

** Disclaimer 1:

This worksheet is different from the others in this series. Whereas the others tell one way to achieve a goal, this one suggests several possible paths. Which path is right for you and your organization depends on several variables:

1. What is your NGO trying to achieve?
2. What methods is your NGO using to get there?
3. What is your NGO's relationship to those in power?
4. Are those in power actually able to help you if they wanted to?
5. How much power does your NGO hold?
6. Who are your NGO's allies?

** Disclaimer 2:

This worksheet will be most helpful to NGO's in countries with a Corruption Percentage Index score higher than 50.

Power Mapping

Are you not sure about the power relationships in your area, and how they relate to your issue or organization? Google "Power Mapping 101"



1. What is the job of a politician?

- Lawmaking
- Budgeting
- Oversight of government policies and departments
- Representing the interests of citizens

2. Why might your NGO need to speak to a politician?

- To request funding
- To borrow equipment
- To use a public space or building
- To approve or speed up a permit
- To request city services
- To get an introduction to someone
- To promote or endorse your NGO
- To support/discourage legislation

3. What do politicians care about?

In a word ...votes. They care about:

- Campaign donations that can be used to persuade people to vote for them
- Keeping their promises to voters so those voters will support them again
- Projecting an image that they believe will generate votes in future elections
- Building and supporting their community as they define it



BEFORE ASKING FOR A MEETING WITH A POLITICIAN

Answer the following:

1. Why would a politician care about your NGO's request?
2. What can you or your NGO offer that will make your request worth their time, energy, and any risks they might be taking by helping you?
3. How can you connect your request to one or more of the things you believe they care about?

PROS AND CONS OF BEING POLITICALLY NEUTRAL

There are good reasons for NGOs to stay politically neutral:

- Aligning your NGO with a single politician or party, who then loses the next election, could mean support might also end
- Aligning your NGO with a politician or party who is not universally popular might cause current partners, sponsors, volunteers, and members to leave and potential partners, sponsors, volunteers, and members to avoid working with your NGO.
- Your NGO's bylaws (rules that govern how the NGO must operate) might prohibit endorsement or support for one politician or party.

However ... there's another side to the coin:

In reality, many NGOs have a clear interest in seeing one politician or party win and another lose. When it comes to interacting with a specific politician, sometimes NGOs walk a fine line between what their rules allow versus what is in the best interest of the people they serve.

The best advice here is to:

Build relationships with the political office, not the person currently in that office; and build relationships with several politicians -- or rather, several offices.

- The fact that you work closely with many political offices shows that your NGO is indeed neutral
- If your main supporter retires or loses in the next election, you will still have others in your camp
- If you can build political support from many political offices, you're likely to get more funding



EMPLOYABILITY SPOTLIGHT:

Learning to speak to politicians will make you more employable

Why would an employer be more likely to hire you if you know how to speak to politicians? The art of speaking to politicians is called Diplomacy. The best diplomats can get what they want AND make the person who approved the request feel good about it.

Most often, diplomats need to offer something in return so that the other party feels they benefitted as well. The process of deciding how much to give up and how much to accept in return is called negotiating. However, sometimes you can't make all parties happy. In these situations, an excellent diplomat will minimize negative feelings and preserve the relationship itself for the future.

The business world is full of diplomacy and negotiating, too! For example:

- Helping an angry customer and convincing them to remain a customer is an example of diplomacy.
- All the following are types of negotiations: buying, selling, trading, partnering, and dealmaking.



QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS BEFORE MEETING WITH A POLITICIAN

1. Have you tried to solve the problem without the help of the politician?

The politician will want to know what work your NGO has done on its own to try to solve the problem before coming to his/her office.

2. Do you really need to speak to the Mayor or Chief Executive?

If a Councilperson or more junior representative could solve your problem, start there.

3. Do you have organizational allies who could join you in the meeting or in the request?

4. Do you really need the politician to solve your problem?

You might have the chance to ask for help only once or twice over the course of a year or several years. Make sure these requests are worthwhile.

5. Are you really prepared?

- What are your requests? Be knowledgeable and able to succinctly explain your situation
- What questions is the politician likely to ask you? How is the politician likely to answer your questions? Remember to think about 'What do Politicians care about?'
- Can you explain what the consequences will be should your request not be granted?
- Have a Plan B in mind if the politician is unwilling to help you on your primary request.

POSSIBLE REASONS WHY A POLITICIAN WOULD WANT TO HELP YOUR NGO

- Your **Board of Directors** contains influential people the politician sees as potential allies
- You can show wide public support for your NGO either through **paid memberships, number of volunteers, or large numbers of participants** at your events
- You can show how your organization **saved the city/province/state/country money**
- You can show how your project **helps the politician keep a campaign promise**
- Your NGO already has a **strong relationship** with the politician
- Participation in your project will make the politician look **better to voters**
- Your NGO has the support of many groups that work with it to **achieve the same goals**

Final Advice:

- Try to build a relationship with the politician early in their term - ideally within their first year of office - in order to do the most good in the long-term.
- Build positive relationships with the staff of the politician. Staff play a key role in organizing a politician's day-to-day calendars and might influence which laws or policies they want to support.