

# Building relationships

## How to create meaningful relationships with politicians

Building relationships takes time. It's a continued connection with someone and often requires both give and take. The stronger and more genuine the relationship, the better your influencing can be.

### Tips for building relationships with politicians

Before you read this page, you might want to look at our guidance on [researching for impact](#).

#### Get to know the person

Politicians are people just like you and me. Think about the different relationships you have in your life, like with family, friends, work. And think about your relationship with issues that matter to you, like cancer and politics. The person you are trying to influence has all these relationships too. Think about them within three key themes: human, cancer experience and policy.

- **Human:** Who are they? Start by getting to know them beyond politics. Do your research so you can ask about their family, mention shared interests, or bring up something relatable eg their love of Parkrun or local culture.
- **Cancer:** In the UK, nearly 1 in 2 people will get cancer in their lifetime. It's something that impacts almost everyone. We want to bring about a world where everybody can lead longer, better lives, free from the fear of cancer – who could disagree with that? If you've found out they have personal experience of cancer through your research, you can mention this and talk about your own to create a shared connection. Not everyone feels comfortable talking about their own experiences, show that you are listening and respect their choice if they don't want to talk about theirs – it doesn't stop you talking about yours.

- **Policy:** What are they interested in? Did they campaign on a particular issue to get elected, are they part of a cross-party group or committee? Find out what matters to them, as well as their political party's position too. Try to find common ground as a foundation to strengthen your relationship.

## Focus on policy over politics

You don't have to agree with their political beliefs but it's essential that you stay neutral when you campaign as a volunteer Campaigns Ambassador for Cancer Research UK. Whenever you contact your politician, whether it's email, phone or face to face, talk about the campaign – why does it matter to you, and importantly why should it matter to them.

## Every interaction counts

Think about all the ways you might be able to build your relationship, remembering it's about give and take.

Of course, you'll be asking them to support policy calls and represent you, but you can also meet them at local events, share useful information and thank them when they speak up for issues you care about – remember that manners can go a long way. Every interaction builds trust and familiarity over time. A balanced is key to developing strong, effective relationships.

## Remind them about the last time you spoke

Politicians meet a lot of people all the time. Help them to remember you and foster the idea of a lasting relationship by reminding them about your last interaction, eg *"I reached out last year and truly appreciated your help. We met at Race for Life, and now I'm hoping you might be able to help with a campaign that I care about."*

## Get to know their teams

Depending on the roles they have in Parliament and their own political party, some politicians can be harder to build a relationship with than others. It's not impossible though! If you're finding it difficult to connect directly with a politician, try getting to know their team – they're often the eyes and ears of the politician. Building a relationship with the people around them can often be the key to getting meaningful access to the politician.

## **Keep trying**

Remember, politicians are human. They won't always agree to support a campaign or take an action. Don't take this personally, it could be for lots of different reasons – they might not have time right now, their political party might be against it or they might not be able to do some things if they have a minister, for example. It doesn't necessarily mean your relationship isn't a success, and you can think about these barriers the next time you contact them.

## **Expect the unexpected**

Things can change quickly in politics, it can often be difficult to predict what will happen next week, or the week after. A story in the press, a resignation or reshuffle, can all quickly change the course of a campaign, sometimes for the better and sometimes not. Politics will keep you on your toes, but don't be put off by sudden change, if you act quickly and provide your politicians with information that can help in the moment, it can strengthen your relationship even more