

# What is public affairs?

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Public Affairs is a specialised form of PR that seeks to influence policy decisions and promote an organisation's reputation by targeting government, politicians and other decision makers at a local, national or international level.

Many organisations engage in public affairs, these include companies, charities, trade unions, membership organisations and other interest groups.

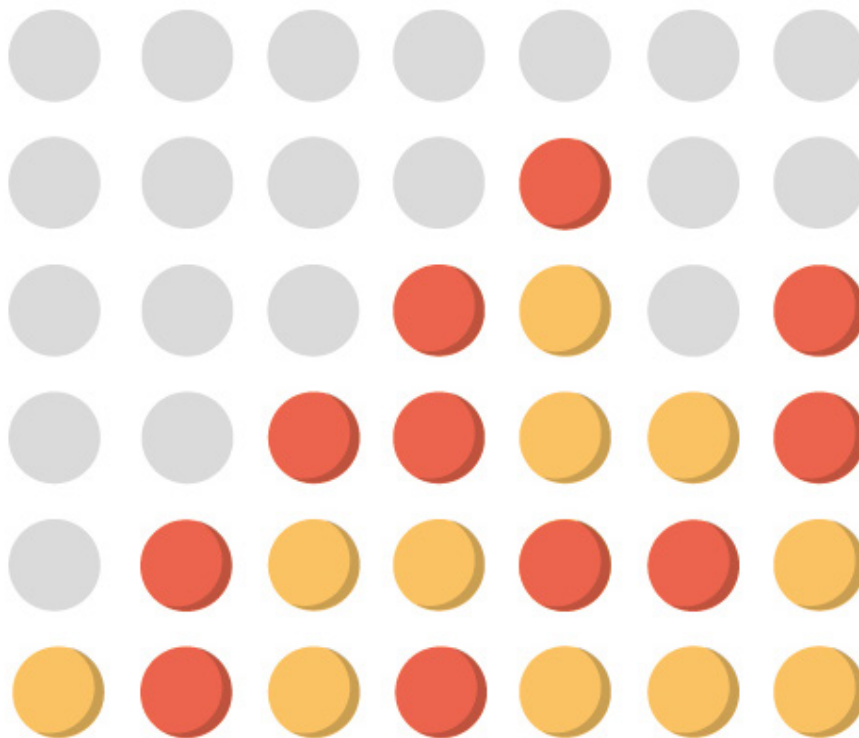
Some organisations use other terms for the function, including: "external affairs", "external relations", "corporate communications", "government affairs", "parliamentary relations", "political strategy", "campaigns" or "policy".

It makes sense to bring in expertise to support public affairs activity. The political world can be bewilderingly hard to influence and unpredictable. Those with experience of working in it can offer their insight to ensure you make an impact and achieve your objectives.

It is worth remembering that even if your organisation doesn't currently have public affairs, your competitors almost certainly will.

At The PHA Group, everyone in our Public Affairs team has recently worked in frontline politics, including at a senior level. They can offer you their wealth of experience and contacts to create a strategy that fits your political needs.

**So how could public affairs consultancy benefit you?**



## Creating Effective Communications

95% of the information most politicians receive makes no impact whatsoever. A bold claim, but one we know to be true. For example, a lot of organisations spend a lot of time preparing beautiful reports that go straight in the bin, or sending off letters that get no further than to junior correspondence officials.

That said, many politicians and civil servants genuinely welcome the expert advice that an external organisation can bring to subject areas that are often highly complex and difficult to get to grips with. Establishing this relationship can be politically beneficial, for example, advising them of any unintended consequences they may not have been aware of with a proposed policy change or bringing a dull area of regulation to life.

In order to achieve these kinds of relationships, external organisations need to be politically astute, and understand the political environment that they are seeking to connect with. Good Public Affairs advice will provide this insight and ensure that your communications are read, are persuasive and lead to actions, or the opportunity to establish relationships. This is critical when your interests are at stake.

Public Affairs will help you identify key stakeholders and come up with a strategy to engage them for maximum impact, in ways that can include meetings, direct correspondence, making submissions to Select Committees, publishing reports or hosting events.

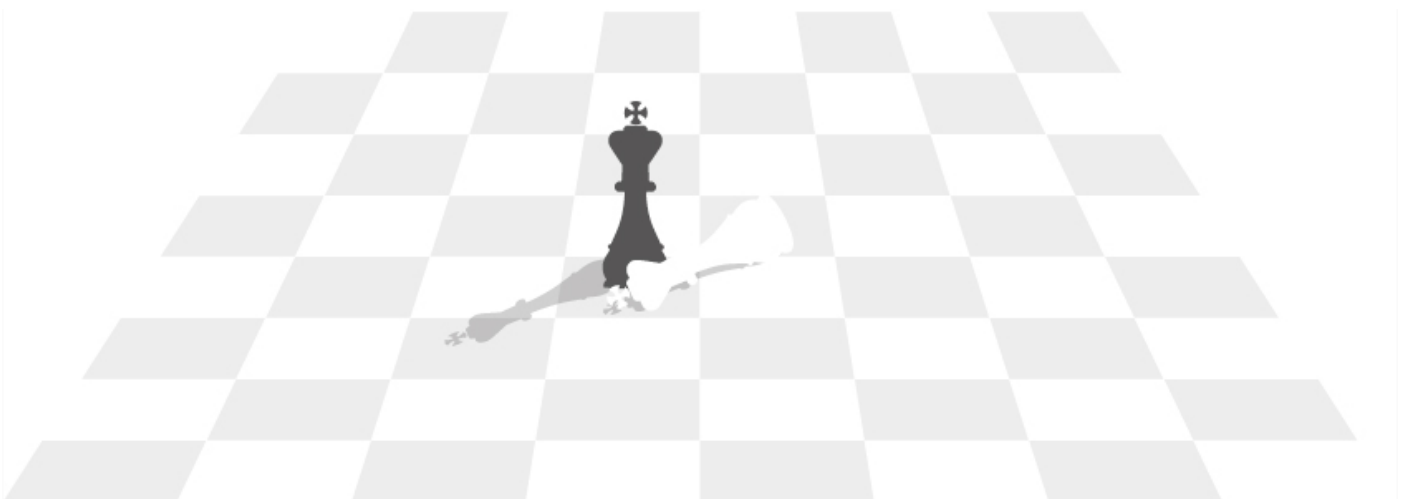
# Proactive Protection Of Your Reputation

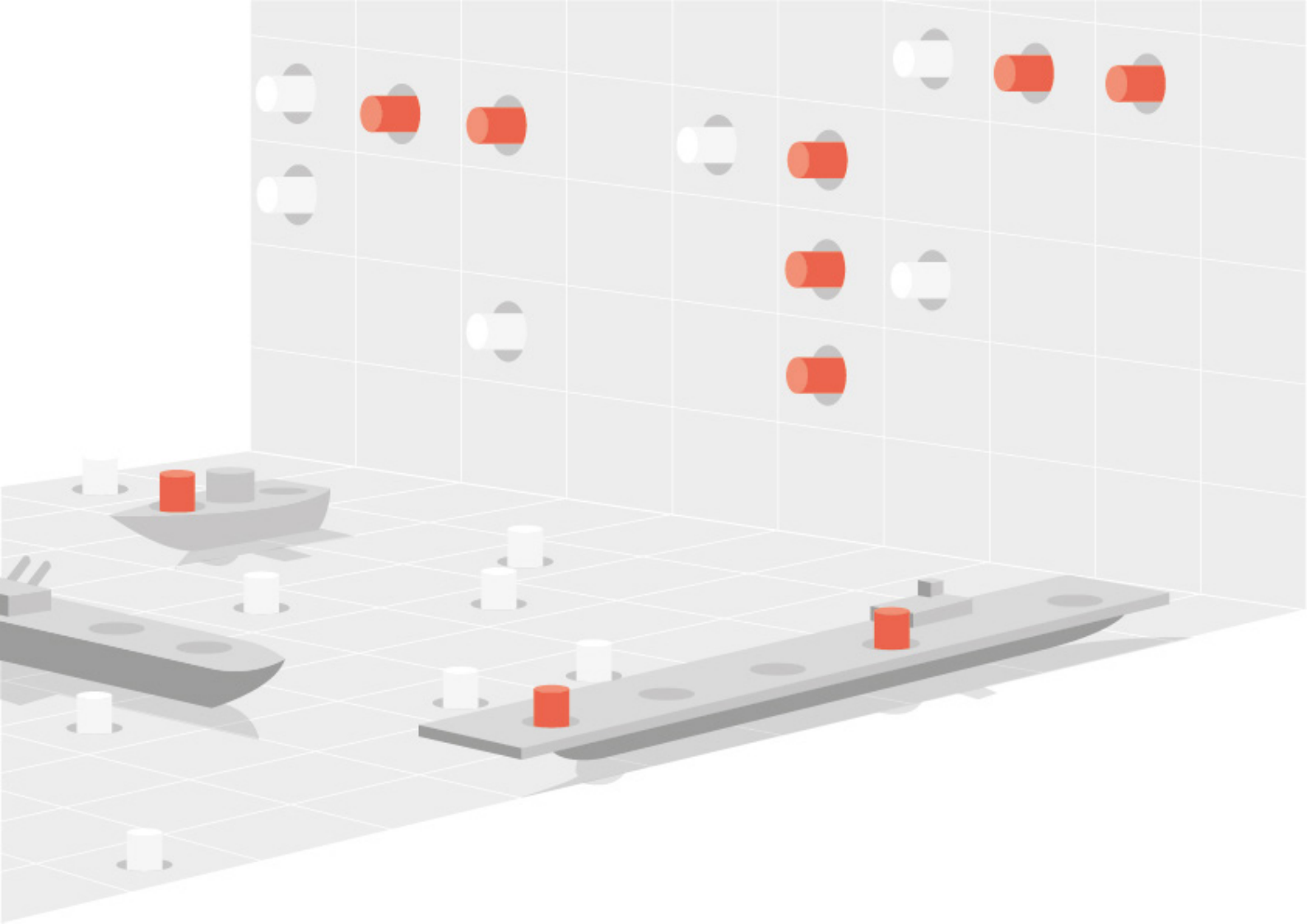
A strong public affairs strategy won't just be reactive, responding to announcements or criticism. A proactive approach should also be taken to boost your organisation's reputation within the political sphere. This will stand your organisation in better stead if you need to campaign against something, e.g. a proposed new regulation, as well as offering protection against negative comments that might be made in the future. This is particularly important as it is extremely likely that your competitors will have their own public affairs activity, and you don't want to be caught on the back foot.

Public Affairs can also protect an organisation from being 'named and shamed' in the media - something which politicians are often quick to do when reacting to a story in their constituency, and

can unfortunately end up becoming a national story. Far too often, CEOs will only look for help when it is too late and the damage has been done, when the crisis could have been averted early on if they had better public affairs engagement. For example, if you have a strong relationship with politicians covering the areas your organisation is interested in, you can keep them updated with changes in the company, and let them know if something goes wrong before they are approached for a comment by the press, potentially limiting any damage.

Public Affairs can also help you secure positive recognition for your work, whether that be by helping you achieve mentions in parliament, attracting ministerial or parliamentary visits or seeking official honours or roles.





# Framing The Political Debate

Decisions are made in a context and shaping that context is vital to securing the right outcomes.

Good Public Affairs will help you frame the political debate in your favour. This may involve building links with interested MPs and converting them to champions who will act on your behalf, whether that be through asking questions, making a speech or securing a debate.

Even when it might seem like you are on the wrong side of an argument in terms of public opinion, good public affairs can help widen and stimulate political discourse and find ways for you to make your own case on its merits.

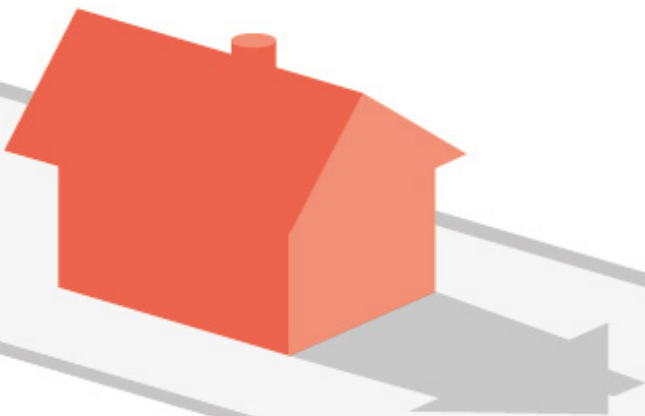
# Monitoring and Risk Management

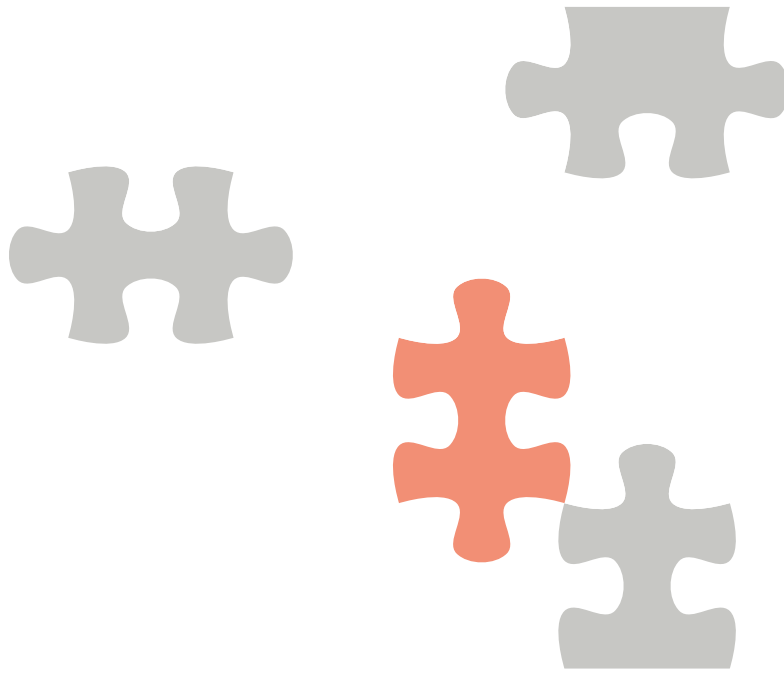
It is essential to know what is happening in the political arena, and how it could affect you.

This doesn't just apply to what is happening in Parliament but also the media, unions, trade bodies and competitors and can help your organisation to plan ahead.

As well as informing you of any potential changes to regulations and laws that might affect your interests, public affairs can also identify new business opportunities or opportunities to boost your organisation's profile.

Good public affairs practitioners will be able to use their extensive political knowledge and contacts to be able to accurately judge the mood of a party on a particular issue.





## Delivering An Integrated Approach

Traditional direct Public Affairs can still be effective, but sometimes indirect forms of influence, including the mobilisation of public opinion, interest groups or the media can be even more powerful.

In a 24/7 media world, which is increasingly fluid, the public, media and politicians are all intrinsically linked. What the media is saying will often determine public opinion and can influence a politician's response to something.

Modern Public Affairs can't therefore operate in a silo. It must embrace the media and social media and seek influence through every medium a decision maker uses for information ahead of a decision.

A strong public affairs team can work alongside relevant media outlets to promote an issue and secure favourable coverage, which gets the public onside and forces politicians to act. It is for our integrated approach that The PHA Group was recognised with two national Public Affairs awards in 2015.

# Can We Help You?

The PHA Group's award winning Public Affairs team offer:

- A genuinely tailored approach, built around your needs.
- Top level experience, direct from the political front line.
- An integrated approach, grounded in PHA's PR heritage.
- A record of success, PHA won two national Public Affairs Awards for our work last year.

If you would like to speak to The PHA Group about the Public Affairs support we can offer you please don't hesitate to get in touch:

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