

Preparing a brief

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In the last issue of *Home & Country*, an article on lobbying was featured. One method of lobbying is to prepare a brief, outlining your personal or your organization's views on a topic, to a level of government, a business or another organization.

The word brief conjures up a very formal document in the minds of most people. And perhaps for that reason, the task of preparing a brief may seem insurmountable. But it's not. Here are a few tips.

To begin with, you or your group needs to have a clear notion of what you want to say in the brief, otherwise it won't be effective. Your brief should have a goal. Focussing on one goal makes the brief easier to research, write, present, and more likely to get action.

Researching is the next step. There is a lot of information out there. The difficult part is knowing where to find it and then knowing how much is enough. A good place to start is your library. If they do not have the information you are looking for, librarians will guide you to other possible sources. When requesting information, it is important to be as specific as possible.

How do you know when you've done enough research? That's a hard question to answer. Your research will be used to support what you have said in your brief. Do not make the mistake of having irrelevant information

in the brief. Be sure all the information you include is pertinent. If there are some facts which are borderline — you can't decide to put them in or leave them out — consider using them in your presentation of the brief, or have them available as back-up at the presentation.

BEFORE you write the brief, know who will be reading it. There is a difference between preparing a brief for a federal Royal Commission and township council. Knowing your audience will help you to determine how formal your brief should be.

PARTS OF A BRIEF

There are several components to a brief. Here they are, in the order they should appear in your brief.

Title Page

Include the title of your brief, or the subject you are addressing; your name or the name of your organization; the date; and the name of the group receiving your brief.

Executive Summary

Aim for a one-page executive summary. It should highlight the brief's important points. If you do not include the summary, you run the risk of someone else summarizing for you.

Summary of Recommendations

If you are only making one or two recommendations, they could be included in the executive summary. If there are more, they deserve a summary of their own for quick reference for the busy reader.

Table of Contents

The pages in the brief should be numbered. Another suggestion is to number the paragraphs for quick reference during the presentation.

Introduction

Information about your organization is included here. Also, you should introduce the matter(s) you intend to address in the brief.

Main Body

This is the informational part of the brief, don't brush over it, assuming no one will read all of it. Perhaps when the brief is presented it appears that little time has been given to it. You never know, however, who will read it later and it does become a permanent record of your organization's stand on this concern.

Your brief will address either a problem, or an opportunity yet to be taken. In the main body, describe the situation, discuss the barriers involved, and present realistic options.

Don't take too long to present your information in the main body. Brevity is the key — people will ask for more details if they want them.

Conclusion

Wrap-up the brief with a couple of concluding statements. You may also want to include a bibliography at the back.

For more information on writing briefs and then presenting them, ask for Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food Factsheet 87-031, called *Preparing and Presenting a Brief*, at your local ministry office.

