Australian Science Communicators
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Presenting science to decision-makers - politicians, business and industry

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&
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How to develop highly targeted communication with politicians at the federal and state levels, with business leaders and industry leaders, as well as with the people who influence them.

TARGETTING DECISION MAKERS

A meeting is arranged….

Eight principles

1. Objective.
Have a clear idea of what you want to achieve. Why do you want to talk to politicians/business? What is your ideal outcome? Would it stand a reality check?

2. Audience
Who do you want to reach? Identify and profile the key people important to the decision-making process. Look for common ground. Are there other major issues for this audience at the time of the meeting? If so, be ready for them to be distracted and think of strategies to re-focus them.

3. Message
Design a clear message which takes into account your objectives and the needs of politicians/business.

4.The key document
Write down the key points you want to get across in a letter to your targets before you start. Make it clear to both MPs and business leaders what specific actions you want them to take.

5. Preparation

- Get the presentation team together to work out how you present the ideas.
- Get your points across in the clearest possible way, in the shortest possible time.
- Select carefully the people in the group, and make sure it is the right size.
- What aids will you use? Video, pictures, PP presentation, charts, diagrams, examples of products etc? Will the meeting room accommodate the aids you choose?

6. Rehearsal
Practice the presentation at least twice to an audience which is of similar size and does not understand some of the technical aspects of the work (simulating MPs, business). Be very strict about keeping to time – your audience has significant time demands already, and

will switch off if it senses time-wasting with unnecessary detail.

7. Post meeting

Write to the people you met, confirming your understanding of the discussion, including any information you promised to follow up, perhaps inviting them to visit.

8. Consider media

Will suitable media coverage add weight to your submissions? Or will it distract the audience from your message? Will the audience feel “railroaded”?

FIRST, CATCH YOUR POLITICIAN
- some basic rules for running a parliamentary briefing

Whatever issue you want to raise with a politician, it must be clearly an issue of electorate importance.

And once that is established, it must be put forward by people with excellent presentation skills and a good understanding of their audience.

The ingredients for CSIRO's successful science briefing series in Federal and State Parliaments were:

- ✓ held in Parliament House committee room during sittings
- ✓ all MPs and their advisers invited
- ✓ small number of key stakeholders invited
- ✓ hosted by the relevant Minister or nominated colleague
- ✓ endorsed by prestigious S&T groups/individuals, public and private sector
- ✓ strictly one hour, refreshments provided
- ✓ no more than three speakers, max 10 minutes each
- ✓ hands-on experience (show and tell items)
- ✓ speakers notes, 2 pages max
- ✓ media invited
- ✓ media release
- ✓ follow-up highlights via fax/email to electorate offices

HOT ISSUES, OUTSTANDING SPEAKERS

The issues addressed in your briefing must be directly relevant to the MPs you're inviting and the speakers you present must have excellent presentational skills. That means they must understand their audience, deliver in plain, direct English and stick to their time limit.
Before inviting anyone to present at a briefing, make sure you have either watched them make a presentation or have checked them out with someone you trust to give an accurate assessment.

Get the speakers together well ahead of the briefing. If the speakers are not in the same city, hold a phone conference. Make sure each knows the area of the subject he/she is to cover and how it fits in with what the others are saying.

The issues must be attractive to the MPs in that they will provide information on legislation currently being discussed, or about to be discussed; or they will look at big, ongoing regional issues that directly affect a number of electorates.

A good example was a National Science Week Parliamentary Briefing on stem cell research. The legislation was in parliament that week and all MPs were looking for as much information as they could get on this highly controversial topic. For those who couldn't get there, the speakers notes were in demand.

Here is the invitation sent to MPs:

Members, Senators and their staff are warmly invited to attend a

Parliamentary Briefing

STEM CELL RESEARCH – a political crisis?

12.30 – 1.30 pm
Thursday 22 August 2002
Senate Committee Room 2S3
Light lunch served

Host: Mr Gary Nairn, MP

Speakers:
Prof Alan Trounson, National Stem Cell Centre,Melbourne
Dr Helge Kuhse, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Human Bio-ethics, Monash University,Victoria
Prof Colin Blakemore, Oxford, UK
Dr Warwick Neville, Research Fellow, Australian Catholic Bishops, Canberra

RSVP 20 August to Wendy Parsons 02 6231 6342
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For further examples, see the paper *"Scientists and Politicians: the need to communicate" p 308 Table 1* [on www.scienceweek]

COMPLEX LOGISTICS

Houses of Parliament are of necessity ruled by complex systems, especially security. To run a successful briefing in a parliament house, you need to learn these systems well and get to know the people who operate them.

If you plan to invite people other than MPs, you'll need to arrange visitor passes for entry to committee rooms. Usually the host Minister or MP's office can help, but don't put too great a load on the staff – maintain the goodwill at

all costs. These are the staff who you'll be asking to fax or email out the briefing invitation within Parliament House.

Hands-on items or displays may not fit through the usual security entry so you'll need to find out where they can be brought in – find this out before the day of the briefing.

Here is the check list I use when organising a briefing

Parliamentary Briefing

Title
……
Time, Day, Date……..
Venue……
…
Host……
…

_ Topic set
_ Speakers confirmed
_ Speakers meeting/phone hookup
_ MPs invitations sent
_ Other invitations sent (note RSVP date for pass list)
_ Audio visual needs confirmed with PH staff
_ Arrangement of room confirmed with PH staff
_ Refreshments ordered, cut-off date for numbers
_ Brief host on program, speakers
_ Media release
_ Speakers notes
_ Pass list
_ Notice for venue entrances
_ Large items delivery to venue?

FOLLOW UP

During parliament sittings in both federal and state parliaments the program for MPs is frenetic, and you'll need to take into account the fact that you'll be lucky to get more than a third of the total number of MPs and their advisers. So it's worth faxing or emailing all MPs after the event offering speakers notes, contacts or websites if they were not able to attend.

Meeting Checklist

(The following notes were prepared by a member of the staff of the Minister for Science, for scientists preparing for one-on-one meetings with Parliamentarians as part of 'Science meets Parliament' Day.)

1. WHO ARE THEY?

Are they a member of the Government / Opposition / Other?
Member of Senate / House of Representatives?
What committees do they sit on?
Rural / urban / city electorate?
How long have they been in Parliament?

2. WHO ARE YOU?

Give context to who you are, what discipline, what research goals?
Past projects?
Eliminate use of acronyms
Bring the science back to the basics.

3. HOW ARE YOU SPECIFICALLY OF RELEVANCE TO THEM?

Do they have a CSIRO facility or other infrastructure in their electorate?
Are they on a Committee that has had scientific input?
Do they have a particular interest in an area of research?
- eg embryonic stem cell research / salinity.

4. WHAT ABOUT DURING THE MEETING?

Stick to the science – leave the policy to the parliamentarians.
Make the science exciting – but don't exaggerate.
Keep an eye on the time

5. WHAT DO YOU WANT OUT OF THE MEETING?

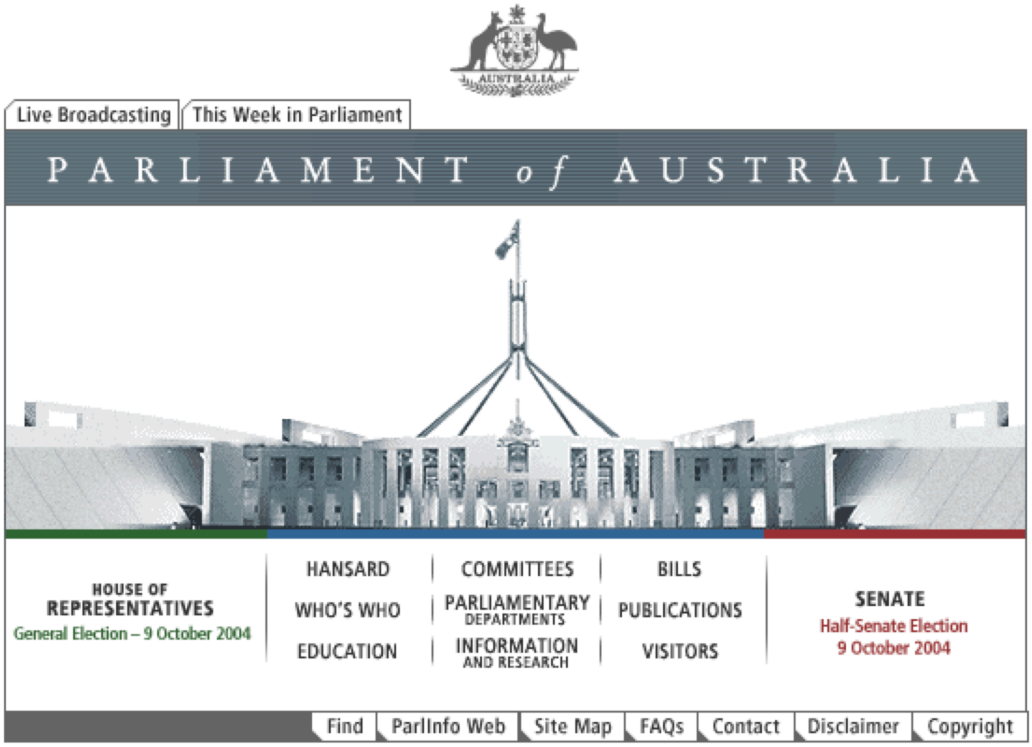
Do you want to raise their interest in an area?
Engender more support for science broadly?
Do you want them to write to someone?

6. WHAT HAPPENS AFTERWARDS?

Make sure you leave something with them – have multiple copies of material, so that you can leave it with the parliamentarian.
Following your meeting, write to them, inviting them to see your work.
If your research is published, send it on to them, for their information.
Try to maintain the link with the parliamentarian – you never know when you may need their assistance in the future!

7. BE POSITIVE!

Scientists have an extraordinarily high trustworthy factor
The people you are meeting have elected to meet with you
This Government places great emphasis on science
This is a great opportunity to gain even more support
Make the most of it!



A very useful website - www.aph.gov.au

Contact details, biographies, mailing labels, maiden speeches, lists of committees, office-holders for Federal Parliament.

Scientists commercialising their research

(Extracts from a paper published by FASTS - the Federation of Australian Scientific and Technological Societies. The full paper is available from the FASTS' web site: www.fasts.org)

Attitudes and understanding by scientists

Thinking commercial does not come naturally to scientists. They do not see careers in the commercial world or recognise the problems that industry is trying to solve. The less experienced focus group participants reported a poor knowledge of the processes of commercialisation, and as one said: "We don't know what we don't know." Some find it difficult to recognise when their work is potentially valuable to commercial interests, or to put a value on themselves. These participants do not understand the processes of industry or appreciate the pressures from shareholders on individual companies to perform, or appreciate the real costs of experimental work.

There is a lack of "translators" who can speak both the language of industry and the language of research. The gap between research and industry is accentuated by the attitude of some of their colleagues, who look down on commercial work as being "dirty science" which can lead to conflicts of interest. For this group, the thrill is in the discovery, the rewards are in publishing papers, and they do not care about the commercial implications of their work. Scientists are trained to produce scientific 'truths', and the outcomes of their work are left at the scientific level and are not translated.

Recommendations from the group

- Change graduate and post-graduate science curriculums to educate students in commercialisation and business skills
- Encourage post-graduate students to undertake doctorates in technology rather than PhDs, with an emphasis on the multi-disciplinary skills as opposed to the narrow single-disciplinary focus
- Encourage scientists to develop business skills through enterprise workshops and courses
- Provide role models of success stories ("more Ferraris in the carpark"), and generate positive messages about the entrepreneurial culture
- Stimulate the interaction between industry and research through sabbaticals in industry for researchers, and by bringing industry people to universities as guest lecturers
- Build awareness of what is needed to translate a science outcome into the market place, and provide incentives to market
- Put in place appropriate industry-focussed boards for R&D groups

Cultural gaps with industry

Australian industry does not have the vision to look ahead 20 or 30 years, to see the "new" technology. It tends to be timid about exploring new opportunities and reluctant to stretch itself financially. Industry prefers proven ideas from overseas to innovative home-grown solutions, and reflects a community view focussed on stability rather than opportunity.

Commercialisation is inhibited by the fragmented nature of industry in Australia.

Industry generally views money spent on R&D as a cost, not an investment. Companies prefer to put money in low risk, short-term ventures, with research focussed directly on a specific product rather than its long term future. Larger companies are reported as wanting the technology on an "all or nothing" basis, with no chance of further collaboration. Industry (as well as other sectors) are seen as intolerant of failure, even though only a small proportion of ideas will succeed and failure can be a valuable learning exercise.

Shareholders concentrate on immediate profits rather than long term growth, which leads some companies to disguise their expenditure on R&D. The overall level of investment in R&D by industry is low by international standards. At the same time, scientists can underestimate the time and cost of the development phase; and there needs to be a better appreciation of the risks on both sides.

More competitive companies are emerging in the form of spin-offs formed by scientists leaving their research organisation. This is leading to a more positive attitude to investment, particularly in areas like biotechnology. These SMEs are easier to deal with than bigger companies with their own bureaucracies. They have fewer resources to put into R&D, but they are more willing to take risks and less likely to bog down discussions with lawyers.

Industry managers tend to have an incomplete understanding of the technology and its implications. Companies may not employ a person with adequate research experience and technical understanding (and the authority) to progress the work and assess the results. Industry finds it hard to keep up with changes in Government policies and funding schemes.

International companies are seen as providing funding for R&D and distribution networks, particularly by the researchers looking to fill niche markets. Some Australian companies act primarily as the agent for an overseas company.

Recommendations from the group

- Involve industry and market people in research projects at an early stage • Increase Government incentives to boost investment by industry in R&D
- Encourage industry to interact with research organisations, and to serve on Boards of R&D groups
- Help investors make hi-tech investments, through education and advice and mechanisms which enable them to spread their risk
- Educate industry (and other communities) to accept failure as a valuable and unavoidable part of commercialisation
- Change research emphasis from laboratory experiments to doing industry trials
- Develop the alumni system of the US to build linkages between industry and research

- Establish a program to sell the advantages of doing research in Australia

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