

Tip Sheet 9

How should we present our case to decision-makers and politicians?

Who are you talking to?

- Who do you need to educate about your issue? Is it a small number of politicians and officials, or are you seeking to influence more widely?
- Once you know who the decision-makers are – an individual or a committee – in addition to trying to communicate directly with them, you should also consider identifying and talking to/communicating with other people who they respect and might listen to (see the Target Map in Tip Sheet 8).
- It always helps to show widespread support. Would it help your arguments (and do you have the time to build a campaign) to have a petition, or to gather organisational endorsements for your position? Only use online petitions if you are sure that you will get a good number of people signing – they can backfire and show, not how many but how few support you.

What should you be saying to them?

- The arguments you use should include a number of different tactics, depending on the interests and educational level of your target audience (1 on researching your target).
- Scientific and public health data are usually the most important. Get your facts straight. Be able to cite any clinical trials or other academic research which prove that what you want to change would work better the way that you want it. Is there clear proof from another country that diagnoses rise, transmissions fall or the 90/90/90 target comes closer if they do what you suggest? ECDC is a good source for this.
- Social and behavioural research may show them that how people behave is not how they expect. Many arguments about, for example, criminalisation of HIV transmission are based in expectations of how people will behave that may not be true. Showing this may help your cause. However, you must also be aware of any research which would help those who argue against you.
- Human rights may matter to them. If so, you can use documents from the UN, WHO or ECHR to back up your arguments about how a key population should be treated, or how access is restricted unfairly for some.
- Financial arguments will help most causes. If you can create a cost-benefit argument from research and public health data, showing a politician how much they could save in the long run by better targeting of testing or better linkage to care, this may help. However, sometimes the short term costs are all they are willing to consider, so be aware of these too.
- Case studies and personal stories will humanise your facts and figures, especially where you are talking to someone who may not “get” the data. It's particularly helpful if the person telling their story is someone the listener can relate to; for example, if your Minister is from a military family, then getting a veteran to explain why your change is needed and how it could have helped them will get them to listen more sympathetically, as well as challenging any stereotypes they may have in their head.

- Does the thing you want them to do work already elsewhere? Show how successful it is. Is it an entirely new idea? Tell them they can be groundbreaking and innovative. Tell the truth, but put things in the best light.

How should you be saying it?

- Research what the decision makers already know and what their background is. Avoid jargon, acronyms, scientific terms unless you are sure they will understand them. Use similes; keep the use of figures and percentages to key points.
- Whether or not you use printed materials, you should be able to carry the key arguments and a few handy statistics for your case in your head. Can you summarise your “ask” in 20 seconds or less? E.g. “community outreach testing can be safe, lower cost and reaches the people most at risk, who don’t test in hospitals. We can show you how to do it here.”
- Sometimes it helps to have different voices putting your message in different forms. Some campaigns in the “case studies” section found that demonstrations and complaints could raise an issue’s visibility, but they needed other people not directly associated with “street actions” to be able to go in and speak to the Minister and their staff more politely and helpfully about why the change was needed. However, it is important for there to be some level of at least informal co-ordination between all parties so that people’s tactics do not damage each other or the cause.

What formats should you use to influence?

- The key formats are printed, social media and verbal arguments.
- If it’s one or a few people, consider personalised communications – a meeting, a tailored letter or briefing. If there is wider influencing to be done, then a booklet, social media, newspaper articles may help you make your case.
- If the case is complex, there are a lot of groups supporting it, or many targets to influence, consider publishing a “brochure” or longer briefing paper showing your extended support with logos, lucid arguments, quotes, simple graphs or illustrations and short stories or examples (a good example of this is the “Halve It” campaign leaflet for increased HIV testing access <http://www.halveit.org.uk>).
- Show public support with social media campaigns, “twibbons” or banners that people can add to their image or website, simple gifs and ribbons.

Whose support will it help to show?

- Cite experts and international best practice – e.g. what does the World Health Organisation think you should do?
- Politicians are almost always more respectful of people with “Doctor” or “Professor” attached to their name.
- Show as widespread expert/professional support as you can, either in a co-signed letter to the most important newspaper, or in multiple logos on a leaflet.
- Use personal stories, preferably from “sympathetic” people who will appeal to them. Use quotes in your lobbying materials from people affected, to humanise the issue. Train and support people to tell their stories (showing the problem or the solution) to the media or to politicians directly in a simple way and how to avoid or manage prejudicial questions.
- Get a famous person to speak for you, especially in the media or at events. Educate them before you let them speak on your issues, unless they are also their issues already.

- Does your key target belong to a political party which has affiliated member groups? Ask suitably linked groups e.g. women's groups, LGBT groups to show their support by passing a motion, writing a letter or displaying your campaign logo on their Facebook or website.

Where should you meet them?

- Obviously, the best option is to have a private meeting in their offices. But there are other possibilities which may help you get there.
- Receptions or meetings on other issues may give you a chance for that brief conversation and a request for a full meeting. Asking a pertinent question from the audience after a speech by them may catch their interest.
- Political or social events may offer the chance to meet a number of key contacts. If their political party has a conference, take a small stand and chat to everyone passing by – you never know when you will meet not only your target but their mother, their best friend, their local party organiser – any number of people who may mention your issue to them. (See Tip Sheet 10 for further discussion of these events)

And if, despite all of the above, you find they are immune to facts, to research and to logic – see Tip Sheet 12.

How to Cite:

Power, L. (2017). *OptTEST Tip sheet 9 – How should we present our case to decision-makers and politicians?* Retrieved from: www.opttest.eu