



Practical Guide to Developing a Public Affairs Strategy



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INTRODUCTION

This guide will provide an overview of what public affairs is, why it can be beneficial to develop a strategic public affairs campaign and how to go about it.



What is Public Affairs?

Public affairs is an organisation's approach to building and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders with a particular focus on key policy influencers such as political or governmental stakeholders.

In the research setting developing and implementing a public affairs strategy can enable you to influence the wider policy agenda for your Research Institute/Centre/ Group's benefit in an effective way, optimising limited resources.

Why should I bother?

A strategic public affairs plan provides a framework for guiding key activities with stakeholders including sector leaders, think tanks, policy influencers, local councillors, TDs, MEPs, the media and Government Departments.

These stakeholders make policy decisions that impact on businesses, charities, citizens and other organisations. Therefore by making these stakeholders aware of your agenda and key 'asks' you can ensure that your issues are understood by them and help influence policy change.

How do I develop a Public Affairs Strategy?

There are 4 key elements to be considered:

1. Identification of key public affairs objectives
2. Identification of key stakeholders/influencers to advance these objectives
3. Development of a Strategic Public Affairs Action Plan
4. Identifications Measurements/Tracking

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Identification of key public affairs objectives

Knowing what you want to achieve before planning who and how to influence is paramount. So firstly you need to understand the challenges in your environment and then you can define the key public affairs objectives.

Think about what your key challenges are going forward (short term and long term) and identify if there are elements of public policy that would be beneficial to change. It is important to be aware of current government policy and priorities as it relates to your objectives.

You may have one or two key objectives and then some secondary objectives.

A few examples are below:

- We want government to join an international research organisation that would benefit Irish industry or the research community in terms of reputational impact and economic impact.
- We want government to provide more research funding for climate related research to advance Ireland's climate action agenda. A subset may be:
 - We want Government to set aside 10 million euro to fund a specific funding call in the next budget.
- We want government to increase its spending into a current programme to advance a key area of policy.

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Identification of key stakeholders/influencers to advance these objectives

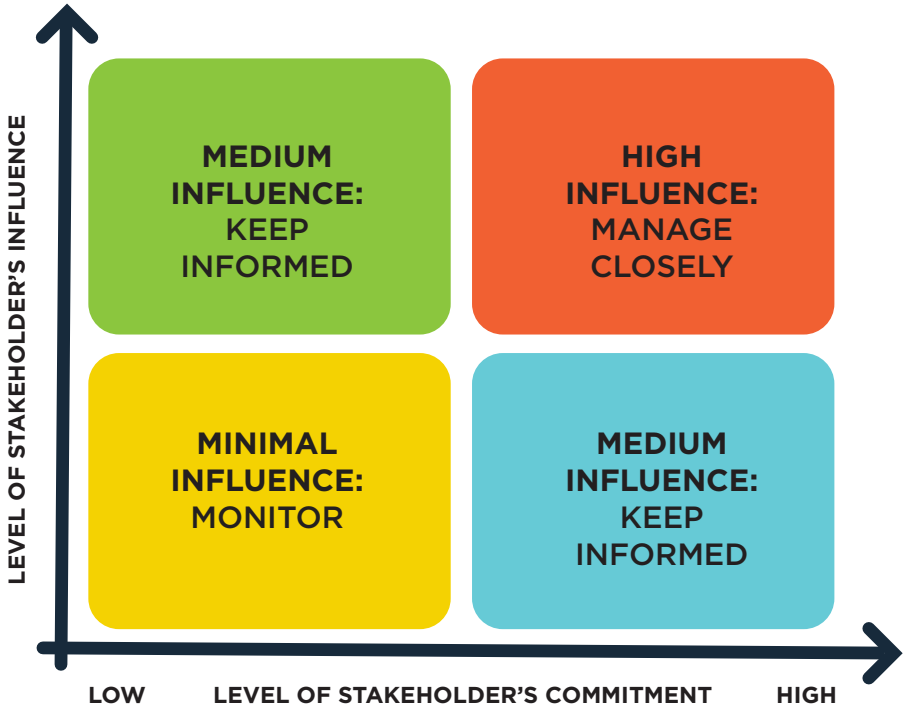
Following the identification of the challenges in the environment and your objectives you are then in a position to understand the key stakeholders/ influencers in your area. It is important to identify the relevant groups/ organisations and also who in those bodies to engage with.

Examples of key stakeholders who could advance your public affairs agenda may include:

- Government Departments
- Government Ministers
- Individual TDs, particularly those on Oireachtas Committees and relevant Political Party spokespersons
- Senators
- Political parties
- Independent Statutory Bodies
- Industry Organisations
- Industry (Multinational and Indigenous) that collaborate with you
- European and International stakeholders
- Think Tanks
- Media
- Influential UCD Alumni
- Internal UCD stakeholders

You could evaluate and map key stakeholders based on their level of influence and commitment to your agenda using the Stakeholder Mapping tool depicted. This will then help you decide which are the priority stakeholders and which are secondary and this will help optimise limited time and resources.

Stakeholder Mapping



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Development of a Strategic Public Affairs Action Plan

Now that you understand your objectives and the key stakeholders and their importance and interest areas, the next step is to develop a plan for engagement with them.

It is necessary to think about:

- What are the key messages you want to convey? These may need to be adjusted to various stakeholders depending on their interest area.
- What tactics/mechanisms are you going to use to engage? e.g.
 - One to one meetings: you may seek meetings with key stakeholders to influence directly.
 - Events/workshops: you may host key events or attend events/workshops where stakeholders are present.
 - Committees/ advisory panels: you may want to look for opportunities to sit on a relevant panel/ committee.
- What collateral will you need to develop? e.g. policy briefings, impact case studies. These can then be utilised and repurposed for various channels including www.publicpolicy.ie.
- What are the associated time frames for campaign elements?
- Do you have a communications plan to enhance your public affairs strategy? See the 'Promoting Your Research to the Media Guide' on the Research and Innovation Portal.

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Identifications Measurements/Tracking

A key element of a public affairs strategy is the monitoring and evaluation of progress throughout to ensure that your time is being used effectively and to adjust strategy and tactics if necessary to respond to changes in the external environment.

Measurements

Indicators for the evaluation of your strategy implementation will be both incremental and long term indicators. Examples of incremental measurements include the number of face to face meetings with key stakeholders (stakeholders with the most influence and highest level of commitment), relevant events hosted involving key influencers/ stakeholders and media coverage initiated. Long-term measurements may include policy or budget changes but these will depend on your overall objectives from the outset.

Stakeholder Engagement Monitoring

Recording of engagements with key stakeholders is necessary. Firstly it is key to record what already is being done. The following information should be sought and recorded for each stakeholder in a database or CRM tool:

- Organisation
- Key Contact(s)
- Role
- Contact Info
- Lead Responsibility
- Communications and meeting actions



Monitoring

Regular monitoring of public policy may be important to advance your public affairs objectives. A number of sources may be useful:

- Merrion Street: for Government Press Releases: www.merrionstreet.ie
- Kildarestreet.com: a searchable archive of everything that's been said in the Dáil, and all written parliamentary questions, since January 2004. It also includes everything said in the Seanad since September 2002, and all Committee meetings since September 2012. Alerts can be set up for keywords and TDs or Ministers.
- Houses of the Oireachtas: you can sign up for alerts on This Week in the Houses of the Oireachtas, The Dáil Schedule and The Committee Schedule: www.oireachtas.ie

Risks

It is important to be aware of possible risks before embarking on any public affairs campaign so that they can be identified swiftly and mitigated as soon as possible.



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