

Benchmarking Data and Politicians

MPs and local councillors can support museums in a number of ways. In general terms they can be a champion of your organisation, but more specifically they can also bring up an issue in Parliament (MPs) or in Council meetings (local councillors), raise the profile of your organisation and they tend to have excellent access to the media.

Where does Benchmarking data fit in?

“It’s about identifying a good story to tell and telling it loud and often. Find simple stories and statistics you can repeat. Identify what those people of influence want and how you can deliver that in the language they understand.”

(John Roles, head of museums and galleries, Leeds City Council, quoted in Museum Practice ,Issue 49, 2010)

As with the media, Benchmarking data can be used in a similar way – to grab attention! Statistics tend to go down well here. Make a simple statement, such as ‘Museum visits up by 20%’ and then go on to explain in simple terms what this means and why.

Some key things to bear in mind:

- Be clear about why you are communicating this information and what you expect as a result – do you want them to support you in publicising an issue in the media or would you like them to attend an event?
- Do make sure that what you are saying is factually correct – can it be substantiated?
- Keep it short and to the point - politicians are presented with a lot of facts every day so to make yours stand out from the crowd, it needs to be bite-sized and memorable. Think about the key points you would make if you were to share a journey together in a lift for 30 seconds! A simple case study can often be an easy way to communicate information to politicians – more guidance on this is provided separately.
- Make it a personal approach rather than a ‘round robin’ communication. If possible, try to word your messages in such a way that they fit well with what the individual is known to champion. Make it clear that this has a constituency focus.
- Once you have made the approach, sustain your relationship with them in the long term – continue to invite them to events or keep them abreast of what your museum is doing.

How to find out who your local MP or councillor is:

- To find your local MP visit <http://www.parliament.uk> and enter your museum’s postcode.
- To find your local councillor, visit your local authority website where you should be able to perform this simple search.

For more detailed guidance on working with MPs please see the Arts Council’s ‘Advocacy Toolkit’ in which there is a link to full guide on the subject. Visit: http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/advocacy_toolkit_130710.pdf