



## How and why might foundations engage with select committees?

### Briefing for foundations

#### What are select committees?

Parliamentary select committees exist in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. They're made up of cross-party groups of backbench MPs and peers (not ministers or shadow ministers), who are selected in proportion to their party's representation. Their purpose is to scrutinise aspects of government's work. They do this through holding inquiries which invite evidence from witnesses and produce reports based on this evidence. Government is obliged to respond to reports that are sent to them, usually within three months. Government doesn't have to take up the recommendations, but around 40% of recommendations are accepted<sup>1</sup>.

#### Why might foundations engage with select committees?

- To challenge or scrutinise government policy. Foundations have a good idea of what the issues are and are likely to be able to make useful contributions.
- To raise an issue not currently getting policy attention; select committees can shine a light.
- To examine how policy aims could be achieved in different ways. Foundations might have suggestions or evidence to show what could be done differently. This opportunity doesn't exist with other policy levers.
- To amplify the voices of the foundation's communities of interest, including grantees.
- To engage with parliamentarians in an evidence-based forum, on the record.

#### How can foundations engage?

- Look at what relevant [inquiries are open](#) and submit evidence.
- Suggest a subject for an inquiry. There are different ways to do this; you may go directly to the clerk or write to committee members.
- Share knowledge with grantees about how to engage with select committees, and support their advocacy activities.
- Take up the offer of free information. The parliamentary education and engagement team run [free workshops](#) for charities, which foundations could play a role in coordinating (and following up with further actions).

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<sup>1</sup> Russell, M. and Benton, M., "Selective Influence: The Policy Impact of Select Committees", The Constitution Unit, UCL, 2011

- Offer to host a visit for the committee so they can get real insight on an issue.
- Bridge the gap between academic research and the reality 'on the ground' with evidence or commissioned research. Contact Parliament's Knowledge Exchange Unit (Naomi Saint, [saintn@parliament.uk](mailto:saintn@parliament.uk) / Dr Sarah Foxen, [foxens@parliament.uk](mailto:foxens@parliament.uk)) to discuss this further.

### Tips for engaging with select committees

- **Look out for new inquiries** that fit with your areas of interest, follow committees on twitter, and set up alerts via the select committees' web pages.
- **Keep your evidence concise.** Data and information available to select committees can be anywhere from absent to overwhelming. Offering committees information in a digestible way that summarises the breadth of research in the field can be very welcome – even 300 words is enough, and it is not necessary to respond to all the questions asked.
- **Provide a single point of contact.** When working on an issue with other organisations, in a coalition for example, having a single point of contact can be helpful. Inquiries can move quickly and it is useful for specialists to know who to contact.
- **Agree with others, but don't duplicate.** The best way to show support for the evidence of another organisation/individual is to submit separate evidence showing agreement; this will have more impact than making the exact same submission, which the committee staff may tire of seeing. This is somewhat different to government consultations, where the volume of respondents making the same point can be persuasive.
- **Tailor your approach.** The personalities, agendas, and time constraints of committee chairs and members can make a real difference to how committees operate. This might affect how easy it is to engage with them. Your approach to one committee might be different to another.
- **Get to know the specialist advisors.** Specialist advisors to committees are good people to know when trying to engage with select committees. They have good knowledge of the actors in their fields and will have a contacts book to help the work of the committee.
- **Inform your board.** Foundations, like other charities, are prohibited from being party political, but this does not prevent participation in select committee enquiries. Select committees are asked to leave their politics 'at the door' and investigate issues neutrally based on evidence.

### Resources

- [UK Parliament: get involved](#)
- [Information about free workshops](#)
- [Research briefings](#)