

HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE

This resource is intended as a source of information where students are guided through the process of advocating on various issues communities are facing around the world. For information about advocacy, what it is and Caritas Australia's approach, please learn more using our resource: [About Advocacy](#).

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ADVOCACY TOOLKIT: How to Effect Change



Laxmi (16) facilitating a wall magazine poster making session with Child Club members at her old school in Jajarkot district, western Nepal. Photo: Richard Wainwright/Caritas Australia

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Getting ready to take action

By taking action as individuals, as a group or as a school community, you can make a difference to the lives of those experiencing poverty and injustice.

Our faith recognised that we are one human family and that we have a duty to act together to promote justice and uphold dignity. So, encourage your friends and family to get involved. Explain why the issues matter to you and consider what tools you can use to inform others.

Determine if your school, parish or community has a group working for justice. If not, consider forming a group.

For more resources on what is advocacy, download [About Advocacy](#).

+ You may like to utilise our [Social Justice calendar](#) to explore specific social justice days that are relevant to your school.



Caritas CEO Kirsten Sayers with senator Penny Wong at the launch of the 'Anchors in a Crisis: Women's Humanitarian Leadership in Faith and Secular Contexts' report. Photo: Caritas Australia. Report can be accessed [here](#)

How to create a campaign

Step 1: What needs to change?

- Use the See, Judge, Act process
- What is the key problem? Identify the root causes
- Identify what needs to change

Step 2: Who is involved?

- Have you listened to those most affected? How are their voices included?
- Who are you targeting to make a difference?
- Who are the relevant decision-makers?

Step 3: How will you influence?

- Develop a set of clear, concise messages
- Decide on the best advocacy strategy/ies
- Prepare your tools
- Develop a plan of how and when you will use your strategies methods and tools

Elements of See, Judge, Act process

- **See:** describe the problem
- **Judge:** reflect on the situation in light of the Church's teaching
- **Act:** plan a realistic and effective strategy that will engage people to make the changes you've identified



“There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgement on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: observe, judge, act.”

Pope John XXIII (1961), *Mater et Magistra* n.236



How to create a campaign

Step 4: How can I make sure young people get involved?

- How can you get your message to the people who need to hear it?
- How can young people be involved in the design, implementation and evaluation of the campaign?

Step 5: Who can I work with?

- Who will want to get involved?
- Who are allies?
- Who is already doing work on a similar campaign?

Step 6: What obstacles might I face?

- What are potential obstacles?
- How will you overcome these?
- Prepare your strategies and arguments for opposing views

Step 7: How will you know it is working?

- Develop success statements, such as 'at the end of the campaign we will have...'
- Decide when you will meet to evaluate

Step 8: What do I need to change for next time?

- Think about what worked and what didn't work in your plan
- Adjust your plan accordingly, so that you can be more effective in the future

BUILDING YOUR CAMPAIGN

Research is key to building up your campaign



Participants of the Grassroots Action Palmerston (GAP) program. Photo: Caritas Australia

Researching your advocacy campaign

Research is crucial for a successful advocacy campaign, even if it's a subject that you know a lot about from personal experience or interest. The more you know about your issue, the easier it will be for you to call for change and to influence other people's opinions.

The research you need to conduct generally falls along these lines:

- What is the issue, and why is it important?
- What needs to change?
- Why are you calling for action now?

1. Involving the right people

The "right people" are often referred to as stakeholders, and your research should include the people who are most affected by this issue, as well as those who can influence the people who make decisions.

Possible stakeholders include:

- Those you are advocating with/for
- Politicians and other decision makers
- Non-profits (NGOs, foundations)
- Organisations such as labour unions or medical associations
- General public
- Students and teachers

CARITAS AUSTRALIA PROJECT COMPASSION

Example: Project Compassion

Project Compassion is Caritas Australia's annual fundraising appeal.

In Project Compassion the challenges that people face are usually much more extreme because of the context, but the aspirations are familiar to almost everybody in Australia, such as trying to make a living, creating a good life for your family, staying healthy, or sending your children to school. This works because it is personal, emotional and uses real-life examples and people.

It also shows a clear cause-and-effect: Caritas Australia is supporting people in need, so if you care about supporting people in need, donate to Project Compassion.

Researching your advocacy campaign

When you are doing this research, it is important to think about what your stakeholders have in common, and what differentiates them. Does everybody view your issue the same way, or are there differences of opinion? How will you balance these conflicting opinions?

Usually, you need to develop messages for more than one stakeholder, and this is why it is important to understand who they are and what they want. For example, a member of the general public is more likely to be convinced by personal stories that make the issue seem relevant to them, even if it has very little to do with them. A good example of this is the Project Compassion campaign, which uses stories about people's lives and the challenges they've faced.

In contrast, although politicians are also sometimes influenced by compelling personal stories (especially if they are about people in their electorate), they also appreciate other types of information, such as statistics and figures which show how big the problem is, how many people are impacted, and what the cost is for not addressing the issue.

Successful advocacy does not just identify problems or concerns but seeks to understand the problem and develop possible solutions. It involves seeking the advice and opinions of those who are most affected by the issues.

Advocacy is typically an ongoing process involving planning, taking action, and reviewing the results. Advocates will often work toward smaller goals over time, learning from any successes and mistakes and adapting their strategies for the future.



Researching your advocacy campaign

2. Be specific

It is important to understand exactly what it is that you want to change before starting your advocacy campaign. Politicians and other changemakers are not going to listen if they think that you are making assumptions or don't understand the current situation.

Make sure that you are advocating for a very specific change, often called an 'ask'. For example, "Stop Climate Change" is a valid issue to advocate for but break it down into specific asks that you can advocate for easily, rather than one huge issue that is too broad.

Once you have a clear and specific ask, you have a strong basis for developing your advocacy strategy.

Example: Broad Issue: Stop Climate Change

Suggestions on how to be specific:

- advocate for increasing investment into renewables
- get your local church to divest from fossil fuels
- raise awareness about the impact of climate change on traditional ways of life, such as for First Australians in regional areas.

Each of these is a more manageable goal than "fixing climate change". It will also allow you to measure your success in contributing to that mission.

Researching your advocacy campaign

3. Know your angle and your allies

When you know what you'll be specifically advocating for, take a look around at other people and groups that are advocating on the same issue – your 'allies'. In tackling big issues like ending poverty, it's good to consider when to join forces with other groups who share the same goal so that you can collectively achieve a bigger impact. You might want to reach out to them to share ideas. At the same time, it's also powerful to know where you have a unique voice, network or tools to bring to the table. Other groups might be advocating on the same issue, but from different angles. Think about your unique voice and angle.

What makes your perspective different to what others are saying on this topic? For example, if you are building a campaign around people your age, this might be what makes your campaign special and unique. Consider how your specific angle contributes to the bigger picture of advocacy on this issue.



Tarsini teaching financial literacy to women in her village in Indonesia. Photo: Laz Harfa

Researching your advocacy campaign

4. Be informed - Internet

The internet is a great starting point, but it is vital to make sure that you are using high-quality sources for your information. In general, use your common sense. A blog post or YouTube video are unlikely to be considered a reputable source if you are trying to convince other people. But there are still plenty of places to find information that is well-researched, up-to-date and relevant.

Look for websites that are related to institutions like universities, think tanks/policy institutes, United Nations (UN) agencies, peak bodies/organisations or government departments.

These types of organisations have information that is up-to-date and correct, and they frequently do research themselves. It is still important to be critical of the information, as the organisation may have a bias.

Often, these websites will end in “.org”, or in the case of government websites, “.gov.au”. Avoid commercial sites run by businesses, as these may be trying to sell you something, rather than just sharing information. These websites usually end in “.com”.

AI chatbots may be a useful starting point, but it is even more important to be critical and make sure you check any links or references to make sure the information is real and accurate.

Make sure the information is up-to-date. This is especially important when it comes to climate change, because climate science improves rapidly and policies change regularly, so what was true even a few years ago may be very different now. It is impossible to stay completely up-to-date, but a good rule of thumb is to make sure that your information is similar to that used by reputable institutions such as those in the list below.

Some examples of reputable institutions include:

- The Australia Institute
- The Grattan Institute
- Lowy Institute for International Policy
- Refugee Council of Australia
- Australian Human Rights Commission
- World Bank
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- Most Australian universities, and most international universities that you've heard of, like Harvard, Cambridge or Oxford
- World Health Organisation, UNHCR, UNICEF and other UN agencies
- Government departments such as the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), or the Australian Institute for Health and Welfare (AIHW)

Researching your advocacy campaign

4. Be informed - The media

If you are advocating for an issue the best way to keep up-to-date is by following your topic in the media. This could involve reading newspaper articles or magazines, listening to the radio, watching the news on the television or reading news websites. This is especially crucial if the issue is topical and there are frequent developments. Similar to internet resources, make sure you are using reputable media outlets, especially those that employ qualified journalists.

Media outlets are facing new and unusual challenges to their resourcing and independence. Keep this in mind when researching an issue, particularly if you are working on a hot button issue.

Summary

1. **Involve the right people:** Who is affected and who are the stakeholders?
2. **Be specific:** Make sure you are advocating for a specific change.
3. **Know your angle and your allies:** What distinguishes you from similar campaigns?
4. **Be informed!** Use reliable trustworthy sources of information.

+ “Today, in view of the common good, there is urgent need for politics and economics to enter into a frank dialogue in the service of life.”

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* n 189



Researching your advocacy campaign

4. Be informed - More advanced research techniques

These research methods are harder, more time-consuming, and less accessible—especially if you don't have a lot of experience creating advocacy campaigns before. They are only listed here to try if your other research methods are not providing enough information.

Hansard

This is the record of all Federal parliamentary proceedings, including the Senate, House of Representatives and all parliamentary committees. It is available online, click [here](#)

This is a great resource, but it can be overwhelming because it is a transcript of almost everything that people said in parliamentary proceedings. It is important to know what you are looking for when using Hansard, because the transcripts are very long and you need to narrow down the day that it was said and key words to search for in the transcripts.

Freedom of Information (FOI) requests

This is a request sent to a government department, local council or statutory authority to make information or documents publicly available. State and territories use a variety of names for these requests.

FOIs intend to promote openness by allowing public access to documents and information so that they can monitor what the government is doing and how the government is making decisions. FOI requests can be rejected, there is sometimes an administration fee and it is a slow method of accessing information. Look at FOI "Disclosure Logs" for successful previous requests.

Academic journal articles

Academic journal articles are written by academics and researchers who are specialists on the subject.

They are usually considered high-quality because they are peer-reviewed, which means that they are read by other academics and revised for quality before they are published. However, many of the journals require a paid subscription, so it can be hard to get access to journal articles except through state or university libraries, although it is possible to find some free articles using Google Scholar. Some articles can also be challenging to read as they may not be written for the general public.

Tips: Talking to Stakeholders

Depending on the issue, talking to stakeholders might be one of the most important stages of information-gathering. This is especially important for stakeholders who are the most affected by an issue.

For advocacy campaigns that impact people living in Australia, it is recommended not only to have them involved during the planning process, but to make sure that they are making important decisions and participating in every stage of the campaign. Other types of stakeholders include politicians, people in campaigns similar to yours, researchers, policy-makers, and journalists.



Manaini stands with other members of her village women's group in a small village in Fiji. . Photo: Caritas Australia

Caritas Australia's Approach (Example: Climate Justice)

When Caritas Australia advocates for climate justice in the Pacific, this is based on what we have been told by our partners in the Pacific, not based on information on the internet or our own opinions.

We undergo a process of consultation, where we talk to the people who are most affected and listen carefully to the responses. This is an act of solidarity, but it is also about subsidiarity and making sure that those who will be most impacted have a seat at the table for the planning stage, and as much as possible throughout a campaign.

BUILDING YOUR ADVOCACY MESSAGE

Develop a clear campaign message



Sakhina (left) with her daughter and a Caritas Bangladesh staff member inside their home in a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Photo: Caritas Australia

Building your advocacy message

One of the most important parts of building a campaign is developing your messaging, and you should make sure that you sound well-informed, worth listening to and, most importantly, convincing. Learning to convince others and construct your argument well is helpful in many jobs. It is also a surprisingly easy skill to develop because you are already an expert at using different strategies to convince your friends, teachers, parents, or strangers. For example, you probably use a different way of writing when you are online as compared to an essay at school.

You also probably do all of this without really thinking about it because you already have this skill set. Learning advocacy messaging is just about refining this skill set and making it more sophisticated.

What influences people?

The first step for devising your message is understanding what influences people. People are influenced by many different things, including past experience, cultural or social expectations, personal finances, and perhaps most importantly - values.

At Caritas Australia, we know from decades of experience that people all over Australia care about people in need, and that they are willing to donate money, fundraise, or do other activities that raise awareness for people that they have never met, and likely never will. This is because they are inspired by their values, believe that all people are entitled to respect, and that supporting others to improve their lives is a valuable and important thing to do.

If you want to advocate for something that you think is important, you need to also find what values your issue relates to, and to try to come up with ways to help your listener recognise that supporting your campaign is a good way to support an issue that they also care about. Once you have done this, you can start thinking about the structure of your message.

Building your advocacy message

Importance of story telling

Stories are an effective way for people to connect with the issue you are advocating about. Sharing stories of people affected by the issue as well as sharing your own story about why you care about the issue can be very powerful.

While facts and statistics are important for an informed campaign, stories can help place people affected by injustice at the centre of your campaign and help your audience connect on an emotional level. These stories are more likely to stay in people's minds than a large volume of statistics.

Where possible use direct quotes to give voice and agency to people affected by the issue.

Myth-busting

Stories stick in people's mind, but so do myths. Be wary of using myth busting as part of your message, as repeating a myth usually reinforces it, adding to misinformation. Advocacy resource website have further information on this, such as the Commons Library article: [From Elephants to Sandwiches: Countering False Information - The Commons](#)

Building your advocacy message

Structuring your advocacy message

There are different ways to structure an advocacy message, but the following is a simple yet effective structure.

Put the most important arguments first

It is generally a good idea to present this in one clear statement.



Organise your evidence

Here, it is usually a good idea to use a variety of evidence, including statistics, quotes, references and stories.



Explain why your evidence supports your argument, if needed

If your campaign is about an issue that is not widely discussed, or about a problem that is not well-known, it can be useful to give people more information.



Make it clear to the listener what the consequences are of not acting

This can be the most important part of your messaging, because it helps to convince your audience about what will happen if they don't listen to you and get involved.

Building your advocacy message

There are also a few more things to think about when you are designing your advocacy message.

Tone - What tone is your message taking?

Is your tone direct or wishy-washy? Are you making it clear that you are advocating for something, or are you just sharing a lot of information? Is it convincing?

Credibility - Has your research informed your message?

If you have researched effectively, then your argument is likely to be convincing and appear credible to others. Using a personal example, another person's story (with permission), statistics can be used to reinforce these stories.

Clarity - Is your message easy to understand?

Nobody will ask others to support your campaign if they can't remember what it's about. Often a very clear and successful campaign can be distilled down into a single phrase or hashtag, so that even people who have never heard of the campaign can recognise the concepts immediately when they see it online or in the news.

Appealing - Does your message appeal to people?

Does your campaign make people feel excited about being able to be a part of something bigger than themselves, or does it make them feel bad for not doing enough? Does it inspire passion? Some topics are easier than others, but it is always worth making it appealing for people to be involved in your campaign.

ADVOCACY METHODS

Deciding on your campaign method



Ronita (22) stands in front of her senior high school in Quezon City, Philippines. Photo: Richard Wainwright/Caritas Australia

Advocacy methods

Advocacy can refer to everything from sharing a link or video to meeting your local MP in person to discuss an issue. There is a wide range of methods you can use as a part for your advocacy strategy. It is worth considering the advantages, disadvantages and power of the different methods before choosing which will work best for your campaign. It's also worth considering how easy or fun the activity is going to be – if no one wants to do the activity, it might not happen.

Ultimately, a strong advocacy campaign uses more than one method so that it has maximum reach. Strong campaigns also require a clear strategy for change and solid research—otherwise people will be able to sense that your campaign doesn't have enough substance and are less likely to get involved. In the end, the tools that you choose to start campaigning are up to you.

Advocacy Ideas

- Petitions (see p.41 - 48)
- Letter-writing campaigns
- Email campaigns
- Contacting local and federal politicians (p.26)
- Online tools and petition sites
- Online articles and advertising
- Meeting with your MP (see p. 27 - 35)
- Contacting local media regarding the advocacy issue (see p.49 – 52)
- Youth groups
- Awareness raising and fundraising events
- Inviting your MP to your event (see p. 36 - 40)
- Joining an advocacy group centred on a particular issue

Advocacy methods

Example: Using social media (Ages 16+)

Benefits:

- More familiar and appealing for younger age groups
- Easier for getting the word out quickly and building momentum
- Cheaper or even free to set up
- Less intimidating than contacting MPs and a good way to try out advocacy for the first time
- Easier to get people involved as simply clicking or sharing a post or video is easy to do

Negatives:

- Harder to judge success—do you judge success by the number of people who interacted with your campaign, or the number of people who then did something about it?
- Many participants may only have a low level of dedication and interest in your cause
- You may need specialised skills such as video editing or graphic design to make something eye-catching
- You need to be more creative and come up with exciting and novel ideas, because a social media audience is rarely interested in what they've seen many times before
- People under 16 years of age cannot access social media`

Benefits:

- More familiar and appealing for demographics who don't spend a lot of time on the internet
- May feel more personal if you start with people you know and ask them to spread the message
- Can be highly effective—many campaigns in the past have successfully petitioned parliament
- The conversations you have with your community will prepare you for questions that the MP is likely to ask you about the petition and the topic

Negatives

- May limit you to your own geographic area
- Usually more time-consuming or expensive to set up



"I ask you to be builders of the world, to work for a better world ... Don't be observers, but immerse yourself in the reality of life, as Jesus did."

Pope Francis, World Youth Day Address at Prayer Vigil with the Young People, 27 July 2013



ENGAGING YOUR MP



Jen (centre), teacher at Faithful Companions of Jesus (FCJ), teaches a class of students as part of the Alternative Learning System (ALS). Photo: Richard Wainwright/Caritas Australia

Engaging your Member of Parliament (MP)

This guide is designed to help you engage your Member of Parliament (MP).

Your local MP is your link to Parliament. They influence decisions which affect the future of the world's poorest people. A face-to-face discussion with your MP is one of the most powerful ways to engage your MP. It gives you the chance to discuss the things you feel strongly about, and it is an opportunity to get your MP to act on your concerns.

Understanding how Parliament works

The Parliament of Australia has many online resources that will tell you more about the work of MPs and Senators, how legislation gets passed and how parliament works. Visit:

www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament

These info sheets are particularly helpful in describing the work of MPs:

www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives/Powers_practice_and_procedure/00_-_Infosheets



Members of the Pacific Australia Emerging Leaders Summit after meeting with Minister Chris Bowen in his Parliament House office. Photo: Caritas Australia

Contacting your MP

Identify your MP

If you're not sure who your federal MP is, you can identify your federal electorate and MP through the Australian Electoral Commission's website:

<https://electorate.aec.gov.au/>. State and territory governments have similar features for state, territory and local governments.

Arrange to meet them in person

A face-to-face meeting is by far the best way to build a relationship with your MP. Further on in this document, we have included tips on how to organise a private meeting. You can also look out for community forums your MP may be holding or attending.

Or get in touch by email, letter or phone

You can also communicate with your MP by sending them an email, a letter, or calling their office.

MPs will respond to all communications from their constituents, but they are much more likely to sit up and take notice of a personalised letter, email or phone call as it shows that their constituent cares enough to take the time. Letters have more impact than an email, particularly if it is handwritten.

In your email or letter, explain why the issue matters to you and what you want your MP to do about it.

Find your MP's phone, email or postal details

Find your MP through the Parliament of Australia website: https://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members

Know how to address your MP

There are certain protocols on how to address your MP, which differ depending on whether you're writing or speaking to them. For details see these [Guidelines for Contacting Senators and Members](#)

What do I do if I receive a letter back from my MP?

If you are happy with the response you receive, it is always good to write a thank you letter. MPs rarely get thanked, but they are human after all and will appreciate it. If you are not satisfied, don't be afraid to write back to your MP and ask them to follow up in more detail or meet you to discuss it. They are there to represent you!

MEETING WITH YOUR MP



Caritas CEO Kirsten Sayers with senator Penny Wong at the launch of the 'Anchors in a Crisis: Women's Humanitarian Leadership in Faith and Secular Contexts' report. Photo: Caritas Australia.

Organising a meeting with your MP

A face-to-face meeting is the best way to build a relationship with your MP by engaging in real and meaningful dialogue. The MP has the opportunity to hear about the issues that you feel strongly about, and you get to hear about what is happening with these issues at the government level.

Setting up a meeting

Call your MP's office and speak to one of their staff. Be prepared to explain where you are from, why you want to meet the MP and who else would be attending the meeting. It can be worth asking to speak to the diary manager when you are trying to set up a time to meet with your MP.

Be patient if you don't get a response immediately.

TIP: Know when to lobby!

- **At key decision-making points:** it's easier to influence the government before they make a policy decision rather than after it.
- **At publicity peaks:** politicians are more interested in issues when media coverage is at its greatest and when people are most engaged. If you act on issues before or during these periods, you are more likely to get their attention.
- **Before an election:** MPs really feel the heat where it hurts – the ballot box. As well as federal elections, there are also state, local and by-elections. MPs will be more receptive to any issues that secure them votes.

Organising a meeting with your MP – Before the meeting

Learn about your MP

It's important to find out about your MP so you can tailor your argument and anticipate their response.

Find out:

- Do they belong to a Party? If so, which one?
- Do they hold any position in government?
- What speeches have they made?
- What issues and causes do they support?
- What are their interests outside parliament?
- Are they Catholic or another denomination or faith?
- What are their views on international development, poverty, climate change, etc?

Look at your MP's website, their Party website and other sources such as They Vote For You (<https://theyvoteforyou.org.au/>) which provides an independent summary of a politician's policy positions.



“The future of humanity does not lie solely in the hands of great leaders, the great powers and the elites. It is fundamentally in the hands of peoples and in their ability to organise. It is in their hands which can guide with humility and conviction this process of change. I am with you.”

Pope Francis, *Address to Second World Meeting of Popular Movements* Bolivia, July 2015.



Organising a meeting with your MP – Before the meeting

Research your issue and know your key messages

Know your key messages and research common counter arguments so that you can respond to these. Go into your meeting armed with the key points you want to make, and back them up with a few powerful stories or statistics from the people affected by the issue.

Be clear about your ask

Go into the meeting with a specific action that you want your MP to take. Oxfam Australia provides a useful guide: [What can you ask your MP? | Oxfam Australia](#)

Assign roles within your group

If there is a number of you meeting your MP then it is helpful to assign specific tasks or roles within the group. Decide who will introduce each member of the group, who will raise which specific points and in which order, who will make the request for action and who will take notes.

Rehearse

Rehearsing what you say will really help you fine-tune your key messages and how you want to say them. Practice in front of the mirror, or even better, with a friend or family member who can provide feedback.

Prepare briefing material

It's recommended that you bring along some information to leave with your MP. Make it concise and no longer than a double-sided page. Your information should help your MP understand what the problem is, who is being affected, what can be done to tackle the problem, what specific actions you are asking them to take, and your contact details for further correspondence. The schedule of your MP may change at the last minute, so it is a good idea to have a summary of your main points to leave with the MP's office in case your meeting does not go ahead or is cut short.



Sakhina (left) with her daughter and a Caritas Bangladesh staff member inside their home in a refugee camp in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh. Photo: Caritas Australia

Organising a meeting with your MP – During the meeting

During the meeting, the main aspects that you want to cover are:

- Making your case
- Understanding your MP's point of view
- Take note of what they say
- Getting a promise on what action they will take
- Building a relationship with your MP
- And last but not least, you may wish to get a photo with your MP to use in your communications or media

1. Approach it as a relationship

Rather than thinking of your meeting simply as about extracting a promise from your MP, think of it as having two primary aims – one is to convince your MP to take action, and the other is to build a relationship with them on a human level.

As a social justice activist, it's often necessary to take a long-term approach. Your first meeting with your MP may not be the last time you'll want to see them, so take a long-term approach. Even if you don't agree with their policy stance on a particular issue, you're more likely to influence your MP if you can connect on a human level.

2. Get to the point and keep it simple

You may only have 15 minutes of their time (even if you have a longer meeting scheduled, MPs often have to change their schedule at short notice) so you'll need to make your point and leave enough time for them to respond.

Keep it simple. Your MP isn't likely to be an expert (unless they also happen to be a minister with a relevant portfolio) as they have to keep up-to-date on a wide range of topics. Make use of powerful stories and simple but strong statistics to illustrate what you are saying.

3. Stay on subject

Experienced politicians are able to change the subject – especially when they're on the defensive. A good response is something like: "I know your time is very valuable; we really only came here to discuss how you can help us with this issue. If you have more time, we can discuss the bigger picture."

Organising a meeting with your MP – During the meeting

4. Talk about real people

Human stories help us understand the impact of an issue at a transformational level, far better than any statistic can. Human stories remind your MP that they can take action to help stop the suffering of others.

5. If your MP is Catholic, use the Church's teachings

Use quotations from Papal statements or other Church teachings to show how your faith impels you to act in solidarity with the most vulnerable (but avoid lecturing your MP about their faith). This is a powerful and specific contribution you can make as a Caritas supporter.

6. Don't worry if you don't know

If your MP asks a question that you don't know the answer to, don't be afraid to say so. You only need to express your beliefs, they don't expect you to be an expert! You may offer to provide more information by email after the meeting and can always contact the campaigns team for support at act@caritas.org.au

7. Don't be intimidated

Your MP is only human! As a constituent you have a right to speak to them, and your MP has a duty to listen to you.

Organising a meeting with your MP – After your visit

Debrief

It's important to make sure you are all on the same page immediately after leaving the meeting, while the conversation is fresh in your mind. Find a space away from other people to discuss:

- How did the MP respond to the issue and the asks?
- What are the next steps?
- How did we do as a team?

Follow up

Write to your MP to thank them for meeting you. Take the opportunity to restate your main points and confirm what action you agreed. Send them further information (if any) you promised during the meeting.

Organising a meeting with your MP – Other FAQs

Do I need to be a constituent to write to/visit an MP?

Parliamentary convention means that MPs can only act on behalf of their own constituents. It is likely that, should you write to the wrong MP, they will pass your letter on to the right person. But it's better to get it right first time.

What if my MP has no interest in my issue?

Just because an MP may not be personally interested in a certain policy area doesn't mean they won't respond to or represent your views. Show them how much it means to you and their interest may well increase. Always remember that MPs are there to represent you.

What if my MP already supports my issue? Should I still contact them?

If your MP supports your issue, consider them a powerful ally and work to maintain a relationship with them. Are there ways in which you can help each other to raise the profile of your issue? During your meeting, don't be afraid to seek their advice and ask them what other actions they can take. Depending on your strategy, it can be important to keep an issue on the agenda or move an MP from passive support to acting on your issue.

Do I need to be an expert about the issues?

Not at all. It helps to understand the subject, but your passion for an issue is what will leave a lasting impact on your MP.

Sample guide: Meet your MP about climate justice

If you were to meet your MP on the issue of climate justice, here are some ways you might prepare:

- Research your MP's policy on climate change and renewable energy (this is often his/her Party's policy). Do you think the policies are strong enough? Discuss and explain the reasoning behind your answer. How could your MP support stronger climate change action?
- Investigate the Australian and global contexts of climate change policy.

Sample questions that you could ask your MP during the visit:

- What kind of challenges do you think our generation will face in our adult life due to climate change?
- We have been learning about the stories of people deeply impacted by climate change in developing countries, in the Pacific for example. What are you/your Party doing to ensure that these people – who have done the least to cause global warming – are helped to adapt to climate change?
- Many other countries are moving their economies away from fossil fuel dependence to renewable energy. How do you think Australia compares and will our industries be competitive in the future?



“We need to communicate with each other, to discover the gifts of each person, to promote that which unites us, and to regard our differences as an opportunity to grow in mutual respect.”

Pope Francis (2015), *Welcome ceremony in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina*



INVITING MP TO YOUR EVENT



Toefuata'iga (13) stands with a group of Samoan school children at assembly. Photo: Caritas Australia.

Inviting your MP to an event

MPs generally welcome opportunities to meet groups out in the community. A visit by your MP will provide you with an opportunity to:

- strengthen your relationship with your MP
- raise the profile of your event by having a local dignitary
- get photos and media coverage, which can be beneficial to them
- have your MP publicly demonstrate their support for the issue
- Introduce them to more constituents at the same time, showing broad support for your issue



“We need to participate for the common good. Sometimes we hear: a good Catholic is not interested in politics. This is not true: good Catholics immerse themselves in politics by offering the best of themselves so that the leader can govern.”

Pope Francis (2013), *Morning Meditation in the Chapel of the Domus Sanctae Marthae*.



Inviting your MP to an event – Before the event

Decide what role your MP will be invited to take

What do you want your MP to do at your event? Common requests include asking your MP to make a speech about the issue, join a discussion panel, present awards to volunteers working on the issue and/or launch a new initiative.

Talk to your MP's staff

Don't be disappointed if an advisor is sent in the place of your MP. The advisor may become a very useful ally if you build a relationship with them.

Give plenty of advance notice about your event so it can be added to their calendar. MPs are often busy and away from their electorate to meet in Federal Parliament. Check that parliament isn't sitting that day if you are planning on meeting them in their local office.

The first step is to ring your MP's office, explain that you'd like to invite your MP to your event and ask about your MP's availability on the proposed date.

Then follow up with a written request with all of the appropriate details:

- Aim of the event and activities planned
- The role you want the MP to play at the event
- Date, time, location, duration, directions to the event
- Estimated number of attendees and details of other guests invited
- Details of a designated contact at your end
- Information about your group hosting the event

Invite local media and issue a pre-event media release

MPs welcome publicity, especially in their own constituency, but ask your MP if they are happy to have the media attend. Issue a media release (see Caritas Australia's Guide to Engaging the Media) and follow up with a telephone call to your local media in the week before the event.

Inviting your MP to an event – On the day of the event

Meet and greet your MP

Schedule a 'meet and greet' of your MP at an appropriate time (e.g. before the official start of the event if they are opening it) and allow time for introductions. Make sure they know the order of the event and where they fit in.

Introduce your MP

Give a brief explanation of why they are there. It may also be helpful to announce whether or not there will be a question and answer session.

Take lots of photos at the event

Organise for someone at the event to take good quality photos. These can be used for your own communications and for the media. Your MP's staff may also take photos for their own communications.

When taking photos that include members of the public, be mindful of asking their permission, especially if children are present. It's a good idea to ask before you take the photo and explain how you would like to use it. You may also like to record some quotes from attendees at your event.



Damian Spruce, former Director of Advocacy at Caritas Australia, with Rod Goodbun and Josie Lee from Oxfam Australia and Matt Darvas from Micah at the Global Citizen NOW: Melbourne Conference.
Photo: Micah Australia

Inviting your MP to an event – After the event

Send a post-event media release

Local media thrive on stories of community events and activities. Send photos and a media release with details of what happened at the event, who was there, what your MP and others said, and be sure to highlight key information about the issue.

Thank your MP

Send a letter or card to your MP, thanking them for their participation. Include any follow-up information you may have promised them.

Reflect

It's a great idea to sit down with your fellow organisers and reflect on what worked well and what could be improved next time you decide to hold an event and invite your MP.



A family in the Pacific, standing in front of a Caritas-supplied water tank.
Photo: Caritas Australia

ORGANISING A PETITION



Ronita (22) smiles outside her front door in a neighbourhood in Quezon City, Philippines. Photo: Richard Wainwright/Caritas Australia

Organising a petition

This guide is designed to help you run your own petition that can be presented to the House of Representatives.

A petition expresses a point of view and contains a request for action. Anyone residing in Australia can sign a petition on a particular subject that can be sent to Parliament. Did you know that this is the only direct means by which someone can ask the Parliament as a whole to take action?

Caritas Australia encourages you to run your own school-level or electorate-level petition to be formally tabled in the House of Representatives. For the most impact, ask your federal MP to personally present your petition. This means that they will discuss it in the House, raising more awareness of the particular issue.

Example Petition

St Joseph's Parish, Hobart created and submitted their own petition to the House of Representatives. They gathered 351 signatures and the petition was presented in parliament by Mr Andrew Wilkie MP.

There parish Social Justice and Peace group were looking into social justice issues facing the world. *"The shrinking Australian aid budget seemed something we should draw attention to."*

They collected signatures after Mass, at the parish fair and invited other local groups to sign their petition. The parish group presented the petition to their local MP, Andrew Wilkie. *"He was very happy to receive the petition from us. He tabled it in parliament and spoke to it for a number of minutes. The parishioners were very happy to have their voices heard."*

Steps to organising a petition

Step 1: Who will the petition come from?

The petition can come from an individual or collectively from your school or parish group.

Step 2: What will your petition say?

We have provided a sample petition in this guide (on page 47), but you will need to re-word to reflect your community's own perspective. Read the [House of Representatives Petitions Infosheet](#) first to make sure that your petition complies with the rules. You can also send your draft petition to the Petitions Committee and ask them to assess it for compliance with the rules. The sample petition we have provided has been checked and approved.

Step 3: Who is going to be the principal petitioner?

Petitions to the House must have a 'principal petitioner' - someone who will be the contact person for any correspondence about the petition.

Step 4: Decide if the petition will be on paper or an e-petition

Parliament welcomes petitions on paper or submitted electronically. Both paper and e-petitions must use moderate language, and the terms (the reasons and request of the petition) must not exceed 250 words. Paper petitions must contain a front page with the original handwritten signature and full name and address of the principal petitioner, who must be either a resident or citizen of Australia. Paper petitions must be submitted with original signatures, include the reasons and request at the top of each page of signatures and must not be submitted with any other documents attached.

An e-petition, once approved by the Petitions Committee, is published on the House of Representatives website and is open for signatures for four weeks. For information on creating a new e-petition, see the Parliament website. <https://www.aph.gov.au/petitions>

To ensure your petition meets Parliament's requirements, make sure you read the Petitions Infosheet.

Steps to organising a petition

Step 5: Determine the timeline and plan of action.

Decide how you will promote the petition in your school or community. Use the school leadership team and/or social justice group, school notices, the newsletter, social media, stories from Caritas' partners and school/parish events to boost your number of signatures

Decide on a final date for collecting signatures and let everyone know. Whether you have 9 or 900 signatures, finish on that day. Every voice counts!

Step 6: Collect signatures and capture the action!

Each person signing a paper petition must do so in their own handwriting, and they must confirm that they are either a resident or citizen of Australia. No contact details are required to be given.

To sign an e-petition, a person must give their name and email address. The person must confirm their intention to sign through a notice sent by email. The parliament website automates this process. An email address can only be used once per petition.

Make sure you take photos of your petition action to promote within your school community.

Step 7: Submit your petition

You can ask your federal MP to present your paper or e-petition to Parliament. The best way to do this is to ask for a meeting with your MP where you can explain why your community feels strongly about the issue, what you would like the Parliament to do, and ask them to personally present your petition to Parliament.

Paper petitions can be sent directly to the House of Representatives.

Mail the petition to:

Standing Committee on Petitions
House of Representatives
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Petition – What happens next?

Whether your MP is presenting your petition, or you have mailed your petition directly to the Petitions Committee, the Petitions Committee will check that your petition is 'in order' (i.e. complies with the rules) before presentation.

If your MP is presenting your petition personally, he or she will have the opportunity to make a statement, thereby increasing awareness about the need for climate action. If your MP is not involved, petitions are usually presented on Mondays by the Chair of the Petitions Committee who announces the subject of the petition and the number of signatories but no discussion of the subject matter of the petition takes place.

The full terms of the petition will be printed in the Hansard (the parliamentary record) for that day and they will also be published on the Petitions Committee's webpage. The Committee may forward the terms of the petition to the relevant Minister, in which case the Minister is expected to respond within 90 days. Responses to petitions are announced in the House of Representatives, printed in Hansard and published on the Committee's webpage. The principal petitioner will also be advised.

Checklist for preparing your petition action:

- Decide if the petition will be on paper or an e-petition.
- Identify the principal petitioner and what the petition will request.
- Check that your petition complies with the rules of the House.
- Decide on a closing date to stop collecting signatures (Government hosted e-petitions are open for signatures for four weeks).
- Decide how/when/where you will collect the signatures.
- Organise an awareness-raising strategy to build support and awareness of your action.
- Think about how you will document the petition and how you will use these photos. Make sure you don't accidentally share any personal information.

ENGAGING THE MEDIA



A primary school class gathers together to learn at their school in Samoa. Photo: Caritas Australia.

Engaging the Media

Local media plays a powerful role in grassroots campaigning and advocacy. Positive media can help to raise awareness about injustices and create real change – change in the community and even change in government policies.

Local media outlets want to know what people in their communities are doing and why they are doing it. Good local media should reflect the community it serves and give voice to the causes you choose to champion.

At the same time media outlets are not always well resourced, so they rely on you to come to them. And that's not as hard as it may sound. It's simply a matter of writing up a press release, making a phone call to your local newspaper, radio or television station, having a quick chat and sending your release to them. This can happen either before or after the event, or both!

Writing a media release

Don't underestimate the importance of your story or the impact you can have. Media is a powerful tool!

When writing a media release try to include the following:

Basic information: The first couple of paragraphs should include the basic information about your event: who, what, when, where and why.

If possible, make it topical: If there has been a recent story/event in the media on your chosen social justice issue you could refer to this and explain how it relates to your school's interest in this issue.

Quotes: Quotes add punch to your story. Remember to include the name of the spokesperson.

Images: Where possible, take good photos of the event and provide captions with names and details. Check that the people in the photo are happy for you to send their photo to your local media.

When writing also make sure it is:

Newsworthy: Stick to the point, be clear as to why your event is important and why the story needs to be heard. Try to stick to one page – less is more!

Interesting: The headline and first paragraph are your opportunities to convince the journalist that it is worth reading on.

This sample press release was used for the Caritas Hearts 4 Climate campaign in 2016. You can adapt the structure and ideas of the sample press release to suit other events and issues. Think about whether you want to send the release before or after your event.

Media Release: [INSERT DATE]

[INSERT SCHOOL NAME] CALLS ON PRIME MINISTER TO TAKE ACTION AND HAVE A HEART FOR THE CLIMATE

Students at [INSERT SCHOOL NAME] on [INSERT DATE] joined in solidarity with the most marginalised around the globe, as part of a 'Hearts 4 Climate' campaign run by Caritas Australia, the Catholic Church's international aid and development agency.

As part of the campaign [INSERT NUMBER] students and teachers from the school are writing to the Prime Minister and his government, calling for urgent action on climate change which is already threatening communities around the world.

The letter urges the government to "have a heart for the climate" and to take actions including committing to strong emission reduction targets, supporting the shift to renewable energy and giving Australia's fair share of global funds to help poorer countries tackle climate change.

The campaign comes in the wake of Pope Francis' Encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'* (Praised be) – On the care of our common home' which marks a key moment in Church history, as now more than ever we are called to care for our common home responsibly.

The Encyclical calls for a new global solidarity, where all individuals, communities and governments have an essential part to play.

Caritas Australia works with communities in 20 countries globally and within Australia. As Pope Francis notes in *Laudato Si'*, as global temperatures rise, we will experience increasingly severe impacts on a global scale. Many communities that partner with Caritas are already feeling the impacts of climate change, including rising sea levels, unpredictable seasons and more extreme weather events, and are working to adapt to and mitigate the effects.

[INSERT NAME AND TITLE OF SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVE] says climate change is the single biggest threat to reducing global poverty.

"While every person on the planet is affected by climate change, the impact is especially severe for women, men and children most vulnerable to extreme poverty – those who have done the least to contribute to global warming," says Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms [INSERT LAST NAME OF SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVE].

"By taking action as individuals, and as a class/whole school/group, we can make a difference to the lives of the children, women and men most affected by climate change," says Mr/Mrs/Miss [INSERT LAST NAME OF SCHOOL REPRESENTATIVE].

Take action

To learn more about climate justice, *Laudato Si'* or Caritas Hearts 4 Climate, visit [INSERT LINK]. Media contact: [Name, phone number and email address of contact].

Engaging the media

Contacting the media

Draft a list of media publications and some particular journalists in your local area and work your way through the list. Don't forget your local radio stations, television news bulletins and newspapers. Also approach Catholic media outlets.

Note: As a general rule, local television stations want to know about your event beforehand and local newspapers afterwards. Radio could be either.

Before you contact someone, make sure you have a copy of your media release and the contact details of your spokesperson handy. You can offer to email your release to them; if you email it, be sure to copy the text into the body of the email instead of attaching it, as the journalist is more likely to read it. Direct contact by phone or in-person is likely to get you the best results!



Monoranjon working on his farm in southwest Bangladesh. Photo: Caritas Australia

Before and after your event

- ❑ Make sure you have someone organised to look after any journalists or media contacts who attend. They can help introduce spokespeople for interviews and line up photos.
- ❑ Organise somebody to take photos so you can send to media after the event and/or distribute via social media.
- ❑ If journalists couldn't attend in person but expressed an interest in the event, be sure to send them some photos and quotes from participants who attended along with your media release. Remember, direct contact by phone will get you the best results!
- ❑ Spread the word using social media - tag us @CaritasAU (Facebook) or @CaritasAust (TikTok, X and Instagram) so we can help you spread the word.

RAISE AWARENESS IN YOUR SCHOOL



Memory with current carpentry students at her technical college near the city of Blantyre in Malawi where she completed a course in carpentry. Photo: Tim Lam/Caritas Australia

Raise awareness in your school community

There are a number of ways you can advocate to raise awareness of social justice issues within your school. Make sure you involve your teachers in your planning and seek permission from your school principal before implementing any strategies.

At a social justice meeting

If your school has a social justice committee or group, seek their support for your cause. Present the issue and discuss how best to engage the school community in raising awareness for the issue and how students and teachers can act to make a difference.

At a student leadership meeting

You can also engage the Student Representative Council to increase support for your advocacy campaign. Presenting the issue at a leadership meeting can also connect you with teachers and your school principal.

Through school communications

School notices and announcements, the newsletter, school website and school social media accounts are important ways of raising awareness for social justice and your advocacy actions. Ensure you work with a teacher to create your material before publishing.

Prayer service

Work with your Coordinator of Religious Education, Liturgy or Mission to organise a lunchtime prayer service. This is an opportunity for students and staff to gather together to reflect on the issue and offer prayers for those affected by injustice and to pray for your school's advocacy efforts.

Classroom integration

In collaboration with your teachers, organise to link your advocacy actions into the classroom curriculum. The issue you are advocating for could be linked to a unit of work being studied and incorporated into class activities and tasks.

Raise awareness in your school community

At a school assembly or event

Promote your advocacy action at a year group, House or school assembly. Think about how you can convey your message in a creative and memorable way.

Whether it's an assembly, lunchtime workshop or an afterschool event, the aim is to raise awareness and inspire others to take action.

It would be a good idea to organise the event around one of the 'international' social justice days such as International Water Day, World Environment Day or Anti-Poverty Week. Use the Caritas Australia [Social Justice calendar](#) to assist you.

If your school has a social justice committee or group, seek their support for your cause. Present the issue and discuss how best to engage the school community in raising awareness for the issue and how students and teachers can act to make a difference.

Suggested outline for a school event

Here's a suggested outline for a short event, which you can tailor as much as you wish:

Introduction and Welcome

About the Issue/s

- Consider using stories, facts and statistics to raise awareness and engage attendees

Group Reflection

- Reflect on the importance of the issue/s and what the school can do to address them

Action Planning and Sharing

- Discuss how advocacy can work within your school community

Use the media and social media to spread the word

Share your story on social media (Age 16+)

Social media is so easy and flexible and can have a huge ripple effect! Share a simple tweet or post, or a photo or video of your school in action.

Caritas Australia (Facebook @CaritasAU, TikTok, X and Instagram @CaritasAust), so that we can find and amplify your message.

Engage the media and your Catholic Education Office

Publishing positive messages and stories in the media can be a very powerful way to influence change. It shows other people that you care enough to take action and encourages them to do the same. If you are hosting a local event or engaging your local MP, the media will be interested to hear about it!



Advocacy Prayer

God of the poor,

You have always heard and responded to the cries of those in need as all people are worthy of your love and care.

We pray for the strength to be the Body of Christ, continuing the work of your Son on earth.

We pray that education and advocacy break down stigma, labels, exclusion and marginalisation.

We pray that ignorance about issues of injustice may be dispelled by the light of knowledge and truth.

We pray for the courage to raise our voices in unity to address the injustices of the world.

We pray that our leaders open their hearts to hear and respond to the cries of the poor.

We pray that fear may be replaced by a love that inspires hope for a future where all work for the common good.

We pray that our advocacy efforts to address poverty, hunger, oppression and injustice fosters development and restores human dignity.

Creator God, whose tender love extends to every person, You call us to advocate on behalf of the disadvantaged,

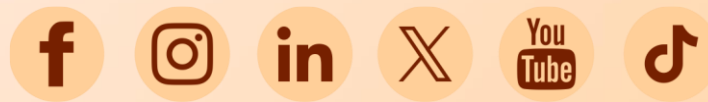
Guide our joint efforts to live this calling to transform the earth and bring justice to all.

We make this prayer in the name of Jesus, advocate for the poor and marginalised.

Amen.



+ Thank You ✝



www.caritas.org.au

