

Guide to building relationships with senior church leaders

- Be aware that for a number of senior church leaders, their main agenda when meeting with an organisation may be the financial benefits the church can gain from their involvement. Try to appreciate the financial pressures on churches that often contribute to this attitude.
- Emphasise the importance of relationship – the need to have mutual understanding and support.
- Place the emphasis of the first meeting on getting to understand their vision for the church, how they see the church making a difference in their community, etc. Try to understand their passion and vision, and see if what the organisation wants to do fits with this and can support it in any way.
- Try to make any meeting informal and friendly.
- Build credibility with senior church leaders by meeting with senior secular leaders as well (e.g. senior public health officials or politicians).
- It may be easier to relate to some senior church leaders through the evangelical leaders fellowship (or equivalent). By relating to a wider group of leaders you may be able to identify which leaders are particularly open to the organisation's agenda, and also help to clarify the nature of the organisation's engagement before meeting one-on-one.
- Church leaders sometimes express frustration that the church's contribution to development (especially in health and education) is not understood or valued by development agencies. Affirm their contribution. If appropriate, discuss how you can help in building a dialogue between the church and the international development community.
- Do some work before the meeting to try to understand the church structures. Also find out the church leader's key interests and achievements. It will also be helpful to find out what issues are likely to be sensitive – e.g. condom promotion or human sexuality – so that you are ready to deal with these issues appropriately, if they arise.
- Identify the leader's key aides. Often these people will have a significant influence on the leader's thinking and will be the ones to ensure that any decisions are implemented, so it is important to engage with them.

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