



Influencing Decision-Makers for Nature Protection

Influencing the corporate or government decision-making process is not easy. On a given issue, dozens of variables could be operating. As a person attempting to influence the process, you need to be aware that there are potentially hundreds of variables; however, some are more important than others. Remember, decision-makers want to be perceived as having made the *right decision*.

Here are some basic guidelines to get the types of decision you want:

Talk to the Right People

It is critical to reach the political (and/or corporate) leaders right from the start. Know who your allies are, and line them up as early as possible. This does not mean that you ignore bureaucrats, assistants, or employees. They have useful information and it is important to inform and persuade those who surround and/or influence decision-makers. But you must tell the leaders what you want. Don't rely on others to relay your message because there is no guarantee that their interests are the same as yours.

Be Proactive, Not Reactive

Keeping informed of local events is the best way to stay on top of decision-making. The further along the decision-making process has gone, the more difficult it is to influence it. Late in the game, people have already formed their opinions and stated their positions on an issue. If you're attempting to influence a "mature issue," it is always best to provide alternative solutions rather than simply opposing a particular position. It's easier for those in power to disregard "ranting" than it is to ignore viable alternatives. Too often people try to influence an outcome after key decisions have been made.

Develop Broad-Based Support

To influence the decision-making process most powerfully and effectively, you will need public support and consensus. It is difficult for decision-makers to ignore a broad base of people taking the same, or nearly the same, positions. It's great to have a lot of people on your side, but also aim for a diversity of supporters. Demonstrating widespread support for your initiative enhances your credibility and profile, and makes it easier to coordinate communications and activities. If you can

win over groups or individuals that have been traditionally opposed or neutral to your issue, this will make your case particularly effective and persuasive.

Invest Time in Knowing the Process and the People

Doing your homework is absolutely crucial. Research everything about an issue, for example:

- If the issue is about a parcel of land, what are the previous land ownership or use patterns?
- How have council members, business leaders, Members of Parliament (MPs) or Ministers of Provincial Parliament (MPPs) voted previously on similar issues?
- What sports or hobbies do the decision-makers enjoy? Making a connection with someone by *briefly* discussing common interests can set a positive tone for a meeting, and shows that you've done your research.
- What are the local newspaper editor's favourite topics?



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There is no substitute for the facts. Word-of-mouth information is important, but only to provide you with another avenue of research. Remember that decision-makers and media deal with many people. They remember and appreciate the people who are well informed and who present alternative solutions.





Make Sure your Proposal Fits into Existing Realities

It is very easy to become blinded by and hopelessly enamoured of your position or solution. Consider carefully the implications of integrating your recommendation into the existing political, financial and social framework.

- Would implementing your recommendation cost more money or require more staff than what is currently planned?
- Can you alter your suggestions to fit into the municipal/provincial/corporate budget and still accomplish what you want? Remember to be creative! Can implementing your solution cost more money in one area but save more in another?
- Does your proposal have financial, health or other benefits that aren't immediately evident?
- On which factors are you willing to compromise, and on which are you *not willing* to compromise? Know your bottom line.

Existing government resources (financial, human, etc.) are critical limitations to keep in mind. If your idea can be implemented with no additional cost, or even with savings, it stands a better chance of being adopted.

Decision-Makers are Human

Remember decision-makers are busy people. Your issue may be *your* top priority, but it is often not theirs. Keep the pressure on politely and persistently. If you don't seem to be making progress, step back and try another approach. This is always better than forcing someone into a position from which they can't or won't retreat. Perhaps you can persuade one of their advisors that you have a good case and your position is the right one. Just keep in mind that, even though he or she may be burdened with biases, ambition, poor information, desire for public approval, etc., the decision-maker usually has a genuine commitment to the public good. But you might have to remind them what that is.

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