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Lobby Law

**Lobbying Kit for Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic)
Member Centres**



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Suite 11 1st Floor 54 Victoria Street Carlton South 3053

T 03 9654 2204 F 03 9654 5204

E fedclc@vicnet.net.au W www.communitylaw.org.au

ABN 30 036 539 902 Inc Reg No A0013713H

Why should Community Legal Centres lobby politicians?

Community Legal Centres commonly carry out a range of lobbying and advocacy activities as part of our efforts to ensure the best outcomes for excluded and disadvantaged communities and the system of justice in Australia. Community Legal Centres commonly collaborate and work closely with government on law reform and policy issues that directly impact upon the Victorian community.

We are represented on committees and reference groups, provide submissions, advice and consultation and seek to raise public awareness about justice issues. Lobbying forms another valid and important aspect of our commitment to participate in the democratic process.

Direct face-to-face meetings with politicians are a way of conveying the concerns of your Community Legal Centre and those of your clients and community to directly a person of influence who may be in an immediate position to help. In this way, lobbying by Community Legal Centres can provide a bridge between our communities and the policy-makers as well as the legal system.

Lobbying politicians can:

- Ensure that the experience from our casework and community engagement is on the justice policy table.
- Enable politicians to meet and speak directly with legal workers, clients and community members.
- Inform and educate them about a decision that is about to be made by Parliament.
- Gain the support of policy makers and encourage consultation on an issue.
- Encourage politicians to make a stand in support of a particular campaign.
- Keep the profile of Community Legal Centres and our issues high amongst politicians.
- Make politicians aware of the Federation of Community Legal Centres and our key campaigns.

Lobbying politicians can be an important part of our campaigning strategy, which also includes Law reform, community alliance-building, liaison with the media, and protest / social action.

Lobbying generally involves some form of contact with Government Ministers, Opposition Shadow Ministers, Federal MPs and / or Senators, State MPs or local Councillors. This can take the form of:

- Petitioning Parliament.
- Sending a mass postcard, email, or letter, with your full address so that they know you live in their electorate.
- Writing a personal letter.
- Speaking with an electorate officer or adviser over the telephone.
- Meeting with an electorate officer or advisor, with follow-up.
- Meeting with the politician in his or her office, with follow-up.
- Meeting with the politician in his or her office in Parliament or Council, with follow-up.

Effective lobbying requires careful thought, preparation and follow-up. You should be clear about the issues you want to raise, and what you want the politicians to actually do for you. Some of the things you may ask a politician to do include:

- Add their name to your particular issue to raise the public profile.
- Approach other politicians on your behalf.
- Speak to the issue in the relevant assembly - the council chamber, Federal House of Representatives, Federal Senate, or the Victorian Parliament.



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- Raise your issue in a forum where they have a particular interest. Politicians can be members of parliamentary groups or committees which have a role in influencing the area of law or policy of concern.
- Help get your messages in the media or support it when it does.
- MPs can create interest and debate by using parliamentary devices such as a Parliamentary Question, an Adjournment Debate, or making speeches.
- Council leaders can change the council's spending priorities or services.
- Ministers can instigate law reform processes.

First steps to lobbying politicians

Find out who they are

You can easily find out who your local politician is and which electorate you live in in the following ways:

Federal MPs

- Find out your Federal electorate and your MP on the Australian Electoral Commission website: <http://www.aec.gov.au/esearch/main.htm>
- Find out more information about Federal MPs on the House of Representatives website: <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/members/index.htm>
- Phone the Australian Electoral Commission on 3834 3400
- Phone the FCLC office on 03 9654 2204

Federal Senators

- Victoria as a whole is represented by 12 Senators. Find out who they are on the Senate website: <http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/senators/homepages/s-qlld.htm>
- Phone the Australian Electoral Commission on 3834 3400
- Phone the FCLC office on 3252 8666

State MPs

- Find out your State electorate and your MP on the Victorian Electoral Commission website <http://www.vec.vic.gov.au/>
- Phone the FCLC office on 03 9654 2204

Local Councillors

- Find out you local Council area by visiting:
 -
- Contact your Council to find out who your Councillor is and how to get in touch with them
- Phone the FCLC office on 03 9654 2204

Do some research on your local politician

The more you know about your local representative the better you will be able to lobby them. Try to find out any particular interests they may have – you should be able to access a brief biography online at the Parliament / Council website. They may also have a more detailed personal website.

Importantly, you should find out if your local politician is a Minister or Shadow Minister. In the case of Ministers, this means they serve as members of the executive arm of government and administer the various government departments. In the case of Shadow Ministers, they are senior members of the Opposition who represent their party on policy and administration in their area of responsibility.

A full list of Federal Ministers and Shadow Ministers can be found at:
<http://www.aph.gov.au/whoswho>

The Federal Parliamentary Handbook also includes biographies of federal politicians:
<http://www.aph.gov.au/library/handbook/index.htm>

A full list of State Ministers can be found at:
<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/mps.html>

A full list of State Shadow Ministers can be found at:
<http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/mps.html>

You should also try to find out what Parliamentary / Council Committees your local politician may be on. This can help you decide what assistance you seek from them, as committee members may be able to provide additional help that other politicians can't. Again, this information can usually be found in their online biography on the relevant Parliament / Council website.

If you want to target a particular committee that has responsibility for the area of lobbying you are interested in, you can find complete lists of members at:

Federal House of Representatives

- <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/index.htm>

Federal Senators

- <http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/index.htm>

Victorian Parliament

- <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/>

As well as targeting your local politician, it is also worthwhile lobbying the Minister or Shadow Minister whose portfolio is responsible for the issue you are campaigning on. You can try to meet with them directly, write to them, or ask your local politician to contact them on your behalf.

Meeting with politicians

When you are tackling an issue that needs to be raised with a politician always do so in writing first. A short letter requesting a meeting with a brief outline of why you would like to meet them is sufficient.

Federation representatives and members are natural advocates because they are dedicated and well-informed. By following a few simple rules, you can achieve great results. Of course, changing government policy is hard work, so don't be discouraged or intimidated if you don't get immediate results!

Conducting a lobbying meeting

You will probably know more about these issues than most politicians so speak clearly and slowly – and use plain English. Politicians are not experts, they are people whose job it is to represent the concerns and aspirations of their electorate. They will have their own sense of the issues that are relevant to their electorate, but often welcome other sources of information and opinion to help guide their views. Aim to focus on a few points rather than cover every aspect of the issue.

Keep in mind what you want out of the meeting at all times. This can basically be summarised as follows:

1. Introduce the member to the issue and why it is a concern;
2. Highlight the importance of the issue to you and others locally and how the Government's response to these issues will be a deciding factor when you vote;
3. Ask your MP, as your representative, to represent your concerns in Parliament, within the party and to other constituents.

To start the meeting, make sure you introduce yourself, shake hands, and make eye contact. Give your name, and explain exactly why you have sought a meeting. Remember to relax and be polite, pleasant and sure of yourself. Your meeting may last anywhere between 10 minutes and half an hour. Most meetings last about 20 minutes so you won't have much time.

When your meeting ends, thank the person for their time and indicate how they can make contact with you again for further information. Also repeat your request, politely, that they urge support for action to stop land clearing within their party's environment policy preparation process. Ask your MP to take your concerns to Parliament and their party room.

If your MP asks for further follow up information, give an indication of when you can provide it.

How to have a successful meeting

Try and explain clearly to the politician's office in advance why you want the meeting, what issues you want to discuss and what the aim of the meeting is. Always leave a name and contact number in case the meeting has to be cancelled or postponed.

Be organised

If you are going along as a delegation (a good idea as the politician will then have the sense that you represent a number of local constituents rather than being a lone voice) share out the roles so that everyone plays a part. Jobs that need covering include introducing and thanking; note-taking and following up; and main spokesperson.

Choose the right pitch

Ensure your contribution is suitably pitched to the politician's level of knowledge. Many politicians

will know very little (if anything) about the issues you want to raise. If in doubt you can ask their office for advice on the politician's level of knowledge on an issue.

Know your subject

While it is not essential to know everything about a subject – be well-prepared. Anticipate both sides of the argument – knowing what you want and why the politician could object to it (particularly if they are not naturally sympathetic to the issue or to unions) is a good way of preparing. Always ask for an action in the meeting – ask the politician to do something.

Be brief

Politicians and their staff are incredibly busy, and so are you. Politicians will appreciate it when you get to the point and respect their time.

Be courteous

Always, always be courteous. Being abrasive or argumentative is almost always counter-productive, and will provide a good excuse to ignore your request.

After the meeting

Get one of your members to take notes at the meeting and follow the meeting up with a letter of thanks for their time, reiterate any key points and remind them of any proposed action. Please send the Federation office a copy of your correspondence and any responses you receive or post them on the relevant BBS folder.

Wherever possible, build a relationship. Get the name of the staff person you speak to and try to deal with the same person each time. If the politician gives you assistance, commend them publicly (including letters to the editor or items in newsletter, which should also be forwarded to their office). The ultimate goal is to build a positive, long-term relationship.

Lobbying will also be more effective where it is coordinated. If the issue is not just a local one, contact the FCLC office to see if other FCLC members are interested in becoming involved in other electorates. Work on issues and campaigns that are priorities.

Finally, it is also vital to complete a report to help the FCLC office stay abreast of other CLC political activity. Use the attached Evaluation Report to fill in any details of the meeting for your records, and forward a copy to the FCLC office.

Some dos and don'ts of lobbying

Preparation

- Bring someone with you
- Do as much research as you can on the polliie
- Know what you want from the meeting, why you are lobbying them, and what outcome you want
- Have an agenda and roles for different members of your group

During the meeting

- Be on time
- Stick to time and confirm how much time you have
- Introduce everyone in your group
- Be professional
- Be clear, concise and interesting
- Be authoritative and credible = be prepared
- Be courteous
- Don't make them defensive
- Be aware of their likely responses if they are likely to disagree with you
- Show that you understand where they are coming from
- Don't just talk and plan - listen and learn
- Don't get sidetracked
- Thank them

After the meeting

- Debrief
- Follow-up thank you and materials
- Return to keep building the relationship

Ongoing

- Get to know the staffers
- Invite them to/attend functions
- Be flexible
- Be patient!



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- Don't forget the Opposition
- Share the lobbying
- Compare experiences and strategies
- Complement your lobbying with other campaigning

Remember. . .

- Framing is even more important than content
- Lobbying polities is not that different from other professional meetings

Tips for thinking about the issue

- Where are they likely to be opposed and why? Eg think of responses to each objection, or myths and facts, common problematic responses or curly questions.
- How can they be won over? (including what do you know about them)
- What do you want from them? Best and worst outcome, outcome you can live with?
- Why is the issue important to your organisation?
- Case studies? Statistics? Authorities and other support that might influence the pollie?
- Choose three major points/themes/issues that you want to cover in the meeting.
- How will you fit these points within the time available?

Tips for background research for federal lobbying

Background research on politicians

You can easily compile a dossier on the Federal Liberal politicians that you intend to lobby.

Start at the easily accessible parliamentary web pages – go to the home page - <www.aph.gov.au> - and then follow the links to the House of Reps and the Senate ad to the list of members.

Follow these links to each politician's biography and portfolio (includes media releases, speeches, Committees participated in). MPs often also have a personal web site for their electorate.

You can also search Hansard to see how they have contributed to debates in Parliament or in the Senate.

It is also useful to 'google' them to find out more – especially the links to media and the better blogs (Online Opinion is sometimes good but patchy) and websites eg New Matilda, Margot Kingston, GetUp!.

If you go to their party's website you may be able to locate recent media releases by them or related to the issue.

Background research on the parliamentary process

Go to <www.aph.gov.au> and then click on 'Visitors' which takes you to pages like the House Daily Program, Senate Order of Business (aka 'Senate Red'), and ParInfo Web (large repository of parliamentary documents). The tab 'This Week in Parliament' is also good.

You can also easily watch or listen to Parliament online using the type of hardware and software that most CLCs have access to now – from the home page click on 'Webcast' and download the free player (you can have it playing in small screen format and on low volume in the background while you do other computer tasks and wait for your Bill to come up on the program, as the order can change on the day and times are only approximate).

'House News' (and its Senate equivalent) is also handy – heaps of stuff re what's been said and decided recently with links to Hansard and to the Committees pages, sitting schedule for the year, the daily program and any late changes. Also has New Bills and Billsnet which gives you the text of bills and their background.

The Parliamentary Library online is a great resource with lots of information on how both Chambers work, how a bill is passed etc. Start from the home page and click on 'Information and Research' then 'Parliamentary Library' then 'Parliamentary Library Publications'. One of the useful features is 'Chronologies Online' eg there is one outlining the progress of the industrial relations changes and opposition to them.

Lawlex <http://www.lawlex.com.au/> is a really helpful search engine if you can get access via someone who subscribes to it (eg a university library or law firm). It allows you to track the progress of bills and work out when and how Acts have been amended since they were first passed. It also has handy direct links to the 2nd Reading speeches in Hansard.

Sample letter to arrange meeting with politician

Dear -----,

Congratulations on your recent election to the House of Representatives [/We noted with great interest your recent speech. . ./ We appreciated your comments in the debate on. . ./etc]

[brief info about your CLC or Working/Task Group and the Federation ie who you represent, how it relates to their portfolio and/or electorate]

We are concerned about the proposed amendments to. . .[or similar – keep it very brief]

We would greatly appreciate meeting with you to further discuss our concerns. [Your organization] looks forward to arranging a meeting at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

[follow up in a week with telephone call if haven't heard back]

Sample follow-up letter after meeting with politician

Dear -----,

Thank you for meeting with us on ---. We enclose the information/case studies/research references as discussed.

[very short expansion on the issues to recap meeting]

Our representatives appreciated the opportunity for an open/informative/such a positive/productive discussion about the issues that are of great concern to our communities.

We hope that you will vote against the Bill/[or similar ie something specific for them to do] and that our background material will assist you in persuading your colleagues to do the same.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you require further supporting information.

We look forward to further contact with you as the issues arise, and appreciate your taking the time to meet with us.

Sincerely,

Evaluation of visit to politician

(Based on 3 key themes that you planned to get across)

1. Rate success from 1-5 out of 5

2. Rate success from 1-5 out of 5

3. Rate success from 1-5 out of 5

For your highest rating, why did that work better?

For your lowest rating, why did that not work so well?

General comments on the meeting?

Ideas for improvement for next time?

Follow-up tasks? (eg thank you letter, research or similar to be sent, another appointment or contact to find out whether you have had any impact?)

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Comments, feedback and additions to:

Policy Officer
Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic)
Suite 11 1st Floor 54 Victoria Street Carlton South 3053
03 9654 2204 fedclc@vicnet.net.au