can be found at businessadvocacy.net. IGA can be found at irwingrayson.com and contacted at david@irwin.org. You can follow David Irwin on twitter at @drdavidirwin.