**How to…. deal with unexpected situations**

Even when you make the most detailed preparations, you’ll still sometimes encounter unexpected situations. Below are some examples of common scenarios that might arise during your advocacy work and how you can respond to them. Embrace the unexpected by being prepared.

# **Unexpected Reactions and How to Respond to Them**

Whether you’re meeting with your local MP or presenting to a large group, you may be expecting one type of response but receive another. For instance, you may expect someone to respond positively to your advocacy efforts but receive a neutral response, or you may expect a negative reaction but receive a positive one. No matter what the reaction of your audience, there are things you can do to keep your advocacy efforts on track. MPs from the party in power can also be Cabinet Members who help develop policies, assist Cabinet Members as Parliamentary Secretaries, lead federal government departments and set priorities for the Government. MPs from the opposition party can serve as Opposition critics and ‘shadow’ roles that are the equivalent roles to the Cabinet but within their own party.

# **Reaction: Positive**

* When you receive a positive reaction to your advocacy efforts, show your appreciation.
* Confirm the next steps. Who will do what? When? How?
* Offer to give credit for the support you’ll receive. For instance, give the business a positive review on social media, write a letter to the editor to applaud their efforts, or tell others in your community about the new accessibility features they’re introducing.

# **Reaction: Neutral**

* When you receive a neutral reaction to your advocacy efforts, use the inquiry approach. Ask if the person understands the scope of the barriers and the impact they’re having on people who are blind or partially sighted.
* Reiterate your key messages to emphasize the importance of the issue. You may need to be prepared to express your key messages in a few different ways, in case your first attempt to explain the issue doesn’t have the desired impact.

# **Reaction: Unsupportive**

* When you receive an unsupportive response to your advocacy efforts, find out why the person is unsupportive.
* To highlight why the issue is relevant to your audience, refer to facts, comparisons, or the economic or social consequences that could arise if the issue isn’t rectified. Help them to understand why working together toward a solution is in everyone’s best interest.
* Explain how the issue could impact them directly, either positively or negatively. For instance, if there is no safe path of travel for someone with sight loss, this may also mean that there’s no safe path of travel for a parent who is pushing a stroller. If large-print signage will benefit people with sight loss, it will also benefit our growing population of seniors.
* Try and consider what is motivating the person beyond what they are saying. For example, a politician might be receiving a pressure from taxpayers organizations to not spend money, but you are asking them to invest more money in a program. If the information is public knowledge then you could bring it up to show you are aware of the constraints they have (and then use that as a bridge for your argument), but if it’s an assumption you are making then it is better to keep that in mind when structuring your argument, without mentioning it directly.

### **Reaction: Disinterest or No Response**

* If you don’t receive a response from the person or business within a reasonable amount of time, reach out to ensure that your original email or phone message was received. Let them know you’re following up on your original message and provide the date when you contacted them the first time. If you’re reaching out by email, you can forward them your previous email for their reference. Ask if anything is being done in response to your initial inquiry.
* Request a response by a certain date. Provide them with a “carrot or stick” scenario to consider. A carrot is something that you can offer them, like additional information or an educational presentation. A stick is a consequence that may arise if they refuse to engage, like escalating the situation to another department or contacting the media. Consequences should always be gradual (i.e contacting the head of the department before containing the CEO or going to the media) so that you can demonstrate you have been reasonable in taking the necessary steps if you do need to escalate.
* Do not mention a consequence that you are not willing to follow through on, as this undermines your credibility.

# **Unexpected Situations and How to Respond to Them**

## **Situation: You cannot find the building where you’re supposed to be presenting, or you can’t find the person who is supposed to be meeting you at the venue.**

* Give yourself plenty of time to get to the venue.
* Have a backup plan that will help you in case you can’t find the venue on the first try. Will you use a navigation app? Will you ask a passerby for directions?
* Before you finalize your plans, ensure that you have the correct address of the venue and the name and contact information of the person you’ll be meeting. Let them know that you will reach out to them with a phone call or text message if you’re having trouble finding the venue.
* If your contact person is meeting you at the venue, give them a brief description of yourself so that they’ll know who to look out for. You can tell them that you’ll be holding a white cane, accompanied by a guide dog, or wearing a green sweater.

## **Situation: The topic or questions are different from what you expected**

* Make a quick mental adjustment and modify your key messages.
* If your do not know the answer, let them know that you do not have that information but you will find out and follow up with a response.
* Redirect the conversation back to your key message with a short bridging statement, such as, “That’s an interesting question. I’d like to reiterate...” or “while I can’t speak to that directly, what I can say is…

## **Situation: Someone else is dominating the conversation**

* Be proactive. Right after the introductions, deliver your key messages by saying something like, “Thank you for taking the time to meet with me. I’d like to talk to you about...”
* Be prepared to interject. Use bridging phrases, such as, “Yes, you’re correct, and...”, “I see. Well, I’d like to say that…”, “As I was saying…”, “May I add that…”

## **Situation: The conversation or meeting comes to a sudden end**

* Quickly arrange a follow up plan. Who should you contact to set up a subsequent meeting? When? How? What information would be helpful in the meantime?

### **Situation: Your technology isn’t working, or you’re missing materials**

* Bring back up copies of your notes in alternate formats, such as digital or braille.
* See if the organizer can assist i.e by printing off your notes in large print or helping you access your emails to retrieve a digital copy.
* You don’t need to memorize your presentation, but it is good to read through your notes leading up to the meeting, so you feel comfortable with the content and know what you want to say.
* Be flexible. It’s okay if things aren’t perfect. You can still deliver your key messages in a slightly modified way.

## **Situation: You have to cancel at the last minute**

* Advise the event organizer as soon as possible and ask whether they’d like to reschedule, or whether you can send someone else in your place. If you are representing CNIB, let us know as soon as possible so we can help make alternate arrangements.
* If they’d like someone else to attend in your place, provide that person with the key messages and materials they need in advance.

## **Situation: Someone is misinformed or makes an insensitive remark about your sight loss**

* Inform or correct them as tactfully as you can. Remember that not everyone knows someone with sight loss, and they’re probably not trying to be insensitive. Say something like, “It’s actually very startling to a person with sight loss when you grab their arm without asking. I know you’re trying to help, but I’ll ask for your help if I need it,” or, “It’s actually not a compliment to tell a person that they don’t look blind. Blindness comes in so many forms.”

## **Situation: Someone denies you access with your guide dog, or acts like they are doing you a favor by allowing your guide dog access**

* Quickly explain the facts. In all of Canada’s provinces and territories, human rights legislation prohibits discriminating against a person who is working with a guide dog. Guide dogs and their handlers have the right to access all the places that the public has access to.
* Offer to follow up with more information about guide dogs and the rights of guide dog teams.

If the person still denies you access, decline the meeting and follow up with your local advocacy lead for support.