

Strategies for Briefing Deputy Ministers, Ministers and Political Staff (LPL1-J02)

Introduction

The guidance below can be used in the context of departmental briefings. It assumes that you have leveraged available tools and processes to create a no-surprise environment for your deputy minister, minister and political staff.

Quick facts:



- A minister plays many roles: minister of the Crown, party member, cabinet minister, member of Parliament, minister of a department or portfolio, and elected member from a particular constituency.
- Ministers rely on the substantive and professional expertise of their deputy ministers and the political expertise of their chief of staff.
- The departmental assistant plays an important role as a liaison between the minister's office and the department or agency.
- On average, a minister will have only three hours a week to spend with their deputy minister.



Do



Preparation

- Be clear on whether you are seeking a decision or providing information.
- Understand what you are briefing about.



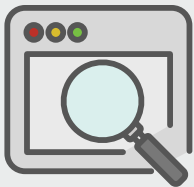
Context and awareness

- Understand your departmental authorities.
- Familiarize yourself with your minister's key priorities.



Communication

- Employ a professional tone and calm demeanour.
- Be prepared to talk about risks (for example, reputational or financial).
- Have a few concrete examples at the ready.
- Respect the complexities of the political context.



Clarity and continuous improvement

- Commit to follow up with information when you do not know the answer.
- Assess what went well and what requires improvement next time.

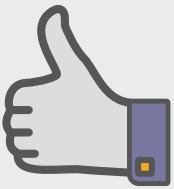


Don't



Transparency

- Don't engage with the minister or their office without clarifying the expectations of your deputy minister's office.
- Don't catch your minister or minister's office off guard.
- Don't exclude your deputy minister's office, departmental liaison or chief of staff.



Honesty and openness

- Don't be closed-minded.
- Don't be vague or long-winded.
- Don't engage in deception by feigning understanding.
- Don't fail to communicate risks or consequences.



Context and accountability

- Don't dismiss the political context, the legislative process, regional considerations or stakeholder opinions.
- Don't provide opinions or options to the minister's office without first consulting the deputy minister's office.
- Don't provide options that cannot be executed.
- Don't mistake marching orders or instructions from the minister's office as having financial, legal or policy authority.



Your goal is to convey meaningful information or advice to decision-makers.

To be convincing, be prepared to answer questions such as:

- What are you proposing? Is it reasonable? Is it rational?
- Why should government resources go here instead of somewhere else? How does the proposal align with ministerial and Government of Canada priorities?
- What is the source of funds? What do central agencies think of the idea?
- Has the concept been tested? How was it tested?
- What do you anticipate stakeholders' reactions to be? Have they been consulted? Where will support come from and who will be critical?
- Has what you are proposing ever been done by your organization before? How is it the same or how does it differ from what has been done in the past? How does it compare with what other countries are doing?
- How confident are you in your organization's implementation capacity? Why are you so confident?
- What are the consequences of failure?
- What are the alternatives? Why is each of the alternatives being discarded in favour of this particular course of action?

Reference material



- [The U-T-C Trinity of Briefing: Understand, Translate, Convince \(LPL1-A01\)](#)
- [Open and Accountable Government - 2015](#)
- [Policies for Ministers' Offices - January 2011](#)
- [Dear Minister: A letter to an old friend on being a successful Minister](#)