



ENGAGING GOVERNMENT

There are two distinct groups that make up 'government'. Both are important, but they each do slightly different things:

- Politicians (who are elected); and
- Public servants (who work in government bodies, no matter who is in power).

1. Politicians

Politicians or elected officials include:

- Mayor and Councillors (local government).
- Premier, Ministers, Members of Parliament (state government).
- Prime Minister, Ministers, Senators and Members of Parliament (federal government).

Generally, at state and federal levels, politicians will be:

- a member of the Government – that is, the party elected to power.
- a member of the Opposition – if Labor holds power, the Liberal members are in opposition (sometimes in coalition with the Nationals).
- an independent member with no party affiliation.
- a member affiliated with a smaller party, such as the Greens.

As a group, Government members are responsible for:

- Deciding policy – deciding how something will run, whether it is the public transport system or a carbon trading scheme.
- Allocating funding – deciding what money or effort is going to be spent where and how.
- Proposing new or updated laws or regulations, and overseeing the government bodies that uphold them (such as the police).

The Opposition, independents and members of smaller parties are responsible for:

- Voting on policy, funding or laws that the Government has proposed.
- Analysing, commenting on or criticising Government decisions about policy, funding or laws (which often means saying what they would do if they were in power).



#Tip: *Politicians love success stories. Most people write to them to ask them to do something. Writing to thank them, or to tell them a good news story is a great idea!*

While you might do a bit of that too, inviting a politician to come and see something you've achieved (or even just tell them about it) is a good way to grab their interest. That way, you'll be top of mind next time they're looking for a project to support or fund. (Sneaky, but it just might work!)

Some of the politicians you might think about approaching at the local Government (council) level include:

- Your local Councillor.
- Members of relevant council committees.

At state level, you might approach:

- Your local Member of Parliament.
- A government Minister.
- The Opposition spokesperson or 'Shadow Minister' on the issue you're interested in.

#Tip: *We've created a separate info sheet about working with local government and state government for your reference.*

2. Public servants

Public servants are sometimes called bureaucrats or civil servants. They work for government bodies and local councils, and generally keep their jobs even if a new party is elected to government.

Mostly, public servants are responsible for carrying out the work of government. What they do is directed or guided by the policy of the government in power – but because of its day-to-day nature, a lot of government work is done by public servants without the direct involvement of politicians.

Whether to contact a public servant or politician first with an issue can be a tricky question. As a general rule, it's a good idea to start with the public servant – especially if you want something fixed or resolved, rather than something brand new created or built from scratch. But if you don't get any joy from the government office or council you're dealing with, the politicians can sometimes help you get things done.

Sample government letter

You can use this letter to write to a government department, specific public servant, your local Member of Parliament or councillor, or a state government Minister. Just do some research to ensure that you've got their title right and the correct form of address.

[Insert group name]

[Insert group address]

[Insert group suburb/town, state and postcode]

[Insert date]

[Insert recipient name]

[Insert recipient title]

[Insert recipient company / organisation name]

[Insert recipient address]

[Insert recipient suburb/town, state and postcode]

Dear [insert recipient name],

We understand that [you or organisation name] [are/is] responsible for the management and maintenance of [insert issue – e.g. roads, trees, footpaths, traffic management] in [insert area – e.g. town or suburb].

We are writing to ask you to take action on an issue affecting the safety and enjoyment of people living and working near [insert location, street and suburb]. The problem is [insert details].

The [insert number of members] of our group are quite concerned about this issue, and some of those have indicated that their neighbours and friends share our concern.

We all want to be able to walk more. We know that walking is great for our health and protecting our environment. We also know that more people walking on our streets improves local safety and security, encourages people to get to know their neighbours, reduces traffic, boosts road safety, and benefits local businesses.

There are a number of things that could be done to improve this situation. They include: [insert some of the things that the government body could do to fix the problem].

We believe that these important actions would benefit everyone in the area. Your attention to this issue will be greatly valued by the community in the [insert location] area.

Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

[insert name]

on behalf of [insert group name]

www.victoriawalks.org.au