

GovTalk

This material was prepared by Andrew Graham, School of Policy Studies, Queen's University, Kingston, Canada. Use it freely and share it with my full permission. If you have any comments or questions, contact me at andrew.graham@queensu.ca

2.2 Briefing Note To Prepare for a Meeting

A key element in preparing a briefing note for the reader in anticipation of a meeting is setting the context, clearly discussing who will be at the meeting and their interests and suggesting a general approach for the reader to use along with speaking notes.

What do We Mean by a Meeting?

This category of briefing note covers a wide range of encounters that the use of the note might be involved in. As a senior official or politician, interaction with the public, with a range of stakeholders, with aggrieved citizens, with partners or meeting internationally, presents a number of challenges for the reader:

- **Why be there?** The reader has to clearly understand the purpose of the meeting. In many cases, this is a given, but do not make that assumption without checking first. For instance, there is quite a difference between a Minister holding her annual meeting with known interest group who see the meeting as part of a continuing relationship and a Minister meeting with victims of a major catastrophe in which they lost property or even loved ones.
- **Who is there?** Identifying the participants and their interests helps the reader in both listening and speaking. Further, the degree to which those at the meeting can affect, positively or negatively, the capacity of the user to achieve his objectives is important.
- **What do we want to achieve?** What is the strategic goal of the encounter? It can cover an amazing range of outcomes, from containing an emerging political problem, to getting advice, to representing the country's interest in an international setting.
- **What is the process?** Are we there to listen? Are we there to commiserate? Are we there to announce? The reader needs to know what is expected of her in terms of how the event will be conducted. For instance, in an international conference, the Minister may have side meetings with counterparts just for the purpose of meeting others in her field of responsibility. There may be few concrete outcomes expected, but the Minister will need to know who this person is, what is happening in their country, how the two

countries are linked and, above all, what are the messages the Minister would best convey.

- **What do you say?** This is a tricky part in that suggesting speaking points can be sometimes stilted unless you keep an ear to how the Minister speaks. Often the Minister's staff will provide direction, sometimes at a very granular level. The question the drafter has to asked is "Do we know how she likes to put things?" with experience this comes more readily. However, this question has to have two answers:
 - **What is our communications/messaging objective:** For instance, there is a significant strategic objective between the reader being in the position of listening and consulting with a familiar person or group just to keep up to date and hear from them and the reader having to defend a new policy initiative that has gathered a lot of unhappy opponents.
 - **What do I say?:** Speaking notes should be real. They should be human. They should be written to speak not written to be read aloud. Ideally, they will be in the voice of the user of the briefing note. Above all, they should be devoid of jargon, acronyms and lame jokes.

Sample of Meeting Briefing Notes

Briefing Note

Ministerial Meeting with the Association of Credit Unions of New Brunswick

Overview

The Minister will be meeting representatives of the Association of Credit Unions of New Brunswick (ACUNB) next Tuesday. This note outlines the concerns they will bring, provides background on the Government's position on them to date and suggests how the Minister might respond to them.

Meeting Details

The meeting will take place in the Minister's Boardroom, with the Minister, his Executive Assistant, the Deputy Minister and Assistant Deputy Minister for Policy attending. From the ACUNB, attending will be:

- Ms. Dorah Leblanc, President
- Mr. Ben Comeau, CEO
- Ms. Flora Gibbs, Vice-President.

The meeting is scheduled from 0900-1000. The Minister has a Cabinet meeting at 1030. The remaining Government officials are available for further discussions, if that is needed.

Background

The ACUNB is a well-respected organization that represents most of the Province's community credit unions. By agreement, it also provides services to those credit unions, such as creating exchange agreements and consulting advice. The Province, through *The Credit Union Act*, regulates the banking activity, inspection and standards.

There is a long-standing relationship between the Government and the ACUNB. It has been productive and positive. The ACUNB advocates for legislative and regulatory changes in support of its members.

This meeting is an annually scheduled event.

Issues and Current Government Position

The ACUNB has informed officials that it will raise a number of issues with the Minister. This chart lists them with the current government position.

ACUNB Issue	Government Position
The need to alter the monthly reporting of basic statistics to a quarterly basis. This is seen by the ACUNB as a cost-saving measure.	This would reduce oversight on the credit unions. However, the proposal has not been analyzed, especially with respect to what other provinces are doing and the implications of federal regulations. We could follow up if you wished.
ACUNB is seeking Government funding for a leadership development program to encourage the recruitment of new managers.	There is no program that could fund this. This idea has broader implications for other industries as well.
The ACUNB wants regulations changed to make it easier for credit unions to amalgamate into regional entities.	This is the major issue for the ACUNB. Smaller credit unions are feeling the pressure of population and industry shrinkage. They see themselves as being more viable as regional entities. The Ministry is researching this idea and will have a policy paper for the Minister within the next three months.

Suggested Speaking Points

- **General Opening:**
 1. We value a continued relationship with the ACUNB.
 2. Credit unions are important in our communities. We want to keep them operating in as many communities as possible.
 3. I look forward to our discussions.
- **Quarterly Reporting:**
 1. I am prepared to give this some thought.
 2. I will need to understand the implications better.
 3. I also want to know how the other provinces do this.
 4. I am not prepared to weaken our oversight role, but I recognize that times are changing and we might be able to adapt.
 5. My officials will work with you on this.
- **Funding for Leadership Training:**
 1. This is a tricky one for us. If we do this, what about other industries facing the very same issue.
 2. Right now the Government has no program for this.
 3. The Ministry cannot act along on this. Perhaps you could develop this further, on a Government level.
- **Amalgamation:**
 1. We see the issue. This is a very real problem.

2. We want credit union services in as many communities as possible.
 3. I appreciate your discussions with officials on it.
 4. We are following up on them and are working on some policy ideas.
 5. We will keep you involved.
- **General Closing:**
 1. Let's keep talking.
 2. Your input is valuable to us.
 3. I believe we share values about credit unions and you understand our need to assure the public of effective oversight.
 4. My officials will be following up with you on the issues you raised here today.

Note Prepared by Givienne Claire, Senior Policy Analyst, Policy Branch

Approved by ADM, Policy George Leblanc.