

Turning your policy idea into action

Workshop Resource | GIWL Youth Summit

So you have an amazing idea to change the world, but how do you make it happen?

This guide, which was adapted from the YWCA Y Advocacy Intersectional Feminist Toolkit, will walk you through the steps to creating and implementing an advocacy plan.

1. Define your **objective** & agree on your **strategic priorities**
2. Map your **targets and allies**
3. Choose your **advocacy activities**
4. Develop **key messages** targeted for different audiences

1. Objectives & priorities

Transforming your idea into a strategy

Objectives are the changes which need to be made in order to address your issue.

First spend time working out what the specific issue is that you are trying to change. Try and summarise it in one sentence e.g. "Abortion is legal but restricted in South Australia" or "Government paid parental leave is inadequate". It can be useful to break your process down into steps...

1. **Identify your issue and your endgame** (e.g. Problem = climate change, End Game = a sustainable planet)
2. **Can I break down the large issue into smaller addressable objectives?** (eg Problem = gender inequality, End Game = women live free from violence, small steps = funding for legal

clinics, national primary prevention programs, parental leave)

3. **Draft objectives by brainstorming ways to address the issue with your group.** Make sure your objective is tangible (e.g. what policy are you seeking to change? What program do you want funded?)
4. **Consult with those most impacted by the issue,** and if you can't speak to people directly, perhaps someone has done research on the issue that you can reference. For example, there are studies where researchers have spoken with university student victim survivors of sexual assault.
5. **Check that your objectives are S.M.A.R.T.I.E.E.**
6. **Prioritise your objectives**

S.M.A.R.T.I.E.E.*

For advocacy to be effective in driving change, it needs to be:

- **STRATEGIC** It reflects an important dimension of what you or your organisation seeks to accomplish
- **AMBITIOUS** It's challenging enough that achievement would mean significant progress
- **TIME-BOUND** It includes a clear deadline.
- **EQUITABLE** It includes an element of fairness or justice that seeks to address systemic injustice, inequity, or oppression
- **MEASURABLE** It includes standards by which people can agree on whether the goal has been
- **REALISTIC** It's not so challenging as to indicate lack of thought about resources or execution; and is possible to track and worth the time and energy to do so.
- **INTERSECTIONAL (INCLUSIVE)** It brings marginalised people, particularly those most impacted, into processes, activities, and decision/policy-making in a way that shares power.
- **EVOLUTIONARY** Consider whether you can evolve your advocacy over time? If so, how?

Stop and consider...

- How does your own power impact on the context in which your advocacy is taking place?
- How are you creating space for the perspectives, skills and experiences of women and gender diverse people, in all their diversity, to be included in your analysis?
- What relationships and knowledge do you already have on this issue within your own or partner organisations? How can you share and build on this?

2. Targets & allies

An insider's guide to working with government to advocate for change

What is advocacy?

Advocacy is more than just awareness-raising. It's a deliberate or purposeful plan that attempts to influence policymakers and stakeholders to achieve social change. Understanding what you want to change will help you identify the kind of advocacy you should do and how to do it...

- **Self-advocacy** – Taking action to represent and advance your own interests, eg advocating for your entitlements at work, such as equal pay.
- **Peer advocacy** – Taking action to represent the rights and interests of someone other than yourself, eg advocating for others who are being bullied or victimised in a social environment such as school or work.
- **Systems advocacy** – Taking action to influence social, political, and economic systems to bring about change for groups of people. eg advocating for women to have access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive healthcare.

Who is responsible for what?

Different levels of government have different responsibilities...

- **Federal** – Responsible for national issues set out in the Constitution ie trade, defence, foreign policy, Medicare, immigration, tax, welfare and pensions, telecommunications, etc
- **State/Territory** – Responsible for health, education, roads and transport, police, prisons, mining, forestry, etc
- **Local** – Responsible for town planning, parks, waste management, parking, etc

Note ACT and NT territory governments combine both the responsibilities of State and Local governments

Who should you speak to?

Governor General

The symbolic head of Government and the King's representative in Australia. Primarily has ceremonial responsibilities and avoids involvement in day to day governing and policy debates.

Prime Minister

The head of the "Executive Government". The Prime Minister is not specifically elected by voters, they are

usually the leader of the political party with the most seats in the House of Representatives. While the Prime Minister has specific responsibilities as the "First" Minister, much of their power is through positional authority (including the ability to appoint Ministers) with members of the government generally providing public support for the Prime Minister.

Cabinet

The highest formal decision making body in the government, made up of senior Ministers in the government. Major decisions need to be made by Cabinet rather than a single Minister. The Cabinet also has smaller committee that focus on specific and sensitive areas such as national security and budget decisions (Expenditure Review Committee). Cabinet discussions are kept secret for 20 years to allow frank discussion of issues.

Minister

Responsible for administering a "portfolio" or area such as Defence or Education. The Minister is authorised to make some decisions on their own within their area of responsibility, but is required to see approval from Cabinet for decisions that require major changes to agreed policies or new funding.

Meeting a Minister is best for advocates seeking policy or legislative change at a Federal or State level. However, Ministers and Shadow Ministers have responsibilities beyond their electorate, so there are extra demands on their schedules. When meeting with a Minister or Shadow Minister, it is essential that you are well prepared, well-rehearsed and have a strong advocacy case. Consult the Parliament House website for the current Ministry list and Shadow Ministry list.

Ministerial staff/political advisors

Ministers are supported by staff in their offices, these staff are selected directly by the Minister and act as a go between for Ministers with the public, stakeholders, media, political parties and departments. Advisors are usually split between policy and media, with larger offices having a Chief of Staff.

If a Minister hasn't got time to meet with you, they might offer you a meeting with an advisor. Meeting with an advisor can be useful. Advisors see Ministers on a daily basis and hold their trust. If you can persuade an advisor to back your cause, they may convince the Minister. Advisors prepare briefs on bills going through parliament and help the Minister and their department engage with stakeholders to ensure their office is making decisions in full knowledge of the different perspectives on any issue. Advisors also play a role in researching policy solutions and developing legislation to enact those solutions.

Top tips for picking political allies

Politicians use their **first speech** to indicate the issues that closely affect them and are of significance to their constituency. This is a great starting point when researching your politician and can help you frame your issue for maximum relevance to their electorate.

Considering a politician's **voting history** can give a fairly reliable indication of their party's platform. In the case of the cross-bench, voting histories can be helpful in directing you to which members you should work with or work on.

Your politician will be a member of various **policy committees**. Knowing what committees they are on will help you understand their interests.

Department/public service/agencies

Departments are made up of public servants who are required to be 'apolitical' and act to support and advise the government of the day. Departments implement policies and decisions of government, and provide advice to Ministers on issues and ideas. Once a Minister has made a decision, Departments can have a lot of influence on how the policy works in practice and can make minor funding decisions within the government's broad policy parameters.

Local MP/representative

While Ministers are responsible for particular subjects, local MPs are in Parliament to directly represent the interest of their local community. Local MPs can be a great way to get your message in front of the responsible Minister. Each MP has an Electorate Office with staff who are employed to support constituents, or members of the community, to navigate issues with government and promote their boss as an effective local member who gets things done.

It's a good idea to interact with your local representatives first. These politicians have made a commitment to represent the local community and can advocate on your behalf. Engaging senators is useful when you are looking to gain access to committees or when you are looking to enact (or block) a bill. Blanket approaches may help to flag your campaign with a wide range of representatives, but if you're looking for a champion or collaborator, consider who is in the best position to help you. Finding feminist allies can be difficult. Unfortunately, in many jurisdictions there are not as many women in government as there should be, but MPs and senators, regardless of gender, can often be very engaged around gender equality. It's important to identify your allies early and nurture those relationships.

The Opposition

The Opposition form a shadow government, with representatives appointed to hold the government accountable and form alternative policies on each of the portfolio issues. Getting opposition support for an issue can help both if they end up getting elected, but also as they have a platform to ask questions and push issues through the Parliament and the media.

Public servants

This could be a person who works for the state or for local government, such as a judge or teacher. People in all levels of public service can also be great people

to talk to for connecting you to others or helping you analyse the invisible power at play.

Other groups to consider

NGOs, stakeholders and lobby groups

While outside of the formal government structure, non-government organisations, lobby groups and stakeholders have a lot of influence in policymaking. At their best, they support policy making by connecting busy Ministers and public servants with real people's experience of policies on the ground.

At their worst, they operate as highly vocal critics to prevent policy change based on their own interests. Both governments and the media seek the views of third parties in assessing and reporting on policies and issues.

If you are tackling an issue related to gender equality, there's probably a group out there looking for the same change you are. Key organisations and community groups often have relationships with everyone listed above. If you Google "issue and Australia/local area" you will often find places and people to connect with.

Corporates and businesses

You may find allyship for gender equality issues among business leaders, and while they might not be perfectly aligned with your values, they can be large powerholders with lots of influence. They may be able to support the amplifying of your message, connect you with useful stakeholders or networks, or even provide financial support.

Committees

Parliamentary Committees

These periodically conduct inquiries into issues where consensus or compromise has not yet been reached. Inquiries are initiated by politicians referring a matter to the relevant Committee. Parliamentary Committees can also decide to conduct an inquiry into an issue that the members see as relevant. It's also possible for advocates to write to the Chair of a Committee to encourage them to undertake an inquiry into a particular issue. Before doing this, it is a good idea to speak to the Committee Secretary for advice on how to frame such a suggestion.

Policy Committees

These are internal party committees. These groups often discuss specific policy areas to provide advice to Caucus (a collective party group of members in the House of Representatives or the Senate who belong to a political party). The best way to in touch with these women's Policy Committees is through an MP as they function more like working groups.

The key women's Policy Committees are...

- Australian Labor Party Status of Women
- Caucus Committee
- Liberal Federal Women's Committee
- National Women's Federal Council
- Green's State Women Committees

3. Advocacy activities

Pathways for change

When thinking about how you want to advocate for change, it's important that you pick your activities strategically. Don't choose something just because it's worked for somebody else, instead consider...

1. What are the things that **need to change** to achieve the outcome I want?
2. What **actions** would cause that change?
3. Are these actions **realistic and achievable** – do I have the capacity, resources and time to do them?

Some pathways to action include...

Community activism

Engaging with local communities to enact change on a grassroots level, for example by...

- Joining or forming a community group
- Organising or participating in community-led marches, events and community forums.
- Developing tools and training to support community and workplace activism.
- Convening spaces (such as gender equality forums) to connect with voters.
- Fostering connections across movements by sharing knowledge and tools and opening space.

Informational activism

Informational tactics are there to start a public debate about certain topics, in the hope that the outcome of the debate will lead to societal change. For example, you could...

- Make public statements/issue a press release/talk to the media
- Undertake desktop research and analysis of existing information points.
- Collaborate with someone to write a research paper and/or develop advocacy materials.
- Undertake research projects using an intersectional approach.
- Partner with research institutions, such as a university or think tank
- Provide technical and advisory support to power holders.
- Present at conferences and/or create space for diverse voices in public forums.
- Set up your own blog or publish articles to educate your community/the general public

Cultural activism (artivism)

Activism can be beautiful. Using creative tactics can make your movement stand out from the crowd and draw attention to your cause. Some potential actions include...

- Creative campaigns
- Working with creative industries such as artists, sculptures, street-art artists, graphic designers.
- Theatre, music, poetry or art performances

Direct influencing

This is targeted activism to get your message across to parliamentarians/ other key stakeholders, for example through...

- Face to face (or virtual) formal or informal meetings.
- Sharing information with allies and the wider movement.
- Writing briefings or letters.
- Attending events and opening space for under-represented people to attend.
- Inclusive input into existing consultation processes.
- Attending regional and international policy forums as a group which includes under-represented people

Digital activism

There are many ways of digital activism. For example, you could...

- Build an online network
- Start a social media campaign, ie by sharing pictures and stories using a hashtag
- Start an online petition

Political activism

Acting within established political institutions to create change through policy, for example by...

- Running for office – Women for Election, Pathways to Politics and Politics in Colour are some great organisations for support with this
- Joining a political party or union
- Working or volunteering for a politician/ political party/ campaign
- Handing out how to vote cards

4. Key messages

Getting your idea out there

Making contact with politicians

Writing letters

The best first step in parliamentary advocacy is to write to your politician. Depending on their position, you may need to send a letter anywhere from two weeks (local MP) to two months (Minister) in advance of a meeting.

Top tip! If you send a physical letter to your MP (rather than an email) they have to send you a reply.

What should you include?

A short letter or email requesting a meeting and a brief outline of why you would like to meet with them is sufficient. If you plan on asking for something (such as signing a pledge or petition), include this in the letter. Recent media briefs that mention you or your cause are also appropriate to send through. Once you confirm a meeting, make sure you include your contact information and a short bio in a follow up email.

Top tips for writing to your MP...

- Make sure you use their correct title – you can find a list of Australian representatives and how to address them [here](#)
- Keep it brief – short and sweet is best
- Use your own words, be polite and give them a clear action that you'd like them to do
- Remember to provide your contact details

2. Call the office

You may wish to follow up written communication by calling their office to remind them of your previous

communication and request a brief meeting. Don't hesitate to call again if you don't get a response.

3. Meeting face-to-face

- **Who should I take?** It's a good idea to bring back up but limit the group to 3 people if possible and assign clear roles/delegate tasks so it's clear who's doing what.
- **What should I take?** Bring a short (2-page) document highlighting the key points of your issue, what was discussed in the meeting and supporting key data that you can leave behind – make sure to include your contact details!
- **How much time will I have?** Meetings can last anywhere from 10-30 minutes. Make sure you clarify the length of the meeting when you arrange it so you can prepare your talking points with a time-frame in mind. Always leave time for questions and don't waste too much time on niceties – don't be afraid to dive straight into the issue once introductions are out of the way. *If you are scheduling meetings while parliament is sitting, be aware that there may be unavoidable delays (for example, caused by parliamentary votes).*
- **What should I say?** Start by introducing everyone – say who you are, who you represent, what work you do and why you have asked for the meeting. Illustrate your point with a mixture of evidence to show the issue exists (data) and why it's important (case studies and personal stories).
- **What next?** Always follow up by sending through any notes and further information to their office after the meeting. Remember to thank them for their time and reaffirm any course of action that was decided on during the meeting.

Communications tactics

Communicating your ideas effectively is essential for advocacy.

A campaign works best when the key messages are repeated – you might become bored with them, but your target audience needs to hear it several times before it has impact. Once you have your key message, you can tailor and adapt this for different audiences. The tone, length and style you use will depend on the audience, but the basic message should remain the same.

Each message should include what, when, why and how to act. It should capture people's attention and persuade them of the argument, without overwhelming them with too much information. Some different ways to get your message out there include **social media**, writing a **press release**, doing a **media interview** or publishing a **blog**...

Tailoring your key message

It is a good idea to develop different framing of messages for audiences such as politicians, the media and the general public.

Think about what each of these audiences might be interested in and focus on this. Just make sure your messages are all saying the same thing and supporting your long term aim – just framed in different ways.

Nothing about us without us! Remember that stories should always be told from the person whose story it is and no policy should be decided without the full and direct participation of those affected by that policy.

Social media for social change

For most people social media is a part of their everyday lives, so when deciding what social media platform you would like to use for your advocacy campaign, have a think about what platforms you are most comfortable on and use often.

But also consider your audience and where they're likely to be. For example, if you're trying to reach likeminded young people, Instagram or even TikTok would be the obvious choice, but when you're wanting to connect with people in power (politicians, power holders, decision makers) you may be able to reach them easier on Twitter or LinkedIn. Some key things to consider...

- **Tagging** – Make sure you tag politicians or organisations correctly and you've not accidentally tagged a parody account
- **Hashtag** – Use something relevant, memorable and searchable and use Camel Case (capital letters for each new word) for accessibility – eg GIWLYouthSummit not GIWLYouthsummit
- **Graphics** – Do everything you can to grab people's attention and make them want to share your message, for example through bold graphics, powerful images and short videos

Top tip! 90% of people watch videos on social media with no sound so always add subtitles! And this is also best practice for accessibility reasons.

Top tips for media interviews

1. **Research your interviewer and their media outlet** before the interview so you know the format, tone, and the interviewer's style.
2. **Ask for questions ahead of time** so you have an opportunity to prepare and you won't get caught off guard.
3. **Avoid hosts that could hinder your campaign.** There are plenty of media outlets to choose from so pick one that will let you deliver your message in a supportive environment.
4. **Use accessible language and adapt your messaging for that outlet's key audience** so it is engaging and easily understandable.
5. **Mention your campaign or organisation's name at least twice** to really embed it in viewers' memories and ensure anyone tuning in halfway through knows what you're talking about.
6. **Speak in full sentences.** This makes it easier for outlets to create vox pops and pull quotes of your key messages and reduces the risk of them being taken out of context.
7. **Dress to fit the vibe.** If you're on TV or filming using a green screen, steer clear of wearing green clothes or anything with a bold pattern. Equally feel free to express your personal style but keep things on the smarter side so you can represent your cause and organisation professionally.

How to write a media release

Do your research and find which outlets best suit your message so you can reach a really targeted audience. Not every story will make front page news, but that's fine as long as you're reaching the people you need to. When you're writing your media release, remember to...

Format correctly

You don't need lots of bells and whistles when designing a press release. Keep it simple on a plain A4 word doc with your organisation's letter head/contact details at the top and don't use any graphics, pictures or jazzy fonts.

Make sure to include the words **Press Release** in bold at the top and (if you want media outlets to not share the story until a specific date and time) include the words **Under embargo until Date Time**.

Have a catchy headline

This is the first thing a reader looks at so it has to be attention-grabbing. Put it in bold, large

font and make it bold, short and punchy. The headline serves two purposes: the first is to make it clear what the issue is and what the main message of the media release is, and the second is to catch the reader's attention and inspire them to read on.

Make your point in the first sentence

You generally have your reader for about 30 seconds so make them count! Front-load your key messages right at the top and never assume your reader will make it to the end of the page.

Keep it snappy

Keep it as short as possible (ideally one page) – remember the purpose is to grab the media's attention, if you succeed they will contact you for further information.

Equally keep your sentences short and sharp, set out your points clearly and concisely and don't use elaborate or technical language – if your reader has to take time to try to understand your point, they're not going to carry on reading. And the most

important thing is to keep it interesting! Once you have their attention don't lose it – boring stories don't make news.

Include quotes

Direct quotes are essential as they allow a journalist to report on the issue or event as if they had conducted an interview with you. Remember, you may only get one quote into a radio story or newspaper article, so each quote should be worthy of publication. Ideally, quotes should be short, punchy and contain an interesting piece of information or argument. People you quote should be identified by their position, eg. Julia Gillard, Founder and Chair of The Global Institute for Women's Leadership.

Make sure it's accessible

Someone with no prior knowledge needs to be able to read your press release and understand it – send it to a friend to make sure it passes this test! Make sure it's informative, interesting, relevant and easy to understand – the goal is to inspire the reader to want to do something about your issue.