

MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY

MP Meeting Tips

Speaking as a constituent to your local MP is an effective and simple means of getting your concerns heard. This approach can be particularly effective when constituents across the country deliver the same message.

General Tips:

- Be absolutely clear about what you want the MP to do (See 'The Meeting and The Ask' below).
- Do not be disappointed if the MP is not immediately supportive. Hearing his/her views and justification of a position is valuable for the campaign, and he or she may come around in the future.
- Always be polite and respectful. Opinions on an issue can change very quickly, but a bad impression lasts a long time.

Representing Yourself:

Be clear about who you are and whom you represent. You may choose to note that in New Zealand the Make Poverty History Campaign is made up of 47 diverse organizations from across the country and hundreds of individual supporters, Spend no more than one minute introducing yourself and your organization (if you are part of an organization or a member of the coalition). Time is at a premium, and MPs are far more interested in what you have to say than what your organization does.

Steps to take:

1. Identify your MP

- If you do not know who your MP is, visit www.mps.org.nz. Here you can find out the name and contact number of your local MP. In addition, other parties may have allocated a list MP to cover your electorate, so you may wish to visit these MPs.

2. Call the MP

- Call the MP's local office, and ask if you can have 30 minutes of his or her time to discuss the issue of global poverty.
- Suggest days that you would be available for a meeting.
- Alternatively, your MP may hold a Saturday 'clinic' when she or he is available to meet constituents, so you could go along at this time.
- Keep a friendly tone.
- Use everyday language in explaining your issue.
- Be careful not to assume knowledge.

3. Preparing for the meeting

- Know your MP – check out his or her website and latest printed materials. Refer to supportive positions taken by the party or members of the party.
- Find out if the MP has met or been involved with similar organizations before on this or related issues. What was the outcome? Has she or he ever spoken publicly about this issue?
- Gauge who the MP is most likely to listen to. A community leader, a volunteer, an academic? Can you enlist them as fellow spokespeople?

- If possible, choose a delegation of 2-5 people and ensure they are on the same page about the message and goals of the meeting.
- Designate a moderator from your delegation and decide who will say what when during the meeting.
- Brainstorm what kind of questions might be raised and prepare answers.
- Plan for different possible outcomes and responses to the meeting.
- Set a clear, achievable goal for the meeting.
- Send a two-page backgrounder (feel free to use the briefing note in this kit).
- Bring extra white bands to give to the MP and staff.

4. The Meeting and 'The Ask'

A typical meeting lasts around 30 minutes. This time will go by very quickly. Prepare to do a lot of listening, while making sure you get your points across before the meeting is over. As a general rule, the MP should talk two-thirds of the time, you one-third. Within the meeting:

- Arrive on time.
- State your case precisely in everyday language.
- Give examples.
- Make clear your goals and what action you would like to see your MP take. Possible 'asks' include:
 - **Raise the issue in caucus.**
 - **Write a letter to the prime minister (or, in the case of opposition MP's, to their party leader)**
 - **Wear a white band to show support for the campaign.**
- Keep a positive tone and actively listen, show interest in and understanding of their point of view.
- Keep the discussion on track – summarize progress, and have talking points handy to move the meeting along if it gets sidetracked.
- Have answers to difficult questions on hand and deal with them confidently. If you do not have the answer, tell the MP you will get back to them.
- Dress appropriately; showing knowledge of dress code increases trust. Don't forget to wear your white band.
- Agree on the end time of the meeting at the start and stick to the allocated time.
- Do not ask people to do what they are unable to do – it may lead to unnecessary frustration on both sides. For example, MPs will not be able to take a public stance that is inconsistent with their party's official position on an issue.
- Check and record what the MP has agreed to do before leaving.
- Make sure you give him/her a white band

5. Follow-up

- Write a letter thanking the MP for the meeting, reiterating the agreed outcomes.