

Making the most of meetings with decision-makers

One way of mobilising resources is to work in partnership with local decision-makers. Local government often has money to spend in the local area, and communities may wish to influence how the money is spent. The following guidelines are for when we arrange a meeting with a

decision-maker, such as a local government official, business leader or religious leader, and we want to develop a relationship with them in which we can make requests and offer encouragement and support.

Before the meeting

Think about who you will meet with

- Make sure you are meeting with the right person. Check that you understand the person's role and how much authority he or she has. Will the person need to request permission for the meeting?
- If you have had previous contact, recall what was promised. Has it been delivered?
- How do you think the decision-maker views you? Does the person consider you to have power, influence or knowledge? How can you use that to make your requests more persuasively?
- Consider what the decision-maker may want to gain from the meeting – information, commitment to work together to solve the problem, etc – and how you can provide this.

Plan who will attend the meeting with you

- Make sure the people going will represent the community. Consider taking someone who will be directly affected by the action you are asking for and can speak about it clearly.
- Do any other local groups have the same questions? If so, consider inviting them to the meeting too.

Arrange the meeting

- Contact the person to arrange a meeting. If possible, ask someone known to the person to introduce you.
- If you do not have a way of getting in touch directly, write a brief formal letter requesting a meeting.
- Confirm the date and time of the meeting, asking for confirmation in writing. Make a phone call or visit the office the day before to say you are looking forward to the meeting and to check again that the person is expecting you at the time agreed.

Plan how to present your requests at the meeting

- If there is more than one of you, agree who is going to say what (for example, who will speak first and who will share the main messages) and who will take notes.
- Decide what you will ask the decision-maker to do. For example, will you ask the person to review the situation? Or pass on your requests to someone else?
- Make sure that you are asking for something that the person (or the department he or she represents) is able to give.
- Think about what arguments the decision-maker will find persuasive and be ready to use them.
- What questions do you expect you might be asked? Make sure you have worked out your responses to possible questions.



During the meeting

Introductions

- Make sure that everyone in the room is introduced. Summarise what happened in previous meetings if you had any.
- Explain why you are meeting and agree how to proceed.
- Agree for someone to take notes and gather contact details of everyone present (ensure that everyone is agreed about how the contact details can be shared).



Keeping on track

- Have a clear, achievable goal.
- Know your main points well and present your requests or concerns clearly.
- Ask questions if you do not understand what the decision-maker is saying.
- Focus on your most important concerns first and leave smaller issues until the end.
- Aim to build confidence and trust. Give encouraging feedback where possible. Do not accuse or criticise the decision-maker – try to see him or her as a partner or friend, rather than as an enemy.
- Always be respectful, even if the meeting is going badly and the decision-maker is negative or uncooperative.
- Summarise progress at various points and say what has been agreed at the end.

After the meeting

- Write a quick report of the meeting so you can remember what was said and share it with others.
- Send a brief letter thanking the decision-maker for seeing you, summarising the main points and reminding him or her about what agreements were reached and what promises were made by both of you.
- After a while, contact the decision-maker again to report on your progress and to find out if he or she has done what was promised.



Adapted from the forthcoming second edition of Tearfund's Advocacy toolkit (ROOTS 1 and 2) by Joanna Watson.