

Influencing policy- and decision-makers

For many people working in museums, the key challenge is to gain support from senior managers, council members and politicians who may not know much of the range of activities your museum provides. These notes should help you prepare information in ways that are going to help achieve influence with decision-makers.

In an ideal world, politicians make decisions based on the best quality evidence. However, the world is not ideal, and decision-makers often operate in an environment that is highly complex, with competing interests, and with concerns for image, reputation, ambition and personal agendas. The consequence of this situation is that policy changes are not just down to rational, evidence-based decision-making, and that politics involves navigating the range of competing interests and viewpoints.

Far from being a reason to despair, this means that you can, with a bit of effort, get your message across. If you can provide rigorous, high quality evidence in effective ways, you will help decision-makers navigate the tangle of interests and viewpoints, giving you a route to influence.

You can achieve this by aiming to:

- **Be useful:** help decision-makers achieve things that they value. Keep their objectives and welfare in mind, and provide them with tools to engage with their own stakeholders.
- **Be clear and concise:** keep it short, get to the point quickly and make complex ideas accessible.
- **Serve a purpose:** address a specific point, focus on immediate actions, and make clear links to outcomes.

Preparing briefing notes

Information for politicians is often presented in the form of briefing notes. These contain key facts and information that help prepare decision-makers to make decisions. In terms of natural history museums, briefing notes are often provided to executive members and council members, to trustees and to management committees.

A good briefing note will **be useful to the reader**. It will help them achieve something they want to, and enable them to answer questions from competing interests or alternative viewpoints.

It will **present information clearly and concisely**. A briefing note should explicitly address a particular point. Key

Advocacy toolkit for natural history museums

considerations and implications should be obvious from the briefing. Ideally, a briefing note will be composed of short bullet points and be no more than two or three pages long.

Finally, it will **serve a specific purpose**. It will address a key action or outcome, with the implications made clear. It will propose clear actions to the reader.

Of course, to be credible, it is important that any communication is free from errors, is comprehensible, and is clearly laid out. This sounds obvious, but it is well worth paying attention to.

These notes have been produced as part of a programme of support for North West museums with natural history collections, led by Manchester Museum in association with World Museum Liverpool and Tullie House Museum, and Museum Development Northwest. If you have any comments, please contact henry.mcghie@manchester.ac.uk

