

Guide to Meeting with your Member of Parliament



The idea of contacting or visiting a Member of Parliament can seem daunting. Yet with some simple preparation, it can be a powerful experience and one of the most effective ways to motivate, support and hold our elected representatives accountable.

There are many ways to contact a Member of Parliament, each with different levels of impact and effort required. This guide will give you some tips on engaging your MP through letters and emails, social media, phone calls and visits.

Which Member of Parliament and what is the best method of contact?

The most powerful type of contact for Parliamentarians is when local residents from the electorate they represent meet face-to-face with them.

If you are visiting as a church, school or university group, try to meet with the Member of Parliament that represents your area. If you are unsure of which Member represents you there are links available below.

The most powerful engagement is to meet directly with your local representative. Not everyone is able to do this due to time, so a quick phone call to a Member of Parliament's electorate office can have a similar impact. Be aware though it is unlikely you will get to speak to the Member directly and would usually speak to their staff.

The next level of impact is letters. Personal, hand-written letters in particular are very powerful. Many members of Parliament are now on social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. While not as powerful as a written letter or a meeting, this type of engagement that is non-aggressive but from a local resident can have a high impact.

The lowest level of impact is an email to your local member, but this can be boosted significantly if it is tailored and personal. While it is seen by many Members as the least powerful means of contact it is still better than no action at all!

Emails and Letters

MPs receive hundreds of emails every day. While it's still good to contact via email, we highly recommend a posted letter as a more impactful way to communicate. A brief one-page letter about a single issue can be very powerful coming from residents of the Member of Parliament's electorate. To write the letter and make sure it has the highest level of impact you should:

- Include your name and address
- Handwrite or type and sign the letter
- Personalise the letter in your own words
- Clearly state the topic and the action you are asking the Member of Parliament to consider
- Request a response or ask a question that requires an answer

Social Media

A quick Tweet or Facebook comment can let your local member know that you care about an issue. Make sure you identify yourself as a resident of the Member's electorate and make the comment polite and brief. Ask for a specific action from the Member of Parliament and do not engage in any fights that can escalate with other social media advocates or users.

Phone Calls

Before phoning your Member of Parliament make sure you are able to express your comments briefly on the matter you wish to discuss. Give your name and the town or suburb where you live in the Member of Parliament's electorate. Don't be disheartened if you cannot speak to the Member of Parliament directly, just ask to speak to a staff member who can take your concern to the Member. Ask for a concrete action and for the staff member to inform you of the outcome. You may be asked to put the matter in writing either in a letter or email.

Face-to-face Meetings

Visiting a Member of Parliament requires more organisation than other methods of contact but it is the most influential way to impact your MP and can lead to positive lasting relationships with the Member.

MAKING AN APPOINTMENT AND WHAT TO EXPECT

To make an appointment simply call the electorate office of your local Member of Parliament and explain that you'd like to meet with your local Member. The staff member who receives your call may ask you what you want to see the Member about, where you're from and who will be attending the meeting. They may ask you to follow up the phone call with some more information via email. This is normal and you should be prepared for that. Offices are busy so you may need to wait a few days and phone again if you have not received a response.

A 15-30 minute time slot will normally be set aside for your meeting at a time convenient for yourself and the Member of Parliament.

Your politician will expect your group to ask for something and will assume that the 'ask' is the point of your visit. Politicians are elected to Parliament to represent their constituents, so meeting with members of their electorate, listening to their concerns, and taking action on their behalf is a normal part of a politician's life.

GROUP SIZES

When visiting your Member there is really no set size that groups should be, **but three to five people is a good number**. If possible, everyone in the group should be a constituent in the members electorate.

Make sure everyone knows who will lead the conversation and that someone takes notes. It is not necessary to record everything that is said but it is important to note briefly what the group asks for, outline the Member's response, record what the Member agrees to do and anything else the group agrees to do as follow up.

BEFORE THE MEETING

1

Who Says What

As a group, look over the Micah MP Policy Briefing Sheet (one double sided sheet) and then the policy booklet, [these are available on the Micah website under 'Resources'](#).

Choose who will lead the discussion at each stage, or who will make particular points, during the meeting. If someone in the group has experience that is relevant to the discussion, make sure that the whole group is aware of that. For example, has anyone visited or lived in a developing country, or are people doing awareness raising work in the MP's electorate.

2

Pre-reading

- a. Read through the MP briefing sheet and the Policy Booklet.
- b. Do some research on your MP and their history in Parliament, noting anything that may be significant, i.e. particular interests, past speeches or comments about global poverty or Australian aid, current or past portfolio responsibilities, whether or not they have been on a delegation to a developing country, and whether they have taken a meeting with Micah before.

Good sources for this research include:

- Their personal website (look under 'About' section)
- APH website which has all the information on their history, committees they have been involved in and any portfolios they hold
- Do a simple 'news' search of them
- [Ask the Micah team for access to our Advocacy Tracker database which contains more details.](#)

Discuss as a group if there is anything that you would like to act on in light of this.

- c. Make sure you are all aware of how to address each politician correctly:

- If your politician is in the Senate, address him/her as "Senator"
- If your politician is in the House of Representatives, address him/her as "Mr/Ms"
- If your politician is a Minister in the Government, address him/her as "Minister"
- If your politician is a Parliamentary Secretary, address him/her as "Mr/ Ms" Of course, if a politician invites you to address them by their first name, or in another way, then do so.

3

Practice

If you have time as a group, have a practice run through of your meeting. You will likely have around 20-30 minutes with your MP (although it may be slightly more or less). Practice getting your message across in any of these situations.

It is easy to get sidetracked in a meeting with politicians either by the politician or by someone in your own group. So be clear about how to deal with unproductive tangents. Try returning to the main point with a diplomatic line like, "That's an important issue that we would love to discuss at another time."

Make sure everyone has a role, even if a small one for your first meeting. Be clear about the important points you need to get across in this short meeting.

4

Resources for MP

If you are using the Micah policy briefings, make sure you have a printed colour copy of each of these for the MP and ensure you've downloaded the correct one, depending on what party your member is with (there is a specific version for ALP members).

[These Resources can be found here.](#)

5

Pray

Before the meeting, spend a moment praying that the meeting will go well. Call on God to move the politician to take action on global poverty.

Meeting Flow

Below is a suggested meeting flow to help you prepare for your meetings.

Don't feel worried if the meeting doesn't go exactly according to script. Your MP will probably want to take time and engage with you and your team, and offer perspectives on the things you say. Listen attentively and respond with your thoughts without getting too sidetracked. Just ensure you have enough time to land your key policy ask on aid.

Note: There are different actions/thank you guides below based on whether you are meeting with an ALP member or Coalition Member so take note!

INTRODUCTIONS

Thank the MP for meeting with you. Each participant can introduce him/ herself; state briefly how long they have lived in the electorate and their involvement in the community.

PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

Explain that you are supporters of Micah (previously Micah Challenge) a movement of Australian Christians raising a voice for the world's most poor, vulnerable and oppressed. Note: Many MPs will know of Micah and the campaign's aims.

Group Member A:

- "Today we are primarily here to discuss Australian Aid, and our opportunity as a nation to help people overcome barriers that keep them poor, vulnerable or oppressed."
- "However, before we do that, we want to thank you."

THANK YOU

Group member B:

- "Firstly, we want to thank you for your tireless work in our local community. We know you have made many sacrifices to be a member of Parliament and serve your local constituency and we want to thank you for that." "We also wanted to thank you for the major progress that has been made with the Modern Slavery Legislation being introduced to Parliament last year. This has seen great bi-partisan support in Parliament and we are really excited by that."

If member of ALP (Labor Party):

We also want to acknowledge two commitments announced by the ALP in 2018 which are in line with the policy asks which Micah has made:

1. The commitment to increase aid as a proportion of GNI every year in office starting with the first budget.

We look forward to working with you to ensure this is done in a timely manner. We believe Australia can and should return to the top half of rich country donors by the end of the next parliamentary term.

2. The commitment made to give \$500m over the next five years to support the work of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees.

This commitment will make a huge impact on the lives of displaced people needing essential services and we are grateful for this.

ONTO THE BRIEFING SHEET

Group Member A:

- “If we could turn back to Australian aid, there are some key points we would like to discuss and several asks we would like you to consider.”
- [HAND THEM POLICY BRIEFING AT THIS POINT] Group member C:
 - Discuss positive progress on beating extreme poverty as per the briefing sheet.
 - Highlight the significant issues and threats that still exist.

Group member C:

- Explain (based on the briefing sheet but in your own words):
 - Sadness at current level of aid.
 - That this is a ‘record low’ for our generosity as a nation.
 - Point out our economic strength and low debt levels compared to other nations.
 - And finish with Australia’s ranking. Group member (back to either A/B/C):
- This is an opportunity for someone to share a very brief personal anecdote about what they care about – could be from having seen the effects of poverty overseas, they may work in the field, or they may just be compelled as a person of faith. It is up to the group.

Group Member D:

- “Micah believes that as one of the richest and least indebted aid giving nations in the world, Australia, should be a leader in aid generosity. It’s time to begin moving in this direction.”
- “To do that (point to call to action on briefing sheet):
- “Australia should return to the top half of rich country aid donors by the end of next parliamentary term.”

If member of ALP:

Make sure you reiterate your thanks for Labor already committing to this, then turn your attention to the importance of the ALP outlining a timeframe for when this will happen.

If Coalition:

Good to point out that ‘we acknowledge the Labor Party has made a commitment that should they get into government they will increase aid as a proportion of GNI very year. We are asking that the Coalition commit to a similar pathway.’

Group member (either A/B/C/D):

- “If you would turn over your policy briefing, we have two specific ways we would like to see the aid budget increased or improved.”
 - “These two asks correspond with Micah’s focus on speaking up for the world’s most poor, vulnerable and oppressed.”
 - Group members (A/B/C/D) – based on time remaining:
- Move briefly through each ask.

OUTLINE THE ACTIONS THAT THE MP CAN TAKE

At this point, you can let them know there are a few ways they can take action:

If member of ALP:

1. Write to or communicate with the Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs, expressing your support for our asks.
2. Take a photo with our team and share it on your social media channels. You can tag us @micahaustralia and use a caption like: “Great to meet with @micahaustralia supporters today to discuss Australia playing its role in ending extreme poverty.”
3. Write an article in your community newsletter about our visit, expressing your support for Australian aid.
4. Make an adjournment speech or move a motion in parliament expressing support for Australian aid.

If Coalition:

1. Write to or communicate with the Treasurer and/or the Minister for Foreign Affairs, expressing your support for our asks.
2. Take a photo with our team and share it on your social media channels. You can tag us @micahaustralia and use a caption like: "Great to meet with @micahaustralia supporters today to discuss Australia playing its role in ending extreme poverty."
3. Write an article in your community newsletter about our visit, expressing your support for Australian aid.
4. Make an adjournment speech or move a motion in parliament expressing support for Australian aid.

Other Parties:

1. Write to or communicate with the Foreign Affairs Minister, expressing your support for our ask.
2. Take a photo with our team and share it on your social media channels. You can tag us @micahaustralia and use a caption like: "Great to meet with @micahaustralia supporters today to discuss Australia playing its role in ending extreme poverty."
3. Write an article in your community newsletter about our visit, expressing your support for Australian aid.
4. Make an adjournment speech or move a motion in parliament expressing support for Australian aid.

YOUR JOB IS NOT TO BE A POLICY EXPERT!

Ask your MP what he/she thinks or feels about the issues you have raised. Allow time for comments and questions. Do your work to prepare, but don't feel like you need to be an expert on every issue. Your personal story and commitment is as important as any policy information you outline (if not more so!). If you are asked a question you don't know the answer to, offer to find the information and send it through to the MP. Just ask who in the office you should address it to.

THANK THE MP

Thank the MP for his/her time, and check any information you committed to provide to the MP and ask if they are willing to have a photo taken with the group.

Follow up:

- It's always nice to follow up with a thank you email to the MP, thanking them for their time, reiterate the points raised and any actions they agreed upon taking.
- If they asked for any further information, make sure you include this in the email.
- **Please inform the Micah team of your meeting so we can track your impact! Please email us to let us know you have had the meeting and what the outcome was. We consolidate this information on Advocacy Tracker so that when future groups meet with that MP at Voices for Justice, they can be well prepared!**

Please email us at gov.relations@micahaustralia.org if you have any questions!

LINKS

Find out what electorate you live in and who your local MP is: apps.aec.gov.au/eresearch/

Find your MP and Senator contact details: aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members



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