



Business  
Advocacy  
Network

PUBLIC POLICY DIALOGUE & ADVOCACY:  
ARGUMENTATION & INFLUENCE

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# PUBLIC POLICY DIALOGUE & ADVOCACY

## ARGUMENTATION & INFLUENCE

### 1. Introduction

Business membership organisations (BMOs) engage in private public dialogue and advocate an improved business environment. Researching the evidence and preparing a policy position are two essential aspects of your advocacy – but almost as important are the arguments, the justification, for your position and the way that you deploy those arguments as you aim to influence others not only to your point of view but to act.

Argumentation is often portrayed as arguing or argumentative and use pejoratively. But argumentation is simply the use of effective reasoning to take people through a logical and step by step justification for your position. It is your arguments that will ultimately sway people to your point of view.

There may be occasions, however, when you conclude that you have to compromise and, in those cases, you may find that rather than influencing per se you are having to negotiate. Negotiation, like bargaining, tends to imply that both parties have agreed in principle and are simply haggling as for example when you go to buy a car. So employers' organisations, trades unions and government may negotiate over issues like the minimum wage.

But in most cases, even if there is need to compromise, it is not so much bargaining as ensuring that the other party understands the implications of what they are proposing and persuading them to deliver their policy imperative in a way that imposes less of a burden – based on interests – so your ability to influence depends on your ability to marshal the evidence and make a compelling case. If other interest groups are with you, it may make the influencing easier; if they are opposed to your position, it will make it harder.

The aim of this handbook is to introduce the essential skills of argumentation and influence. By the end of the book you will:

- Understand how to prepare a reasoned argument in support of a stated position;
- Understand the principles of influencing;
- Understand the steps required to influence successfully; and
- Have a greater level of self-esteem and self-confidence.

## 2. Argumentation

The Oxford English Dictionary defines an argument as “a statement or fact advanced for the purpose of influencing the mind” or “a reason urged in support of a proposition” and defines argumentation as “a process of reasoning” or as “a methodical employment or presentation of arguments”. The strength of your argument – based on evidence and logic – is what ultimately determines whether you will be able to influence policy outcomes.

The starting point for effective influence is having appropriate and objective research evidence. This is covered in *Identifying, understanding and framing issues* and *Research methods*. You can then use the evidence to prepare a reasoned and compelling argument. You will, in time, write this into a policy position.

Argumentation is the thought process in which you develop an argument. Argument assumes that there is more than one point of view and indeed that the points of view may be directly contradictory. An argument is simply the logical and systematic presentation of reason and supporting evidence intended to convince an audience to accept a particular point of view. Argument is rational. It does not depend on emotion or threat.

Argumentation depends on evidence which can be fact or opinion.

Facts offer objective data and can be proven. Facts may come from scientific measurement, or from the way nature works, or from observation, or from statistics. If factual evidence is poorly presented, you will quickly find that the parties are arguing over the facts rather than the conclusions to be drawn from the facts.

Opinions are personal views or judgements. They cannot be proven but can be legitimate if they come from an expert in a particular field. Opinions need to be credible.

Whilst stories are specific, a good narrative – perhaps an example of how a business has suffered from poor regulation of how a farmer’s livelihood is being harmed – can be a good way of making a specific point.

Many people argue, both orally and in writing, in ways that are aggressive and inflammatory. That is always counter-productive. Your audience will be much more likely to listen if you are calm and create a rapport such that everyone feels able to express their point of view. Indeed, you may even modify your own arguments and position in response.

In preparing your argument, recognise that there are always other points of view. Brainstorm those potential objections and be ready to defend your position. At the very least, you should be ready for objections when they are raised. Ideally, you will be able to construct your arguments to explain why you think they are inappropriate.

Fisher & Ury (2011) go further and suggest that you think about the way in which critics might respond to your target audience if they accept and adopt your point

of view. Then write two or three sentences to help your target audience defend their decision.

Let us turn now to preparing your arguments. Kuhn & Crowell (2011) suggest that there are three ways in which people prepare arguments: the single perspective, in which they set out the advantages of their favoured position; the dual perspective, in which they additionally set out the cons of an opposing position; and, the integrative perspective, in which they include both the pros and cons of all positions.

The approach that you adopt may depend on the issue. Sometimes there is merit in showing all the options and then leading the policy maker through each in turn, showing how options improve on the preceding options. On the other hand, there may be occasions when the policy maker may alight on a sub-optimal option.

You may want to concede that your solution will not completely solve a problem but rather that it will make a start on solving the problem. This will help to establish the limits of your argument.

You do not need to decide which approach to adopt until you have all the possible options and the pros and cons for each. But you do need a way of brainstorming the options and the arguments.

Kuhn & Crowell (2011) found, in their research, that the best way to prepare an argument is to work in small groups: to generate reasons for your own position; to formulate questions to secure additional evidence; to evaluate reasons and rank their importance; and, to anticipate alternative arguments and prepare responses. It may help you to set up a role play with a small group of people playing the role of the association – and developing private sector arguments – and a small group of people playing the role of the Ministry or Department – and developing public sector arguments. You can then combine all the arguments in your own integrated approach, even if you subsequently decide not to use all the arguments in your policy position.

In preparing your argument, and thus your policy position, remember:

- You need a powerful opening statement and a powerful closing statement;
- You need to be as specific as possible;
- You need to address the counter-arguments, but to do so respectfully;
- To choose your words and writing style carefully and match it to your audience;
- To strike a balance between credible fact and authoritative opinion (facts alone are often good enough but opinion alone is unlikely to be persuasive);
- Narrative can bring an argument to life;
- Visuals – photographs, graphics, even cartoons – in a document can provide a powerful way to convey a key message;
- In written documents, you should always end with your argument, rather than someone else's, so that the reader has your position at the front of their mind as they stop reading.

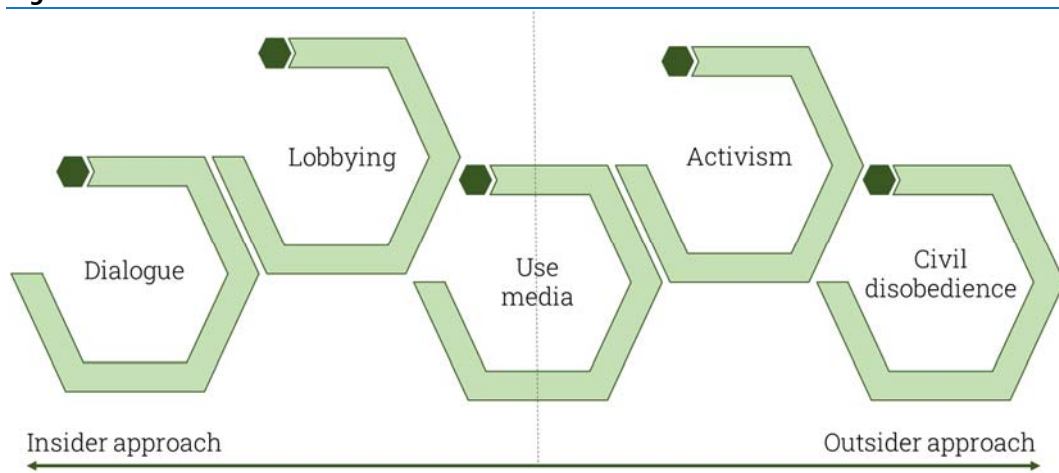
## 3.Persuasion & influence

Some academics suggest that persuasion is subtly different to argument in that argument aims to secure agreement whereas persuasion aims to secure action. Argument, as already noted, uses evidence and reason presented in a logical way. Persuasion additionally makes use of *pathos* and *ethos*. Osborn & Osborn (1988) describe *pathos* as 'proof based on motives and emotions'. This is where your narrative can become an important element of your argument. They describe *ethos* as an assumption that people 'can be persuaded by the personal influence of the source of a message'; in other words, if the speaker appears to be honest and trustworthy, likeable and credible, then the audience will be more likely to accept the argument and to act. Business membership organisations, and indeed interest groups in general tend to use the word, 'influence', rather than persuasion to describe what they are aiming to do.

Influencing is thus used to describe the activity whereby you seek to persuade a person or organisation round to your point of view and then to act in a specific way or to support a viewpoint or action. In the case of private sector advocacy, the aim may be to persuade a Ministry or Agency or municipal authority to repeal an existing regulatory requirement, or to implement a proposal for a new regulation in such a way that it is less burdensome than it might otherwise have been, or to enforce an existing regulation, or to create a new regulation, or to avert a proposal for a new regulation, or to delay the introduction of a new regulation (usually to allow time for business to prepare) or to stop something that the public agency is allowing to happen, such as a corrupt practice.

Influence requires a compelling message – evidence, narrative, reason (and you will have that if you have taken time to prepare your argument) – but it also requires honesty, integrity and trust. However, the approach that you employ to influence policy makers is also likely to make a difference. Going directly to policy makers – taking the insider approach – and engaging in dialogue or lobbying gives you a chance to have a two-way communication and thus to hear, and perhaps address, objections. Conversations should always be followed up with written submissions, to reinforce your key points and arguments and to leave a reminder with your target audience. Using the media, or talking via intermediaries, only allows for one-way communication which is likely to be less effective, though it can be a good way of demonstrating the extent of public support for the issue. Take care with the use of media though – it can backfire and encourage policy makers to continue with their proposals. Grass roots campaigns, demonstrations and other forms of activism – the outside approach – tend to be less effective still, at least for the types of issues pursued by business associations.

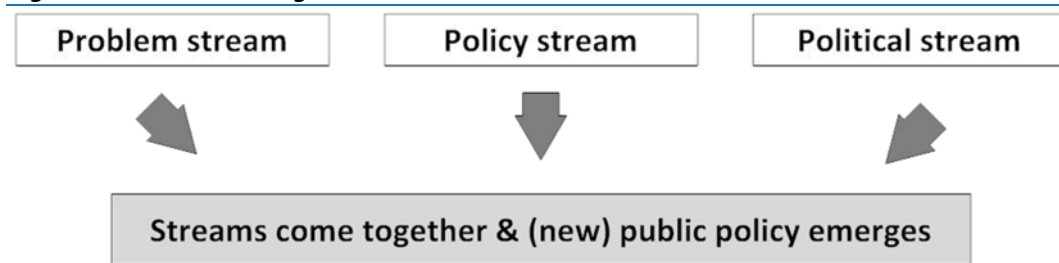
**Figure 1: Insider outsider continuum**



Influence may need to occur at different times: to put an issue on the 'agenda', to encourage a particular option to address the issue, to ensure a decision is implemented. In all cases, your strategy may include directly influencing the decision makers but may additionally or alternatively revolve around influencing those who in turn influence the decision makers. You will need a plan embracing those with whom you need to communicate and your messages – for more detail see *Planning an Advocacy Project* – and here will focus on the skills of influence.

Kingdon (2003) notes that there are many problems for people in government to solve: the "problem stream". There are many people – researchers, advisers, etc – all of whom have policy ideas to solve the problems: the "policy stream". Sometimes a champion, or a policy entrepreneur, or an effective pressure group, will pick up a policy proposal and run with it. This requires patience and persistence. Often, however, nothing happens until the "political stream" – public mood, elections, catastrophe – changes. Kingdon argued that it is only when all three come together that change happens. This means that you need to be ready with your solution – but you also need to be seeding the problem stream – putting issues on to the agenda – and aiming to provide the catalyst that will trigger the political stream.

**Figure 2: Streams & change**



There are several ways in which you can begin your advocacy activity. You can engage in dialogue with policy makers. This implies a mutual desire for a conversation and perhaps therefore recognition by the policy makers that there is a problem to be solved. You can lobby policy makers. This is still likely to face to face but implies that you have first to persuade the policy makers that there is a

problem. If you cannot secure access, you may start in some other way, through the media perhaps. Your first objective has to be secure a meeting with the relevant public officials.

Much influencing is undertaken through engaging in public private dialogue (PPD). The World Bank explains that PPD is the structured interaction between the public and private sectors in promoting the right conditions for private sector development, improvements to the business climate, and poverty reduction. It is about stakeholders coming together to define and analyse problems, discuss and agree on specific reforms, and then working to ensure that these ideas become a reality. PPD provides:

- A conversation
- An opportunity to understand each other's point of view
- A forum to share information, opinion and policy ideas
- An opportunity to understand driving forces, such as political or commercial imperatives
- A forum to promote balanced decisions which lead to buy-in from public & private sectors
- A mechanism to follow-up decisions & monitor implementation

Bettcher *et al.* (2015) note that "governments that listen to the private sector are more likely to design credible reforms and win support for their policies. Dialogue improves the flow of information and builds legitimacy; it improves trust and understanding."

Negotiation is often a zero-sum game: for one side to do 'better', the other side has to do 'worse'. If you drive down the price of a second-hand car, you do better but the seller does worse. But dialogue does not have to be negotiation. Effective dialogue will look for positions that balance all interests so that everyone feels that they have done better. You will find this easier if you focus on interests rather than positions. See yourself as working with government to solve a mutual problem, not as fighting the government. Even something like the minimum wage can be viewed in this way with an increase in the minimum wage being offset by improvements in productivity – assuming of course that you can generate those productivity increases. Look for mutual gain. Influencing can be rather more amorphous than negotiation – and may include disputes over the facts themselves.

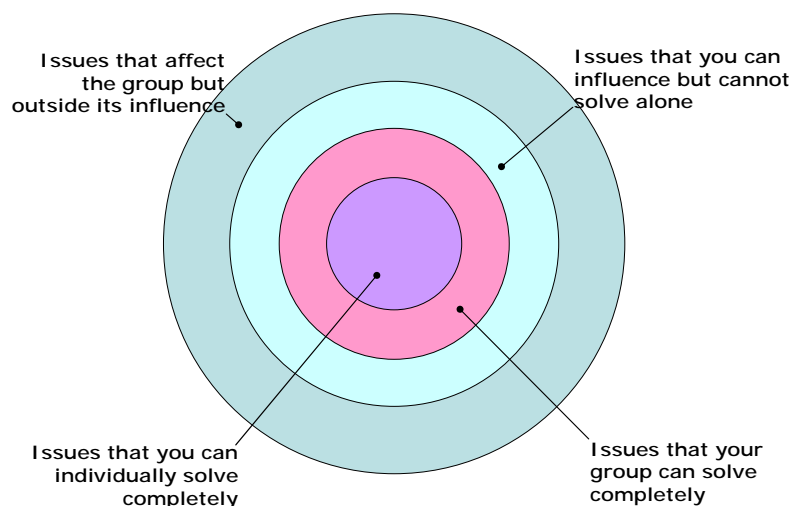
Think of the target audiences that have to be influenced as a series of concentric circles. A good advocacy strategy directs the BMO's energy towards maximising influence through the inner circles – acting effectively and efficiently on those issues within its circle of influence, while making systematic effort to bring more issues of concern within the circles of influence.

When people think about negotiation, they visualise the need for two parties to come to a mutually acceptable solution. Influencing is often more encompassing, not least because there may be more than two parties involved and because influencers often seek to work through others – opinion formers – in their efforts to influence the ultimate target – influencing a Minister in the Government will be



far easier if the Minister thinks that 90 per cent of the population backs a specific proposal rather than just one per cent – and because, as we have just noted, we should be aiming for everyone to win. Influencing may also be easier if there are third parties, such as apex bodies, that can open doors.

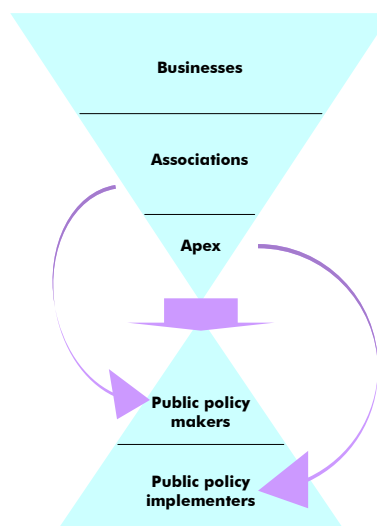
**Figure 3: Circles of influence**



Source: Maer Associates

You may find that success requires that you work with and through a number of different parties – civil servants, Ministers, Parliamentarians, for example – not only to bring them round to your point of view but also to encourage them to advocate your position. This will require sustained effort over a period of time.

**Figure 4: Exerting influence through third parties**



Source: Irwin Grayson Associates

There will also be occasions when you are seeking to influence public policy in the knowledge that another stakeholder is trying to influence the Government in a different direction. This means that the policy maker has to choose between mutually incompatible demands – say between businesses and consumers – or has to find an acceptable balance. That is why gathering good evidence can make a big difference to your ability to influence policy makers and opinion formers.

## 4. Principles for successful influencing

The first step in achieving successful influence is to take the initiative: recognising – rather than just waiting, wishing and moaning – the policies and activities that need to be different. The influencing mindset moves away from just complaining to specifying clearly what needs doing and setting about getting it done. Successful influencing requires a healthy combination of interpersonal, communication, presentation and assertiveness skills. It also requires the consideration of a range of options, good preparation and clear prioritisation. To be successful, you need:

- **To be clear about the change(s) required:** Whether at personal or group level, influencing requires adapting and modifying your personal style as you become aware of the effect you are having on other people. This will be clear if you have prepared your policy and your arguments well.
- **Understand yourself and the effect you have on others:** If others perceive you as opposing them, that will shape how they interpret anything you propose or question that you ask. Influencing is generally two way – the party that you are aiming to influence will most likely want to influence you to change your position as well.
- **Do not manipulate others:** It is sometimes tempting to exert influence through coercion and manipulation. You might occasionally even succeed but that is not really influencing. It is forcing people to do what you want, often against their will. It fails the test of influencing because it does not win support. In fact, over the long term, it works against you.
- **Take others' views into consideration:** Invite the other party to put their point of view, so that they do not feel forced – especially if they actually do agree with the action proposed. Where they disagree, people are far more willing to come halfway (or more) if they feel acknowledged, understood and appreciated. Because they feel good about making the choice, people may even end up doing or agreeing to something they would not previously have done.
- **Be positive:** Emphasise the positive aspects of your case, rather than being overly critical of the existing public policy position. Look for ways to help policy makers look good by supporting your case.
- **Even when you disagree, do not cause embarrassment:** One of the most powerful forces affecting behaviour is the avoidance of humiliation. No one wants to be embarrassed so take care – offer to work with them, provide them the ammunition that they need to work on your behalf within the organisation.

People do not like to feel manipulated, so take care with your approach. Remember, too, that the people you are trying to influence will be assessing your motives, so be open about your objectives.

## 5. Steps for successful influencing

Influencing and negotiating skills are very similar and the steps to success are also very similar. Effective influencing requires that you:

- Identify the right people to influence and, if possible, get to know them through regular dialogue;
- Adopt appropriate behaviours and attitudes;
- Engage in effective communication;
- Build rapport with your target audiences;
- Are clear about your objectives;
- Ask questions. Fisher & Ury (2011) suggest that “statements generate resistance whereas questions generate answers”.
- Are confident in your position (which requires that you have good research) and able to offer compelling arguments in a logical, rational and reasoned way;
- Listen: if the other side perceives that you are listening to them, they will be more like to listen to you. Ensure that you understand their position.
- Sometimes, you may find it helpful to reframe the discussion: move the focus from position to interests, or to options, or to standards.
- Network widely, build coalitions, mobilise public support.

Influencing requires that you build support and trust, not that you bully and cajole.

In the workplace, people sometimes seek to exert influence through coercion and manipulation, perhaps because they are in a position of power, and they may succeed in getting things done, but that is not influencing. That is forcing people to do something, often against their will, and that will not succeed in winning support.

The objective is to persuade a target audience to accept, and ideally then to espouse on your behalf a certain viewpoint.

You will need to understand the target audience and particularly the values, attitudes, emotions, perceptions and motives that drive them. Sometimes you may find that it is necessary only to use economic arguments; other times you may need to present a case in such a way as to draw on national pride.

Fisher & Ury (2011) suggest that rather than trying to defend your proposal, when it is challenged, you reiterate your underlying interests. And then ask the other side if they can think of a way of addressing those interests whilst at the same time addressing their own. If the conflict appears irreconcilable, ask why one side's priorities should take precedence.

Start by ensuring a clear awareness of the issue through articulating the facts – say, this regulation costs 90 per cent of our members 10 per cent of their income because – rather than making judgemental observations. However, there can be

merit in following the facts with feelings, though this has to be treated carefully – as a result, they are very frustrated with the government...

Once the facts have been accepted, the next step is to promote a change of attitude. Negotiation is often adversarial; wherever possible, you should aim to be collaborative - "We are on the same side on this". Indeed, it is not unusual to find that you really are on the same side, but that the official needs the evidence that you can bring to support the case for change.

The most important part of influencing is offering a solution. You could ask the person whom you are trying to influence if they have ideas, but it is usually better if you can offer a proposal. Offering a benefit to the person or organisation that you are aiming to influence makes a big difference. We are not talking here about personal benefit! For example – enforcing the performing rights legislation will increase our members' income by an average of 20 per cent and that will mean the government gets extra tax income. Benefits could also include public praise, an improved environment leading to more businesses and more jobs, etc.

- Identify the issue and be clear about the desired end result;
- Identify the stakeholders who need to be influenced;
- Research where they are 'coming from'; understand their needs and the other pressures on them, perhaps from other groups seeking to influence their thinking in a different direction;
- Research the issue to ensure that you have all the facts at your finger tips;
- Identify and quantify the benefits to both private and public sectors;
- Be flexible in your demands – a partial move in your direction is better than no movement at all;
- Develop an influencing plan;
- Build coalitions and seek support from other groups who, in turn, might be able to assist you to influence the key stakeholders;
- Launch the influencing activities, build momentum, regularly monitor progress and amend the plan as necessary.

## 6. Building rapport

Rapport is about meeting people on their own level, making them feel at home and so developing a feeling of warmth and well-being. Carkhuff (1969) identified eight core variables in communication, all of which will help you here. These are not in any order of priority.

- Empathy – showing acceptance and understanding of the feeling state of the individual;
- Positive regard – showing interest and attention, demonstrating concern - this is very effectively achieved using voice tone;
- Respect – not judging or evaluating, treating the person as an equal;
- Genuineness - being sincere, showing that you are not playing a role or maintaining a façade;

- Precision – being specific, avoiding vague terms or jargon;
- Self-disclosure – being unafraid to reveal your own feelings, when relevant to the discussion;
- Confrontation – saying it like it is. Confrontation must be presented with warmth, respect and empathy and must be specific if it is to be useful and helpful; otherwise it is hurtful and punishing; and,
- Immediacy – openly responding to the relationship and developing it to deal with the current situation.

Building rapport is a skill you can learn and develop by being aware of your own feelings and by reading other people's body language to determine their true feelings. Remember that we often do not express ourselves directly, but if the words and the gestures do not match, you can bet it is what you are seeing that is the true picture. Think about what might have caused the discomfort, whether it is expressed as anger, embarrassment or whatever. Be alert at all times for situations in which you experience a "bad feeling". Try to identify the cause of that feeling, to pinpoint what it was that failed to build rapport between you and the other person. Now you are becoming aware of what you should not do to avoid creating bad feeling in the people with whom you communicate. Look also for the reasons why things go well. Identify techniques that work for you, try them out in different situations, develop your skill.

If you work at this consciously for a while, you will find that it becomes second nature to act in a way that builds rapport with others and this will pay dividends not only in your professional life but in your personal life as well.

## 7. Tips

There are no rules, but the following pointers may help:

- Prepare well.
- The nature of the relationship, the history and the perceived equality of the parties will make a difference. If you value the relationship you will generally use collaborative strategies, which demonstrates concern for the other party;
- Be confident, and if you do not feel confident, at least do your best to appear confident about your position and your ability in communication and persuasion;
- Allow enough time for your influencing activities;
- Be clear about your objectives and prioritise since they impact upon the influencing process – having clear goals will mean that you are more likely to enjoy a focused discussion in which the objectives can be used to define progress and as a measure of success – but be flexible as well. It is often better to compromise and get some way to your objectives than to lose everything;
- As far as possible, be open during the influencing process;
- Do not be unnecessarily irritating; take care about personal language, for example;

- Respect the other party – they have objectives, too – listen carefully and do not interrupt;
- If you need time to think, take it – ask for a short break and recap your notes.

## 8. Conclusion

Influencing is a means of encouraging others not only to adopt your point of view but also to stimulate them to act on it. There are many ways of influencing policy makers, but one of the strongest is through personal dialogue with public sector officials and Ministers. This requires having at your fingertips all the evidence and then being able to marshal the arguments in a way that is totally compelling.

There is charter of good practice for public private dialogue which, if you are new to dialogue, may help you and your target audiences structure your interactions effectively.

## Further reading and further information



- Carkhuff, R. R, (1969) *Helping and human relations*, Holt, Rhinehart & Winston
- Charter for public private dialogue  
[www.publicprivatedialogue.org/charter/](http://www.publicprivatedialogue.org/charter/)
- Fisher, R, Ury, W, & Patton, B. (2011) *Getting to Yes: negotiating an agreement without giving in*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, rhBusiness Books
- Kingdon, J.W (2003) *Agendas, alternatives and public policies*, Longman
- Kuhn, D. & Crowell, A (2011) Dialogic Argumentation as a Vehicle for Developing Young Adolescents' Thinking, *Psychological Science* 22(4) 545-552, DOI: 10.1177/0956797611402512
- University of Minnesota Libraries, *Writing for Success*, [baf.fyi/writing1](http://baf.fyi/writing1)

This series of advocacy competence handbooks – divided into modules and units – is intended to support business membership 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 handbooks are all available at [businessadvocacy.net](http://businessadvocacy.net).

## Module 2: Policy positions

### 2.3 Argumentation & influence

**This handbook introduces concepts, tools and techniques that will help you prepare effective arguments to support your policy positions especially when you engage in dialogue and advocacy in face to face meetings**

The Business Advocacy Network is an initiative of Irwin Grayson Associates and can be found at [businessadvocacy.net](http://businessadvocacy.net). IGA can be found at [irwingrayson.com](http://irwingrayson.com) and contacted at [david@irwin.org](mailto:david@irwin.org). You can follow David Irwin on twitter at [@drdauidirwin](https://twitter.com/drdauidirwin).

