

Five step approach to advocacy

Introduction

The concept of advocacy is simple: identify an issue and lobby policy makers to do something about it. But in practice, advocacy is rather more complicated. 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.

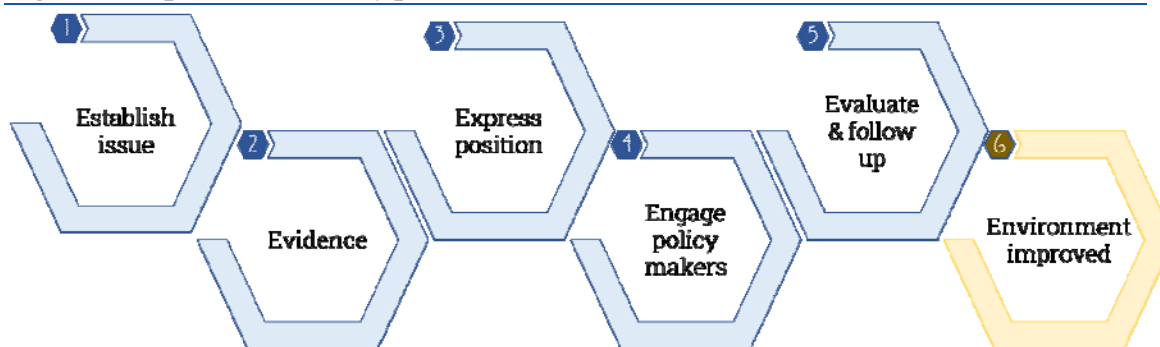
It will help you to split the process into steps. The actual number does not really matter since the objective is simply to divide in such a way that the process becomes easier to manage. Experience suggests five steps are particularly helpful:

The five step approach

- Establishing, or 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 and collating evidence – which requires excellent research, including a systematic gathering of views, the ability to draw logical conclusions and a process for developing consensus internally;
- Formulating and expressing ‘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;
- Engaging with appropriate people in Government – to influence public policy; and
- Evaluating and monitoring progress – to ensure that, when the public sector agrees changes, they are put into practice.

And if you are effective in each of these steps, then you will ultimately achieve policy reform and a contribution towards improving the environment in which businesses work.

Figure 1: Steps in the advocacy process



Source: Irwin Grayson Associates

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

Establishing 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 important to remember that an association will not be able to fight on too many fronts at once, so will need to prioritise.

Evidencing the issues

The next step is to research the issue, to ensure that the association has a full 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).

For existing regulation, it can be sensible to consider the potential implications if it did not exist (especially if it 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.

Expressing responses and proposals

Preparing policy proposals is usually the hardest step. 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.

Engaging 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.

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.

Evaluation and follow up

Once policy makers have agreed to your proposals, you may need to make an effort to monitor progress. 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.



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