

## ACF COMMUNITY TOOLKIT

A practical guide for determined citizens to take collective action against pollution and destruction and for a more beautiful world.

# How to get your local **MP** to listen to your community



**AUSTRALIAN  
CONSERVATION  
FOUNDATION**







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**This toolkit describes the nuts and bolts of implementing advocacy tactics to put pressure on your local state or federal MP and to plan effective campaigns locally.** Your goal is to develop relationships with your local MP so they represent your community's concerns and to plan your campaigns strategically so you use minimal resources for maximum impact.

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## A note from the ACF team

This guide was written by campaigners, communicators, organisers and government relations advisors. We've spent years advocating directly with elected representatives and know how to run strategic, effective campaigns. We've also worked a lot with communities and know just how powerful activated communities can be.

We are also people who are deeply concerned about the urgency for action on unchecked pollution and extinction, and we are determined to scale up action. We know that a handful of experts or one group alone will never have enough impact. We need a wave of collective action all over the country.

We created these toolkits because the inaction has gone on for too long.

Big polluting companies damaging our climate. Politicians who forget they represent the people. The reef is bleaching on our watch. We have work to do. People like us must step up, get involved and come together to demand change.

We want to hear your stories, questions, comments and feedback, so please feel free to ping us on the ACF Slack Channel if you use it. On Twitter: >> [@AusConservation](https://twitter.com/AusConservation). Or by email >> [action@mail.acf.org.au](mailto:action@mail.acf.org.au)

Please spread the word! Only people who know this guide exists will use it. And when we work together, we can create a tomorrow that's even more beautiful than today.

*So let's get on with it!*



Reef snap action, Melbourne. Photo: James Thomas.

# People made this crisis.

Together we can  
solve it 

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

— MARGARET MEAD

## The stakes are high

Right now, a pollution and extinction crisis threatens the web of life. So much is already lost. Our children won't get to see the animals now extinct, the ancient forests now clear-felled or the seasons as they used to be.

We're sick of the wilful neglect and reckless decisions that are trashing our living world and our future. The big polluters. The dismissed extinctions and mindless consumption. The environmental vandalism and subsidised

destruction. The politicians so bewitched by Big Coal lobbyists that they forget they represent the people.

We won't accept our elected representatives choosing to hand public money to companies who burn polluting fuels, instead of investing in powering our country with sunshine.

Enough is enough. People made this crisis. And together, we can solve it.



Deanne in Toolangi State Forest, Victoria. Photo: Ali Sanderson





People's Climate March. Photo: James Thomas.

## People power can change the world

Together, we have the power to unite and resist the big polluter lobby and demand our elected representatives represent us – and we have the power to win.

We know this because we've seen it before. Many of us have worked for years interacting with governments and political offices; we've learned what makes our elected representatives tick – and how we can use this knowledge to get better outcomes for our environment.

We've seen big polluter lobbyists bewitch our politicians – and we've seen grassroots groups successfully lobby to lock the gate to coal seam gas.

We know there is nothing more powerful than people coming together to say enough is enough. That's how change happens. People like you and me, we step up and get involved, we get engaged and come together to demand it.

Throughout history, people have stood together and demanded what's right. People power is what gave women the

vote. It's what stopped apartheid. It's what abolished slavery, even though the naysayers said it would ruin the economy. Now it's our turn.

We are the people who will roll up our sleeves and stand up to the power of the big polluting companies. We are the people who will compel our elected representatives to listen to the people who elected them and do the right thing.

*We are the people who together, will make change and demand what is right.*

Together, we will stop Adani's polluting coal mine. We will make coal toxic so that no MP can stand up in public and say it is good for humanity. We will make our elected representatives listen to the people who represent us. And we will demand our governments step up and lead – to rapidly shift Australia away from coal and gas – and enable everyone, everywhere, to power their lives with 100% clean, renewable energy from the sun and wind.





# Find out what makes your local Member of Parliament tick

“Every moment is an organising opportunity,  
every person a potential activist, every minute  
a chance to change the world.”

**- DOLORES HUERTA**

**Before you start planning your local campaign, it's important to do your research and map out where your elected representatives sit on the issues you care about.** If your elected representative loves apples and you start trying to influence them with oranges, it's unlikely you'll influence them at all. Once you know the lay of the land, you can plan tactics that are strategic and effective and use your resources wisely.

## **GATHER INTEL!**

**Before anything else, begin with the following six steps to find the information you'll need for all future advocacy activities.**

### **1. Get your MP's contact details**

Find your MP, their official website, and their office contact info >> [www.acf.org.au/find-your-representative](http://www.acf.org.au/find-your-representative).

### **2. Get a sense of your MP**

Read their website, Facebook page, biography, first speech in parliament and recent media statements. Friend them on Facebook and follow them on Twitter, visit their office and grab the campaign pamphlets there have in reception to see what's important to them and the electorate.

Research what they and their party have said on the issues you care about. *They vote for you* has excellent information about how your representatives in Parliament vote on issues you care about >> [www.theyvoteforyou.org.au](http://www.theyvoteforyou.org.au).

*Open Australia* is a website that enables you to keep track of what your representatives have said and done in Parliament, as well as recent debates and questions >> [www.openaustralia.org.au](http://www.openaustralia.org.au)

### **3. Sign up to your MP's mailing lists**

Sign up to your MP's website to receive regular email updates, invites to local

events, and information on their positions on local issues to understand what they're saying. Every MP has an e-newsletter.

### **4. Find out where your MP stands**

What does your MP think about climate change, coal, clean energy and our environment? Remember your MP might have to vote the party line and the policy positions on their website will have to align with federal party policy. However you can also learn a lot about what your MP really thinks from their comments in the media, which news releases they put on their website and historical commentary on issues from before they became the subject of party politics.

### **5. Set up a Google News Alert**

Sign up to receive an email whenever your MP is in the news at [www.google.com/alerts](http://www.google.com/alerts). Use keywords like "Bob Smith MP".

### **6. Get researching!**

Do some research on Google News >> [google.com/news](http://google.com/news) to find out what local reporters have written about your MP. Find and follow those reporters on Twitter and try to build relationships. Before you attend or plan an event, reach out and explain what your group is doing and give them background materials and a quote. Journalists on deadline – even those who might not agree with you – appreciate it when you provide easy material for a story.



## IT'S ALL ABOUT RE-ELECTION, RE-ELECTION, RE-ELECTION

To influence your local Member of Parliament (MP), remember one thing: election cycles in Australia are short. Most of the time, most MPs are either running for election or preparing to run for the next election.

This doesn't mean your MP is cynical and unprincipled. The majority of people in our Parliament believe in their ideals and care deeply about representing their constituents and having a positive impact. But they also know that if they want to make change, they need to stay in office.

This constant re-election pressure means MPs are enormously sensitive to their image in the electorate, and they will work very hard to avoid signs of public dissent or disapproval. What every MP wants – regardless of which party they're in – is for his or her constituents to agree that:

*“My MP cares about me, shares my values, and is working hard for me.” – What every MP wants their constituents to think*

## WHAT DOES AN MP'S OFFICE DO, AND WHY?

A MP's office is composed of roughly 3-5 staff, based in one or sometimes two offices in different parts of the electorate. Each federal MP also has an office in Canberra, but unless they are a Minister, this office is usually empty except during Parliamentary sitting weeks.

MP electorate offices perform the following functions:

- **Provide constituent services.** Staff connect with both individual constituents and local organisations, serving as a link to and an advocate within the federal government on issues such as visas, grant applications, and public benefits.
- **Communicate with constituents directly.** Staff take calls, track constituent messages, and write letters to stay in touch with constituents' priorities, follow up on specific policy issues that constituents have expressed concern about, and reinforce the message that they are listening.
- **Meet with constituents.** MPs and staff meet with constituents to learn about local priorities and build connections.
- **Seek and create positive press.** Staff try to shape press coverage and public information to create a favorable image for the MP.
- **Host and attend events in the electorate.** MPs host and attend events in the district to connect with constituents, understand their priorities, and get good local press. This takes up an enormous amount of their time.

## WHO MAKES POLITICAL DECISIONS AND HOW?

One important thing that's not on this list is making legislation. If your MP belongs to a political party, then he or she isn't able to decide how to vote on legislation. Party discipline is tight in Australia, and 'backbench' MPs almost never 'cross the floor' to vote in opposition to their party.

When a bill is listed for a vote in Parliament, the leadership of each party decide how that party will vote on the bill. They do consult their party room, but ultimately the leadership will make the call based on existing party policy, negotiations with the other side, their sense of how the politics of the issue will play out with the voting public, pressure from industry or lobby groups, and media coverage.

Once the decision is made on a party policy position, all MPs from the party are required to follow the "party line". The same applies for all official party policy and election platforms.

*However, this doesn't mean you shouldn't hold your MP accountable for the policy of their party.*

Otherwise, we'd be faced with an eternal cycle of buck-passing: backbenchers telling constituents that policy decisions

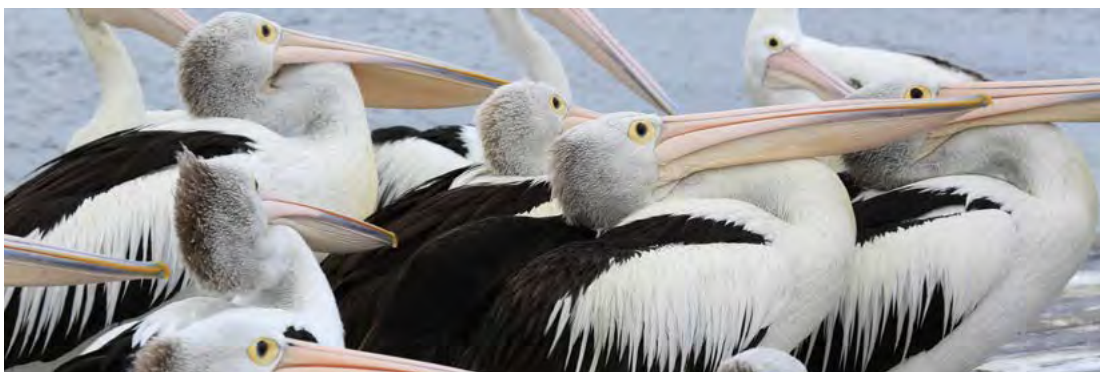
are made by the relevant Minister or by Cabinet. But those people aren't the representatives of the concerned citizens in question, and so they don't need to care very much what those citizens think.

Holding each MP to account for the policies of their party is the only way to make change at the top. It's important to let your MP know you understand their political constraints, but aren't going to let them off the hook.

However, there are still lots of things your MP can do, and these are all things you can focus on:

### **Make your MP defend their party's policy in public**

MPs generally find it frustrating to defend an unpopular policy to their own constituents – although they didn't make the decision, they have to defend it to their angry voters. If your MP frequently has to defend an unpopular policy, you can be sure they will relay that dissatisfaction to decision makers in the party. Electoral mathematics also comes into play: what happens in individual seats matters to party bosses as they have to win those seats for their party to win an election.







### **Ask your MP to make public statements that disagree with their party's policy on an issue**

MPs do this a lot, and it is much harder for a party or government to stick to a policy if backbench MPs are undermining it in public. MPs can threaten to cross the floor on a particular issue – a couple of Coalition MPs have used this tactic to raise the profile of key issues lately.

### **Ask your MP to raise issues in their party room**

Ask your MP to raise community concerns for discussion with their colleagues, and lobby internally for a change of position. They can also relay your concerns to the relevant Minister or Shadow Minister, and bring you back an answer.

### **Ask your MP to express concerns in Parliament**

MPs can even express their concerns about a policy position while they are speaking in Parliament. They can read out your letters or table your petitions in Parliament.

### **Put the onus onto your MP**

Ultimately, put the onus on your MP to show you that they've done everything in their power to oppose their party's bad policies and advocate for better ones.

*While you might not have the ear of the party leadership, holding your MP to account for the decisions of the party is powerful.*

To form government in Australia, a party needs to hold a majority of the 150 seats in the House of Representatives. Your MP wants to keep his or her seat so they can keep their job, and the leadership of his or her party need him or her to keep that seat in order to win the next election.

## WHICH ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE SHOULD YOU TARGET?

You elect people to represent you in three levels of government – federal, state and local government. Each arm has different roles and responsibilities so make sure you're talking to the person who can make a difference at the right level of government.

### Why target the federal government

Federal Members of Parliament are responsible for broad national issues like defence and the economy. Especially as Australia has signed a number of international treaties, the federal government (or Commonwealth) is often responsible for making laws to protect our environment. It also leads the way (or is supposed to) on major issues like climate change and transitioning Australia to clean energy.

Every Australian is represented by one Member of Parliament who sits in the House of Representatives (Lower House). You're also represented by 12 Senators if you live in a state, and two if you live in a territory.

**Members of Parliament** represent people in their electorate (you!). They debate proposed laws and issues of public concern in the House of Representatives (the lower house), make new laws and change existing ones. Members can also present petitions from constituents (like you!) and raise citizens' concerns and grievances. Elections are won and lost in the lower house, because that's where parties need a majority to form

government.

**Senators** in the Australian Senate (also known as the Upper House) represent each state and territory and share the power to make laws with the House of Representatives. It reviews and sometimes blocks laws and keeps the government in check.

These dynamics mean that pressure on the MP who represents you in the Lower House is easier, and generally more powerful, and this is usually the best place to focus your advocacy work. However, targeting your state Senators is also an option – just follow the general advice in this toolkit and apply it to your Senator.

### Who is my local MP?

#### Which electorate do you live in?

You can find out which federal electorate you're in and the local Member of Parliament that represents you at [www.electorate.aec.gov.au](http://www.electorate.aec.gov.au)

#### How to contact Members of Federal Parliament:

- House of Representatives  
>> [www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members/Members](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members)
- You can find and write to your MP on our simple webpage  
>> [www.acf.org.au/mp](http://www.acf.org.au/mp)
- Senators  
>> [www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members/Senators](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Senators)







### Why target your state representatives

State governments are responsible for everything the federal government isn't – such as running schools, police, public transport and hospitals. They are responsible for the day to day administration of decisions and administration of land and water management, as well as delivering clean energy projects, closing coal-fired power stations, conservation, pollution, state climate laws and targets, and much more.

There's quite a big overlap between state and federal powers. For example, the

federal government might fund a project a state government delivers, or a large project might need state and federal approval under different laws (like Adani's Carmichael coal mine). It may be a good idea to meet both federal and state representatives.

Like federal parliament, all states but Queensland have both upper and lower houses.

- Find your electorate and state representative contact details at >> [www.acf.org.au/find-your-representative](http://www.acf.org.au/find-your-representative)

### HELP, MY MP IS ACTUALLY PRETTY GOOD!

DON'T switch to targeting other MPs who don't represent you. They don't represent you so they don't really care what you have to say. Stick with your own local MP.

DO use this guide to engage with your MP locally. Instead of pressuring them to do the right thing, praise them for doing the right thing. This is important because

it will help ensure they continue to do the right thing. MP staff rarely receive feedback when the MP does something good – your efforts locally will provide highly valuable positive reinforcement. Ask them to champion your concerns – raise them in the party room and in Parliament, speak out in the media and at events and community forums.

### HELP, MY MP IS IN A 'SAFE' ELECTORATE!

If your actions mean citizen's voices are strong and questions are asked, you will unnerve your MP and change their decision-making process. Even if your MP is in an electorate that always votes Labor or Liberal, don't just assume they have a safe seat and there's nothing you can do to influence them. The reality is that no MP ever feels 'safe'.

More broadly, no one stays an MP without compulsively protecting their image. Even the safest MP will be deeply alarmed by signs of organised

opposition, because these actions create the impression that they are not connected to their electorate or listening to their constituents.

In recent years, voting patterns in Australia have changed. For example, Mayo in South Australia was called a 'safe' Liberal seat right up until Rebekha Sharkie won it for the Nick Xenophon Team at the last election. That same election, the 'safe' seats of Batman, Gray, Melbourne Ports, Higgins, and others, suddenly seemed likely to change hands.



## WHAT YOUR MP CARES ABOUT

When it comes to constituent interactions, MPs care about things that make them look good, responsive and hard-working to the people of their electorate. **In practice, that means that they care about some things very much, and other things very little:**

MPS CARE A LOT ABOUT	MPS DON'T CARE MUCH ABOUT
Verified constituents from the electorate (or state for Senators)	People from outside the electorate (or state for Senators)
Advocacy that requires effort – the more effort, the more they care: calls, personal emails and especially showing up in person in the electorate	Form letters, a tweet or a Facebook comment (unless they generate widespread attention)
Local press and editorials always matter, national press can also be important	Press in other electorates, social media (unless it generates widespread attention)
An interest group's endorsement	Your thoughtful analysis of a proposed bill
Groups of constituents, locally famous individuals or big individual campaign contributors	A single constituent
Concrete asks that entail a verifiable action – vote for a bill, make a public statement, etc.	General ideas about the world
A single ask in your communication – via letter, email, phone call, office visit etc.	A laundry list of all the issues you're concerned about

## WHAT YOUR MP IS THINKING: GOOD OUTCOME VS. BAD OUTCOME

Here are some examples of different ways MPs can react to advocacy – actions they might take, what they’re hoping to see happen as a result, and what they really don’t want to see happen:

EXAMPLE ACTION	GOOD OUTCOME	BAD OUTCOME
<b>Letter to a constituent</b>	Constituent feels happy their concerns were answered	Constituent posts letter on social media saying it didn’t answer their questions or neglected their questions for weeks/months, spreads the word that MP X is unresponsive and untrustworthy
<b>An event in the electorate</b>	A local newspaper reports that MP X appeared at the unveiling of solar panels on the local kinder, for which she helped secure funding	Local newspaper reports that protesters barraged MP X with questions about supporting funding for dirty coal while getting photos taken in front of solar panels
<b>Town hall / listening session</b>	Local newspaper reports that MP X hosted a community meeting and discussed her work to balance the budget	Local newspaper reports that angry constituents strongly objected to MP X’ support for privatising Medicare
<b>Policy position</b>	MP X votes on a bill to wind back clean energy legislation and releases a press statement hailing it as a step forward	MP X’s phones are deluged with calls objecting to the bill. A group of constituents stage an event outside her local office and invite press to hear them talk about how the bill will personally put their families and community at risk from extreme weather



# Opportunity 1

## Go to your MP's **listening events**

“There go the people. I must follow them, for I am their leader.”

— **ALEXANDRE LEDRU-ROLLIN**

## OPPORTUNITY 1:

# Go to your MP's listening events

Does your MP have a coffee morning to catch up with constituents? Do they stand out the front of a local supermarket on Saturday mornings? Most MPs will regularly host some kind of community listening forum. These events can take different formats, from a coffee morning to a street stall, a more formal 'town hall meeting' or an 'open office' held at a particular time and date.

*These events are great because they are designed to let your MP hear from you and your community, so take advantage of them.*

You will be able to find out what type of event your MP hosts from their website. If you can't find one, call their electorate office and ask.

## BE PREPARED

Things to think about when preparing to attend a listening event:

### Be respectful

As much as you might disagree with the position your MP takes on a given issue, they deserve your respect and civility. This is not only the right way to approach any interaction, it also makes it more likely that you will be heard: if you are angry, loud or abusive, your comments will be written off more easily as the views of a nutter. It's okay to be assertive, but it's not okay to be aggressive or disrespectful.





### Go in a group

If possible for more than one person to attend, bring several members of your group. This gives you the opportunity to ask more than one question – you can prepare and assign them to group members beforehand – and makes it clear that the issues raised are important to more than just one constituent. If the event is large, arrange for members of the group to sit separately. If the event is a 'drop in' style event, arrange to come at different times and reinforce similar themes and issues. If you can't get childcare, take the kids! This can help MPs see you more as community members than campaigners and it can break down barriers.

### Follow up

If you weren't satisfied with the answer you received, follow up. Write to your MP asking for clarification or for a follow up meeting. Tweet at them or post on their Facebook page. Contact the local paper. Again, be respectful, but it's fine to be persistent and let your MP know you will hold them accountable for the positions they take, and that you won't accept a brush off.

### Record any promises

If the MP does make any commitments to you during the event, make sure you record them and follow up. For example, if your MP says they will take a question on notice, make sure you follow up with their office to get the answer. If your MP says they will raise an issue with the relevant Minister, you could call their office a week later, refer to their commitment and ask for the Minister's response. This will amplify the impact of your first interaction enormously and let your MP know they need to take you seriously.



Photo: James Thomas / ACF.

## NO LISTENING EVENTS?

# Escalation tactics

## QUESTION YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE AT PUBLIC EVENTS

MPs attend public events in the electorate constantly — they love kissing babies and cutting ribbons.

These are opportunities to get face time with your MP and make sure they're hearing about your concerns, while simultaneously changing the story that ends up in the media.

These events are generally not intended as opportunities for constituents to give their opinions, so you will need to approach them differently. Here are some suggestions for ways to get your message across:

Create a team to shadow your MP

### Be visible

Your group could attend an event holding signs, wearing matching t-shirts, or props. This kind of visible presence can get your message across to your MP without you even talking to them — especially if they already know your group. This tactic is also great for attracting media and community attention, who love nothing better than a involving a local MP. Again, a respectful tone will make a stronger impact and make you harder to dismiss as fringe-dwelling nutters.

### Be creative

It's harder for an MP to refuse to engage with a protester who is dressed as a Nemo Fish and the media is more likely to pay attention to your question and the MP's response.

### Identify and try to speak with media on the scene

Be polite, friendly, and stick to your message. For example, "We're here to remind MP Sara that her constituents want a strong Renewable Energy target to help drive the transition from coal to renewables." You may want to research in advance which local reporters cover federal politics or relevant beats so you know who to look for.

## ORGANISE YOUR OWN EVENT AND INVITE YOUR MP

If your MP does not run any 'listening events', consider organising your own event.

For tips on how to do this, see opportunity 4, below.



# Opportunity 2

Visit your MP for  
a meeting 

"Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one  
wild and precious life?"

— MARY OLIVER

## OPPORTUNITY 2:

# Visit your MP

Politicians receive a lot of emails and letters. But when a local voter takes the time to personally call or visit face-to-face, they're much more likely to listen. It's a critical part of democracy that the people we elect to represent us do just that. MPs need to hear from ordinary Australians, not just industry lobbyists. They represent you and should want to hear your views – not just take your vote.

Think about bringing a delegation from your community to the meeting. It's often helpful to bring a diverse group of people (2- 3) who represent a cross section of your community, from local business owners, to faith groups, sporting clubs and environmental organisations. You don't need to be an expert, the fact that you care about the issue is enough.

## REQUEST A MEETING

To request a meeting, you can email, phone or write a letter – or try all three. If you email or write a letter, you will need to follow up with a phone call. MPs are busy and need to respond to urgent issues and their diaries change a lot. Don't be put off if your meeting gets cancelled, shortened or rescheduled at late notice – be polite but persistent!



## SAMPLE LETTER

Here's an example to help you write your letter, email or plan your phone call:

Dear *Minister/Senator/Prime Minister*,

I am a local resident in your electorate and I am deeply concerned about *<insert your issue – eg climate change/clean energy/our reef>* because *<insert your personal reason here>*.

I would like to meet with you, preferably some time the week of *<insert date>* to hear your views on the issue and to ensure that you, as my *<federal/state>* representative, are doing everything you can to help make Australia a true leader on *<eg cutting pollution/protecting our reef/clean energy>*.

I'm *<describe yourself mention of any community roles (e.g. sports clubs, associations) or experiences that show you're in touch with the local community>*.

**[for a Government MP]** I believe that your Government wants to do the right thing and build a national response to *<climate change/coral bleaching/clean energy>* that is wide ranging and effective, but I'm concerned that at present they're not representative of what the broader community wants to see.

**[for an Opposition MP]** I believe the Opposition is now in a perfect position to move forward with a much more positive stance on *<cutting pollution and supporting clean energy>*. I want to assure you that your local community will support you if you show real leadership on *<climate change/our reef/clean energy>*.

I would like to hear your views on *<eg stop funding polluting coal and speed up clean energy>*, both short and long term, and hear your views on the road map you have in place.

I'm also interested to hear your views on the local aspects of climate change. *<Insert a particular issue of concern in my community is personal issue that you want to raise with your MP>*.

Can your office please contact me to arrange a suitable time for a meeting?

Yours faithfully,

*Name*

*Address | Email | Phone Number*



## MAKE AN AGENDA

Write down the name and position of the politician or staff member you will meet – and note how to address Senators, Ministers and Members in different contexts >> [www.aph.gov.au/Senators\\_and\\_Members/Guidelines\\_for\\_Contacting\\_Senators\\_and\\_Members/](http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Guidelines_for_Contacting_Senators_and_Members/)

We find it works well to structure your meeting in four parts:

### 1. Welcome and introductions

Introduce yourself/ yourselves by telling your story – both your personal story and the groups you represent. Try to link your story with:

- The story of your community and the challenges it faces, so your meeting expresses your motivation and what you expect of your MP. If you have a delegation, ask them to introduce themselves and the groups they represent;
- A topic of interest to your local MP that you discovered whilst gathering intel before the meeting. This could be anything which helps connect your issue with something your MP is passionate about. This will also show that you've done your homework.

### 2. Make your case

**The challenge:** Describe the problem we face and why it matters.

**The solution:** Build your personal and community case – 'What our community supports'.

**The Ask:** What you want your MP to do about this. You don't need a detailed set of policy solutions but it's important to be specific about what you want

your MP to do about the issue on your community's behalf. Do you want your MP to raise your issue in Parliament? Advocate on your behalf about your issue? Make a different decision or talk to their party about your concerns?

### 3. Discussion

Note down any useful points from your background research – such as your MP's particular interests, areas of potential agreement or blockages. Prepare some questions to ask your MP, such as, do they know much about the issue? Are there any parts of the issue they don't understand? Do they see any blockages to addressing the issue? What are their views on the solutions or action you propose?

### 4. Wrap up

Sum up what both parties have agreed to do and any follow-up. Before the meeting ends, confirm their response – whether it's a yes, no, maybe or no comment. If relevant, ask who you can contact as a follow-up (including their state or federal counterpart for your electorate) and confirm their contact details with reception. Thank your MP for their time and for listening to their constituents.

## PRACTICE AND BE PREPARED

### Prepare materials

Prepare any materials you want to show, like maps, a petition, summary of research, an outline of your ask. It might be useful to identify material you can send by email or drop off later as an excuse to follow them up.

But remember how busy your MP is – don't hand over long documents they

simply don't have time to read. Anything you give them must be succinct.

### Practice makes perfect

The best way to overcome nerves and have a successful meeting is to practice beforehand. Write down the key things you want to say – this will help sharpen your message.

## RUN A GREAT MEETING

Your elected representative may also be accompanied by a staff member or adviser. If you're invited to meet with an adviser rather than the MP, don't underestimate their importance or influence; treat those meetings as if they were with the MP.

### Be flexible and understanding

Normally, you will have a 15 to 30 minute time slot for your meeting. Keep in mind that your MP may be late, have to cut the meeting short, arrive halfway through or need to cancel unexpectedly, sometimes through no fault of their own. Therefore it's important to make your point early in the meeting. Briefly and clearly state up front why you wanted to meet, what your position is and what you want them to do, and repeat these points again at the end..

### Always be polite, professional and courteous

Arrive on time. Give yourself time to sign in at reception and gather your thoughts. Use your MP's correct title

(Senator, Minister or Mr/Mrs) and surname (for example, Mr/Mrs Smith or Senator Smith) unless you're invited to use his or her first name. Acknowledge any support they have given to your issue in the past. No matter how outrageous the decision a government has taken or their attitude towards the people who are campaigning against them, you are never going to influence someone by being abusive or impolite. Being professional, courteous and determined will go further than name-calling or attacks. Never be rude.

### Take notes

Take good notes during your meeting, including replies your MP gives to your questions, or allocate this task to someone who is coming with you who is happy to say less in the meeting. You can draw on these later to write letters to the editor, call talkback radio etc. Sometimes it's easier to get local media interest if your MP is engaged in the issue and is backing it.

### **Speak in your own words**

You want your MP to know they're dealing with a real person – facts and figures don't win hearts and minds but personal stories do. Local MPs are interested in what's going on in their local community, so let them know what you/your group are doing on this issue. The most important thing you can do is convey that you and your community are deeply concerned about your issue, that you/your group will be active in the community and want your MP to listen and act. A powerful personal story can really pack a punch.

### **Don't assume knowledge**

Don't assume the MP knows anything about your issue. You will probably find you know more about a particular issue than he/she does – MPs have a wide range of issues to investigate as part of their job and can't be experts in all of them. Speak at a basic level and avoid using lingo, acronyms and abbreviations. But also be quick to jump ahead if the MP is familiar with the issue.

### **Don't feign knowledge**

If you don't know the answer, just say so. You don't need to be an expert. It's enough to say who you are and why you care about an issue. Be as responsive as you can be but don't make things up. Say you will get back to them with an answer - it's a good way to keep the dialogue with your MP going.

### **Keep the conversation on track**

If your MP seems to be going off-topic, gently try to bring them back to it. Be respectful but firm. Don't be intimidated or afraid to bring up tough issues. Question your MP on their past votes or positions they've taken or ask for a definitive answer.

### **Sometimes it's better to ask questions**

Don't assume you understand your MP's motivations, drivers or the sources of information they use to make their decisions. In these situations it's better to ask rather than tell. Some questions that can be useful in moving conversations along are:

- Who and how many have come to see you personally on the issue of climate change/clean energy/our reef etc?
- What case did they put forward?
- What references are you using to form that view?
- Why did you take that position in parliament?

### **Show appreciation**

At the end of the meeting, thank the MP for their time, even if they don't agree with your position. Remember – you're aiming to build a relationship with them.



## SOCIALISE WHAT YOU'RE DOING

Communicate on social media and with the local reporters you follow what is happening. Take and send pictures and videos with your group: *"At MP XYZ's office with 10 other constituents to talk to her about clean energy. Let's hope she listens to the people who elect her."*

You can also engage local media following your meeting with a letter to a newspaper editor >> [www.acf.org.au/letter-to-editor](http://www.acf.org.au/letter-to-editor).

## FOLLOW UP AFTER THE MEETING

Make sure you send a follow-up email or letter in the week after your meeting, thanking the MP for their time. Provide any material or answers you said you would address as a priority and remind them of any commitment they made in the meeting.



Photo: Thomas Kinsman / ACF.

## CAN'T GET A MEETING?

# Escalation tactics

### MEET WITH YOUR ELECTED REPRESENTATIVE'S STAFF

The staff in an electoral office are the MP or Senator's eyes and ears. Whether it's the electoral officer or an adviser, it's valuable to have a conversation with them to relay back to the MP for their response. Treat them with the same respect and courtesy you would treat the MP or Senator. It's good to maintain an ongoing relationship with them as they'll be more accessible.

### MAKE A PUBLIC DEMONSTRATION OF YOUR COMMUNITY'S SUPPORT

It's worth getting together with a few people in your area to express your community's support. You could deliver a collection of signatures from individuals, groups and organisations to your MP or Senator's office, linking to a media event outside the electoral office – or a symbolic event that involves a number of people in your area. Feel free to get creative and know that something visual involving a large group of people will most likely attract media coverage, which you can send on to your MP.

### PHONE YOUR MP'S OFFICE

If you're not able to get a meeting of any sort or arrange a media activity, ask to speak to someone in the MP's office

(an adviser or staffer) to convey your message. You'll have to make your points much more succinct than they are in the Meeting Briefer, but the point should be the same.

A phone call doesn't carry the same weight as a personal meeting, so it's worth encouraging your friends, colleagues and family to call in. When it comes to phone calls, there's strength in numbers and the more the better – for more info, see opportunity 3 below.

### VISIT YOUR MP'S OFFICE WITHOUT AN APPOINTMENT

Another option is to drop by your MP's office without an appointment and ask to speak to your MP or a staffer. Think strategically about this. Do you already have a reasonable relationship with your MP or do want to try to develop one? If you drop by and demand a meeting, you might end up blacklisted as a troublemaker, damaging your future relationship.

If this is a concern, making a public demonstration of your community's support outside of your MP's office might be a better way to go – unless your MP already knows who you are, this tactic will have a similar impact without tarnishing your name.



Photo: James Thomas / ACF.

If you're still keen to drop by and ask for a meeting, here are some tips:

### Try to visit when your MP is there

Most MP electorate offices are open only during regular business hours, from 9am-5pm. Electorate offices will be staffed all throughout the year, but your MP will be away from the office a lot of the time including in parliament.

Figuring out when your MP will be in their electorate office can actually be tricky if they don't want to meet with you, but you can always just call up the office, explain that you'd like to submit a meeting request, and ask which weeks the MP is likely to be in the electorate so you can request a meeting for an appropriate time. Office staff may well be willing to share this information. If your meeting request is not accepted, you have the option of just showing up.

### Be prepared

Before you go, prepare several questions.

Politely, but firmly, ask to meet with the

MP directly. Staff might "offer to take down your concerns" or ask you to leave. If you are not attempting to develop a positive relationship, don't settle for that. You want to speak with the MP directly. If they are not in, ask when they will next be in. If the staffer doesn't know, tell them you will wait until they return. Sit politely in the reception waiting area. Note: the MP may or may not actually come to the office, especially on weekends.

Office sit-ins can backfire, so think carefully about the optics of your visit. This tactic works best when you are protesting an issue that directly affects you and/or members of your group. It is critical you are polite and respectful throughout.

### Spread the word on what you're doing

Communicate on social media and with the local media you follow what is happening. Take and send pictures and videos with your group: *"At MP Sara's office with 10 other constituents to talk to her about clean energy. She refuses to meet with us and staff won't tell us when she will come out. We're waiting."*



# Opportunity 3

Make mass  
coordinated

**phone calls** 

"Dripping water hollows out stone, not through force but through persistence."

– OVID

### OPPORTUNITY 3

## Make mass coordinated phone calls

Mass office calling can be a powerful tactic if deployed at the right moment.

### GET PREPARED

#### Get your MP's number

To find your MP's number, visit [www.acf.org.au/find-your-representative](http://www.acf.org.au/find-your-representative)

#### Prepare a single question per call

For in-person events, prepare a list of questions, but for calls, keep it simple. You and your group should all agree to call in on one specific issue that day. The question should be about a live issue – e.g. a vote that is coming up, a chance to take a stand, or some other time-sensitive opportunity. The next day or week, pick another issue, and call again on that.

#### Organise people to call in

You can ask people in your group to call in individually whenever it suits them, or arrange a single day where everyone agrees to make the call. People are much more likely to do something when

they've made a commitment to another person to take an action at a particular time, so coordinating your efforts not only strengthens their impact but the likelihood of a shared commitment.

### START CALLING

#### Find out who you're talking to

In general, the staffer who answers the phone will be a junior staffer in the office. If possible, it's best to speak to the legislative or policy adviser in the office – that's the person who knows the most about the issues, and works directly with the MP.

Most offices carefully monitor all the calls they get, so even if you only get to share your comments with the receptionist, you're still making an impact. Your concerns are most likely to find their way to the MP.



ACF members.  
Photo: Ali  
Sanderson / ACF

## SAMPLE PHONE CONVERSATION

*Staffer: MP Sara's office, how can I help you?*

Caller: Hi there, I'm a constituent from Electorate X. I want to share my concerns about MP Sara and what her party is doing to tackle climate change. Can I please speak to the relevant policy adviser?

*Staffer: I'm happy to take down any comments you may have. Can I ask for your name and address to verify you're in MP Sara's electorate?*

Caller: Sure thing. [Give name/ address]. Can I ask who I'm speaking with?

*Staffer: Yes, this is Jeremy Smith.*

Caller: Thanks, Jeremy! I'm calling to ask what MP Sara and her party is doing to tackle climate change. Can you tell me what MP Sara is going to do about it?

*Staffer: Well I really appreciate you calling and sharing your thoughts! I of course can't speak for MP Sara because I'm just a Staff Assistant, but I'll pass your concerns on to her.*

Caller: I appreciate that Jeremy, but I don't want you to just pass my concerns on. I would like to know what MP Sara is doing to stop this. [If they stick with the "I'm just a staffer" line, ask them when a more senior staffer will get back to you with an answer to your question.]

*Staffer: I'm afraid we don't take positions on party policies.*

Caller: Why not?

*Staffer: Party positions are the Minister and Prime Minister's responsibility. We have no control over them.*

Caller: But MP Sara has the ability to speak out and say that this is unacceptable. Other MPs have done so. Why isn't MP Sara doing that?

*Staffer: As I said, I can't speak for MP Sara.*

Caller: It is everyone's business if our government backs a massively polluting mine that will kill our reef and destroy our children's climate. MP Sara is my elected representative, and I expect her to speak out on this.

*Staffer: I'll pass that on.*

Caller: Thank you for passing on my concerns. I find it unacceptable that MP Sara refuses to take a position on this issue. I'll be notifying my friends, family, and local newspaper that our MP doesn't think it's her job to represent us or actually respond to her constituents' concerns.



### Keep a record of the conversation

Take detailed notes on everything the staffer tells you. Direct quotes are great, and anything they tell you is public information that can be shared widely. Compare notes with the rest of your group, and identify any conflicts in what they're telling constituents.

### FOLLOW UP

Follow up with an email. All staff members in the respective state and federal parliaments parliament have the same email format. So if you know who you are trying to reach, you can easily reach them by email.

Political offices get massive amounts of email and they are very resentful of mass email tactics which activist groups use, which can actually cause their email systems to crash. Be persistent and passionate, but also put yourself in the shoes of the busy person you are trying to reach, and make sure that your communication will engage, rather than alienate.

### REPORT BACK

Report back to your group and tell your media contacts what the staffer said when you called.

#### Tell us how it went!

Let's track our collective impact. Reporting your activity helps us understand the difference we are making. Include your attempts as well as your successes. All of these actions contribute to a public narrative that people care about rivers, forests, oceans and wildlife.

It's easy to track online petition signatures or social media reach, but often the most impactful actions taken by our community can be the hardest for ACF to track – like meetings with decision makers or published articles. We rely on you to report back!

Report your advocacy action on our simple form. You can use it every time you have an engagement with your MP – letters, phone calls, meetings and more: [www.acf.org.au/reportback](http://www.acf.org.au/reportback)



Photo: James Thomas/ACF.

# Opportunity 4

## Run your own **community forum**

"Dripping water hollows out stone, not through force but through persistence."

– OVID

## OPPORTUNITY 4

# Run your own community forum

A candidate forum is an event where you invite candidates from all political parties in an election period to meet with your local community. People can ask questions and candidates have the opportunity to explain their positions on pollution, climate change and protecting nature.

Be creative with the format of your forum or meeting. For example, you could ask your MP and election candidates to sit at tables with their constituents, to listen carefully and then report back the table's views to the whole room.

*You should always treat candidates from all parties with respect – your tone can help create the sort of democracy you want to be part of.*

Organising a community forum can be a great way of getting your MP's attention, but it can also be a lot of work. You'll need to think about a venue, how you'll get community members to show up to the event, and how you'll get the MP to accept your invitation.





# Develop a strategic plan for your **local** **campaign**

"Keep on going, and the chances are that you will stumble on something, perhaps when you are least expecting it. I never heard of anyone ever stumbling on something sitting down. "

— **CHARLES F. KETTERING**

# How to develop a strategic plan for your campaign

Now that you know where your elected representative sits on the issues you care about and how to influence them, you can develop an effective strategy for your local campaign.

Campaigns are rarely won without a smart goal, a clear strategy and great tactics. We want to empower you – and people in communities right across Australia – to run strategic campaigns in your local communities that add up to something huge. With the tools in this kit, you can create a strategy and plan to roll out effective campaigns in your community. When we work together and collaborate across our local communities we can win!

## WHAT IS STRATEGY AND HOW DOES IT WORK?

*“Simply put, strategy is turning what you have into what you need to get what you want” – Marshall Ganz*

- What you have is your constituency’s resources: people, time, skills, money, experiences, relationships, credibility, your allies, supporters, your leadership.
- What you need to achieve the change you want is power. Power is gained through tactics that can creatively turn your resources into the capacity you need to achieve your goal.
- What you want is your goal. Your goal is a clear and measurable outcome that allows you to measure progress along the way.



## IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS

Know the difference between a goal, a vision and a target?

TERM	DEFINITION	EXAMPLES
<b>LONG-TERM VISION</b>	Sometimes we get so focused on achieving a campaign goal, that we miss the forest for the trees. It's important to take a step back and look at the bigger picture – How would you like the world to look? How will it look if your goal is achieved?	A world powered by sun, wind and waves where our reefs, communities, wildlife and forests thrive.
<b>CAMPAIGN GOAL</b>	<p>A campaign goal is the tangible outcome your campaign is seeking to achieve. What needs to happen for your long-term vision to be realised? Is it the federal government implementing a specific policy? The protection of a particular forest?</p> <p>Your goal should always be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Resourced and Timely.</p>	<p><b>Ultimate goal:</b> Adani's giant megamine is stopped and Australia transitions to 100% clean energy by 2030.</p> <p><b>Local goal:</b> Your local MP is advocating to stop damage to our climate for a better world – by stopping Adani, phasing out coal and repowering Australia with 100% clean energy.</p>
<b>TARGETS</b>	Who can make your goal a reality? Who are you going to pressure to get the outcome you need? Is it Prime Minister Turnbull? Is it your local state MP? It's good practice to narrow down your target. For example, 'the government' isn't a target because it is a body which contains too many different individual actors. Try and narrow it down to a specific minister.	<p><b>National targets:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prime Minister Turnbull</li> <li>• Opposition leader Bill Shorten</li> <li>• Environment Minister Josh Frydenberg</li> </ul> <p><b>Local targets:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your local federal member of parliament</li> </ul>



<b>THEORY OF CHANGE</b>	Theory of change is a way of expressing your strategy succinctly – a sentence that summarises how you turn what you have into what you need to get what you want.	By creating a huge network of local groups working on a shared strategy to pressure political representatives locally, we'll create a national wave of pressure that stops the funding for Adani and pushes government and business to transition fairly to 100% clean energy.
<b>OUTCOMES</b>	Outcomes are things that have to happen on the way if the goal is to be reached. Most outcomes can be achieved in more than one way.	<p><b>Goal:</b> Your MP acts</p> <p><b>Outcomes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your MP feels pressure from the community to act</li> <li>• A broad group of people in your community is turning up the heat on your MP with local actions and events</li> <li>• A small core group of people are organising people locally</li> </ul>
<b>CRITICAL PATH</b>	Campaigners use the term critical path to mean the logical sequence of the outcomes we need to achieve a given goal.	See example below
<b>TACTICS</b>	Tactics shouldn't be confused with strategy. Tactics are the activities you will engage in at each stage of your campaign to achieve an outcome. This could be anything from a petition to letter-writing to picketing outside your MP's office. Planning tactics is where you can get really creative and add colour, light and movement to your campaign.	<p>In this toolkit we've outlined some core tactics to help you achieve your campaign goal by applying and escalating pressure on your local MP.</p> <p>Don't feel limited by our suggestions. When you develop your local plan, you can get creative with your tactics – i.e. will you dress up as solar panels and picket outside your MP's office?</p>

## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

Measures of success are measures you put in place to check whether you are on the way to achieving your goal. This could be the number of petition signatures you collect over a certain period of time or number of stories you have had placed in local media for example. This helps you to track your campaign as you go along and gives you some tangible, smaller goals to achieve along the way.

When you create your local plan, set your group some measures of success. This could be along the lines of:

- Your group meets X times with local state or federal MP
- Your group recruits X number of people to the campaign
- Your group hosts an action outside your MP's office.
- Your group gets two stories in local media
- Your group holds two public events

## MAKE A LOCAL CRITICAL PATH

A critical path is series of outcomes you need to happen in order to achieve your end goal. It's a really useful tool to use to develop your strategy. **Here's a suggested critical path for a local campaign to stop Adani and create a future powered by sun, wind and waves:**





## DEVELOP A PLAN TO WIN YOUR CAMPAIGN LOCALLY

Now that you have the shared strategy, you can develop a plan to deliver it locally. Once you have set up your local group, and familiarised yourself with the campaign tools in this kit, you can start thinking through the activities your group will engage in to achieve your local goal.

### Have a campaign planning meeting with your group

Get your group together to talk through the strategy and develop a local plan of activities to roll it out.

### Create a timeline for 6-12 months

It's no use planning a whole bunch of activities if no one has the time to do them. What can your group realistically achieve in the next 6-12 months? Plot out your activities and outcomes.

### Map out your main activities

Using your critical path as a guide, plan activities under each outcome. What activities can your group engage in to achieve those wins along the way? How will you grow your group? Will you hold an event to recruit people in your community to your group or sign them up to the campaign?

Plan out each stage and stay topline with your activities – for example, 'event to recruit new people' is enough detail for now. When you've done this you, can plan each activity in more detail. You might not have time to do this for the whole critical path, so try focusing on the first few steps.



Knitting Nannas of Toolangi. Photo: Ali Sanderson.

### Plan your activities in more detail

Once you've worked out the type of activities you will engage in for each critical step, you can start planning your activities in more detail.

You might want to create working groups for this – eg one working group develops the activities related to pressuring your MP, while another focuses on pressuring the Prime Minister and federal Minister for Energy and the Environment. You might also form a creative working group to develop the props and design for public actions. Or do everything together as one group, if that works best for you.

### Assign roles and get people to commit

You might have already assigned clear roles for people in your group. When you're planning, make sure there are people responsible for each activity being developed and delivered. There's no use planning activities if no one has committed to doing them. Get people in your group to take ownership of specific activities.

### Set yourself some measures of success

Set yourself some small tangible goals so you know as your campaign unfolds, how you are tracking on achieving your outcomes. Set yourself some measures for each activity e.g. how many people need to turn up to your event for it to be successful? How many petition signatures do you need to make an impact on your local MP?

Evaluate and plan ahead. Make sure you check in regularly to see if you're on track with your plan. If the activities you're engaging in aren't working or helping you achieve your outcomes, this is where you can change tack.



People's Climate March. Photo: James Thomas.

Let's show up  
and speak out  
**for a world  
where our living  
planet thrives** 🌱