

How to Visit your MP

Visiting a politician is one of the most impactful things you can do whilst campaigning for an issue. It carries more weight than most other campaigning methods, as it involves face-to-face contact. Here are some steps that can be followed when meeting with your MP or Senator, either as an individual or group.

Before the Appointment

1. Request a meeting in writing

When making an appointment to meet with your MP, most offices will request that you send the request in writing.

It is preferable to send a letter rather than an email. Your meeting with the MP could be an action point you have mentioned in a letter sent appealing about a certain issue or could be a stand-alone request.

In the letter requesting a meeting you should:

- Outline who you are
- Outline the issue you would like to talk about in the meeting and some of the things you will say
- Outline who will attend
- Make clear if you represent an organisation, or are from the politician's electorate.

2. Confirm your request

Confirm your request with a telephone call, checking whether the office has received the request and expressing that you are looking forward to hearing back. If you have not heard back within ten days, phone again. Be persistent until you have an appointment locked in. Make sure you ask the office how long the meeting will be. Don't be discouraged if you are only able to get an appointment with an advisor, rather than the MP.

3. Do some background research about your MP

Before meeting with your MP, you should find out such things as:

- How to address the MP.
- If they have attended an event centred around the issue
- If they are a member of a parliamentary commission
- If they have mentioned the issue in parliament
- If they are involved with any organisations engaged with the issue
- The policy of their party is on the issue.
- If they have any specific portfolios relating to the issue

This information can be brought up in the appointment to engage the MP and remind them of their prior involvement or commitment. To find this information you can look on the who's who section of the Australian Parliament website, as well as the MP's website if they have one. You can also use the Hansard website to gather this information, by searching for the name of the MP and the issue you are campaigning about.

4. Know your issue

Ensure all attending the meeting are clear on the issue you will discuss. Prepare a couple of points to mention, and have your facts straight. Do not plan to talk about more than one issue. It is recommended to go into the meeting with a typed information sheet you have created, outlining the points you will discuss in relation to the issue.

Ensure you are up to date with the latest news and developments, and have answers to basic questions or arguments that people usually have about your issue. You could have a role play as a group beforehand to practice answering questions. If in the meeting you don't have an answer to something, commit to following up with this information after the meeting.

5. Plan what group members will do

Delegate points each group member will talk about (if applicable). Decide on who will tell personal stories, will take notes, request further action etc.

6. Be Clear about your objectives

Know what action you are asking your MP to take, and when you would like them to take it by. Here are some suggestions for actions:

- Talk to a minister(s) on your behalf or forward to them a letter outlining your concerns.
- Lobby parliamentary or party colleagues; raise the issue at party meetings.
- Ask a question in parliament, with or without notice, to obtain information about, or draw attention to, your issue.
- Give a speech in parliament about your issue.
- Promote a motion for debate in parliament to support your issue.
- Get the issue referred to a Parliamentary Committee.
- Speak at a public meeting, or a meeting of your group.
- Make a public statement, perhaps directed to the media.
- Put an update on the issues in their next electorate newsletter.

7. Pray

Ensure to pray prior to your appointment, asking God to make the meeting effective and to prepare the heart of the MP to hear your message. Ask God the kinds of things you should talk about. Also remember to keep praying for your MP after the meeting, that they will be moved to action.

During the Meeting

1. Make a good first impression

Dress appropriately and arrive on time. Look smart and well groomed. Introduce yourself and those in your group, thanking the MP for making time for the meeting. Make sure you are polite and speak clearly. At the end of your meeting, be sure to thank your MP again and indicate you would be happy to meet with them again.

2. Listen

If you are unsure about your MP's prior engagement with the issue, then listen carefully to how they respond to what you are saying, and tailor your message to their response. If they seem to know much of what you are talking about, skip some of the background information and focus on your own experiences or telling them about what the MP's constituents are doing.

3. Be clear

Make sure you are speaking clearly about your issue. Discuss one point at a time. Make sure you are clear about what you are requesting of the MP. Give compelling reasons why the MP should take that action, including expressing that there is electoral support.

4. Secure a commitment

After you discuss the issue with the MP and what actions they can take, ask them what they will do as a result of your visit and when they will do it. If they refer you to another MP, gently remind them that you would like their involvement. If they disagree with your standpoint, ask them the reason for this.

Once you have secured a commitment ensure someone has written it down.

After the Meeting

1. Debrief

Debrief with your group about what happened in the meeting. Discuss things you would do in the future and things you would change. Make notes of things you should remember for the next visit. Go over the notes taken during the meeting and delegate follow-up tasks. Spend some time praying together for the MP.

2. Follow up

Send a follow up email to the MP. Thank them for meeting you and reiterate any actions you thought they committed to, expressing that you look forward to hearing from them. If you have promised to send through further information, do this. Ensure you follow up the MP if you receive no reply, until you have heard from the office.