

Lobbying Senior Administrators & Politicians



This section describes various strategies for lobbying senior administrators, politicians and other decision-makers. The strategies, adopted from an Assembly workshop presented by Patricia Spindel, are described as low, medium and high profile approaches.

Getting the Attention of Senior Administrators and Board Members

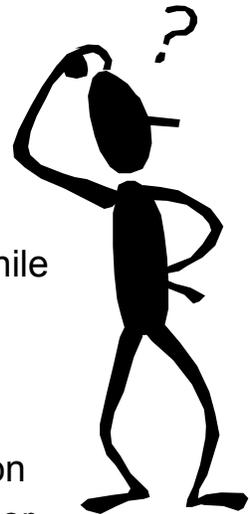
“Political action” doesn’t only refer to efforts that target politicians and public policy – it refers to any action you take to effect change in an area that matters to you. One area where you may have suggestions for change is in your workplace. Here are some tips on how to get your ideas across to senior administrators and board members.

Get together

Gather a group of your co-workers who share your concern and are interested in bringing their ideas to the decision-makers within your organization.

Identify the issue

Develop a problem statement that will outline the issue in one or two sentences. This will help you focus your efforts, and will ensure that the administration clearly understands your concern. When appropriate, use examples from your work experience to support the reasons for your concern (while maintaining confidentiality).



Identify the issues underlying your concern

To do this, you may need to obtain background knowledge on the issue. Contact another colleague, mentor, RNAO, ONA, or someone else you respect and trust. Ask them for suggestions on how to tackle the issue you have concerns about.

Take time to write down what you want to say, clearly and precisely, with supporting facts

Contact your colleagues, mentors, or RNAO to check your statements and facts. We are here to help!

Suggest solutions

Present your solutions with accompanying rationale. For example, explaining how each solution will assist in improving patient care will lend support to your argument. Identify the risks associated with your proposed change, as well as the risks associated with not changing.

Book a meeting with the appropriate person/administrator

It is recommended that you first meet with the immediate manager of the unit/program to discuss your concerns before arranging a meeting with the Chief Nursing Officer or Vice-President of Nursing.



Express yourself clearly and succinctly

At the meeting, present facts (research, data, etc.) that will help the administrator raise your concern at other meetings. Offer to show them an example of the problem so they will have firsthand experience with your concern, as well as a context in which to place the issue. Try to keep on point – too much information turns people off.

Offer to be of assistance in the future

This includes sending relevant information to the administrator.

The key to successfully presenting to administrators and/or board members is to always help them problem solve. Make suggestions on how the problem can be solved, and offer your assistance in further efforts.

Assess and Re-evaluate

Are you happy with the outcome? If yes, then congratulate yourself and your colleagues! Celebrate and thank the administration for their belief in you. If not, consider why this might have occurred. Did you address issues of concern? Is it because of the cost associated with your proposed change? If you are unsure, ask! Then develop your next plan of action to address your concern. Call RNAO for assistance.

If after several attempts you have made no headway, you may need to ask yourself if there are moral and ethical concerns you are facing. While it may be difficult to confront your situation, you may need to ask yourself, *“Can I continue here, or is it time to move on?”*

Getting the Attention of Politicians

Lobbying politicians is one of the most effective ways that you can influence change – whether at a community, municipal, provincial, or federal level. Entering into the political arena may seem like a big step, but it doesn't have to be. Remember, the job of any politician is to represent your concerns and interests as an Ontario citizen and voter. To learn about past successful lobbying efforts led by RNs, see the Success Stories section of this Kit.

Identify your strategy

When planning strategies to lobby politicians, it is important first of all to identify how high profile you wish your activities to be. Generally, it is advisable to start with low profile strategies and, if necessary and advisable, to gradually increase the profile. Choosing the appropriate strategy depends on a variety of issues. It is always more effective to be “in sync” with other members, so check with RNAO Home Office for recommended strategies.

Advocacy Game Plan

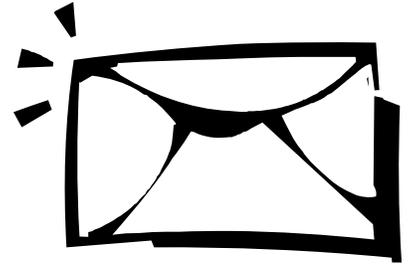
- Low Profile Strategy
- Medium Profile Strategy
- High Profile Strategy

Low Profile Strategies

Letter writing campaign

In your letter, remember to:

- State the problem
- Explain the impact of the problem
- Say what you want done about the problem
- Give a recommended option as the solution
- State the date/time by which you expect a response



Medium Profile Strategies



When you get the first “No”, move to a medium profile strategy.

- Meet with MPPs, MPs and/or government officials
- Arrange public meetings in the Minister’s riding
- Release briefs to the Opposition and Members of Cabinet

Meetings with Government Officials

- Identify the benefits of/need for the policy change
- Substantiate your arguments with local data, evidence, your experiences or those of other jurisdictions
- Link to strategic direction or current government priorities
- Respond to concerns raised by acknowledging them and providing evidence that supports your point
- Follow up with written responses

High Profile Strategies

- Picketing or leafleting the Minister's riding.
- Put up posters in the Minister's riding.
- Release briefs to the news media.
- Have a news conference/news release.
- Have a group occupy the Minister's constituency office.
- Demonstrations/picketing at the Legislative Building, Minister of Health's office or outside hospitals.



Do not reverse from a high profile strategy to a low or medium strategy.

→You have to be strategic when using a high profile strategy. It is important to build alliances when using a high profile approach.

**RNAO Formal Request for Full Public Inquiry into SARS
Outbreak
June 9, 2003**



The press conference held by RNAO at Queen's Park on June 9, 2003 is an example of a high profile strategy. The event was organized to deliver a formal request to Premier Ernie Eves to order an independent commission of inquiry into the SARS outbreak that claimed the lives of two Ontario RNs. The event was attended by at least a dozen nurses wearing masks that read "silenced", "ignored", and "muzzled" (pictured above).

Gaining Access to Politicians

Timing is critical. Where possible:

- Immediately before and immediately after elections are good times to initiate contact.
- Raise your issue in the context of current media stories, newly-released research findings, or government initiatives. The Ministry of Health website lists current press releases at www.health.gov.on.ca.
- If funding is a factor, try to schedule your meetings prior to budget preparations.

How to set up a meeting

- Call about three weeks ahead to book an appointment at the MPP's constituency office. Once a time has been scheduled, fax or email a letter confirming the time, date and location. Include names of people attending (it's usually a good idea for at least two people to go), and a brief description of what you want to address.
- Have a planning session to map out how you want to handle the meeting: for example, who will ask questions, and who will take notes.
- Review your key messages and questions. Focus on one or two issues only. Go armed with facts, figures and best of all, personal examples that relate to key messages.
- Remember, Home Office is just a phone call away!



The Meeting

- Don't be overwhelmed. You are an expert in nursing care and highly knowledgeable about health-care issues. Speak from your own experience. Be friendly and to the point. Stress that health care is in the public's interest and use examples that support patient advocacy.
- Explain your position on issues. Speak confidently and honestly. If questions come up that you aren't prepared to answer, promise to follow up with information by fax or email.
- If your MPP supports the issue, ask how she/he could concretely work on behalf of nurses and RNAO. Use local examples to help make RNAO issues relevant to your community. End the meeting promptly, summing up with a review of points of agreement.

After the Meeting

- Send a thank-you letter, again summarizing your discussions and any action or commitments. Send a copy to RNAO's President.
- Now that you have established yourself as a valuable contact, keep in touch by sending your MPP a Chapter newsletter, extending an invitation to speak at a Chapter meeting, or inviting her/him to a meeting where an RNAO Executive Officer will speak to registered nurses.



Guidelines for Writing a Brief or Submission

While writing a submission is a key medium profile political strategy, it is not necessarily an easy task and involves many steps before the final draft is completed. We encourage RNAO members who are interested in writing a brief or submission to contact the RNAO Policy department:

- To find out what briefs or submissions have already been prepared by RNAO
- To ask for guidance. The Policy department has extensive experience in writing briefs and submissions and will be happy to help you.

Why do we present briefs?

- To make our position known on the record
- To communicate directly with politicians

This section outlines the process that RNAO follows when writing a brief or submission. It is divided into the following sections:

- what a brief/submission is;
- what needs to be done before the brief/submission is written;
- writing the brief/submission; and,
- presenting the brief/submission.

Writing a Submission

What is a submission?

RNAO often responds to nursing and health-related issues through submissions. Submissions are documents that reflect the ideas and opinions of an individual or an organization. Submissions can be directed to the federal level, including Royal Commissions; the provincial level, including task forces and standing committees, or; the municipal level, including township councils.

Know your audience

It is important to think about who will be reading the submission *before* you write it. Identifying your audience will help to determine how formal your submission has to be and how it should be "pitched". Call the Policy department to help you answer these –and other—questions.

Focusing on an issue

A submission should be clear, concise, and focus on a specific issue. This makes the submission easier to research, write, present, and more likely to get action. It is also likely to have more impact if the submission delivers a message that is congruent with what others within the association or the profession are saying – there is strength in numbers!

Compiling background information

When preparing a submission for RNAO, the Policy department starts with a scan of available and relevant resources. Previous submissions, legislation, reports, working papers, journal articles, and discussion papers may all provide either background information or support for recommended options, strategies, solutions, and

alternatives. Whenever possible, we draw on the expertise of our diverse membership, who often provide examples in clinical practice that strengthen the main points of the issue(s) and/or recommendations that are included in the submission.

Framing the issue

Submission issues are always framed in a way that speaks to the RNAO mandate: Speak Out for Health, Speak Out for Nursing. When it is a joint submission, all participating organizations' and groups' mandates, visions, and values must be taken into consideration.

What to include in the submission

When writing a submission, you should focus on three areas: defining the issue; supporting your argument with evidence; and proposing solutions. RNAO uses the following structure when writing submissions: title page, summary of recommendations, introduction, main body, and conclusion.

Structuring the Submission

Title Page

The title page includes the title of the submission and the subject that is being addressed. RNAO's name and logo are also included. If it is a joint submission, RNAO's name and logo and the name and logo of any other group or organization are included. The title page must also include the date of the submission and the name of the group who will receive the brief.

Summary of Recommendations

RNAO usually includes a one-page summary of recommendations. This is particularly helpful for public officials who want a quick summary of RNAO's position. Without a summary, there is a risk that others may summarize it for decision-makers, and will have a different focus.

Introduction

This section usually includes information about the organization or group writing the submission, the group's objective, and the content that will be addressed in the submission.

Objectives and issues that RNAO intends to address in the submission are explicitly stated in the introduction. The audience also needs to know why RNAO is interested in this topic. RNAO's mandate, mission, and vision provide direction to what issues are addressed and why the organization is interested in the topic that is presented in the submission. It is also important to provide a context

for the main body of discussion in the submission. This usually includes a discussion of what is happening in the broader social, environmental, economic, and political contexts.

Main Body of the Submission

This is the informational part of the brief that becomes a permanent record of RNAO's position on this issue. Brevity and quality are the keys to a good main body. In this part of the submission, we describe the policy issue that is being addressed, and outline the evidence supporting our recommendations. It is always important to bring a nursing perspective to issues.

Conclusion

RNAO ends the submission with a couple of concluding statements. It is important to reiterate the main issue(s) and the key points from the recommended solutions to address the issue(s).

Presenting the Submission

Prior to presenting the submission, you will have to attend to some administrative details. This includes how many copies are required, where to send them, to whom, by what date, and where and when you will present.

The responsibility of presenting the brief should be delegated to the best person for the job. Generally, one person will present the brief although others may be available to answer questions. The presenter should have a good grasp of the topic at hand, and preferably work in or have clinical expertise in the area.

A specific amount of time will be allotted to each presentation. This allocated time needs to include time to answer questions.

Media coverage

There may be media present during the oral presentation of the submission. RNAO provides copies of submissions to the media, as the summary of recommendations gives them a complete synopsis of the submission which they will find useful. The RNAO Policy and Communications departments work closely in preparing for media and press releases. Usually a spokesperson is identified to the press to answer questions. For further reading on media, refer to the Media Relations Guide.