

So you want to lobby decision- makers?

Direct lobbying is a good way to change the opinions and policies of decision-makers, including governments, politicians and companies.





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While working with the media and public campaigns will indirectly influence decision-makers as they will hear or read about your campaigns and views, you can also mount campaigns to speak with them directly. Direct lobbying is a good way to change policies.

Lobbying can include:

- visits or meetings with officials in the capital city, at the embassy or in local/district offices;
- discussions with officials at inter-governmental meetings eg. United Nations conferences, Organisation for African Unity summits, Commonwealth gatherings;
- trips or excursions organised for officials;
- letters, petitions and other forms of contact with decision makers.

Who to lobby

Identify the targets, the decision-making institutions and bodies. Be clear where the power lies and who has influence. Also analyse how easy it is to get an audience with them, as some officials are more accessible than others. Usually it is good to start out by meeting with a wide range of officials and then to narrow down your targets as the campaign develops and you get to know the institutions better. See the section "So you want to plan and evaluate your campaign" for some more ideas on this. Some questions you may want to ask yourself include:

Who are the people making decisions on landmine policy/mine clearance policy? Are they in a government ministry or department? Which ministry/department - Foreign Affairs/Defence/Other? Are they in a UN agency? If your country is affected by landmines, what about other Ministry officials who must deal with aspects of the landmines crisis: health, agriculture, transport, education and trade? Are they an ambassador or embassy official?



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Should you speak to politicians - political parties/members of parliament/retired public figures? How easy accessible are they (are they always out of town? Do they have staff who will not arrange appointments with you etc?)? Can you find creative ways to access decision-makers - through their religious leader/friends/colleagues?

Visits or meetings

A visit to the office of the decision-maker is often a good way to establish contact and put across your message about antipersonnel landmines. Contact the office by sending a formal letter requesting an appointment. The people who will make up the delegation should sign the letter. Be sure to confirm the appointment by phone, check the address, time and directions to the venue. If you do not receive a reply to the letter, telephone or visit the office to request an appointment once more, or use contacts who may help gain you access to the official.

Plan your delegation carefully - the more constituencies your delegation represents, the better. For example, having a mine clearer, mine survivor, campaigner and researcher in the delegation will enable you to put across all the facts and opinions necessary to influence the decision maker. Also look at the representivity of the group in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, geography and so on. Delegate different tasks to each member of the team and appoint one leader who will introduce everyone and guide the meeting. Plan the arguments you want to put across, practise saying them, think of questions or counter-arguments you will be given and plan how you will respond. Say specifically what you would like the decision-maker to do for example: adopt new legislation, ask a question in parliament, change a policy, speak to the Cabinet etc. Leave a statement and a pack of material behind which summarise your arguments and include your contact details. Use the time well - often half the meeting can be used for introductions and other issues, and the delegation gets distracted from making its point. Make sure that you are:

- on time
- polite - do not shout or become abusive even if you disagree with them!



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- brief - put across your arguments, but do this briefly
- ask questions - often these meetings are important opportunities to find out about government plans, for example for demining or legislation.
- critical and forceful if necessary

International conferences'

Diplomats at conferences like Commonwealth, United Nations and Treaty conferences usually expect to be lobbied by their own country campaigners and by other campaigners on any number of issues in the treaty text, on their own government's position and on other governments' positions.

They are trained to be knowledgeable, approachable and "diplomatic" even if they wear suits and ties and have never been to a mine affected country. During the conference you should attempt to meet and develop a good relationship with a number of diplomats. Often that is the reason you are attending the conference. Also this might be your only opportunity to confront decision-makers on issues related to landmine policy.

Work as a team

To begin with, meet with other campaigners from your country or region to establish what your main lobbying points are and to decide on strategies to convince a diplomat to accept your position. Divide amongst the group diplomats and delegations to lobby. When you first meet with diplomats and delegations, it is important to let them tell you what their positions are on the various issues of concern. Then, in the give and take of the discussion, if their position does not support the International Campaign's, that is when you lobby. Campaigners should report back the results of the meetings to the campaign group to ensure you are not duplicating efforts and plan for further lobbying.

Approach in pairs

Approach an experienced campaigner and ask them to work with you when lobbying delegates and discuss how the conversation went afterwards. If you need a translator present approach someone before hand and ask for help. If you need a landmine survivor,



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deminer or someone from your region to help you get across a particular point then approach them to accompany you. Don't feel like you have to take on a delegation alone. Find support. Work with others. The key thing is to do it! Each time you do it, it gets easier!

Approaching a delegate

Don't be shy! Take advantage of numerous opportunities to approach diplomats during the lunch and coffee breaks, social functions and even rest rooms. But if they look as if they're in a hurry, harassed or angry, leave it until another opportunity arises. Wear your name tag and campaign badge. Introduce yourself and repeat your name and country campaign again every time you approach them.

Conversation

Think of a way to strike up a conversation before hitting them with the point you want their support on eg. Are you both from the same town? Where do they work - in an embassy abroad, in their home capital or another forum such as the Conference on Disarmament? Most larger delegations include military/defence people, policy or political people and trained arms control negotiators - what is their background?

Making your point

Once you feel comfortable talking with them, start thinking about getting your point across. Don't dominate the conversation - you want to find out what they think and know and will do regarding your points - so listen to them! Don't write points down using pen and paper - try to remember and keep notes of their name, country and points, later on. Don't hesitate to ask simple questions or interrupt if what they say is untrue but do so in a polite manner. Don't shout or threaten them but speak with confidence and from the heart! Don't say something is an official International Campaign position unless you are absolutely certain.

Follow up

Thank them for their time even if you disagreed. If they admire your ban badge - give it to



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them and get another for yourself! If they ask you a question which you can't answer - get back to them later or bring along someone who can answer their query. If you discuss something which they haven't seen (eg. A media story) offer to return and give them a copy. Invite them to campaign briefings and social events during the conference, if there are any during the particular conference.

Trips or excursions

Organising excursions to visit demining sites; hospitals where survivors are being treated, prosthetic clinics or mine awareness lecture, can expose decision-makers to the reality of the landmines crisis and can be very powerful ways to influence them. Some hints for organising trips include:

- brief the delegation and provide them with background information before the trip so that they know what to expect;
- plan your time realistically: allow time for informal interactions between deminers and officials, for example, and for breaks for refreshments and travelling between sites
- try to make sure that the delegation will see activities, rather than viewing sites, empty building or materials, for example a mine, awareness play in progress, or deminers at work
- if appropriate, invite the media to accompany the delegation.

Letters, petitions and other forms of contactⁱⁱ

Letters are important not only to change views, but also to reinforce positive statements or actions. Some hints for letter-writing:

- Make your letters brief, clear and to the point. Concentrate on one issue, such as a call for ratification of the Mine Ban Treaty, or a request for information on stock destruction.
- Give reasons for your stand or request. Provide background information and facts and include newspaper clippings or research reports if appropriate.



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- Remember that staff members will open most letters addressed to a government official. You will have more chance of having the official to whom you addressed the letter read it if it is challenging and asks questions that cannot be answered by a form letter.
- Sometimes you will get a form letter in response. If you are not happy with the reply then write a follow-up letter.
- Think of asking different members or allies in the campaign to write letters at the same time. But try to make sure that each letter has a slightly different angle and different wording. Alternatively, ask these members and allies to sign one letter to give it more weight.
- Coordinated letters or postcards which arrive on the same day, or week, can have a larger impact. Choose a symbolic day or week for the letter-writing campaign.

Other forms of contact:

- Postcards with standard messages, which are distributed and signed by individual members of the public, have often been used by the ICBL and are another form of letter-writing. Postcard campaigns have various pros and cons, however: The cons: the letters are not personally written to the official so will not receive a personal reply and are likely to be seen as less significant than individually written letters. The pros: the message is communicated to the public that signs and sends in their postcards, the public is involved in doing something for the campaign and it is relatively easy to generate a high volume of postcards to a particular official.
- Petitions are also used to influence officials, though they are not as effective as individual letters. The value of petitions is primarily as a tool for organising and educating the public, and they have been used most effectively to this end by various national campaigns in the ICBL.
- Telephone calls and email messages can get through to an official, especially if you have had previous contact. Try to speak directly to the official and if you can't ask to speak to their advisor or legislative aide. Several campaigns have organised call-in days, and asked members and the public to call the president or another official all on the same day, usually a symbolic day.

Tips for successful lobbyists

- establish yourself as a resource for policy makers by supplying them with information - newsletters, research papers, publications and the outcome of research;
- express your willingness to help them find additional material or data;
- maintain your relationship with the policy maker by sending them information, thanking them when they voted appropriately on the issue you are concerned about and inviting them to events;
- encourage people to write personal letters to the policy maker and send copies of these letters to the press;
- organise a briefing for the policy makers at which an expert on the issue can talk about its importance.

(Dr Marjorie Jobson, Human Rights Institute of South Africa)

Footnotes

- 1 Taken from the ICB's information sheet entitled "How to Lobby"
- 2 War Resisters League: Organizer's Manual, Ed. Ed Hedemann (New York: War Resisters League, 1986), pp 205, 206.

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