



BEFS SEMINAR NOTE

Elections and influencing party policy: preparation for Scottish elections 2011

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3rd June 2010

Context

In seeking to influence the policies of political parties, it is important firstly to take a step back, set elections in perspective, and understand how policy is developed and agreed - and by whom.

Elections should be seen as punctuation marks. *Democracy* happens between elections. It is important to build up relations between elections and avoid engaging in debates with political parties before elections as this may hamper the development of fruitful relations.

Elections are a long way from being very important except for people engaging in political parties. Elections are not (just) about giving power – but also limiting power: elections are a limited redistribution of power.

In the 'policy community' there are many centres of influence, many different players, eg: political parties, business, NGOs, media and new media, civil service (in the current minority government, the civil service is very powerful in Scotland), unions, academics, churches, landowners, Local Authorities, professionals.

Until about 20 years ago manifestos were not very important. Now, especially with (more) proportionate representation and coalitions, the manifestos play a stronger role in forming the basis for partnership working. Any policy 'ask' which you wish to be included in a manifesto will only be a few words: your message needs to be very succinct.

What do you need to do?

1. Agree what it is you want and evaluate whether the 'asks' are deliverable
2. Go to parties to tell them you can HELP. They do not have expertise and have very limited research/policy capacity – they rely on stakeholders to help.

Joint Manifestos

Joint action increases the ability of individual organisations to engage in the process of influencing party manifestos.

Options:

1. Identify the top 3-5 'asks' and focus on these (3 is sufficient for a single issue organisation)
2. Alternatively, structure your manifesto into policy areas in the same way as party manifestos do, ie economy, health, care, education, and present what you can offer for each area.

Q&A

- *Do you include the likes of BNP?*

If asked, yes, but they don't tend to be interested

- *What's the timetable for engagement?*

1 year before election

- *Ask for long or short-terms action?*

Both. As Scottish Environment LINK is looking at elections on some level almost every year, it is developing a rolling manifesto, outlining 'asks' in local, Scottish, UK, European/international level, for the short term as well as long term.

- *Advice for influencing the next Scottish election without having built up extensive good relations/how to cheat!?*

Agree 3 'asks', eg 1 legislative, 1 administrative reform and 1 funding scheme.

Produce a well designed, simple 2 page leaflet, 12 point font, with pictures. Avoid professional jargon, use Daily Mail style language and avoid detailed explanations. Contact the individuals responsible for preparing each party manifesto and share the task by involving member organisations in meetings with the political parties (rather than BEFS).

- *Are there real benefits to engage in this? It's rather time consuming, and a lot of new policies are coming internationally anyway*

The main Asks from SE LINK this election are likely to be focused on implementation of existing policies ie a consolidating approach covering delivery, enforcement and governance issues.

- *SNH has a political team, does HS have anything similar? Can BEFS benefit from/use capacity in HS?*

Would warn about working too closely with a government agency, and you'd be unlikely to get anything very radical, since the civil servants would be promoting their own agenda. In relation to engaging at European level it is best to use other bodies such as Europa Nostra and the European Environment Bureau (EEB).

In conclusion

'Asks' need to be:

- Practical
- Deliverable
- Realistic – but still ambitious – a point from which to negotiate down.