

Influencing City Councillors - 8 easy steps!

We all exercise influence every day - in our workplace, in our families, and with our friends! We may not use that word, but we use the same skills. With persuasion and persistence, we try to help others see our point of view.

Yet many of us have fears about influencing politicians - afraid we can't express ourselves well enough, especially with someone we think knows more than us.

With a little experience you will find that politicians are just ordinary people - and they are eager to hear from, and be educated by constituents like you. Remember, there is no one more important to them than the people who can vote for them in their ward.

Here are eight easy steps to get started on educating city council about your issue!

Step One - Find your ward and who your city Councillor is.

On the Internet go to www.ottawa.ca and press on "inside city hall" go to city wards (click on the area of the map where you live). To get a list of all city Councillors simply click on "city councillors".

Step Two - Put your team together.

Ask members of your community, supportive board and/or staff members to go with you. The ideal number of people to attend is from two to five. This will show the politician that your community is concerned while not overwhelming her/him. Ensure that at least one member from your team is a constituent from the ward of the Councillor you are meeting with. Councillors pay particular attention when a



voter in their ward is present!



Step Three - Prepare your message

The content of the meeting should be planned in advance.

- Identify the key messages you wish to convey.
 - what is the issue,
 - who does it affect,
 - how does it affect your community and
 - what would it take to fix it.
- Research some key facts or figures that can support your argument.
- Have in mind, you are likely to be asked questions about cost. You need not have detail on the costs, but you will want to consider a response. One way is to stress how it will reduce costs for the city in the long run, as a particular social problem will be avoided. (i.e. providing affordable recreation for youth, reduces police costs of responding to youth crime)
- Put your ideas in your own words, back up with your own experiences, examples and a few facts.



Step Four - Call your Councillors office to book a meeting.

Be prepared to tell them the names, and affiliations of your team members and a couple of points you want to address. You may also be asked to put your request for a meeting in writing.

Step Five - Plan your meeting

The meeting with your Councillor should be organized and informative.



Everyone should try to contribute to the meeting. Here are some tips:

- ★ Someone should act as the main spokesperson and introduce everyone.
- ★ Review/rehearse what you plan to say during the meeting. Provide each team member with a role; lead speaker, person who speaks from own experience, constituent and note taker/observer. Agree who will speak when.
- ★ Prepare materials to take to the meeting. Using facts or background information is important to help make your point. Make copies for each participant (including your Councillor and their assistant).
- ★ *Materials to take with you include:*
 - ★ A profile of the group/groups your team represents
 - ★ An agenda or a list of topics to be covered
 - ★ Any background information on the issue that you feel the politician should have (this is your opportunity to "educate" your Councillor on your issue!)
 - ★ Letters from other members in your community affected by the issue and who support your efforts but are unable to attend

Step Six - Meet with your politician.

- ★ **Remember you're the expert -** Though feeling nervous is natural, you have every reason to feel confident going in. Councillors rely on members of different communities to inform them on different issues - you will know far more about the issues than they do. And remember that if you don't have the answer to a question say you will get back to them with the information right away - and expect them to do the same thing!



- ★ **Getting started** - At the meeting introduce yourself and your team and thank the Councillor for meeting with you. Make sure they know that you represent the voices of others in your community and that you will go back and talk to your community about the meeting with the Councillor. Politicians are affected by a direct show of community support.
- ★ **Explain your issue** - Explain the issue; who does it affect, how does it affect them and what is needed to fix it. After you have made your points answer questions from the Councillor and be sure to ask the Councillor how they would be prepared to help.
- ★ **Get a commitment** - Ask your Councillor what he/she is willing to do. Note what they have said they will do.
- ★ **Closing** - Be sure to thank the politician for their time and go over what each of you will do if there is follow-up from the meeting (get back with any unanswered questions, send more information, talk to colleague...)



Step Seven - Send a thank-you letter after the meeting.

It is a great idea to keep in touch with the politicians. One idea is to send him/her an invitation to visit your agency/community. Start building a valuable relationship with your elected representative!

Step Eight - Record your experience.

Once you have met with your councillor fill out the **Report Form** - this is a good way for you to let others from your group/agency know what happened and also to keep councillors accountable! (See Form on next page)



Report Form

Use this form to record the results of your lobby. If you fill it out right away, it will help you to remember the details of what was said and the follow-up you will want to do.

Name of politician:

Position:

Meeting Date:

Time:

People in attendance:

Goal of Meeting:

Questions asked by politician:

Statements/Commitments made by the politician:

Commitments we made:

Follow-up Needed:

Other useful information:

Adapted from materials produced by the Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare