



*National Democratic
Institute for
International
Affairs*

CONSTITUENT SERVICE
MANUAL FOR ROMANIAN
PARLIAMENTARIANS

*Effective Methods of Bringing
Constituents into the Decision
Making Process*

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FOR
ROMANIAN PARLIAMENTARIANS

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ABOUT THIS MANUAL

This manual from the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) provides information about methods that members of parliament can use to communicate with citizens and provide services to their districts. This project is funded by the Agency for International Development (AID). The handbook is written for the use of members of parliament, especially newly elected MPs, as well as their district staff.

In researching the material for this handbook, NDI conducted more than thirty interviews with Romanian senators and deputies. We received further information about district activity through a written opinion survey of all members of Parliament. We have used Romanian case examples from all the major political parties to illustrate the concepts throughout the book. To maintain a nonpartisan and objective approach, this book does not specifically name the parliamentarians who were used as examples. However, all of the cases are based on real situations.

The following chapters provide information about approaches that MPs might consider adopting. In some cases, the manual may cite activities that you have undertaken already. Based upon the priorities set by Romanian MPs, the manual is divided into sections on strategic planning, communications, casework and local project work.

ABOUT NDI

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs was established in 1983. By working with political parties, civic organizations, parliaments and other institutions, NDI seeks to promote, maintain and strengthen democratic institutions in new and emerging democracies. The Institute is headquartered in Washington, DC, and has a staff of 120 with field offices in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Eastern Europe, Latin America, the Middle East and the Former Soviet Union. NDI has supported the development of democratic institutions in more than 60 countries.

NDI has been active in Romania since 1990 performing and supporting a variety of programs focused on election processes, civic education, non-profit sector organizations, and local government and parliamentary development. Like all of NDI's work in Romania, this manual emphasizes public participation which we believe to be essential to the success of democratic governance everywhere.

INTRODUCTION

GETTING INVOLVED IN CONSTITUENT SERVICE

Two Romanian members of parliament. Two different philosophies about constituent service. "I am like a doctor," proclaims one MP. "Citizens come to me feeling desperate and powerless. They need to get a problem solved. I use my office to try to fix their problems."

"I want to enable people to solve their own problems," says the other MP who is from the same political faction. "Although my office may play an important role, ultimately I want citizens to think that they solved their problems themselves."

Should an MP be a "doctor" who tries to cure a problem or someone who empowers others to solve their own problems? You can be both. By working with a local organization and citizens to solve problems, you can help them to understand that they have the power in a democracy to seek answers and services. Today an MP may be a person who fixes a problem; tomorrow citizens may know how to remedy their predicaments themselves.

Regardless of the role the MP decides to play, it is necessary to actively participate in the community he or she represents. Both the "empowerer" and the "doctor" understand that they have special responsibilities toward their districts. And they understand that they can gain political benefits from playing a prominent role at the local level.

Why get involved in your district?

Across Romania, senators and deputies have opened district offices that provide services to their constituents. Why are they doing it? Why do they think this work is worthwhile?

Over the course of a year, The National Democratic Institute (NDI) asked Romanian MPs these questions when the Institute conducted research in preparation for writing this manual. The answers we received varied little from responses that MPs in other countries would likely provide.

Constituent service:

•*Creates a link between citizens and institutions of power*

An MP's work in Bucharest is remote and abstract for most citizens. By getting involved in local problems and helping citizens, you demonstrate that parliamentary democracy has practical applications in people's lives. By listening to public opinions and relating these concerns to one's own party and the parliament, an MP assumes the role of a conduit for developing policies based upon real human needs.

•*Provides a public resource*

Members of parliament hold the power to untangle the bureaucratic maze. They have authority and resources to get answers and they enjoy access to information often unavailable to local elected officials and other community leaders. The MP constituency office therefore represents a unique community resource.

•*Humanizes the MP, the party and parliament*

By working actively in the constituency, an MP demonstrates that democracy is a system in which leaders care about real people with real problems, not just abstract ideologies and faraway policies. This humanizing approach helps build greater trust in the institution of parliament and may produce residual benefits for your party as well. Your powers as an MP are certainly limited and you will not be successful when responding to every request for assistance. But it is better to have tried and failed than to have not tried at all; citizens recognize a good effort and will remember and appreciate your attempts to help them. Of course you must be realistic; do not build false expectations about your power.

•*Mobilizes citizen participation*

When you work with local officials, non-governmental organizations and ordinary citizens, you empower them to improve their lives and their communities. By widening the number of citizens who directly take responsibility for their own destiny, you are fighting apathy and helping to make democracy work through the politics of practical problem solving. And you are also building a base of potential political supporters.

Obstacles to Serving Constituents in Romania

As an MP, you might be thinking: "It is easy for Americans to talk about the usefulness of constituent service. A U.S. senator's office has ample funding and staff and does not have to deal with the legacy of communist dictatorship. In Romania, these ideas just will not work."

The challenges specific to Romanian MPs are difficult to overcome. This manual presents practical approaches and concepts that Romanian MPs are already using to effectively serve constituents:

•Overcoming the obstacles: the legacy of dictatorship

It is difficult to perform local outreach or help citizens solve problems in a society where personal initiative has been long stifled. Yet, the seeds of civil society have begun to sprout in Romania. MPs are working with representatives of nongovernmental organizations and local leaders to tackle local problems. Citizens, unwilling to tolerate obstructive bureaucracy, have begun to ask their MPs for help.

Almost 80 percent of respondents in a recent NDI survey of Romanian MPs said they travel to their districts at least three times a month.

•Overcoming the obstacles: the electoral system

The emphasis on party identity as opposed to individual identity on Romania's electoral list system would seem to pose a challenge to effective constituent service. But numerous examples of active MPs prove that providing constituent service makes smart political sense. By getting involved in the district, you can establish an identity apart from the confusing alphabet soup of party politics in Romania. In addition, being known as an active and effective MP with strong local support places you at a political advantage within the party.

•Overcoming the obstacles: conflicting loyalties between the party and the district

Many MPs may believe that their primary loyalty lies with their party. But this allegiance does not have to conflict with their local activities. In fact, constituent service provides an MP with a chance to involve the party in addressing local needs and problems. Thus, an MP who is active at a local level can strengthen the party by keeping it in touch with citizens.

Overcoming the obstacles: limited financial and staff resources

In 1994 the Chamber of Deputies voted to provide funding for constituency offices. Such funding has been provided to senators since 1992. As all MPs know, however, these funds are very limited.

However, developing an active district profile does not always require a lot of money. MPs have been able to take advantage of state funding to establish offices, hire staff and travel in their constituencies. MPs have also been able to use the support of their political parties, local public administration and non-governmental organizations to communicate with citizens in a cost effective manner.

In NDI's survey of members of parliament, almost 80 percent of respondents indicated that they travel to their constituencies at least three times a month. Obviously, MPs are getting active back home without spending large amounts of funds.

NDI's survey also found that MPs believe that their biggest obstacle to working in the district is insufficient time -- not insufficient staff or equipment. The lack of time is the single most common complaint of MPs everywhere -- including the United States and Western Europe. The only answer to the challenge of time is to make your district activities more efficient.

Citizens and local leaders often mistakenly believe they need to talk directly with an MP -- and not his staff -- if they want to solve a problem. But effective MPs realize that they must use their staff as their spokespersons in order to reach a wider audience and work more efficiently. MPs need to build public trust in their staff in order to overcome the obstacle of insufficient time and resources.

It must be stressed that MPs can best manage the obstacles they face if their district strategy is focused, professional and innovative. We hope the following chapters will give both new and veteran MPs some ideas about efficient ways in which they can have an impact on the lives of the people they represent.

CHAPTER I

ESTABLISHING A STRATEGY FOR YOUR DISTRICT ACTIVITY

A deputy in Oltenia faces a choice: spend every Saturday morning talking with people who randomly visit the office with various unspecified problems. Or arrange meetings with groups of villagers on Saturdays to discuss the land law.

A congressional representative in Florida who specializes in retirement issues also needs to decide how to spend time in the constituency. The member thinks it is important to be available for one-on-one meetings in the office, but also realizes that a larger audience of pensioners can be reached by arranging to appear regularly on radio call-in programs.

Members of parliament constantly face these kinds of choices when deciding how to allocate their time in district activities. Do you meet with people individually or do you try to reach them collectively? Do you seek to focus the agenda when you talk with people, or do you open yourself to a wide range of topics? In fact, your inventory of activities should include all of these approaches -- but how do you decide when you should do what?

The Need to Plan

As an MP, you already know that you cannot do everything for everyone. In fact, the powers of Communist Party activists in the Ceausescu era to "get things done" often superseded the powers of today's parliamentary lawmakers. And yet, citizens are constantly approaching you with unrealistic demands.

Not only are your powers limited, so are your time and resources. Even in the U.S. where the Congress has ample funding, there is always too little time and too few resources to do everything. And everywhere in the world, the next election always seems to be just around the corner.

Because time and money are precious resources, successful MPs develop strategies to determine priorities and plan for the most effective district work. Strategic planning requires you to:

- 1. Define your goals**
- 2. Establish objectives to fit your goals**
- 3. Determine priorities**
- 4. Develop goal oriented action plans**
- 5. Evaluate your plan regularly**

1. Define your goals

Successful MPs generally define a limited number of goals for their constituent work and then select objectives (activities) for meeting those goals. Your goals should encompass your major political and policy priorities, and reflect your broad sense of mission as an MP.

Goals are the broad targets toward which you move by means of various activities. Strategic planners note that goals should be demanding, yet achievable. If the goals you set are too easily reached, then perhaps your time could be used more effectively on other goals. For example, if you already have a good relationship with the party leadership in your home town, perhaps you should not focus on strengthening this relationship as your primary goal. Instead you might concentrate on building contacts in other towns.

Your goals should encompass your major political and policy priorities and reflect your broad sense of mission as an MP.

On the other hand, your goals should not be impossible to attain. If your primary goal is to eliminate air pollution in your district, you are setting yourself up for failure and disappointment. Instead you might try to focus on reducing pollution in a particular town or from a particular industry.

Typical district office goals for Romanian members of parliament might include:

- * working for the interests of the people who voted for you;
- * working for the interests of under represented groups of citizens;
- * developing a relationship with potential voters/supporters;
- * developing an ongoing relationship with local government officials in your district;
- * developing a relationship with specific interest groups in your district;
- * becoming a spokesman on a specific issue that is important to your district.

All of these goals may be appealing and in some cases they may overlap. But for the purposes of planning, it is best to select two or three goals to be the focus of your district activity.

Many members of parliament find that goals are more manageable if they share their district responsibilities with other MPs. According to an NDI survey of Romanian MPs, 61 percent of the respondents who were elected from the same district with other MPs from the same party have divided responsibilities for district activity with their party colleagues. Fifty-one percent of these respondents said they have informally divided the district into different zones which they share. In Arges Judet, for example, MPs from the PDSR divided up the judet among the seven MPs from their party. Each MP is responsible for outreach to 5 to 6 communes and must keep in close contact with the mayors and local councilors from those settlements.

Forty-two percent of the NDI survey respondents who share a district have divided responsibility for district activity according to issues. For example, one MP might deal with rural problems while another might deal with industrial problems.

2. Establish objectives to fit your goals

Objectives are the activities you pursue to move toward your goal. Often you will need several objectives in order to reach that point.

For example, you may decide that you want to develop a better relationship with a large rural population in an isolated area of your district. In order to reach that goal you may plan to hold public meetings in that district four times a year. You may also determine that you will speak on the telephone with the mayor of that region's major town once a month. And you may send your chief of staff to the district once a month to meet with groups of citizens about problems they are encountering individually with bureaucracy.

Below we have listed some examples of strategic objectives that members of parliament established in order to serve wider goals. The goals and activities described below illustrate the range of options available to MPs for involving themselves in district work. The choices you make must be based on your own unique circumstances.

Goal: Expedite implementation of the land law
Objective: Hold meetings with local officials

A PDSR deputy in Transylvania determined that the implementation of Law 18 is an important long-term goal for his district and his party. He therefore scheduled a series of meetings with mayors throughout the district to discuss delays in implementing the land law. During one of these visits a mayor informed the MP that the city's surveying equipment was inadequate to meet the number of requests for land. The MP promised the mayor to investigate the possibilities for providing assistance in obtaining new equipment.

- Goal:** Connect citizens to the legislative process by developing legislation based on district needs
- Objective:** Hold meetings with citizens and collect information that can be used in developing amendments or draft laws

A PNTCD MP from Moldova used information obtained from his district office to develop legislation. By meeting with villagers throughout the district, the MP's staff documented key concerns about national laws relating to farm and pasture land. Based on the feedback of his constituents, the MP's office developed legislative amendments to address problems found in Law 18, which the party's central office subsequently accepted. In addition, the MP's staff has used district experiences to develop national legislative proposals directed at the ownership of forest and mountain areas. Within the district, the MP's office publicized its efforts to change the law based upon local needs.

- Goal:** Serve veterans
- Objective:** Develop specialized casework capabilities to serve veterans

In eastern Transylvania a UDMR MP determined that his office could provide specialized services to Hungarian veterans who were having trouble obtaining accreditation for veterans' benefits. The office successfully enlisted the support of the Ministry of Defense to obtain a ruling that declared the veterans eligible for the benefits, which include 10,000-20,000 Lei per month and free medical treatment. The MP's office publicized the new ruling in the newspaper and provided details of the procedures veterans would have to follow to obtain benefits.

Strategic planners note that you should begin by listing all the activities that you might perform to move you toward attaining your goals.

The next step -- determining priorities -- helps you narrow your objectives to those that will best aid you in reaching your key goals.

3. Determine priorities

A PD senator told us he that when he began his term in office, he answered all invitations.

However, he quickly realized that even though he believed these activities were generally serving his goals, he was doing too many things that produced too little impact. He is now more careful in selecting priorities.

One senator in Transylvania said that when he first took office he did too many things that produced little or no impact. He is now more careful about selecting priorities.

Strategic planning demands that you face the difficult task of listing your activities in priority order, which means discarding some good activities that you would otherwise like to pursue. Sometime, you must abandon some good ideas to focus on more pressing responsibilities. At

other times, you must say no to people who think their meeting or activity is the most important request in the world.

The first step in determining priorities for your activities involves ranking the importance of your goals. Suppose you have established two primary goals: 1) to improve your relationship with an isolated rural region and 2) to improve your relationship with small business people throughout your district. If you decide that your work on the small business issues should take precedence, you then must determine those activities in the isolated rural area that you must cancel or postpone. If you had planned to visit the region once a month, maybe you should reduce the frequency of visits to four times a year. Of course when you do visit the region, you should make sure that you participate in many activities and reach the greatest number of people possible.

One political party in Canada advises MPs to consider the following guidelines when setting priorities¹:

a. *How many constituents will be reached with the activity?*

You can meet with villagers individually regarding land reform issues. Or you can host a meeting of 40 villagers to discuss land reform. The large meeting may not be as personal, but you can affect the lives of many more people.

b. *How important is the activity to the community?*

MPs often receive invitations from groups or individuals whose views and problems do not reflect the concerns of most people. In some cases, these groups may represent radical points of view that alienate most citizens. If you make a special trip to a region in your district, you will maximize your effectiveness if you meet with people and groups who represent the broad concerns of your constituents.

c. *How much work is involved? Are the resources available?*

When analyzing whether to organize an event, you should not be afraid to turn to others to help you with the project. If, for example, you want to meet with citizens from a specific region on a regular basis, perhaps organizations like the Pro-Democracy Association can organize some events for you along with other MPs.

Many MPs believe it is most beneficial to spend time with potential supporters -- those people who have not supported you in the past, but may in the future.

¹ New Democratic Party (NDP) Constituency Office Resource Manual for the Ontario Provincial Parliament (New Democratic Party: Toronto, Canada, 1990) pp. 17-18.

If an MP from your party is interested in working with a targeted group -- such as senior citizens -- perhaps you can jointly perform some activities and share the workload. You should also consider conducting activities that require a limited amount of time and energy; do not involve yourself in overly difficult or complex efforts.

d. Consider the negative ramifications of declining an invitation to an event.

Will you create irreparable bad feelings if you do not attend? Will your absence create damaging publicity? You might divide the audiences for potential activities into three types:

*** Friendly groups:** MPs in other countries and Romania attempt to maintain regular communication with friendly groups to preserve that good relationship.

In NDI's parliamentary survey, MPs noted that their best relations in their districts were with mayors and councilors from their party. These relations with local elected officials, which were even ranked higher than the MPs' relationships with fellow MPs from the same party, are vital to an MP's district strategy.

*** Hostile groups:** MPs try to avoid extensive contact with clearly hostile groups. However, it is important to meet with such constituents at certain times to openly and honestly discuss your differences of opinion.

*** Potential supporters:** Many MPs believe it is most beneficial to spend time with potential supporters. In 1995, for example, NDI observed a deputy who spent an entire afternoon at a large conference of tenants of nationalized housing. This MP believed that this meeting was an effective use of his time because he was generally -- although not completely -- in agreement with their concerns.

4. Develop goal oriented action plans

Writing down your plans on a calendar will help you visualize whether you are attempting to do too much and whether your activities are adequately focused on your primary goals. If your schedule seems too ambitious, you should drop or postpone events.

Begin by recording on a calendar the scheduled activities over which you have no control. Once you have noted the dates and times of events that you are obliged to attend, you and your staff can begin to plan and organize your own activities. The activities which you initiate to serve specific goals should be put into the framework of a goal-oriented action plan.

An action plan should list a general office goal and the activities that you will perform to move toward that goal. The action plan should specify deadlines for the activities and the persons who are responsible to implement the activity. For example, if you want to produce a newsletter four times a year, your staff should determine when the draft text must be ready, when it must be finalized for the printer, and when and how it will be distributed.

From NDI's research in Romania, it is clear that some Romanian MPs have begun to plan within the framework of strategies based upon broad office goals. Take for example, the case of the deputy who held meetings with the mayors in his district to discuss the progress of land distribution in their communities. Looking at a four month calendar, he determined which weekends he would be free to travel to different towns and villages. His assistant then scheduled meetings with the mayors in these towns and villages. This strategic approach raised his profile in the district and gave the MP a better understanding of the overall progress of land reform through out the district.

5. Evaluate your plan regularly

Every three months you and your staff should assess whether your strategy is moving you toward your goals. Have you managed to implement the objectives that you laid out for yourself? Have your activities helped you achieve your goals? You may have planned to reach out to the population of an isolated region by working with the mayor of the largest town in the area. You may, however, find out that the mayor is unreliable. Or perhaps he is so unpopular that he actually hinders your ability to communicate with citizens. In such a case, you may need to find other local leaders who can help you reach out to citizens.

Finally, be realistic. You may find that a particular region of your district is so unfriendly to your party -- or to you -- that no amount of outreach is effective there. In such a case, you might be better served by focusing your energy on a group of citizens who are more receptive to your positions. In other cases, you may find out that you do not have the staff or the funding to implement a project which has turned out to be more complicated than you originally expected. You may need to cut back your original plans in such a case. In the continual process of evaluation, remember: It is better to have a small success than a large failure.

CHAPTER II

COMMUNICATIONS AND OUTREACH

At a public meeting in rural Hunedoara, a mine worker stands up and asks his MP if the mining industry is going to die in their region. For years it has been rumored that the mines are unprofitable and will have to close.

At another meeting outside of Chicago, a steelworker asks his congressman if the steel industry has any future. Thousands of people have been laid off in recent years and several factories have been closed.

“Our traditional industries will continue, but these industries will no longer provide the same number of jobs. Therefore, we must build a more diversified regional economy.” This is the message delivered by both the Romanian and American legislators.

The audiences in Hunedoara and Chicago begin a dialogue with their representatives. “We are too old to lose our jobs... what new industries do you think we can attract... how can we prepare ourselves for the economic transition...” Although the U.S. member of Congress and the Romanian MP can offer few promises, they can provide useful and honest information about a wider political and economic picture, and help prepare people for an uncertain future.

A dialogue is a two-way street that benefits both sides of the conversation. By communicating with citizens, members of parliament are able to explain their vision for the community, and are able to learn what their constituents are thinking and feeling. Such exchanges let citizens know that their parliamentary representatives care about their needs and opinions.

What is Outreach?

Parliamentarians use a variety of techniques to communicate with constituents. Some of these methods -- such as writing letters and sponsoring public forums -- are traditional. Other techniques -- such as forming advisory committees, holding special events and conducting public opinion surveys -- are more innovative.

These activities are called “outreach” in the United States because they attempt to reach out to a wide number of people who otherwise may not participate in the political process except at election time. These people may have good ideas and energy that can be used to promote local projects or build a base of support for local problem solving. At other times, outreach may

simply provide an outlet for a frustrated citizen to ask a basic question that deserves an honest answer.

I. Offices and Office Hours

You may spend most of your time at the parliament building in Bucharest, but your district office remains a permanent symbol of your ongoing interest and presence. And your assistant, who greets constituents as they come in the door, provides many citizens with their first impression of you.

It is important to hire assistants who have the capability to obtain a basic understanding of legislative questions and legal issues that they must confront daily. Choose assistants who are friendly, professional and energetic. Some MPs hire experts who are lawyers and can advise constituents about certain problems, but any "expert" must also be able to deal compassionately with people.

Your assistant, who greets people as they come in the door, provides many citizens with their first impression of you.

Many parliamentarians locate their offices in their party headquarters for financial or other practical reasons. These MPs often believe that since they were elected on party lists, it is important for them to share the party's hardships and successes by being located in the party headquarters. Increasingly, however, other MPs are establishing separate offices. One PDSR deputy told NDI that he believes it is important to separate his position within the party from his job as a member of parliament. Therefore, he decided to open his own office, although it is much more expensive.

According to NDI's survey of members of parliament, office hours are overwhelmingly the most popular method that MPs use to communicate with citizens. In NDI's poll, 82 percent of respondents answered that they "often" use office hours to communicate with citizens. In contrast, 40 percent often use public meetings, 37 percent often use the mass media, and 39 percent often use the mail to communicate with citizens.

Most MPs schedule office hours in their district offices on Fridays or Saturdays, although many reserve Saturdays for traveling around the district. Throughout the week, the MP's staff usually meets with citizens and attempts to handle problems themselves. During Friday and Saturday office hours, MPs meet with those people who the staff has determined to require special attention. Of course, many constituents simply choose to come to the office only on those days when the MP will be available for regular office hours.

Although everyone seems to agree that office hours are valuable, MPs in Romania have differing opinions about how much time should be spent in the office. Some believe that sitting in the office represents a powerful symbol of accessibility. Others believe it is more important to get out of the office and travel around the district. Most parliamentarians agree, however, that their district offices form the cornerstones of their district outreach activities.

II. Public Meetings

At one public meeting an MP can talk with hundreds of citizens and gain a sense of the community's problems and values. This information is vital for your work in Bucharest. In addition, by appearing before a group of citizens, you demonstrate an interest in their problems and the courage to confront hostile questions. As a visible link between Bucharest and the citizenry, your appearance at a public forum helps strengthen public belief in the institution of parliament and will serve you well at election time.

A. Planning a public meeting

In planning a schedule of public meetings, you need to consider some basic questions.

How many, where?

An active MP should develop a regular schedule of public meetings -- at least once a month -- throughout the district. When you begin strategic planning, sit down with your staff and study a judet map. Where haven't you been in a long time? Plan a trip there. Have you ever met with small business people? Perhaps a local association of small businesses can arrange a meeting for you.

Issue focus or general topic?

You will need to decide whether your public meeting should focus on a single issue -- like the land law -- or whether the topic should be more general -- such as a review of the recent parliamentary session. Generally, a specific issue will attract more people to the meeting and will be more appealing to the media. However, an open forum may be more suitable in a community that you do not often have an opportunity to visit. In such towns and villages, citizens may welcome the chance to attend a meeting and speak about a variety of issues.

How can you advertise the meeting?

Advertise the time and place of your public forum well in advance of the meeting. In the U.S., many members of Congress mail postcards to every house in the neighborhoods near the meeting place. While this practice may not be possible in Romania, it is feasible to hang posters in apartment blocks or on billboards, or place a small advertisement in the newspaper.

Be sure to inform the media about the public meeting. After distributing a press release, your staff should telephone newspaper and television reporters to remind them of the upcoming meeting. The staff might inform the reporters of some key issues that are likely to be examined: "We expect a lot of citizens to discuss the land law at the public meeting..."

Regardless of how you advertise, it is important to promote your event and circulate details about the meeting. Even if attendance at the meeting turns out to be small, a widely publicized

notice highlights the fact that the meeting occurred and that you made yourself available to your constituents.

Can you ask a local organization to organize meetings for you?

Since organizing meetings can be very time consuming, you might consider asking an NGO to organize a meeting for you. For example, the Pro-Democracy Association seeks to bring citizens face-to-face with their elected representatives from different parties. Or perhaps an issue-based organization -- such as an environmental club or a cultural association -- can plan an event for you or include you in an already scheduled activity.

How can you prepare yourself?

In the U.S., a congressional assistant recalls being invited to a "friendly informal neighborhood meeting." However, when she arrived at the meeting, she was met by a group of 200 environmental activists raging with anger at her and her boss. She felt trapped. And she obviously looked uncomfortable and appeared unprepared.

Do not let this happen to you. Acquaint yourself with your potential audience. Ask your staff to acquire as much information as possible about the group to which you will be speaking. If you are visiting a city that you rarely visit, your assistant should do some research -- telephone a few city officials or a local reporter to find out about the pressing local issues. Ask your staff to prepare a brief memorandum for you about what you should expect at the meeting.

B. Holding a public meeting

A successful public meeting requires a moving and focussed discussion, facilitated by both the MP and the moderator. But, you should also be flexible enough to allow people to express themselves so that they understand that you are listening and are concerned.

Choose a moderator

Do not moderate the forum yourself. Select another person to perform this important task. The moderator can be a local ally from your party, a media figure or even one of your staff members.

The moderator should introduce the topic for discussion, announce the rules for questions and answers, and state the time that the meeting is scheduled to end. Make sure the moderator can firmly control the proceedings and, if necessary, can play the role of the "bad guy." That is, if someone in the audience becomes rude or talks too long, the moderator should not be afraid to interrupt. Also, five minutes before closing the forum, the moderator should remind the audience that the meeting will end. Such an announcement protects the MP from the appearance of cutting someone off from speaking or not recognizing other questioners when the meeting ends.

Make an opening presentation

In an opening statement you should directly and briefly address the topic of the public forum. For example, if you are there to provide an overview of the past session in parliament, you may want to limit your discussion to three key issues. Your speech should also reflect a well-researched understanding of your audience; you would not address a lawyers association in the same manner that you would speak to a trade union meeting.

Be prepared to discuss issues, not simply to recycle old rhetoric. You will be more appreciated as a speaker if you are clearly prepared to discuss your audience's concerns. While some politicians are skilled at extemporaneous oratory, most are not. Lots of empty words will not camouflage ignorance.

Registry of attendees

You should consider sending a sign-up sheet through the audience during every public forum. Through this device you can gather a list of names and addresses that may be useful to you in the future. On the sign-up sheet you may also leave a space for attendees to write comments or inquire if they have particular interests. This information may translate into potential supporters for future projects.

Allow plenty of time for questions and answers

Consider a public meeting a forum for dialogue. Consider yourself less a speech-maker and more a facilitator of an honest discussion. Below we have listed some suggestions to use in playing that role.

- * *Encourage questioners to be brief.* During introductory remarks, the moderator should clarify the rules for questions. Participants should be permitted to ask only one question at a time and their questions should be brief and to the point.

 - * *Encourage reticent participants.* In selecting questions, the moderator or MP might survey the entire audience and encourage people to speak who clearly have questions but may be afraid to ask. In some public forums the meeting organizers provide citizens with pencils and small cards on which to write their questions that are later collected and given to the MP to answer. This practice encourages people to participate who otherwise might be too nervous to speak in public.
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- Sometimes a question of general interest may be buried within a confusing or rambling personal statement by a citizen at your forum. In such a case, it may be wise to interrupt the speaker and reformulate the question.
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- * *Rephrase confusing questions.* Sometimes a question of general interest may be buried within a confusing or rambling personal statement by a citizen at your forum. In such a case it may be wise to interrupt the speaker and reformulate the question.

At a 1994 public meeting in Oltenia, for example, a small business owner stood up and began to describe his complicated tax problems. The presiding MP politely stopped the man's speech and noted that he had raised a good point regarding national tax policies and new small businesses. The questioner was grateful that the MP had been listening and understood his concerns; the MP was able to impart valuable information without wasting too much time on issues of interest to only one member of the audience.

- * *Avoid campaigning.* You should make it clear that you are there as a public servant to listen to citizens, answer their questions and have a discussion. You will return at another time to campaign for their votes. This does not mean, however, that you should try to pretend you are not a politician. If you insist too frequently that you do not care about reelection, you are likely to sound disingenuous.

- * *Avoid provocations.* You should avoid responding to clear provocations from the audience. During a 1995 meeting in a village in Hunedoara, a senator cut off a speaker who insisted on aggressively talking about nationalist topics. The audience appreciated the MP's insistence that the meeting should proceed in a civilized manner.

- * *Be willing to accept criticism.* If you believe a criticism has merit, it may not hurt to admit it. Your audience will appreciate your candor. However, you should try to turn a critique into an opportunity for constructive problem solving. For example, during a meeting in an isolated town in Transylvania, local people chastised an MP for failing to pay enough attention to them. The MP admitted that he had been negligent, but he turned a potentially negative situation into a positive opportunity to question his audience and find out the kind of parliamentary liaison needed in town.

- * *It is acceptable to address some unrelated questions now and then.* People often want to discuss issues that are irrelevant to your duties as a member of parliament. As a local community leader it may be appropriate for you to selectively comment on such questions. However, most MPs believe that you should not allow questions which are clearly unrelated to your job as an MP to dominate the meeting.

III. Finding new ways to meet citizens

There are many imaginative ways to encourage people to communicate with you. Such events do not have to be dreadfully dull.

Special events

Some MPs organize special events to appeal to particular audiences. For example, a group of opposition MPs in Moldova organized a football match for themselves and interested young people. Before the match, the MPs discussed some political issues with attendees at the event.

A U.S. member of Congress from the Midwest regularly organizes a “fair” for senior citizens. The event is a social occasion during which senior citizens can acquire information about government programs available to them. And they get a chance to talk informally with their congressional representative and socialize with each other.

In these cases, the MPs and congressman determined that they wanted to reach out to key groups -- young people or senior citizens -- in more informal ways. As an MP who is active in your district, you may want to think about designing events that will be useful and fun for key groups that are important to you.

Tours and surgeries

Some MPs find it useful to organize trips throughout the key regions of the district and hold several different meetings in a short period of time. If you plan such an event, you should be sure that you meet with a wide spectrum of interest groups and publicize your tour schedule through the local media. You might also ask a local group to organize a tour for you. The Pro-Democracy Association in Hunedoara has arranged several tours for groups of MPs to remote regions of the district.

In Ireland and Great Britain, MPs schedule personal appearances at locations where ordinary people congregate such as pubs or public squares. Several of these meetings, which are called “surgeries,” are scheduled throughout a day. On the following page is an example of a press release from Irish MP Charles Flanagan announcing his surgeries for a weekend.

Door-to-door -- meeting citizens randomly

During the electoral season, American politicians often campaign by going house-to-house to talk with citizens. This technique can also be used to meet people and listen to their opinions. By going out to meet people throughout your term, you show citizens that you are not simply interested in talking to them only during election time.

Most Romanian politicians do not feel comfortable with the American practice of door-to-door canvassing. However, the concept of meeting people at random can be adapted to different places and in different ways. A Romanian MP can effectively meet people at the market place. Several Romanian MPs meet people after church in small towns or villages.

Interestingly, a PNT-CD senator from Moldova used the door-to-door technique effectively in villages by going to houses unannounced. "To be successful, you have to be persistent," he noted. "The first time we came to people's houses they were suspicious," he said. "The second time, they welcomed us back. The third time, they offered us a glass of wine."

A senator from Moldova said he used the door-to-door technique effectively in villages by visiting houses unannounced. "To be successful, you have to be persistent," he noted. "The first time we came to people's houses they were suspicious," he said. "The second time, they welcomed us back. The third time, they offered us a glass of wine."

IV. Using the mail

Romanian MPs typically do not write large quantities of mail to their constituents. With limited equipment and staff, it is difficult for parliamentary offices to write many letters. Furthermore, it often seems that face-to-face contact is the only really effective way to communicate with people and get things done.

Increasingly, however, MPs are finding that they can use mail to contact people that they would not normally meet on the street or at political meetings. A letter indicates that an MP takes the concerns of his citizens seriously. A letter provides MPs a chance to empathize with their constituents and articulate their positions on key issues. In addition, a concise written expression of these positions can be a very useful preparation for public meetings and media appearances.

Letters should be straight forward and uncomplicated. The most effective forms of written communication are not formal and long, but simple, personal and brief.

A. Types of letters

Parliamentary letters to constituents are written either in response to a letter sent by a citizen or are unsolicited communications.

Letters of response may answer a citizen's complaint, a request for help or an expression of opinion. In the United States, the office policy of most members of Congress dictates that all constituents who write letters deserve a speedy reply. (Please see Annex #1 for an actual example of a constituent letter and Annex #2 for the U.S. Congressman's response)

A letter of response may be negative in content but the MP should let the citizen know that his or her viewpoints are important. For example, you might write:

“I understand and share your concern about air pollution, however I cannot support your proposal to completely close down our city’s paper factory. Such an action would cause severe economic hardships. However, I am working with the government and international organizations to identify funding for pollution abatement equipment to help ease the unhealthy conditions identified in your letter.”

Unsolicited letters, the other main type of constituent mail common in the U.S., are generally rare in Romania. Such letters are often sent to citizens without the MP having received any requests for communication from the constituents. Often the same letter is sent out to large numbers of people who are known to be interested in a specific topic.

Unsolicited mail can be an effective way to reach out to new audiences who do not necessarily expect to hear from you or simply to maintain contact with old friends and supporters. For example, if you have been active in promoting the rights of veterans, you can write to the members of veterans groups to inform them of your activities. In the U.S. such a letter might begin by stating:

“Dear Mr. Smith, as a veteran you might be interested in the recent activities of the Democratic party to promote your rights through legislation in Congress...”

Because unsolicited letters are unusual in Romania, they can be particularly effective. Citizens will be impressed to receive a letter from their MP, especially if it contains substantive and useful information.

In the United States, unsolicited letters are normally sent in large quantities in order to reach the widest possible audience. Such mailings often require a database of addresses. Typically, an American congressional office keeps lists of names and addresses of people categorized by the issues in which they are known to be interested, such as environment, business, veterans or pensions. Your office may want to collect addresses of people who are concerned about particular topics. In addition you may be able to acquire lists of addresses from nongovernmental organizations that are active in your community. It is useful -- if not essential -- to put these addresses into a computer database for repeated use in the future. By using a computer you can print large quantities of the same letter to groups of people.

B. Writing constituent mail

Romanian members of parliament have developed their own styles for writing constituent mail and this manual does not intend to say that any writing style is "wrong". However, the following English language techniques may be helpful to you and your staff in writing quick concise letters to constituents.

1. *Plan your letter*

Before you begin writing, it is important to define the purpose of the letter in concise and concrete terms. This intention should be plainly stated in your letter. After briefly stating your reason for writing, you should next provide further explanation.

This style of writing, known as the “inverted pyramid style,” is a classic international technique for conveying information quickly and efficiently. You begin the pyramid by stating the most important information. In this manner, even if the recipient stops reading after the first paragraph, he or she should have a good understanding of the letter’s purpose. The letter should next provide all necessary explanatory information. You should close the letter with additional helpful suggestions or ideas.

a. State the purpose of the letter

b. Provide further explanatory information

c. Close with alternative suggestions or ideas

For example, if your office helped a widow to receive the veteran benefits of her deceased husband, you might plan a letter along the following lines:

“I am pleased to inform you that my office has helped to determine that you are legally entitled to receive the veterans benefits of your deceased husband.

Explain why the widow is entitled to the benefits.

Explain why it may have taken so long for the benefits to come through (it is not necessary for you to take responsibility for the delay).

“If I can provide you with further information, please do not hesitate to contact my office.”

In writing constituent mail one party from Canada recommends the following advice to new MPs when planning a letter²:

- Good news before bad
- Requests before justifications
- Answers before explanations
- Conclusions before discussions
- Summaries before details
- Generalities before specifics

2. Write the letter

Several suggestions might be helpful as you compose your letter:

- * *Think about your audience.* How much do they know about the subject of your letter? If you do not know the person to whom you are writing, it is safe to write in plain and simple terms that any layman would understand.
- * *Briefly explain important background information.* Even if citizens seem to be well informed, it is worth repeating your understanding of a situation. For example, if you are writing to tenants of nationalized houses, it might be wise to clearly reiterate the current status of legislation on this issue just to make sure that the citizens do not misunderstand.
- * *State your thoughts in concise sentences.* Long sentences can be very confusing and may simply cause citizens to feel frustrated when they want to get quick, useful information from your letter.
- * *Avoid complex or bureaucratic language.* In writing, your goal should be to cut through technical or obscure terms by providing citizens with clear answers and information. By using customary words and phrases, you can create a familiarity with your readers and build trust as their representative.

3. Edit the letter

As you reread your finished letter, ask yourself: is it concise, strong, personal and sincere? Is the overall tone of the letter appropriate for communicating with this citizen or group of citizens? If the letter strikes the right tone, are there some small changes -- such as adding another piece of information -- that will make your point even clearer?

² DNP Constituency Office Resource Manual, pp. 51-53.

Finally, professionalism requires that you check your letter for grammatical and spelling mistakes. An MP's staff should remember that such simple errors can reflect negatively on the competence of their boss.

V. Documenting feedback

How do you record all of the information that you receive in your outreach activities? How can you obtain measurable feedback about the opinions and concerns of citizens? There are several basic methods.

A. Opinion surveys

Public opinion surveys can provide members of parliament with information about citizens' needs and priorities which can help you improve your communications and outreach. And surveys also let citizens know that they are partners in the governing process.

Surveys do not have to be complicated. In fact, the less complicated, the better. Surveys which will be widely distributed should be limited to two pages. This would normally contain 10-15 questions.

Here are some brief points about putting together public opinion surveys:

- * Questions can be either closed-ended or open-ended. A closed-ended question provides the respondent with limited options for the answers. For example, a closed-ended question might ask:

Who do you believe are your representatives in parliament?

- MPs who represent my constituency and are from the party which I voted for
- All MPs from the party I voted for
- All MPs representing the constituency where I live
- MPs from my home town or village
- I have no representatives in parliament
- No opinion
- Other _____

An open-ended question might ask citizens:

Who do you believe are your representatives in parliament?

Generally, it is easier to ask and evaluate closed-ended questions. Although open-ended questions can provide interesting information about citizens' motivations, you should usually try to limit such questions to one per survey because every answer will be slightly different.

- * Keep questions simple. Avoid bureaucratic language and long sentences. And do not assume that citizens know what you are asking about. For example, if you ask about Law 18, make sure that citizens know you are asking about the land law.
- * Avoid biased or leading questions. You need to find out how people really think -- not how you would like them to think. A biased question might ask:

Are you angry about the inadequate funding which the government allocated to our district? Yes__ No __

Instead you might ask:

Do you believe that the government allocates adequate funding to our district?
Yes ___ No ___

- * Response options should be clear. All possible answers should be covered in your response options. The respondent should be able to mark only one answer. For example, a poorly phrased questions might ask:

How often do you read a local newspaper?
 Everyday
 Almost everyday
 4-5 times per week
 Once per week
 once per month

With these response options, the same respondent could answer "Almost everyday" and 4-5 times per week. Also, someone who never reads the local newspaper has no possible response. A better question would ask:

How often do read a local newspaper?
 Everyday
 3-4 times per week
 Once per week
 Once per month
 Never

Survey questionnaires can be filled out by the respondent, or interviewers can personally ask the questions to random citizens. Such personal interviews yield the most accurate results. However, they are more expensive and difficult to administer. If you choose to distribute written questionnaires, make sure that it is easy for citizens to reply. It is best for the person distributing the questionnaire to collect it immediately after it is filled out. If you are distributing the questionnaires by mail, it is best to include a stamped return envelope with your address written on it.

Citizens want to know that you are gathering their opinions for a reason. Therefore, it is vital that the results of your survey are published in a newsletter or released to the press. This feedback tells citizens that they are involved in the decision-making process.

B. Documenting opinions from phone calls, letters and informal comments

You should create a method to collect and record the comments received by your office. When people call with a comment about an issue, your staff should write it down. Similarly, ask citizens who come into your office with informal observations to put them in writing, so that you can document the issues that matter to people.

C. Advisory committees

If you are interested in acquiring specialized or expert information from your constituency, you might consider forming an advisory committee. Such a committee should comprise a cross section of people who are interested in a particular subject and it should be assigned a specific task such as preparing written recommendations or organizing an event.

For example, suppose you want to promote the creation of a national park in your district. In order to pursue this project, you could first assemble an advisory committee of environmental activists, scientists, economic development experts and interested citizens. This committee could be asked to organize a seminar on the park proposal or prepare a report that documents the unique natural qualities of the area and recommends options for protection. When you prepare to lobby government ministries for the protection of the region, such research could be valuable ammunition. Through its involvement in the project, the committee will also become *invested* in reaching a solution and could be *enlisted* as useful political allies on other issues.

VI. Publications and newsletters

You and your staff probably do not have the time, money or expertise to produce elaborate publications. However, newsletters and brochures do not have to be expensive.

A. Newsletters

Newsletters represent the most common publication format. Again, such a publication does not need to be elaborate or more than one or two pages. It is much better to produce a plain and simple publication on a regular and frequent basis than to print a fancy newsletter only once a year. The newsletter should describe your activities and promote issues about which you believe strongly. The newsletter is also a forum in which to present views and opinions that you have received from constituents. Be sure to include the results from opinion surveys.

B. Brochure on constituent office

When you conduct public meetings or meets with citizens individually, it is helpful to hand out a basic brochure that lists your office address and hours of operation, and features your photograph. Distribute this brochure to citizens to let them know that your office is ready, willing and open to serve them. (Turn to Annex #3 to see an actual congressional pamphlet)

C. Issue publications

Another type of publication can focus on a key issue. If you have been active on veterans issues, for example, you or your staff might write a one-page paper on you and your party's work on behalf of veterans and the status of those issues in parliament.

VII. Press releases³

An effective way to generate free media attention is to create a press release. A press release can be used to publicize an event or highlight specific accomplishments. Press releases should be short (about one page), concise in content and be of general interest to the perspective audience. Before sending out a press release, however, a number of factors should be considered that will increase your chances for coverage.

1. Press releases should be timely. It is unlikely that a news organization would publish an account of an event that occurred over a week ago. Likewise, do not send out a release so far in advance that the recipients forget about the event before it occurs.
2. Use vivid language in the press release. Quotations are valuable especially in press and television.
3. Say something newsworthy. If reporters become accustomed to receiving press releases that do not merit news attention, the reporter may dismiss all of your future press releases without even reading them.
4. Limit your press release to one page that summarizes the major points or issue and their significance.
5. If possible, supply the newspaper media outlets with a good quality black and white photograph of event explaining what is depicted (e.g. the names of those appearing in

³ Excerpted from T. King and C. Olsen, "Delivering the Message", *Uneven Paths: Advancing Democracy in Southern Africa*, (NDI, Edited by Padraig O'Malley, 1993, New Namibia Books (PTY) Ltd.) Chapter 4.3.

the photo, the date, location and nature of the event). Most Newspapers are more likely to use a press release if a picture is included.

6. Follow-up on press releases. Call those to whom the press release was sent and make sure they receive it. Before an event, inquire whether someone from the news organization will be able to attend. After an event, contact the press who attended to answer any questions and emphasize important points or issues.
7. Create a press list. Identify the news organizations that receive press releases, the format they prefer, and the information they require. Compile address, telephone/fax numbers and the names of appropriate personnel including assignment editors and reporters likely to cover your story. It is important to develop a relationship with the individual reporters. A good rapport is often a key element in getting your press release covered.
8. In all press releases, be sure to list a contact name and number where a reporter can call and follow-up. Many reporters are under tight deadlines and appreciate a story that is already written and has a contact number for follow-up questions.

Dialogue is a two-way street

A communications strategy should use a variety of methods for speaking and listening to the people you represent. Such a package of methods should give different citizens in different places a chance to express their opinions as well as learn about your activities.

As communications become more automated and computers become more widely available, it will be become easier to reach a wider audience. These advances will make the business of constituency outreach much easier and more efficient.

However, members of parliament warn that there is no substitute for personal, one-on-one contact. Radio interviews and computerized mail (still a dream for most Romanian MPs) must be complemented by a steady schedule of meetings in towns and villages with citizens.

Remember that dialogue is a two-way street: By listening to citizens, you will come to understand their concerns and values which will help you to be a responsible and effective legislator in Bucharest.

CHAPTER III

SOLVING THE PROBLEMS OF INDIVIDUAL CITIZENS

A village pensioner in Moldova visits her senator's office to ask for help in finding her pension money which has mysteriously been lost in the labyrinth of government bureaucracy.

Half-way around the world, in rural Mississippi, an elderly woman walks into her congresswoman's office because her social security pension money has not arrived on schedule.

Both women are angry and confused. The local bureaucrats in Mississippi and Moldova have asked them to fill out numerous official complaint forms, but still, they have not received their money. They have come to their elected representatives as a last resort

In Romania -- just like everywhere -- citizens need an identifiable individual to whom they can turn for help when they are bewildered or frustrated by bureaucracy. People should know that they can acquire answers from their MP. You and your staff have a broad knowledge of public administration -- both national and local -- and you are not bound by red tape. MPs and their staff should be sympathetic human beings with human faces who can use their authority to cut through red tape and solve problems.

Working on the problems of individuals is known as "casework" in the parliaments of the English, speaking world and in this guidebook, we refer to individual problem solving as casework. Through casework, members of parliament clear up red tape and expedite matters for constituents lost in the governmental bureaucracy.

Why do casework?

Why involve yourself in helping individuals solve their problems with bureaucracy? After all, MPs are lawmakers not social workers, right?

But actually lawmakers are social workers in a very real sense. A good MP will try to improve the lives of people in his district by creating responsive laws and policies. Casework allows you to acquire a first-hand understanding of the way in which parliament and government is working -- or not working -- for your constituents.

Casework also lets your constituents know that you care about the impact of parliamentary decision making upon their daily lives. In a democracy, MPs understand that citizens are their "bosses," and all wise employees try to be responsive to the concerns of their superiors.

In a practical sense, casework is an important method to further a parliamentarian's goals -- goals as a public servant and goals as a politician. For example, suppose that your goal is to guarantee that rural people in your district understand their rights in the process of land reform. Your office can meet that goal by explaining to your rural constituency their rights and clarifying steps they may take to avoid problems in acquiring land. Casework in this instance represents both an element of good public service and a smart political activity.

But how much time should you spend on casework?

According to NDI's survey, Romanian MPs receive an average of over 15 requests per week from individual citizens who are

requesting assistance. These requests come mostly in the form of office visits, telephone calls and letters. In many cases, a single problem could probably consume days of work and attention. With MPs facing a large number of responsibilities, how much time should you spend on this work?

Citizens need an identifiable individual to whom they can turn for help when they are bewildered or frustrated by bureaucracy. People should know that they can acquire answers from their MPs.

One extreme view holds that it is your responsibility to devote time and energy to every citizen who comes to you with a problem. This view is clearly a recipe for wasted time. Members of parliament across the world warn that you should not feel responsible for solving the personal problems of every citizen who comes to your door. For example, if someone visits your office complaining about a noisy neighbor, you should not, as an MP, feel obliged to spend time trying to solve the problem.

In some cases it is clear that you can deal with the problems of citizens better on a collective basis. Many MPs in Romania, besieged by requests about Law 18 (the "Land Law") have organized collective meetings to discuss the land law and potential recourse available to citizens who are unhappy with the law's application. Some members of parliament have arranged free legal counseling for citizens regarding land law issues. One deputy in Moldova said that his office typically receives five to ten daily requests for help on the land law. In order to help as many people as possible and reduce the amount of time he would have to personally devote to such problems, the MP hired a lawyer specifically to advise on land law cases.

Responding to constituent problems

An MP faces three general options in deciding how to address a constituent request: 1) refer the case; 2) reject the case or 3) try to personally get involved to find a solution.⁴ Although the last option sounds like a noble and responsible path, it is often unnecessary.

Option 1: Refer the case

Most parliamentary offices -- in Romania and elsewhere -- refer cases that are not within their jurisdiction to the appropriate agency. In an NDI survey of members of the Romanian parliament, 73 percent of respondents noted that they consider it their responsibility to "refer citizens to the proper authorities that are competent to solve their problem."

However, in many situations, citizens do not have a basic understanding of where they can go for help or how they should solve the problem. In such cases, a parliamentary office can offer some friendly "hand holding" to confused and frustrated citizens.

For example, suppose an elderly man comes into your office complaining that he does not know how to get his car registered. You might begin by patiently explaining that this issue is not the responsibility of parliament. You might then provide the man with the appropriate contact information at the police department.

Your office should maintain a list of telephone numbers, office addresses and names of people in the city administration and other local public offices that can be used as a resource in such cases.

If the man is truly confused and appears unable to take care of the matter for himself, you may want to telephone the police office and try to set up an appointment for him.

You can advise him that he may come back to your office if he continues to have problems, but make sure to emphasize that your office is not responsible for decision making in this case.

Your office should maintain a list of telephone numbers, office addresses and names of people in the city administration and other local public offices that can be used as a resource in referral cases.

Option 2: Tell the person there is nothing you can do.

Saying "no" is often the hardest thing for a politician, but in the long run, most MPs believe it is politically unwise to hold out false expectations.

⁴ NDP Constituency Office Resource Manual, pp. 8-9.

See also: Establishing your Constituency Office: A Guide for Newly Elected Members of the House of Commons, (Ottawa, Canada: Canadian House of Commons, 1993) p. 37.

Saying "no" is especially important for issues which the public sector has no control. In Romania, citizens still expect government to take care of matters that are now controlled by the free market. During a public meeting in a village in Transylvania, for example, two MPs were asked to do something about the high prices in a privately owned local grocery store. While these prices may represent a very real problem for the local customers, the members of parliament maintained that they could not interfere in such matters of private commerce.

In addition, MPs should advise their staff to carefully decline any extensive involvement in legal issues. MPs in all countries are commonly asked to get involved in matters that are before the courts or are under investigation by the police. Involvement in such cases is generally considered to be unethical.

Option 3: Playing the role of an advocate.

If an MP or staff member determines that a case should not be referred or rejected, there are a variety of ways in which an MP can play an advocacy role. Below is a brief description of typical procedural steps that a district office would follow:

Opening the case

Effective parliamentary staff agree that it is important to give the person a chance to tell her story in her own words. Don't be too official or bureaucratic. Remember, the citizen has come to your office because she is tired of dealing with impersonal rules and procedures.

Still, you do need to acquire the basic information. One PNT-CD Senator from western Transylvania told NDI that he insists that all constituents put their complaints in writing. In many countries, members of parliament ask citizens to fill out a one-page form in which they describe their problems and officially ask for assistance. The "fact-sheet" on the opposite page illustrates forms used by U.S. Representative Peter Visclosky.

Try to keep the meeting personal, but as short as possible. By keeping the meeting focused, you let the citizen know that you are interested in helping her, not just in listening. At the end of the meeting inform the citizen of the steps you plan to take to try to resolve the issue.

On the road to resolution

Before you start working on a case, you must determine the appropriate person to contact. Do you start with a local office in the prefecture? An office in city hall? New parliamentary staff will clearly have to consult with the MP about the proposed plan of action. After some experience, the staff person will learn the most effective methods for dealing with a case.

Clearly, it is important to build up a list of contacts in public administration whom you personally know. The list should be kept in a special file. Such contacts can help you out or at least let you know who else can assist you.

However, it is important not to give the impression that you are looking for special favors when you use personal contacts. For example, you might say: "Mrs. Popescu has informed us that she has not received her pension money for the past month. Can you please look into the problem?" A staff person should not, however, say "would you please do me a favor and increase the amount of Mrs. Popescu pension?" An MP and his staff should carefully maintain the impression that the office is simply ensuring that the constituent receives fair consideration within the administrative process. According to one deputy, it is important to show people "how to use the law, not circumvent it."

Telephone, letter, or personal meeting?

Should casework be performed via letter, telephone call or personal meeting?

When should you use interpellations? These are largely questions of personal style and efficiency. There are arguments for all methods.⁵ MPs in Romania and elsewhere have made the following comments:

* *Telephone inquiries can be fast and efficient.* For the sake of time, it often makes sense to do as much work as possible on the telephone. However, there is usually no written evidence that the phone call was made. If a bureaucrat agrees on the phone to straighten out a problem with someone's veteran benefits, you have no written verification if he later claims that you misunderstood his verbal promise. Some experienced MPs in the U.S. and Canada require their staff to maintain a log of telephone conversations.

* *Letters are official and verifiable.* A letter written by a member of parliament carries more authority than a telephone call made by a staff person. Many legislators in North America and Europe believe it is essential to maintain a written record proving that action has been taken on behalf of a constituent. This "paper trail" is particularly important with difficult or complex cases. However, writing letters is time-consuming and can create a delay in response time.

A deputy helped a handicapped small businessman secure a proper tax rate, which was lower, because he was able to "open the eyes" of the authorities to the man's legal status.

It appears that members of the ruling party tend to have more success with written correspondence since they are more closely affiliated with the bureaucracy of

government ministries. A PDSR deputy from southern Transylvania, who is a practicing attorney, believes he can help citizens by writing letters that ask for a legal clarification of complex questions. This deputy raised an example of a handicapped private business owner who believed he was being charged unfair tax rates. By writing an official letter, the deputy

⁵ Establishing Your Constituency Office: A Guide for Newly Elected Members of the House of Commons, pp. 36-37.

helped the citizen secure a new and proper tax rate because he was able to "open the eyes" of the authorities to the man's legal status.

** Personal meetings are effective, but extremely time-consuming.* Many Romanian MPs believe that a personal meeting is the only real way to solve a case. In some cases, MPs actually visit ministries in Bucharest to discuss citizen problems. Such meetings should be used rarely however since an MP's time is limited. Furthermore, the MP should be well-aware of the details of the case so that he does not appear to be lobbying for inappropriate favors. As a follow-up to any meeting in which an MP resolves a citizen's problem, a letter should be written to any public offices and to the constituent describing the meeting's outcome.

** Interpellations require an official government response.* If a matter is serious enough, an MP can use the pulpit of parliament to make an inquiry on behalf of a citizen. Through interpellations, an MP can make an official and public inquiry to the government regarding a matter that may originate in casework. The government is required to answer an interpellation. Some MPs warn that caution must be exercised when deciding to interpellate on a case regarding an individual because the publicity may cause more harm than good. Obviously it is essential to advise individuals that an interpellation will be made on their behalf.

** Occasionally a legislative remedy is necessary.* Sometimes it becomes clear that a failure of law has caused an individual's problem and a law needs to be changed. MPs in many countries often use the examples of a common citizen problem to illustrate or justify proposals for new laws. However, in most countries including Romania, legislative solutions are not an efficient way to help citizens who need immediate help since the law-making process is long and unreliable.

Keeping track of your work

It is important for a parliamentary staff person to keep good records of all efforts made by the MP's office to help a citizen. Even make a note of situations in which the office attempted to make a phone call but received no answer. This way you can tell the constituent that you have been working hard on their behalf.

In some congressional offices in the US, staff are required to make a telephone call every 15 days to inquire into the status of unresolved casework. This kind of follow-up is remembered by citizens, and sometimes this persistence is the only way to resolve a case.

How do you measure casework success?

Often, after exploring various avenues to resolve a problem, your efforts may be unsuccessful. In these cases, it is vital that you provide an honest and clear answer to the constituent without hiding behind bureaucratic language. At the same time, make it clear that the MP was not the final decision-maker in the case, and your office cannot be blamed.

In NDI's survey, Romanian MPs noted that they believe they have success in solving the problems of individuals in 28 percent of the cases. Interestingly, there was little difference between the perceived success of PDSR and opposition parliamentarians: PDSR respondents felt they had success in 29 percent of the cases, while opposition MPs responded that they had a success rating of 26.5 percent.

These Romanian perceptions of success are not much different from those American members of Congress. According to one study, U.S. Congressional offices estimated that they achieved "favorable outcomes" in 37 percent of the cases they handled.⁶ It is not surprising that the majority of cases have negative outcomes since citizens usually request the assistance of their MP as a last resort and have probably already exhausted most of the alternatives for resolving their problems.

Just because an MP's intervention did not bring about a positive change, should the MP's efforts be considered a failure? No. A unsuccessful attempt at problem solving could contribute to a longer term change in policy in the government or within the opposition. Furthermore, while the ultimate answer to the citizen's problems may be negative, in many cases, people often prefer a any resolution to no answer at all.

If you handled the case with a human approach, the citizen will have had at least one positive experience with Romania's system of democratic governance. By working on such a case, you have taken a small step to empower people to find solutions to their problems. You have also performed a wise political act that may be remembered at election time.

⁶ Johannes, John R. Congressional Caseworkers: Attitudes, Orientations, and Operations. (Prepared for delivery at the 1978 Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago) p. 26. Quoted in Frederick H. Pauls, Congressional Member Office Operations (Congressional Research Service, Washington, DC, 1992) p. 17.

CHAPTER IV

ACTING AS A LOCAL PROBLEM SOLVER

A factory in a southern Transylvanian town belches smoke that poisons the lungs of its residents. In central New Jersey, toxic chemicals threaten to seep out of a hazardous waste landfill into the drinking water of a blue-collar town. In poor communities who can help to tackle these dangers?

In both these cases, local citizens and non-governmental organizations turned to their MPs for assistance. In Transylvania, a PAC MP helped to identify several billions of lei in international funding for pollution abatement. In New Jersey, local members of Congress and Senators worked closely with the Environmental Protection Agency to clean up the waste dump.

As Tip O'Neill, the former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, said: "All politics is local." This means that every district has pressing problems that are important to people. The roads are full of holes and heating systems are unreliable. Factories face closure. Public facilities, such as medical centers and schools, are endangered. By involving yourself in these issues, you can demonstrate that you and your political party care about the community's welfare not just in theory, but in practice.

Is local project work part of an MP's job description?

Well, not necessarily. MPs are not formally vested with the authority to make local decisions. Parliamentarians are usually acting on an informal basis when they get involved in solving local problems. Therefore, an MP usually uses unofficial powers to address local issues. These powers include: the symbol of an office, position within the party, access to information and powers of persuasion. When MPs get involved in local problems, they recognize that they are not simply members of parliament in Bucharest, but district "statesmen" and local party politicians.

Although it is not part of an official job description, a deputy or senator is in a unique position to make a difference in the community. An MP can use channels that are not available to elected officials in local administration or leaders in nongovernmental organizations. A deputy or senator can bring a local issue to the attention of his party or lobby within government ministries in Bucharest. MPs can also explore legislative avenues to address district problems. For example, they can make interpellations regarding local issues or propose legislative amendments or draft laws based on local needs and experiences. On a more unofficial level,

MPs have found that they can sometimes act to convene the representatives of conflicting interests and facilitate negotiation.

Talking with leaders, providing vision

As part of an outreach strategy for local problem solving, it is essential to pay regular visits to local elected officials and other community leaders. While it is important to respond to invitations, it is even more impressive to initiate appointments yourself with local leaders. MPs should think about their goals in determining whom they want to meet. Perhaps, you are interested in a particular region of your district or perhaps you are interested in cultivating a relationship with organized labor, in which case you should schedule regular meetings with trade union officials.

Community leaders may make requests for goods or services that are beyond the immediate control of an MP. In some cases, you may be asked to get involved in an issue that requires significant time and potential political risk. You should be selective about the projects in which you become deeply involved. Such projects should complement a limited number of goals for your work in the community.

MPs are often expected to translate these office goals into a broader regional vision for the future. An opposition MP recently noted that his goal for his mountainous district was economic development through increased tourism. He recognized that he was not in a position to directly promote this vision, but he could try to improve the infrastructure for economic development. Therefore, he decided to lobby for the improvement of key roads in the district and support environmental programs.

As Tip O'Neill, the former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, said:
"All politics is local."

Lobbying for change

In traveling throughout Romania we have encountered numerous examples of MPs who have lobbied on local issues. Sometimes these are relatively noncontroversial problems involving a few simple phone calls or a letter. Some examples:

A PDSR deputy from Moldova successfully supported the application of a town to receive municipality status... A PD deputy from Muntenia persuaded a state warehouse to store grain processed by a private company... A PL93 deputy from Transylvania successfully lobbied to keep a school open... A PDSR deputy lobbied to establish a notary office in a small town.

The list could go on and we are sure that most MPs reading this manual could add to it.

Other cases are more difficult and controversial. After determining that a local issue is worth fighting for, an MP can develop a strategy for resolving a problem or improving his or her community.

The opening paragraph of this chapter described an MP's efforts to clean up the air in one of the worst polluted towns in Romania. This campaign, which brought together a coalition of NGO leaders and local elected officials, spanned several years and involved frequent communications with three government ministries, international financing organizations and directly to the parliament. The senator has delivered floor speeches and has appealed to the legislative commissions responsible for the budget.

You should be selective about the projects in which you become deeply involved. Such projects should complement a limited number of office goals and reflect a broader regional vision.

An extraordinary budget appropriation was finally authorized for pollution abatement equipment. Now, an evaluation of the equipment's effectiveness is underway. This lengthy project required a large degree of determination on the part of the MP and his allies.

A case study: A village train stop is being canceled

Every project is different and every legislator's style is different when dealing with local problem solving. As you read the following case study, imagine how you might apply your personal style as a politician and public servant to resolve this problem.

You are an MP and a railroad line through your district has canceled a stop at a large village. People in the village rely upon the train to get to their jobs in the judet capital city. No reason is given for the cancellation. One day the mayor of the village calls your office to ask for your help. He is a member of your party and a strong political supporter. What can you do?

This case study is based upon a real situation in Transylvania. But this kind of question is not unique to Romania. Several years ago, a congressman in the US was informed that train service provided by Amtrak (the U.S. national passenger railroad company) between his suburban district and a nearby large city was being cut off. These are the steps his office took to try to save the service .

As you read about these actions, try to consider whether similar advocacy activities could be effective in Romania.

1. Verification that the railroad service would indeed be terminated.

Because the Congressman's staff first heard about the planned termination as a rumor from angry passengers, they needed to confirm that the cutoff was actually being planned. A few phone calls verified the information, at which time the staff informed the Congressman about the problem.

2. Research on the impact of the service stoppage; was it worth pursuing?

After telling the Congressman about the proposed termination, the staff investigated the impact of the service stoppage. Angry passengers were complaining loudly about the plan, but how many people would really be affected? Were there really no other commuting alternatives?

The congressman's staff found out that the service stoppage would impact a few hundred commuters who would be forced to drive three hours to and from their jobs in the city. The railroad did not consider this number of passengers large enough to warrant the service. However, the staff also found out that the service was not very expensive to maintain because it was part of a daily long distance train link between two large cities. In other words, a train was not operated solely for the commuter passengers and therefore the continuation of the commuter service was not a major financial burden for the railroad.

A Romanian deputy noted that his vision for his mountainous district was economic development through increased tourism. He recognized that he was not in a position to directly promote this goal, but he could try to improve the infrastructure for economic development.

Because the expense was not high and the issue was important to local citizens and the mayor, the Congressman decided to fight for the continuation of the service.

3. Staff to staff meeting

The Congressman instructed his district representative to meet with the staff of the railroad to see if an informal agreement could be found to keep the commuter service operating. The railroad representatives claimed that the issue was beyond their control. Washington had targeted the service for budget cuts because it was determined to be wasteful. While the railroad staff understood that the service was relatively inexpensive in reality, they insisted that they could do nothing.

4. Letter to railroad president

The Congressman immediately responded to the railroad's intransigence by sending a letter to the president of Amtrak arguing -- forcefully, yet politely -- for the continuation of the commuter service. Copies of the letter were sent to subordinates of the railroad president and

to other potentially influential decision-makers, such as the chairs of the congressional committee overseeing transportation issues. The Congressman also encouraged other local decision-makers -- U.S. senators, members of the state legislative assembly, and local elected officials -- to contact the railroad to protest the termination of the service.

5. Communications with the public

To publicize his advocacy efforts, the Congressman's office distributed a press release announcing that he had written to the president of Amtrak and asked for a continuation of the commuter service. The press was contacted so that the public could see that the Congressman was active on this issue. Even if the advocacy effort failed, citizens needed to know that their representative in Washington was active and concerned about local issues. The Congressman also scheduled a meeting with representatives of the railroad passengers to inform them about his activities and get their feedback.

6. Meeting with local mayor and interested councilmen

The Congressman scheduled a meeting with local elected officials to discuss the proposed termination. Since the Congressman was a Democrat and the mayor was Republican, working together on the issue was used to demonstrate bi-partisan cooperation in addressing local problems.

7. Meeting with railroad representatives in Washington

In Washington, the Congressman's office arranged a meeting with a high-level Amtrak representative to discuss potential alternatives to termination. In preparation for the appointment, the Congressman's staff prepared a short memorandum that outlined several options for resolving the problem, including service cutbacks, but not termination.

With these options on the table, the railroad representative agreed to continue the commuter service with some cutbacks in frequency. The railroad was pleased to have avoided a lengthy fight over a relatively minor issue. The Congressman was pleased to be able to tell constituents that he orchestrated the continuation of the railroad service.

8. Follow up: calls to local officials, press release, letter of confirmation

Immediately after the meeting, the Congressman's staff initiated follow up. First, the Congressman personally called the local elected officials to tell them the good news. Then, a press release was prepared announcing the Congressman's successful intervention in the problem. Finally, the congressman sent a letter to the railroad representative thanking him for his cooperation and explicitly confirmed the details of the compromise agreement.

9. Research long-term solutions

The Congressman recognized, however, that the solution he arranged might be a temporary one. Since Amtrak is a public corporation that is continually targeted for budget cuts, the commuter service could not be expected to be very secure. Therefore, the Congressman recognized that he had to help find a long term solution for commuters apart from Amtrak. In recent years, the Congressman has supported efforts to develop an expanded commuter railroad service that is operated and partially funded at the district level.

Some techniques to consider

This case study highlights some approaches to advocacy that MPs may want to consider when they deal with local problems:

* Confirm and research the problem

Confirm that a problem is indeed a legitimate problem before you start to fight for its solution. If a mayor informs you that the village school will be closed, perhaps he means that he is afraid that the school might be closed. After you receive information about a local problem, your staff should make enough phone calls to be sure it is true and find out how serious it is. After you have investigated the facts, you should decide whether the problem is worth fighting for.

In the case of the polluting factory in Transylvania, international organizations worked with local environmental organizations to confirm the severe danger of the air quality. This information was provided to the MP before he got involved in the project.

* Make sure the problem cannot be solved informally

Maybe the problem can be solved with a simple phone call or informal meeting. Do not fight a battle that does not need to be fought. In the case of the terminated railroad service, the congressional staff tried to work with railroad staff to reach an agreement privately and informally. This overture indicated to the railroad that the Congressman was serious about the problem, and the railroad staff was not surprised when he began to lobby publicly for the commuter service.

As a skilled negotiator, you should examine various options to problem solving before assuming that only one solution exists.

* Think through options before solutions

As a skilled negotiator, you should examine various options to problem solving before assuming that only one solution exists. In the case of the railroad service, the Congressman understood early in the project that he would probably have to accept some cutbacks in the commuter service in order to keep it from being completely terminated. Public leaders need to understand the needs and interests of the people

who oppose them and try to develop compromise solutions that will at least partially satisfy the interests of everyone.

*** Communicate with many people, in many ways**

Is it better to write letters, make phone calls, or hold meetings? All three if necessary. If you are serious about being an advocate on a local problem, expect to make a wide number of contacts, to many different people, using different methods. If you write a formal letter to a ministry, it should be quickly followed up with a personal telephone call to that office to make sure it received your correspondence.

In Romania and the U.S. a personal meeting is often the only way to get a straight answer or solve a problem. But if you are meeting with a ministry official, make sure they know beforehand what you expect to discuss. If you are committed to helping the community solve its problem, you may need to make repeated efforts over several years.

In the Romanian parliamentary system, interpellations provide a public method by which an MP can question the government. When MPs make interpellations, however, they might consider sending a copy of their speech to a wide number of decision-makers and the press -- both in Bucharest and back in the district.

Remember also to communicate directly with the citizens who are affected by your efforts. Meet with them or talk with them on the phone to get their feedback.

*** Be persistent**

A PAC MP from Banat told us that Government ministries will sometimes agree to help him solve a local problem just to keep him from bothering them. Sometimes only persistence pays off. Advocacy can be very time consuming because the source of decision making power may not be obvious and government officials may be unwilling to admit that they have the power to make a change.

In the case of the Transylvanian factory which needed pollution abatement equipment, the MP and his allies had to speak with many officials before they got results. The MP met with ministry officials, made speeches in the parliament and appealed informally to potential supporters. The MP and his partners recognized that the problem was too severe to be solved very quickly and they were prepared to spend a lot time and energy.

*** Use your allies**

Romanian MPs quickly point out that their local party organization is essential for local problem solving. More than likely, mayors

A deputy from Muntenia stressed that it is vital to deal with your allies in local government as peers. If you look down on them as inferiors, you may find that your party allies are not very interested in helping you tackle a local issue.

and officials from your own party will be contacting you to ask for assistance. This is natural. Your allies in the past are clearly the people you should ask first for help in local problem solving.

A PD deputy from Muntenia stresses that it is vital to deal with your allies in local government as peers; if you look down on them as inferiors, you may find that your party allies may not be very interested in helping you tackle a local issue.

NGO networks can also be vital. The Transylvanian MP lobbying for pollution abatement equipment was able to exploit and expand the network that local NGOs had already developed. The issue had already attracted the attention of international organizations due to the pollution's severe impact on children. The MP was able to rally support in local government, in his party, in parliament and in the government.

*** Build coalitions and multi-partisan partnerships**

You should also be prepared to work with local leaders who did not support you in the past. In some cases, they may include members of other parties. By building a coalition you demonstrate that an issue is truly bipartisan and you gain the opportunity to reach decision makers with whom you may have little direct contact.

In Banat, a PAC MP told us that his cooperative relationship with a PDSR deputy has helped him to fight for local needs within the power structure of Bucharest. The two deputies meet regularly to discuss opportunities for collaboration on a nonpartisan basis.

The two MPs worked together recently on a project to obtain funding for road repair equipment for the largest city in the district. This funding was obtained through the sale of public land to a bank. However, this land transaction required government approval in Bucharest.

Over a three week period, the opposition deputy and PDSR deputy visited four government ministries in Bucharest to get the necessary approvals for the transaction, and spoke with representatives in government about the worthiness of the project. Because of their cooperation, the government accepted the land sale to the bank as a nonpartisan project that was ultimately intended to provide money to repair the city's roads.

*** Use the press**

As an MP, you can make news out of stories that may otherwise be ignored by the media. Even if you do not have the authority to allocate money or reverse ministry decisions, you do have the power to focus attention on a local issue. By contacting the press, you also let citizens know that parliament is an

In Banat, an opposition deputy told us that his cooperative relationship with a PDSR deputy has helped him to fight for local needs within the power structure of Bucharest.

institution responsive to their everyday needs. If you have helped in solving a local problem, go ahead and take some credit in the press. Of course, you should make sure to share your success with all your partners -- even if they are political opponents.

*** Follow up**

Advocacy demands prompt and thorough follow up. If you receive a verbal promise, write it down in a letter. If the public is going to be affected by your efforts, put out a press release as soon as possible and make telephone calls to local leaders. People are grateful for information and sometimes can offer immediate ideas to help you in your future work.

*** Short-term answers/long-term solutions**

A short-term solution can unravel quickly. Public servants are often in the business of reacting to emergency situations. But once you have "put out the fire" it might be a good idea to see how you can keep the fire from starting next time. In the case of the commuter train, the congressman realized that larger transportation questions needed to be addressed in the district. He has since worked with local leaders to find more permanent solutions to the district's commuting needs.

In the case of the polluting factory in Transylvania, the MP may be forced to pursue further action if the solution he helped to fund is inadequate. If the pollution abatement equipment that has been installed at the plant does not adequately clean up the air, environmental NGOs have said they expect the MP to again fight for their cause.

Public leaders need to understand and accommodate the interests and needs of the people who oppose them and try to develop compromise solutions that will at least partially satisfy the interests of everyone.

Comparison of approaches: Opposition and ruling coalition

Achieving success in local problem solving may often seem to depend on whether you are in the opposition or part of the ruling coalition. It is certainly clear that there are different approaches used by both sides, but it also appears that members of both the opposition and ruling coalition can score successes in local problem solving.

In NDI's survey of Romanian MPs, PDSR MPs noted that they tend to use rather conventional methods in trying to solve problems which the district's public administration is having with governmental institutions. Their top three preferred methods for local problem solving include visiting ministries, making telephone calls and writing letters. In contrast, and not surprisingly, the opposition uses methods that are more confrontational toward the government. According to the NDI survey, the opposition's preferred vehicles for local problem solving are interpellations, telephone calls and the mass media.

Clearly, MPs from the ruling coalition appear to use their connections to government as a way to aid key constituencies at home. The utilization of partisan allies in government is a natural aspect of a representative system. Certainly, most Democratic congressmen will tell you that local issues become easier to address when a Democrat is in the White House. However, the connection to government also puts added pressure on MPs from the ruling coalition. For example, during a meeting with local officials in central Transylvania, a PUNR MP was expected to defend inadequate government funding of local infrastructure improvements.

Opposition parliamentarians sometimes complain that they have no avenues to power and therefore no way to solve problems. However, as demonstrated by the pollution abatement project in southern Transylvania, an opposition MP can successfully deal with difficult issues. But it clearly requires a more creative and persistent approach.

Opposition MPs may have some overlooked advantages when dealing with local issues. First, opposition members have a large reservoir of allies in local government positions. According to a PD deputy from Muntenia, these alliances can be crucial. Furthermore, opposition MPs are not constrained by alliances with the government and therefore can be more dogged in their interpellation and investigations of local problems.

Finally, opposition parliamentarians can try to promote innovative non-governmental financing and encourage a larger degree of local self initiative when they approach local problems. One PNTCD senator proudly boasted that his office was able to work with the Soros Foundation to facilitate the donation of computers to schools in his district. This kind of creative community service was unrelated to his party affiliation.

Whether you are in the opposition or the ruling party, local problem solving requires a member of parliament to creatively push the boundaries of normal practice. You may need to assume the role of spokesperson or symbolic advocate which goes beyond your official duties in parliament. In many cases, successful local project work requires you to seek out new partnerships -- with local government, NGOs and individual citizens. The empowerment you offer these individuals and groups will help to strengthen the institution of parliament in your district.

CONCLUSION

This manual should not be considered an absolute blueprint. Rather, it is a collection of good ideas for constituency activity which have been used in Romania and in other countries. Like most parliamentarians around the world, Romanian senators and deputies have usually performed these constituency activities in an unplanned or ad hoc manner. We hope this manual will encourage MPs to more consciously plan out a program for their district activities in which they focus on limited and achievable goals.

We know that the Romanian examples in this manual are unfinished stories. In many cases, MPs are only in the beginning stages of discovering what activities are useful and effective, and what activities simply do not work for them. In other cases, we are sure that senators and deputies are performing work which we simply did not have a chance to uncover. However, we hope that this book will encourage MPs to share their constituent outreach experiences with their colleagues at home, in their party meetings, or in the halls of parliament in Bucharest.

There is no real conclusion to this manual because there is no conclusion to the process of public participation in a democracy. Constituent service is part of a system of democratic dialogue which should be continuous, even though particular problems may have beginnings and ends. The information in this manual demonstrates that Romanian elected officials have launched new efforts in public participation and constituent dialogue, and are committed to building upon these beginnings.

APPENDICES

4-11-42

DEAR CONGRESSMAN TONY HALL

AFTER RECENT STUDY OF
THE FEDERAL SUGAR SUBSIDY I FEEL
• THE GOVERNMENT HAS NO BUSINESS
SETTING THE PRICE OF SUGAR.
I FEEL THE MARKET SHOULD
DECIDE HOW MUCH THE SUGAR GROWER
EARN.

AND I ALSO FEEL THAT THE
SUGAR SUBSIDY COSTS AMERICAN CONSUMERS
MILLIONS OF DOLLARS IN HIGHER
FOOD PRICES.

ANNEX #1

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

January 19, 1996

Dear

Thank you for contacting me to express your concerns about the sugar subsidy. I appreciate hearing from you.

I agree that the time has come to eliminate the government subsidy on sugar. In the past, I have supported efforts to reform the sugar program to assist America's small family farmers. However, those attempts have failed to address the many problems involved with sugar subsidies.

The subsidies primarily benefit a small number of wealthy sugar cane growers while small family farmers continue to struggle. Subsidies also keep sugar prices artificially high, costing American consumers an additional \$1.4 billion every year for food. As the largest purchaser of food, the federal government itself pays higher food costs and passes that expense on to American taxpayers. The subsidies are also contributing to the environmental degradation of the Florida wetlands where many of the large cane farms are located.

I am convinced that abolishing the subsidy program is the only way to solve these problems. Therefore, I cosponsored H.R. 1687, a bill that repeals the sugar program. However, the Republican Budget Reconciliation bill maintains the subsidies at current rates. Please be assured that I will continue to work with my colleagues, both Democrats and Republicans, to eliminate sugar subsidies.

Your letter and others that I have received from residents of the Dayton community have been overwhelmingly opposed to the sugar program. Those responses were a major factor in influencing my position. I hope that you will continue to inform me of your views.

Sincerely,

Tony P. Hall
Member of Congress

TPH:eh

ANNEX #2

Congressman Pete Visclosky

Making a Positive Difference in Your Life!



Congressional Services

1st Congressional District

Indiana

Dear Friend,

It is a great honor to represent you. To serve you best, I need to know your concerns and opinions on both local and national issues. Your input will allow me to fight for positive change in Northwest Indiana and the United States.

I encourage you to visit, write, or call me at *your* Gary, Portage, Valparaiso, or Washington D.C. offices whenever you have problems or questions regarding the federal government. As a resident of Indiana's First Congressional District, these offices belong to *you*.

To help me effectively and quickly respond to your inquiries, please:

- **Make your contact personal.** Whenever possible, use your own experiences or those of someone you know to explain your situation.

- **Try to be brief.** The best way to explain your views is in a clear, concise letter.

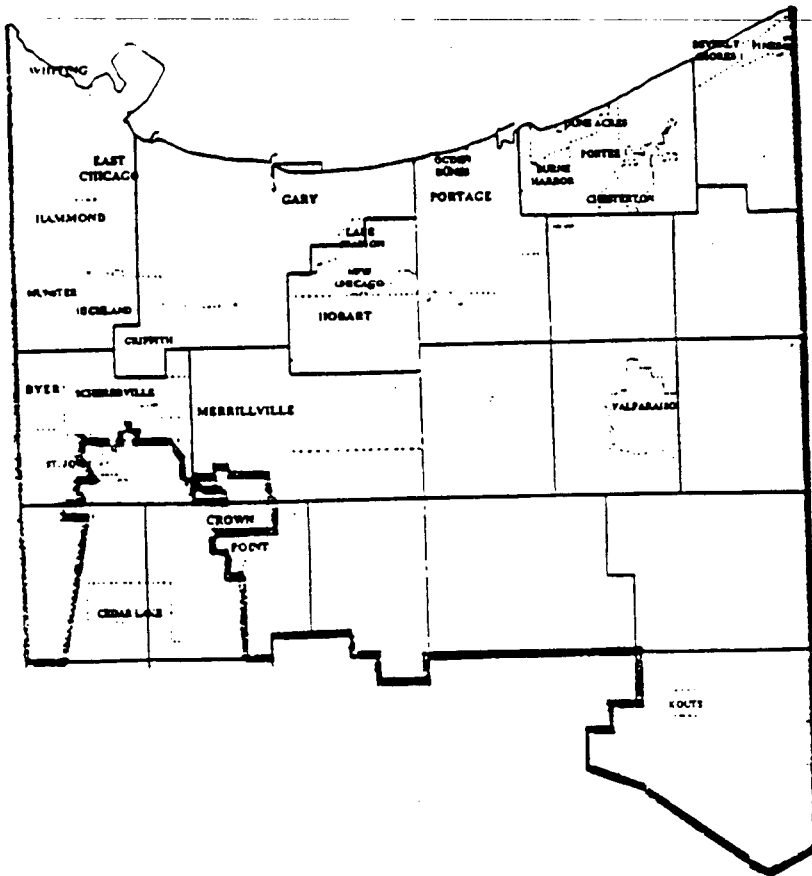
- **Be specific.** If possible, indicate a bill number and author along with your opinion.

- **Clearly identify yourself.** It's impossible to respond to letters without return addresses or legible signatures. Please include your complete mailing address on both the envelope and letter.

I hope to hear from you soon!

Sincerely,


Pete Visclosky



ANNEX #3

CONGRESSIONAL SERVICES

As your representative, my primary responsibility is to serve you. Please take full advantage of the many services offered by *your* congressional office. These services include:

CUTTING THROUGH RED-TAPE

The federal government is immense. When dealing with its many departments and agencies, you may feel caught in a bureaucratic nightmare. *Your* congressional office is here to help. While I cannot require federal officials to decide matters in your favor, I can insist that all rules are followed to ensure that your request receives serious consideration. Some of the most common problems arise from: **Social Security and Medicare Benefits; Immigration and Naturalization Services; the Armed Services; Veterans' Services and Benefits; Welfare and Social Services; and Regulatory Agencies.**

LEGISLATIVE SERVICES

- Providing information on laws.
- Providing information on bills pending in Congress.
- Providing copies of bills and other information.
- Providing information about federal loan and grant programs.

WASHINGTON TOURS

When planning a trip to our nation's capital, you can obtain information about what to do and see by contacting *your* congressional office. A limited number of special tours of the White House, U.S. Capitol, FBI and other popular attractions can be arranged. Because so many people come to Washington, D.C.

during the spring and summer, it is helpful if requests are received several months in advance.

U.S. ACADEMY NOMINATIONS

Each year it is my privilege to recommend a select few of Northwest Indiana's high school graduates for admission to the nation's service academies - Army, Navy, Air Force, and Merchant Marine. Interested young people should contact me at one of *your* four offices.

VISITS TO LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS

I enjoy speaking to civic organizations, schools, businesses, public meetings, and other group functions. Please, call for more information.

U.S. FLAGS

Members of Congress are able to provide, at cost, American Flags that have been flown over the U.S. Capitol. These flags can be donated to civic, church, and school groups. Please, call for more information.

GOVERNMENT PUBLICATIONS

Every year the U.S. Government produces many documents that you can obtain at little or no cost. These include "How To" manuals, research reports, information directories, consumer guides and much more. Please, call for more information.

FOUR OFFICES TO SERVE YOU:

WASHINGTON

2464 Rayburn Building
Washington, D.C. 20515
(202) 225-2461
Mon-Fri 9:00 am - 6:00 pm

GARY

215 West 33rd Avenue
Gary, IN 46408
(219) 884-1177
Mon-Fri 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

PORTAGE

City Hall
6070 Central Avenue
Portage, IN 46368
(219) 763-2904
Tues 8:30 am - 4:30 pm

VALPARAISO

City Hall
166 Lincolnway
Valparaiso, IN 46368
(219) 464-0315
Thurs 8:30 am - 4:30 pm