

Communicating with Policymakers

Delivery Tips 101

Know your story

It seems obvious, but preparation and practice are key. Know your key messages like you know your address.

- What are your supporting facts and anecdotes?
- What are your vulnerabilities and how will you address them if asked?

Say who you are, and whom you represent

Another obvious one, but it bears repeating. Start by telling them who you are, who you represent and why you're there.

Keep it simple

Stay on point and focused. Avoid jargon. Don't overload your presentation – a few concise, compelling and clear examples are more effective than many general points.

Know your audience

Research your contacts before the meeting.

- What does the person to whom you're talking need to do their job?
- Where do they stand on this issue?
- What constraining factors do they face (time, politics, funding)?
- Who are their influencers?
- What are their key issues?
- What language is effective/ineffective?

Assertive is good, aggressive is not

Being passionate about your cause and stating your case with conviction is important. However, it is neither prudent nor productive to be combative.

- Be respectful.
- In the face of potential conflict, pause to consider appropriate responses.
- Avoid repeating negative language
- Use flags and bridges to transition to appropriate messages.

If you don't know, say so

You are an expert on many things, but no one expects you to be an expert on everything. Not having the answer to a particular question is an opportunity. Say you don't know – but you'll find out. This is an opening to continue a dialogue and be a resource.

Follow up

Take careful notes about questions or issues on which you can follow up. Then do it!

Flags and Bridges

Flags and bridges are a way to draw attention to key points and gracefully transition away from negative language and back to your messages.

Flags are verbal clues to your listener that important information is coming. Listeners will perk up at a flag, and are more likely to remember what comes next. Examples are:

- The most important thing to remember is ...
- The bottom line is ...
- The key finding of this study is ...
- What that means for you is ...
- The real issue is ...
- Let me be clear ...
- Let me put that in perspective ...
- And don't forget ...

Bridges are transitions. Bridges are particularly handy when a meeting veers off topic or beyond scope. Some samples are:

- Before we move on, let me just add that ...
- That's a great point/question, but the real issue is ...
- That's not my area of expertise/I can't speak for others, but what I can tell you is ...
- I understand why you/your constituents are concerned about that, but our concern is ...
- The data don't address/indicate _____ what they do show us is ...*
- You make an important point and I would just round back to the fundamental issue, which we see as ...
- I could talk about _____ all day, but I know our time is limited and I really wanted to talk to you about ...

Take a minute before any meeting or interview and think through flags and bridges that gracefully bring you back to your key messages. Practice with your government relations and/or communications team until the transitions feel natural.

*Remember, you don't have to repeat negative language. Pronouns are your friend. For example, "The data don't indicate *that*, but they do show us how important ..."