

STANDARD BRIEFING NOTE 2

Advocacy Planning and Submission Writing Tips

This Briefing Note contains key points, key terms, background information and examples of practical application as well as links to further information and local contacts. It does not contain legal advice and should be used as a starting point for further research rather than an authoritative source. Feedback on its contents is welcome. Some of this material is based on perspectives shared at the Make Change Happen Feast Event held in Adelaide in 2016. The RRNSA particularly acknowledges the contribution of Dr Niki Vincent to the 2016 Feast Event.

Five Key Points for Successful Advocacy

1. Don't do it alone.

This is not only lonely, its dangerous. Those who are threatened by what you are doing will find it much easier to cut you down if you are out there by yourself. Instead, join up with others who can offer new perspectives, new skills or new forms of support. The Rights Resource Network SA can help link you up with others who care about the same issues as you.

2. Define your goal or purpose.

This might be a challenging and painful exercise but it is a fundamental precursor to successful advocacy. The more specific you can be about your goal the easier it is to plan steps to achieve it. Sometimes your big picture goal might be large and complex (eg equality for all persons regardless of attributes). If this is the case, break it down into more specific goals that connect in with a particular opportunity (eg providing a persuasive submission to the parliament that gets referred to in the committee report; engaging positively with the media; securing a meeting with a key decision maker).

Some questions that can help in defining and refining your goal include: What are the values that drive you? What are the larger purposes to which you are prepared to commit? How do these connect with those in your group or organisation or network? What is the shared purpose that you all find compelling? What action do you want the decision maker to take? How do you know when you have reached your goal?

3. Embrace an experimental mindset and look after your self

Opportunities to learn and grow offer themselves every day. Look for them and try to take advantage of them – in service of what you care most deeply about. Leading any kind of change is an experimental art. Living life as a learning laboratory allows you to try things out, make mistakes and learn from them, build your skills and take pleasure in the journey as well as the outcomes.

4. Stay connected to your opposition.

If you have an open, creative mindset you are more likely to engage with a broader range of people. This in turn makes it more likely that you will discover allies or supporters of your cause from a diverse range of walks of life. Be open to challenge. Be welcoming of those with whom you think you disagree. Talking to people with a different view to you helps you to

refine your message and goal, and test your persuasive skills. You may even change your own position or form an alliance over matters of shared interest.

5. Grow your own self-awareness.

You are a system as complex as the one you are trying to change. In order to best equip yourself for the change journey ahead, you need to understand your own triggers – what ‘pushes your buttons’ or ‘hits a nerve’? What can turn you from a bright, strategic, graceful person into a more primal defensive one? What are your needs for power and control? For affirmation and importance? Do you try to solve others problems rather than handing back?

Lean in to your incompetence. Risk failure so you can learn new things. Be prepared to change your decisions. Develop your compassion for others – even those who oppose you. Build your resilience for the challenging journey ahead. Be prepared to operate in despair and keep going.

Five Tips for Effective Campaigning

1. Have a plan.

An actual plan. Tactics are not plans. Your plan should identify the key steps you need to take to reach your goal. It should include consideration of key influencers, key decision makers, resourcing implications, potential allies and opposition.

2. Tell your story

Your story is important and compelling. Share it as broadly as possible (and as appropriate having regard to individuals involved). Ask for feedback from media if your story is not taken up. Ask other groups for ideas and advice in terms of reaching key audiences.

3. Work together

Build coalitions – the Rights Resource Network SA can help you link into other groups or individuals that care about the same issues as you.

4. People power

Get as many people on board as you can. Numbers matter.

5. Be flexible –

Sometimes things don’t work out. Be brave enough to acknowledge your mistakes or inexperience. Know when to change your plan. Know when to ask for help. Know when to step away.

Five Tips for Effective Submission Writing

1. Develop a high quality, accurate, detailed ‘core’ story – and use it everywhere!

Take the time and effort to prepare a really great 'core' submission that can be adapted for a variety of purposes eg law reform commissions, parliamentary inquiry, letter to local MP, letter to Minister. A slight change in tone and length can make the core submission very versatile.

Your core should be focused, detailed, and accurate and draw upon your strengths. For example, if your organisation delivers a service to clients, focus on how the issue impacts on the quality of service being received or delivered and on the impact on the lives or wellbeing of your clients. Use evidence (data, testimonials, legal rules) to support your claims or key points, and clearly identify the problem as precisely as possible. You should also try and identify or develop a clear solution. What do you want the decision maker to do? Think carefully about whether you are asking for substantive change (eg change to law or policy or funding) or a process change (eg the opportunity to raise your concerns or have your voice heard).

2. Provide a clear solution and a Plan B

Be strong, clear and specific about the precise change you want to see happen... and offer a back up plan or compromised position, particularly when you are asking for significant reform eg:

"We recommend that all South Australian government agencies include options to indicate non-binary gender on all official forms by using the term 'non-binary' in addition to 'male' and 'female'.

If this recommendation is not adopted, as an interim measure, we recommend that a comprehensive review be undertaken of all South Australian government agencies to determine whether and why they are collecting information about gender and what practical or other barriers exist to offering a non-binary option on all official forms. This review should issue a public report within six months."

3. Make the first paragraph and first page count!

Use an Executive Summary to set out (1) who you are and why you are making the submission eg *"I am a parent of a transgender child and this inquiry is of critical importance to my family..."* (2) why the reader should care *"As my elected representative, you are in a position to make this change..."* (3) what you want them to do eg *"I ask you to help change the current law or government policy by ..."* (4) what's in it for them eg *"You can demonstrate your leadership and commitment to our community by promoting equality and inclusion ..."* This should be at the very beginning of your submission and ideally be less than 2 pages long. It could be all the reader reads!

4. Use personal stories, experiences or case studies to support your key points

This is the human heart of your submission and is likely to be the most persuasive. If you don't have your own examples, get in touch with some other organisations or individuals who might have published some already that you can refer to. Rights Resource Network SA can help.

5. Use comparative examples and back up your claims with evidence.

You don't need to be a lawyer or policy expert to do this - a little research can go a long way. Draw upon the work of others, particularly great organisations like the Australian Human Rights Commission or the Human Rights Law Centre or even reputable overseas groups- no need to reinvent the wheel. Keep the points as clear and concise as possible and try to address rather than ignore evidence or claims that might be made against your argument. Making these connections is what the Rights Resource Network SA is all about!

Try these places for some good examples of effective submission writing

- ❖ Human Rights Law Centre <https://www.hrlc.org.au/submissions>
- ❖ Law Council of Australia <https://www.lawcouncil.asn.au/tags/submissions>
- ❖ Australian Council of Social Services <https://www.acoss.org.au/acoss-reports-submissions/>
- ❖ Uniting Communities SA <https://www.unitingcommunities.org/category/submissions-reports/>
- ❖ Equality Australia <https://equalityaustralia.org.au/resources/submission-all-schools-same-rules/>