HOW TO LOBBY YOUR MP

We all have the power to shape and influence government policy through lobbying our Members of Parliament (MPs). Your MP is elected to represent your interests and can help to influence the UK government and Parliament in many ways. For example, the Enough Food for Everyone IF lobby played a key role in ensuring the UK Government kept its promise on aid spending in 2013.

MPs can do lots to influence their party and the government, from asking a parliamentary question to speaking with a minister. Lobbying your MP may seem daunting but it’s actually pretty easy and a great way to help make change happen. This guide covers how to prepare, how to set up a meeting, what to say and how to follow up.

1. Do some background research:
   - You can find your MP by entering your postcode at www.theyworkforyou.com. The site also records MP’s speeches and how they’ve voted.
   - Check out your MP’s website and their page on www.wikipedia.org to find out a bit about them. What party do they belong to? Is their party in power or in opposition? What are they interested in? Are they a minister, or a member of a select committee (groups of backbench MPs who scrutinise government)?
   - Can you connect your issue to your MP’s interests or the local area?

2. Make an appointment
   - MPs have regular surgeries to meet constituents, often on a Friday.
   - Find their contact details online or in the Yellow Pages, and call their office to make an appointment.
   - If they can’t meet you in the window of time you have for the campaign (eg before an important vote), try to speak to them over the phone or write a personal letter or email with your concerns, and say what you want them to do. All MPs can be contacted at: House of Commons, London, SW1A 0AA and emails can be sent via TheyWorkForYou.

3. Before the meeting
   - Make sure you understand the key messages of the campaign and read the ActionAid campaign guide or the information online: www.actionaid.org.uk/campaign
   - Plan what you will say in rough notes, especially what you want to ask your MP to do.
   - ActionAid will provide a briefing to leave with your MP – make sure you have this.
   - Link up with a local campaigner or get a friend to come and support you if you can.
4. **In the meeting**

- Look smart and arrive on time... but be aware, MPs are busy so often run late.
- Say hello, introduce yourself as an ActionAid Community Campaigner and explain why you’re there. Say why you particularly care about this issue, and what needs to be done.
- Remember – MPs aren’t experts on everything. You’re likely to know more than they do about your issue (unless they’ve worked on it or have a personal passion).
- If your MP goes off topic, try to steer them back. Say something like “I know your time is limited – what I really came to talk about is...”
- Make your ask/s of them very clear. What do you want your MP to do? Write to their party leader? Vote a certain way? Ask a parliamentary question? **Crucially, try to get them to give a specific commitment.**
- Ask if you can get a picture taken with your MP. At ActionAid, we’re always interested in pictures of campaigners with MPs, and your MP might want one too so offer to send it to them.
- If you plan to send a press release to local media, ask your MP if they are happy with this.

5. **After the meeting**

- Thank your MP for their time by writing a letter or an email. Re-affirm what action they’ve agreed to take and ask them to keep you informed. If you’re both on Twitter you could also tweet to thank them, sharing a picture if you have one (see our, How to use social media, guide for tips).
- **Tell us how it went** (call 0203 1220 683 or email natasha.adams@actionaid.org).
- You may decide to, write a press release. If you do liaise with your MP’s office to get a quote to use, and send the release to your local paper with a picture (if you have one) using our, How to get media coverage, guide.

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Our Activism Officer can support you to lobby your MP. Even if you don’t need help, let us know what you’re planning and how it goes. Call 0203 1220 683 or email natasha.adams@actionaid.org.