

GOVERNMENT **RELATIONS** GUIDE

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TRUE
MODERATION



Working relations,
without assumptions.

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CONTENTS

FORWARD – WHY DOES ANYONE NEED TO ADVOCATE?	4
BUILDING AN APPROACH	5
Topic Review	6
Responsible Authorities	7
Identifying the Disconnect	8
Getting Prepared	13
Escalating Interests	17
POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS	21
Political Receptivity	22
Standing Out: Understanding Opposing Views and Significant Gains	23
Levels of Government and Intergovernmental Relations	24
ACADEMIA AND MEDIA	25
Academia	26
Media	27
INEFFECTIVE BEHAVIOURS	29
Resorting to Threats or Abuse of Power	30
Emotional Responses	30
Simplification of Analytics Through Prejudice	30
Disingenuous Practices	31
Forgetting the Basics	32
CLOSING THOUGHTS	33
ANNEX: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES	34



A vertical photograph on the left side of the page shows a person's arm and hand holding a dark-colored megaphone. The person is wearing a light orange t-shirt and light pink pants. The megaphone has a small label with a truck icon and the word 'VOLVO' on it. The background is a solid light orange color.

FORWARD – WHY DOES ANYONE NEED TO ADVOCATE?

Like any individual or organization, government functions best when well-informed. That is, functioning with a robust and objective understanding of whatever is related to the particular task at hand. For government (whose sole purpose is to serve the public), this means operations should include some form of systematic and genuine public engagement supported by bias-free critical thinking.

It also means the performance standards against which government programs are measured must include some way of determining that they achieve their intended impacts. Implementing a government project or program is not a success alone. It must make a real-world difference to truly serve the public.

When the government isn't well informed or when its performance cannot be linked to real-world outcomes, a disconnect forms between government activities and the public.

Advocacy builds connections between government and the organizations and individuals whose voices ought to initiate or change government direction. In my opinion, this is why advocacy exists.

The goal of this document is to help anyone interested in advocacy to positively influence government by addressing, and in some cases rising above, the behaviours that disconnect government from the people they serve. While focussed on Canadian federal advocacy, advice and approaches in this document may be useful when approaching other levels of government or engaging organizations in general.

BUILDING AN APPROACH

The most effective advocacy approaches are those that make good use of everyone's time, are comprehensive, and lead to tangible, durable results. A summary of steps and considerations when building a government relations approach are as follows.

WHEN TO GO POLITICAL?

- ▶ Setting a new policy direction. Such as influencing party platforms, election promises or announcements.
- ▶ It relates to a vote on legislation.
- ▶ The topic is relevant to a committee or task force member.
- ▶ The topic is relevant to a local representative (directly representing you or an organization).
- ▶ Before engaging media or academia (to create opportunities for collaboration).
- ▶ When escalating an unresolved issue (after bureaucratic engagement has been exhausted).

Over-escalation, such as attempting to resolve issues solely through the political level can lead to pitfalls.

TOPIC REVIEW

IS THE TOPIC NEW OR RELATED TO AN EXISTING GOVERNMENT PROGRAM, INITIATIVE, CONSULTATION ETC.?

Situating your interests in the context of government activities is an essential first step. It establishes the most appropriate contact points for political advocacy or bureaucratic engagement. It will also inform the best approach and timing for escalating your interests. Lastly, it is necessary in order to identify other stakeholders or complementary government programs that may need to, or could, be engaged.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN ACTS OR REGULATIONS?

Certain activities of government are associated with predefined processes. In terms of building an effective advocacy approach it is important to differentiate between legislation-making (Acts), regulation-making, and other activities.

Only legislation is subject to parliamentary and senate votes. This one point is crucial to understanding the value of counting the number of politicians with whom you may need to interact. Note that regulations must be subject to consultation, but are not voted on by parliament.

Put simply, counting politicians is akin to counting votes, which matters most when discussing legislation.

ARE YOU REPRESENTING THE TOPIC AS AN INDIVIDUAL OR ON BEHALF OF OTHERS?

Your representativeness reflects a baseline level of public engagement and a respective level of credibility during interactions with government. If your opinion is unique, or your personal experiences exemplify a key issue or approach, then your level of influence will be greater. This is because you are a source – that is, an originator or a first-hand witness. This makes you more likely to become a leader of, or expert in your topic.

Associations or organizations with broad memberships can, by way of way of their governance, also demonstrate a strong representativeness.

Lastly, if you are a provincially recognized professional (governed by a college of practice or other authority) related to your topic, such as a physician for a health topic, then you may have credibility given your professional standing. However, a professional standing does not change the need for your opinions to be validated.

ARE YOU SUPPORTING YOUR TOPIC WITH DATA AND IS THE GOVERNMENT EXPECTING IT? IS YOUR DATA SOLICITED OR UNSOLICITED?

Law and policy making as well as government operations are designed to be supported by empirical evidence. That is, at some point in any interaction with, or activity of government data will become a focus.

The government is generally accountable for, and will apply the necessary resources to review data that it solicits (that it expects to receive). This can be through activities such as application processes, public consultations, or submissions such as those to support testimony at parliamentary, senate or departmental advisory committees. However, unsolicited data is always at risk of being ignored.

When offering data that the government didn't request, expectations must be set (internal to government or publicly) that it will be taken into account.

RESPONSIBLE AUTHORITIES

Establishing the responsible authority for your topic is important regardless of whether you are already in contact with government or political officials. Even the best intentions can lead officials to attempt to resolve issues, or take on responsibilities, that actually belong to, or are shared with, other levels or divisions of government.

First determine which level (or levels) of government (municipal, provincial or federal) have responsibility for the topic at hand and whether contact is best advanced through interactions with a politician and/or a government official (bureaucratic level).

A summary of different government and political roles and resources is provided in the Annex.

Speaking first with the government officials accountable for your topic is typically the most effective way to begin any government relation effort. It also creates the foundation necessary for later escalation of your interests (to political levels). Note that not all responsibilities are clearly divided between levels of government. Topics such as parks, jobs, infrastructure, the environment and public health may be effectively approached through more than one level of government.



WHEN ORGANIZATIONS UNDERPERFORM

There are a wide variety of issues that can impact the performance of any organization. In this document they are generally described as efforts that are ‘self-limiting’, ‘constrained’, ‘compromised’, or ‘limited value’ etc.

Human behaviours that play a role in underperformance can be due to a variety of external or internal factors.

The purpose of this document is not to pass judgement on those issues that impact performance but to rise above them. To focus on results.

IDENTIFYING THE DISCONNECT

The start of any solution begins by recognizing that there is an issue. That is, being aware. Given good government is one that is well-informed, it is not surprising that building awareness is a hallmark of all advocacy.

However, it cannot be assumed that if the government was only aware of a topic, then the corresponding issues driving advocacy would be addressed. In addition to being aware, governments must do their best to analyse, make decisions, and then take action/implement. These basic steps are not exhaustive nor mutually exclusive. They represent fundamental areas where an imbalance in government effort can readily contribute to disconnections that drive the need for advocacy.

INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Being well-informed is achieved by both acquiring relevant information, as well as capitalizing on best practices to obtain it. The following challenges to information and knowledge management are not unique to government and should be considered when exploring the root cause of advocacy drivers related to building awareness:

- ▶ High personnel turnover coupled with inadequate information management.
The government’s ability to build knowledge and apply precedents or consistent decision-making is compromised.
- ▶ Constraints and/or limited value are placed on seeking public opinion, or conducting rigorous research to support actions.
A self-limiting scenario is interfering with the government’s capacity to be well-informed.
- ▶ Use of information management systems and/or knowledge acquisition practices are below public benchmarks.
The government is less able than the public it serves to perceive or measure influences and trends in the world.

Disparities in how the world is perceived by the public versus the government can become impediments to innovation. Media collaborations are also enabled by situations where the government is not in tune with public perceptions. Lastly, when challenges such as these are not unique to government, advocacy approaches may be found through comparisons to other sectors, or countries.

ANALYTICAL INTEGRITY

Integrity within government is described in the public service code of values and ethics: “By upholding the highest ethical standards, public servants conserve and enhance public confidence in the honesty, fairness and impartiality of the federal public sector”. Honesty (genuineness), fairness (consistency) and impartiality (bias-free) are key constructs to supporting integrity in analysis. However, notwithstanding this code, challenges can arise that quickly become the root cause of advocacy.

- ▶ Analysis of the same type of, or identical, information is inconsistent depending on the individuals within, or divisions of government to which the information is provided.
Government practices are contributing to an inconsistent public record of knowledge and unfair actions stemming from the same data/information.
- ▶ The rules used to determine what information is relevant or irrelevant (Inclusion and exclusion criteria) regarding data to be analysed are inconsistent and/or influenced by arbitrary (cannot be validated) factors.
A data bias is undermining the government’s analytical integrity and/or holistic analysis.
- ▶ Constraints on availability of data are driving an inappropriate reliance on assumptions, substitutions or extrapolations of data within program analytics.
The government’s ability to genuinely manage, monitor, change, and/or measure programs is compromised.
- ▶ Behavioural program outcomes are not supported by social sciences (e.g. sociology, psychology) due to a constrained value or resources dedicated to the inclusion of this data.
A self-limiting scenario is impeding the production of the most effective options to achieve program outcomes.
- ▶ Analytical rigour or capacity is compromised/constrained compared to public benchmarks for the same work.
Self-limiting scenarios are creating substandard government analytics compared to public benchmarks and introducing bias.

Challenges with analytical integrity can create advocacy opportunities for collaboration with academia and other research bodies. Integrity challenges can also manifest themselves as a prejudice towards a subgroup of individuals – identifying the prejudice that a lack of integrity has created can lead to potential collaborations and stronger more representative advocacy positions.





DECISION MAKING AND DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGY

Effective governments are those that keep up with society. They are not disrupted by invention (such as technology) but encourage and anticipate breakthroughs in all sectors. They use public engagement to calibrate and embrace risks in support of innovation as well as protecting safety, knowledge and our environment. A good government knows how to support and manage change. The following challenges to strategy and decision making can act as barriers to leading-edge thinking and consequently become drivers for advocacy.

- ▶ Use of the precautionary principle is influencing decisions and action in the absence of a risk calibration process (public engagement) or a valid determination of public risk tolerance.
Positive progress in government action is being hindered by uncalibrated assertions of risk avoidance. Essentially, no effort is being made to overcome a fear of the unknown.
- ▶ A relative risk assessment and/or prioritization has not been made or is constrained.
The government is not applying resources to the highest risks. This can hinder innovation and create ignorance of meaningful threats to the population.
- ▶ There are constraints or limited value placed on addressing issues across organizational structures, mandate, or levels of government.
The public service is providing suboptimal support and long-term planning because of ineffective collaboration between levels or divisions of government.
- ▶ Long term planning is perceived to be, or is frustrated by, elections of politicians and performance evaluations of bureaucrats that take place on different calendar cycles.
The perception or reality is that governments are not rewarded for long-term planning.

When the government is unable to, or fails to keep up with the best interests of society it risks creating a culture of change resistance within its own ranks and the public it supports. These attitudes can undermine the overall resiliency of a country to embrace change. Challenges of this nature are likely to precipitate the need for advocacy across multiple topic areas and 'unlikely' partnerships between many sectors could be possible. Broad unifying issues of this nature may also be appropriate for in-depth media coverage (longer story-telling).

OPERATIONAL INTEGRITY (IMPLEMENTATION)

Integrity in government operations is about honesty. It's about the most genuine, efficient, and transparent use of resources to achieve meaningful goals. It's about getting things done. Avoiding waste, maximizing the outsourcing of tasks that government doesn't have to do in order to empower and encourage the world outside to grow. The best government operations also include easily accessible conflict resolution. Good operations welcome change by detecting trends that challenge existing models and include feedback loops to continuously improve.

The following challenges to operations are among those that can readily create advocacy drivers:

- ▶ There is an inconsistent approach to, or a lack of value placed on transparency surrounding program operations and/or performance metrics.
The government's operations are interfering with the ability of the public to hold it accountable through independent analysis. Opportunities for the public to engage in benchmarking, trend analysis, and technology enhancement based on government information are also hindered.
- ▶ Dispute resolution practices do not exist, or inappropriately escalate directly to the courts (judicial review).
Government operational precedence and learning is being driven through an inefficient use of the judicial system. Program evolution becomes linked to the speed of the court system and systemic bias is created against public entities that lack the resources necessary to launch a legal challenge.
- ▶ Operating systems and/or user interfaces require specialized knowledge not readily accessible to the public and/or compromised operational systems are managed through work-arounds that put added responsibilities onto end users.
Government is not providing the public with baseline access to programs. This complicates future updates and places limits on or prevents program evolution.



INTEGRITY AND THE REAL WORLD

Serious rifts in integrity form when a government systematically relies on unvalidated assumptions instead of measuring real world results. Key Examples include:

Communication: Relying solely on tactics that commit action with no follow-up, or commit to intermediate steps with no link to end results.

Law: Creating laws relying solely on assumptions that the law will achieve its intended goal, and never checking if it does.

Program Performance: Judging how well a program meets its objectives based solely on an indicator that might predict a real world result but never validating if it does.

Any practice that accepts something assumed as something real will introduce bias and threatens integrity.

- Operational excellence is constrained compared to public benchmarks for the adoption of technology, automation, data management, and client service.

Self-limiting scenario is hindering the government's ability to demonstrate good stewardship of public resources through the adoption of efficient program designs. Essentially the government is using human beings to perform tasks that have been automated outside of government.

- There are constraints or limited value placed on achieving efficiencies across organizational structures, mandates, or levels of government for overlapping and/or complementary program operations.

A self-limiting scenario is contributing to inefficiencies (duplication of effort) in government operations. Consequently, conflict resolution can create different outcomes and force wasteful reconciliation of duplicate programs for the public.

Government operations are highly sensitive to a loss in credibility given how direct interfaces with the public provide opportunities for immediate performance evaluation. Challenges stemming from operational integrity may be addressed through the accountabilities of government under the Financial Administration Act (FAA). The FAA is supported by organizations such as the Treasury Board, Department of Finance and individual departmental offices of audit and accountability. Issues that cross levels of government can be viewed as presenting multiple avenues for advocacy and challenges are likely felt by stakeholders across sectors. Meetings between provincial and federal governments (such as first minister meetings) can be considered when developing agendas that cross levels of government.

In relation to any of the basic steps above there are specific laws, policies and offices within government designed to prevent disconnections from forming. Examples include the public service code of ethics, the performance management system for public service executives, as well as offices such as the Auditor General and Information Commissioner.



GETTING PREPARED

Research is essential, but can put a strain on resources when developing an advocacy plan, in particular if acting on your own. Partnerships can play an important role to not only offset any research burdens but create a stronger representativeness of collective interests and angles to achieve common outcomes. Some tips and approaches that can help quickly lead you to useful information are below.

LINKING TOPICS TO GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

There are a number of key documents that contain information related to the government's priorities. Reviewing these documents is a good first step to situating your interests.

Speech from the throne: Provides overall priorities of the government and can be found on the Privy Council website. The 2020 speech for example: <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/campaigns/speech-throne/2020/speech-from-the-throne.html>

Minister Mandate Letters: Each Minister will receive a letter from the Prime Minister outlining a series of projects/expectations that are meant to be completed within their tenure. These items form the foundation of performance management for the Minister and establish a strong public expectation that they will be completed. When advocating to a particular department it is essential to understand if your topic is related in any way to the content of a mandate letter. Mandate letters can be found on the Prime Minister's website: <https://pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters>

Budget documents: The federal budgets contain both language that describe priorities as well as the specific line items where funding is being directed to support particular government operations. Budget documents can be found on the Department of Finance website and other locations: <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/services/publications/federal-budget.html>

LOBBYING AND ETHICS

Certain types of advocacy can be considered lobbying as defined in the Lobbying Act and/or fall under the Conflict of Interest Act.

The Office of the Commissioner of Lobbying and the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner are both welcoming and useful resources if you are ever unsure.

LOBBYING

<https://lobbycanada.gc.ca>

CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND ETHICS

<https://ciec-ccie.parl.gc.ca/Pages/default.aspx>

Priorities can also be explored by reviewing the agendas for senate and parliamentary committees, or petitions that have been submitted to parliament by members. Often a quick call or message to the clerks who support these committees will be helpful in determining who are the witnesses, the goals of the discussion and identifying if there are also opportunities to provide input. For more information, please refer to the Annex.

Finally, government priorities may also be found in media releases from different departments, ministers, and speeches made by officials at events. Reviewing any articles and general web/literature searches by topic or past events can help identify sources.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN OF AVAILABLE INFORMATION

Some readily available information on a variety of topics can be found by researching:

- ▶ Organizations and associations related to your topic, or those that have similar, competing or parallel interests. It is highly relevant to be aware of any competing interests to your topic and to understand your relative positioning.
- ▶ Public content from industries or consumer/patient/special interest/religious and recreational groups etc.
- ▶ Statistics from government sources.
- ▶ Approaches (government and public advocacy) to your topic in other countries including international agreements.
- ▶ Historical references (legal precedence, past discussions on your topic – look for lessons that have not been applied or repeating problems and trends).
- ▶ University/college programs in the areas related to your topic. This can help identify useful publications and academic contacts interested in supporting research.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN CHOOSING AN APPROACH

Keep options open when choosing an approach to interactions with government. Procedures between offices with respect to answering calls, letters and emails will vary. Establishing contact through a phone call can be the best first step. Ideally, discussions with those authorities will provide the insight necessary to move ahead.

Other considerations that may be useful include the following:

- ▶ Creating debate, analysis and input from a variety of stakeholders. When a topic is not in the government's priorities and/or has not been well served by existing consultations/public engagement it may be a potential candidate for committee work (parliamentary/senate/advisory). Note that senate committees are subject to different timelines than those of parliament given they are not married to an election cycle. *Contact the clerk responsible for the committee of interest to learn about their agendas and priorities. Also conduct advocacy directed towards the members of the relevant committee and partner with or reach out to other related stakeholders who could become potential witnesses/submit information.*
- ▶ Seeking input and support from a professional group. Generally, provinces and territories are legally responsible for recognizing professionals. For this reason, there are often provincial/territorial and national associations, as well as universities/colleges or schools of practice each with their own respective priorities. *Tailor which organizations you contact based on your topic. Of note, educational institutions may be more likely than other professional associations to see topics that represent emerging challenges for the profession as an immediate priority.*





- Seeking public opinion research (national polls, social media mining). When conducted in an objective bias-free manner, public opinion research is a powerful tool to support government programs and advocacy alike. Multiple research organizations exist that can conduct reputable polling. In addition, social media mining can provide insights similar to polling. However, while social media research can reach extremely large sample sizes, the nature of the sampling may not meet standards of objectivity. When choosing a polling approach ensure you understand exactly how you will use the information once obtained and include the questions as well as methodology in any publication to ensure the integrity of your work.

Look for published statistics in literature and from government sources first. There is often national polling on a regular basis and costs can be contained by purchasing a single question that can be 'piggy-backed' on these surveys. Inexpensive yes/no questions or other surveys can be conducted on social media through the strategic use of influencers related to your topic. The latter approach may still contain bias, however, with a strong correlation between the influencer and the topic, the reputability of the responses/insight can be increased.

- Creating broader appeal. There are almost always partnerships that can be created around any topic. A fundamental aspect of building these partnerships is finding common disconnects in government behaviour that are driving advocacy (for similar or even different topics). It is important to avoid letting a well polished communications strategy, territorialism over achieving outcomes, or a desire to feel special, prevent you from finding common policy ground with like-minded organizations. *Use your understanding of the disconnect that drives your advocacy to propose points of discussion with other organizations/individuals. Even if joint advocacy isn't an option, it is fair to discuss how parallel efforts could yield complementary results. Make use of publicly available information from other organizations and never hesitate to reach out.*

ESCALATING INTERESTS

The desire to escalate represents a difference of opinion between you and the government over the priorities of the public. An understanding of how your topic relates to the government's priorities as well as the responsible authorities for your topic is essential to effectively reconcile this difference of opinion.

Like any difference of opinion, they should be managed objectively and focus on the facts of the matter. It is not a 'threat' nor inappropriate to challenge the priorities of government. It is also not a 'threat' to hold public officials accountable. An escalation of interests is ideally managed as a welcome exploration and validation of public priorities.

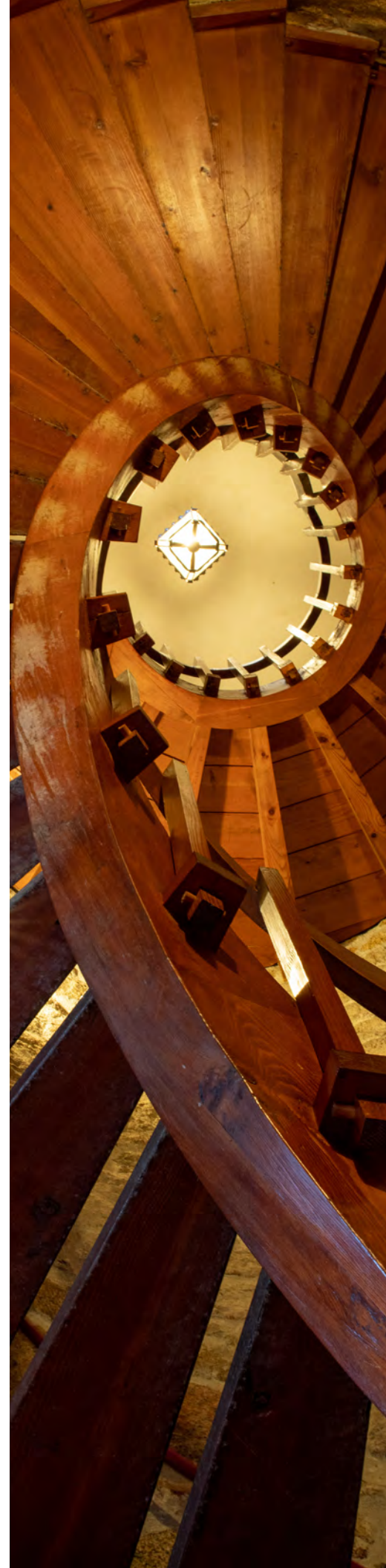
Effectively, the goal of all advocacy is to demonstrate that you have been better able to determine public priorities than the government on a given topic. Escalation, is sharing this determination progressively through the government's priority setting governance.

THE ROAD TO PROGRESS

When working with accountable authorities within a department/agency of government it is necessary (and respectful) to escalate interests through the organizational structures step-wise, to the highest non-elected official before officially raising issues with the responsible politician (for example a Minister of a department/agency).

Skipping or working around levels in a hierarchy creates a management obligation, or minimally a prerogative, to delegate back to the individual or office who is accountable for, but did not have the opportunity to address, your topic. Working in parallel with other individuals or organizations is acceptable, however, they should not be used as an excuse to skip or work around those who are directly accountable.

When escalating work through political authorities, priority setting respects both political party governance and parliamentary procedure. That is, escalating your interests beyond the politician (Minister) responsible for a given topic can take the form of multiple actions besides a direct hierarchical progression to the Prime Minister.



CANADA-USA NEIGHBOURS

Canada is the world's 2nd largest country and the largest that borders only one other country – the USA. Our neighbours are an important consideration or comparator in all advocacy.

- ▶ The United States and Canada share the world's longest international border, 8,891 km (5,525 miles) with 120 land ports-of-entry.
- ▶ We trade nearly \$2 billion a day in goods and services
- ▶ Canada was the United States' largest export market in 2019 and 3rd largest supplier of imported goods.
- ▶ Typically about 400,000 people cross between the two countries every day.
- ▶ U.S. defense arrangements with Canada are more extensive than with any other country.
- ▶ The United States and Canada have hundreds of environmental and natural resource partnerships.
- ▶ Canada is the 5th largest source of foreign students in the United States and the United States is the 6th largest source of foreign students in Canada.

US DEPARTMENT OF STATE

<https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-canada/>

OFFICE OF THE US TRADE REPRESENTATIVE

<https://ustr.gov/countries-regions/americas/canada>

These actions can include the use of petitions, committees, question period debate and work with local/regional representatives. It can also involve any kind of open public engagement and building interest in your topic through institutions such as the media or academia.

UNDERSTANDING AND RESPONDING TO IMPASSE

An impasse that merits escalation should involve two parameters. An identifiable lack of progress towards an outcome that encompasses, or is incremental to, addressing your topic as well as an inability to create meaningful progress without escalating. Essentially, your efforts aren't taking you anywhere or where you are going isn't helpful. Your difference of opinion with the government regarding the public's priorities will ultimately inform what you consider to be meaningful progress.

When faced with impasse, creating a record that captures your understanding of the lack of progress is essential. It can include capturing information such as:

- ▶ The outcome measures involved and interactions with the responsible authority
- ▶ Behaviours of the responsible authority (ineffective/effective)
- ▶ Evidentiary debates (government officials involved and the data on hand)
- ▶ Direction to you by the authority to escalate
- ▶ Comparisons/references to the following as impeding progress
 - The interests of other stakeholders
 - Political direction
 - The public's interests

Capturing an understanding of each impasse will inform your approach and increase your appreciation of the disconnect that is driving your advocacy. It will also inform the research investments or partnerships you may need to make. Ultimately, a record of each impasse will build integrity necessary to support later interactions with officials, politicians and the general public.

As part of a government relations strategy, you may choose to manage resources by progressively investing in your approach. That is, getting started right away and reserving the effort you apply to research or partnerships, depending on how your topic is received by government as you escalate.

Resource investments that should be considered at each impasse include the following:

Building/Validating Research

- ▶ Validate evidence used by government.
- ▶ Explore references to political, public, or other stakeholder interests used by the government as a reason for impasse.
- ▶ Generate/locate research to address gaps in research or to respond to any issues identified when validating evidence.

Increasing Representativeness

- ▶ Use your understanding of the disconnect surrounding your topic, to engage other like-minded organizations and/or individuals that could increase your representativeness.
- ▶ Expanding/modifying the scope of your topic to align with, or incorporate other organizations in order to create partnerships that will ultimately achieve your desired outcome in addition to others.
- ▶ Managing your interests or topic as one that falls under an umbrella of another organization in order to create partnerships that will ultimately achieve your desired outcome in addition to others.





Generating public scrutiny

- ▶ For evidentiary gaps or debates, academic engagement can be useful not only to generate research, but also explore existing or innovative ways to bring public attention to your topic.
- ▶ Media engagement can take place at any time. However, its use generally drives responses that are directed through the political level. If addressing an impasse while still escalating through a government hierarchy (non-elected officials), media engagement should coincide with a defensible and intentional strategy to engage the political level.

At every impasse when drafting correspondence to trigger escalation, refine how you describe the disconnect between your topic and government. That is, practice using language that will ultimately resonate best with the general public.

MANAGING EXPECTATION – TIMING AND IMPACT

Not every disconnection between the public and government is of the same magnitude. Your topic, even if it has merit, may not be of great enough concern to drive an immediate change in government priority. When identifying the disconnect that is driving your advocacy it is likely you will develop a sense of its impact on the public. However, if you are unsure, it is important to calibrate the risks you believe the public faces as a result of the disconnect either in advance of, or as part of pursuing an escalation strategy.

Any organization that is responding to public interest must manage their own resources and integrity, including government. Changing direction in response to emerging priorities (such as those presented through advocacy) requires an honest estimation of the resources required to make the change balanced against the incremental gains derived from reprioritizing. The credibility of government can be hurt if they are unable to justify shifting between priorities — ‘waffling’.

Taking into account the government’s capacity and methods for managing a change in priorities are key factors to ensuring a successful escalation of interests.

POLITICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Advocacy at the political level is influenced by factors that can be taken into account when developing a strategy. The following is not exhaustive, but includes key examples of these factors.

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

My personal opinion is that communicating with someone in their language is great and understanding how their language has shaped them as a person is even better.

Our languages contribute more to each of us than just an ability to express what is on our minds.

They ground our perspectives in centuries of expression. They contain insights into, and influence over our culture, gender, attitudes and more.

Official languages and other languages spoken in Canada should always be taken into account in advocacy. From research and partnerships to outreach and analysis, making an effort to understand the influence of language will only increase the impact of your advocacy approach.

Respecting the legal requirements of official languages in Canada is great. Developing an appreciation of their importance to our country is even better.



POLITICAL RECEPTIVITY

Politicians may be more or less receptive to advocacy depending on cycles that are influenced by elections, polling, and their ability to manage public expectations on the fly. While it is a good idea to approach all political parties with your topic (take a non-partisan approach), taking into account the following considerations can help you tailor your discussions with each party and manage expectations:

- Election timing: Immediately following, mid-term and pre-election.
Immediately following an election the government will be the least receptive to ideas that don't align with (or for opposition parties, draw criticisms of) the priorities on which the winning party gained control. During this time, new political priorities generally would only happen in an emergency.
The time that governments have to make progress against their priorities is sometimes called the 'policy runway'. As time or 'runway' start to run out, advocacy opportunities can arise. The desire for progress can create receptivity to new priorities with short attainable outcomes, and/or interim priorities complementary to those of government.
In the year to months prior to an election, and during campaigns, political parties will be the most receptive to advocacy as well as the most ambitious ideas.
- Polling. All political parties use polls to guide their actions. However, interpretations can vary.
Simple interpretation of polls can lead to 'don't rock the boat' versus 'shake things up' approaches. That is, positive polls may lead parties to limit their receptivity to advocacy in order to maintain course and negative polling can create receptivity to advocacy that could drive change. At the same time, a party that has gained popularity through innovation and measured risks may be receptive to new ideas in order to maintain momentum. Advocacy approaches can be tailored to how individual parties are interpreting their polling results.
Majority versus minority government status can also influence receptivity. A majority government is not likely to adopt significant changes to the platform on which it campaigned. Minority governments, however, can create a general and continuous pressure on parties to blend or compromise on their interests until such time as one or more parties have made significant progress in their polling. Receptivity to advocacy by all parties is generally higher.

- The Senate. Canadian senators are not elected and have been taking on progressively more independent roles. While senators must focus on the priorities of government their independent nature and non-elected status can make them more receptive to advocacy topics in general. In particular, those topics whose solutions may span multiple election cycles.

Overcoming any lack of receptivity can include tactics such as public opinion surveys to back-up your research, the use of the media to gain attention, and offering change management and communication support to politicians related to your topic. In general, a lack of receptivity to a topic at the political level is the point at which the greatest level of effort may be required to support your topic from identification to describing how to implement.

STANDING OUT: UNDERSTANDING OPPOSING VIEWS AND SIGNIFICANT GAINS

The competitive nature of politics creates a need to differentiate. The desire to do better at, or something different than opposing parties – to know and better serve the priorities of the population. One way of evaluating the political interests in your topic is understanding two simple factors that can influence the ability of politicians to attract the support of the population.

1. Creating debate over which party will have a greater impact on the same priority and;
2. Creating debate over which topics are of the greatest priority

When advocating at the political level it is important to consider your topic in these terms. Researching alternative solutions to your topic can help prepare you for discussions with politicians. In addition, it is important to be aware if there are other priorities that could be framed as something that is, or appears to be, opposite to your topic. That is, something around which opinions are, or could be divisive.



Address any potential competing interests directly with politicians when advocating for your topic. If necessary, you may wish to expand your topic through research and partnerships to something larger than your original interests as a method to encompass competing topics while creating more impact. Essentially, every effort should be made to address debate in priorities by searching for solutions that create the greatest positive impact.

Politics are meant to create healthy debate. Pitting topics, or approaches to the same topic, against each other engages the public by creating the need to choose sides. Choosing sides drives voting intentions that can be measured by polling.

LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS

Even when focussed on federal advocacy, it can be important to consider your topic from both municipal and provincial/territorial points of view. There are a number of financial, legal and governance connections between levels of government. If your advocacy topic has an impact that is focussed on a particular region or regions it is worth exploring how it may benefit from these connections.

Political considerations between federal and provincial/territorial governments can be obvious when they are led by different political parties. However, municipalities which do not have political parties, can also be influenced the politics of higher levels of government. For example, while each level of government can tax the population the ability of municipalities to run deficits is limited (in most cases it is legally not permitted). This can create a funding dependency between municipalities and other levels of government. Federal, provincial/territorial politicians may take into greater account advocacy surrounding topics that both impact municipalities as well as align with these funding relationships. That is, cities and towns may have no choice but to request funding from higher levels of government and that funding can come with political strings attached. Infrastructure, transportation, jobs, health and the environment are among a number of these types of advocacy topics.



ACADEMIA AND MEDIA

When you combine academia with media you get well communicated reputable information. Quite frankly, nothing works better to fill the gaps between governments and their people. The following are suggested approaches and considerations when reaching out to either.



ACADEMIA

For nearly every advocacy topic, there are academic institutions who may be able to help. This could include, research, identifying issue drivers, generating solutions and resolving evidentiary debates. A key to academic outreach is remaining flexible in order to find a complementary (win-win) relationship based on an objective question as opposed to a pitch aimed at supporting your topic.

Consider what you can do to enrich the learning experience of students and support faculty before reaching out. For example:

- ▶ Provide access to information and insight that isn't publicly available or not easy to obtain such as applied research, explanations of significant sector outcomes, innovation methods, national or global data trends, and details regarding the relationship between your topic and others.
- ▶ Offer guest speakers, experts or veterans in your topic who can share applied knowledge and experience.
- ▶ Propose awards – financial or in-kind support such as employment opportunities and connections. Note that financial relationships should include efforts to ensure there are no impacts on the credibility of the collaboration.
- ▶ Describe, and create exposure for, academic contributions. Examples include quotes in publications including websites, press releases, lobbying materials or submissions to government committees.
- ▶ Suggest follow-up measures, on-going relations, or testimonials.

Outreach to faculty, student associations, alumni and related non-government organizations can be avenues for making contact. Remain flexible in your approach and consider any feedback that is presented as a barrier to collaboration. In addition to any immediate support, academic outreach represents an opportunity to create reputable publications as well as grow long-term knowledge and understanding of your topic through students.

MEDIA

The ability of media to act in a free, impartial, and comprehensive way can make it a natural resource when addressing gaps between governments and the people they serve. When communicating through media you are ultimately exposing your assessment of, and research to support, the disconnect that is driving your advocacy. The disconnect and the information surrounding it is the key to what can drive public interest. Tailor your media approach according to your confidence in how well you know your topic. The more honest you are with yourself about how well you know your topic and what may be motivating any detractors or competing priorities will determine how well you can avoid creating unintended outcomes from a media relationship ('losing control of the narrative'). If you are unsure, then your approach should be to intentionally use media to fill in any blind spots or to confirm your confidence.

Consider the following:

- ▶ Testing interests and building support. At any point you can engage media for the purposes of observing, without prejudice, how the public reacts to information that you feel characterises the disconnect between your topic and the government. This can be achieved by offering media information such as survey data, research results, and observations with limited to no opinion.
- ▶ Driving change in government priorities. You may engage media purposefully to drive public opinion. When engaging media with a purpose it is important to consider what action you hope to inspire based on the information you are sharing. Specific direction may be required if a target for the response you trigger isn't obvious. For example: "Write to your member of parliament".



FEDERAL GOVERNMENT EXECUTIVES

The official performance measures for federal executives include a long list of effective and a short list of ineffective behaviours which are as follows:

- ▶ Provides direction that is either insufficient or overly prescriptive and controlling
- ▶ Argues against or impedes decisions made by the organization
- ▶ Attributes failures to individuals or previous administrations
- ▶ Focuses on process at the expense of results
- ▶ Abdicates decision-making responsibilities to other levels

See the Annex for a link to the complete set of federal government competency profiles.

- ▶ Earned versus paid media. If you have the resources necessary to produce an article and/or press release then you may wish to engage media by paying for your content to be ‘released on the wire’. This is a paid service that will make your content available to the majority of mainstream news outlets who may choose to publish your story and follow-up with you directly. Alternatively, you may wish to ‘earn’ media by working with a news outlet, journalist, or building interest through other means such as social media, referrals, or publications outside of the mainstream. When reaching out to a particular news agency/outlet directly review their past publications to develop an understanding of their style, audience and objectivity to ensure a good fit with your interests.

Whether through the media, academia or other public engagement (such as surveys) it is important to interpret responses to your topic in a constructive manner and allow for changes to your approach. Take the following into account with any response to media:

- ▶ Critical points of debate/contention – in particular any that were unexpected.
- ▶ Potential partners, detractors, or subgroups who have distinct perspectives.
- ▶ New information sources, or linkages to other topics.

INEFFECTIVE BEHAVIOURS

Through interactions with government, in particular while identifying the disconnect that is driving the need for advocacy, you may encounter individuals or organizational cultures that exhibit ineffective behaviours. That is, behaviours not focused on objective results. They may be personal, unintentional, inefficient, disrespectful or presumptive. The list goes on.

When tackling any difference of opinion, it is important to be self-aware and not duplicate the ineffective behaviours of others. Always focus on end results and your evaluation of public priorities and impacts. The following examples of ineffective behaviours apply to government as well as those who advocate. They should complement the considerations used to identify the disconnect surrounding your topic. These behaviours are pitfalls. However, they can grow out of natural emotional responses, honest efforts to find compromise, genuine fears of failure, and innocent naiveties that can manifest in anyone.



RESORTING TO THREATS OR ABUSE OF POWER

Government officials with legal authority or procedural control over essential operations are in positions of power over the population. Likewise, so are advocates over politicians when representing significant portions of the population within their riding. Be mindful of the motivations behind, and authenticity of, any effort to leverage (threaten/abuse) these powerful influences.

EMOTIONAL RESPONSES

Getting emotional is normal and can be an important motivator behind advocacy and government action. However, regardless of the passions at play, behaviours should still remain objective. In government, changes in priorities can create hard feelings, ego driven resistance to change or passive aggressive actions. When advocating you may also feel driven to over escalate your interests to share your concerns as broadly as possible, even nagging.

Emotional responses undermine credibility and diminish the receptivity of officials to your interests. When observed in government, document the behaviours and include in considerations when escalating your interests.

SIMPLIFICATION OF ANALYTICS THROUGH PREJUDICE

Everyone is motivated by results. We want to achieve something, to attain the satisfaction of a goal, the implementation of an idea, reap the benefits of effort. For both government and those who advocate making compromises based on assumptions about what the public wants can be the most direct avenue for attaining something you can measure. However, assumptions, when left unvalidated are ultimately a form of prejudice.

Assumptions can take many forms, paternalisms, stereotyping, decisions based on anecdotes. Assumptions can lead to the exclusion of stakeholder input, using double standards or self-righteous presumptions which can masquerade as 'common sense'.

Advancing any form of work without making an effort to confirm or dispel assumptions (as you would confirm or reject a hypothesis in science) risks creating prejudice. Be wary of any compromise in approach that accepts an assumption as fact.



DISINGENUOUS PRACTICES

Capitalizing on opportunities to resolve issues can be clever and helpful when advancing a topic. It is always important to keep an eye out for opportunities that can create progress. However, practices that are opportunistic as well as dishonest can ultimately harm relations. Disingenuous practices are not associated with credibility and can damage receptivity to good ideas.

Within government and advocacy disingenuous practices can take any number of forms including:

- ▶ Sending anonymous correspondence/using scapegoats,
- ▶ Bluffing legal/enforcement actions,
- ▶ Hiding information/reducing transparency to avoid confrontation or accountability,
- ▶ Consulting, surveying, engaging in a way that knowingly restrains responses.

Government actions based on these practices can be addressed through accountabilities under the FAA and other frameworks. Advocacy based on these practices' risks creating severely poor government relations. Avoid opportunities that lack credibility.



FORGETTING THE BASICS

Many issues are influenced by fundamental patterns or relationships. For both governments and advocates, in order to attain meaningful results basic influences should never be overlooked. Failing to recognize these basics can lead to assumptions that an issue or disconnect is ‘new’ and unrelated to past lessons. Basic influences can be expressed many different ways and they are critical. The following is not exhaustive but includes examples of those things that should not be forgotten by anyone making an effort to set population-based priorities:

- ▶ Treating symptoms of a problem versus the cause.
 - Managing behaviour by controlling supply or access to something versus what is causing the demand.
- ▶ Buying versus learning/building. Can also be expressed as teaching versus providing.
 - Establishing the value of respecting the effort and knowledge associated with obtaining or creating something.
- ▶ Making a rule versus making a principle.
 - Using detailed control versus in-depth inspiration to manage population behaviours. Micro versus macro-management etc.
- ▶ Honesty versus avoidance
 - Managing ignorance through efforts to recognize versus conceal what is and is not known.

A focus on outcomes will help identify the most basic form of the issue or topic at hand. Never allow a significant breadth of impact nor inflations of complexity blind you to or cause you to forget the basics.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

In my opinion, the best connections are those that are genuine. If advocacy is driven by a disconnect between government and its people then the more honest and direct you can be in your efforts the more success you will enjoy.

The bottom line is: don't make assumptions. If you have reached a point of representing a topic that is of importance to you never assume how others may receive it. Simply ask, engage and invite opinion. Promote dialogue and revert to listening when faced with individuals or organizations who both disagree and also fail to acknowledge the possibility of your point of view. Even the harshest criticism, or intractable individual, can provide insight. Learn from every interaction.

From my experience working in Canada's federal public service, I believe we are lucky to have such a great infrastructure of ethics, accountability and dedicated individuals on whom the public can rely. While advocacy needs exist, so do people in all sectors who want the best for the public. Choosing our top priorities and finding our most effective way forward is something I hope this document inspires.

My final note is that at any point, when asked what is your biggest priority, or what is the 'one thing' you would like to see, either know it in advance or pick one. Progress is good.

ANNEX: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

CONNECTING WITH GOVERNMENT

1-800-O-CANADA – this toll-free service is available 24/7 and can provide general program advice on any federal government operation as well as help provide direction to the appropriate contacts for any more detailed interests.

Government Electronic Directory Services (GEDS): <https://geds-sage.gc.ca/en/GEDS?pgid=002>

This database provides a directory of public servants across the country. When emails are not available (often due to challenges with spamming), a phone call to the person of interest can be made to request their email address and/or establish contact.

The websites for the Prime Minister, Parliament, Senate, Privy Council and Library of Parliament can provide details regarding priorities, announcements, changes in senior public servants, memberships of politicians in different committees, and sub-groups of politicians (caucus') focussed on different topics.

Note that the Clerk supporting any particular committee can be of assistance understanding agendas, witnesses and forward planning.

<https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council.html>

https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en_CA

<https://pm.gc.ca/>

<https://www.parl.ca/>

<https://sencanada.ca/>





POLITICAL PARTIES (WITH A HISTORY OF SEATS IN PARLIAMENT)

- ▶ Liberal Party of Canada: <https://liberal.ca/>
- ▶ Conservative Party of Canada: <https://www.conservative.ca/>
- ▶ New Democrat Party of Canada: <https://www.ndp.ca/>
- ▶ Green Party: <https://www.greenparty.ca/>
- ▶ Bloc Québécois: <https://www.blocquebecois.org/>

Elections Canada Website – Voter Information Service: “The Voter Information Service provides information about your electoral district, including the list of candidates, locations of advance and election day polling places, the address of your local Elections Canada office and a map of your electoral district.”

<https://www.elections.ca/scripts/vis/FindED?L=e&PAGEID=20>

LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT

https://lop.parl.ca/about/parliament/education/ourcountryourparliament/html_booklet/three-levels-government-e.html

First Minister’s Meetings – <https://www.canadaspremiers.ca/>

KEY FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE RESOURCES

Foundation Framework for Treasury Board Policies:
<https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=13616>

Departmental plans and Results
<https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ems-sgd/edb-bdd/index-eng.html#orgs/gov/gov/infograph/results>

Performance and Talent Management In the Government of Canada:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/topics/performance-talent-management.html>

Key Leadership Competency Provide and examples of effective and ineffective behaviours (for federal government executives):
<https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/professional-development/key-leadership-competency-profile/examples-effective-ineffective-behaviours.html>

Public Service Employee Survey
<https://www.canada.ca/en/treasury-board-secretariat/services/innovation/public-service-employee-survey.html>

Value and Ethics Code for the Public Sector
<https://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/pol/doc-eng.aspx?id=25049>





TRUE
MODERATION



Working relations,
without assumptions.