

POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT

FOR COMMUNITY RADIO BROADCASTERS



CBAA | COMMUNITY
BROADCASTING
ASSOCIATION OF
AUSTRALIA



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WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?

The CBAA Political Engagement Toolkit has been designed for staff, volunteers and committee members at Australian community radio stations.

This booklet not only highlights the need for and benefits of political engagement, it also provides easy to follow insights for station staff and volunteers.

Accompanying this booklet is a series of standalone factsheets. These cover areas such as overviewing the community radio sector, broadcasting guidelines during elections and making the most of different types of media.

The complete CBAA Political Engagement Toolkit can be accessed online at cbaa.org.au/politicalengagementkit.



The CBAA is the go-to service for information, advice and services for community broadcasters. To contact us, please email office@cbaa.org.au or call 02 9310 2999.

BENEFITS OF POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT

WHAT IS POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT?

Political engagement involves building a mutually beneficial relationship between your station and relevant elected representatives, including state and federal members of parliament, ministers, local councillors and mayors.

Political engagement is not a partisan activity. The relationship between your station and elected representatives should be based on the guiding principles of community radio, not the political affiliations of particular individuals.

Done successfully, political engagement will strengthen the connection of your station to the communities you broadcast to.

WHY DO POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT?

1

BUILD THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

In an era when political apathy and disillusionment are high, a successful political engagement strategy will play a key role in connecting politicians with the real lives and concerns of the communities they represent.

2

CREATE COMMUNITY RADIO ADVOCATES

As key decision makers in governments, on councils, and within political parties, political representatives can champion the cause of community radio in various ways, especially when governments or councils are looking to make cuts.

3

OPEN NEW DOORS

Whether they're in government, opposition or on the crossbench, politicians have large networks and connections across the community, which can lead to increased opportunities for fundraising and building new audiences.

HOW POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT WORKS FOR ALPINE RADIO

Station Secretary Nick Brown says their station believes it is “important to maintain good relations with members of parliament, whatever their political persuasions. The two-way communication process can keep both parliamentarians and the electorate informed about local community issues.”

At the end of the day, the relationships formed with local MPs can affect the station's future. "If we've got them onside we can go to them and say this is what the Budget's doing and we need some help – it's good to have them on your side."

“Because they’re so busy, you really have to be persistent in trying to get them to engage. You need to get in their calendars.”



POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT TOOLKIT • 5

UNDERSTANDING YOUR AUDIENCE

As in all forms of communication, knowing who you are talking to, how they think and what they want is crucially important.

WHO DO I NEED TO KNOW?

FEDERAL	Local Member The voice of your community in Canberra. Can be an important advocate for community radio. You can be their conduit to their constituency. Target for regular on-air appearances and participation in fundraising.
	Minister for Communications Key decision-maker about the industry, with around 12 per cent of station income coming directly from the federal budget. Congratulate newly appointed Ministers, introduce them to what your station does and invite them to visit when they are in the area.
	Communications Spokespeople The Opposition Shadow Minister or Cross-bench Spokesperson will likely be more accessible than the Minister. Plus, they could very well be Minister one day. Congratulate incoming spokespeople and keep them updated with station milestones.
	Other Ministers & Spokespeople If you're a specialist station, or have programs that deal with specialist areas, you need to interact with the relevant minister, shadow minister and spokespeople.
STATE/ TERRITORY	Local Member The voice of your community in your state or territory parliament, this local member is likely more available than your federal MP. Some states – Victoria, Tasmania and Western Australia – have Upper Houses that have geographically distinct areas.
	Ministers & Spokespeople State and territory level politicians are more likely to visit your local area than their federal counterparts. Target them for funding partnerships across service areas, e.g. youth, education and ATSI.
LOCAL COUNCIL	Mayor Likely to be your most accessible high-profile politician, wanting to regularly promote Council activities in your local community.
	Councillors Will generally be available to discuss local issues.



“Committed as we are to Australia’s diversity, we are committed to community broadcasting. Community radio is a very valuable platform to communicate to our constituents and is often the only media available to regional and remote communities.”

Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, MP for Wentworth and fmr Minister for Communications, with CBAA President Adrian Basso, Sept 2014.

WHAT DO POLITICIANS WANT?

Despite rumours to the contrary, politicians are as human as the rest of us, and have similar needs. By understanding what politicians want you will be able to engage with them more productively.

1

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

People are very quick to complain to politicians when something happens they don't like – which is fine because dealing with these concerns is a core part of a politician's job – but very few people will get in touch to say 'well done'.

Finding ways to acknowledge the positive work your local representative does can go a long way to building a healthy and respectful relationship.

2

SIMPLE REQUESTS WITH SIMPLE OUTCOMES

Politicians get asked to do multiple things every day. Some of these issues are extremely complex and some have no solution. There's nothing an under-pressure politician likes more than a simple request that they can respond to and action immediately.

It's worth keeping this in mind as you engage with MPs. Also note that you don't need to rush everything into the first time you meet or talk. A series of simple encounters can give the time needed to build a more nuanced relationship.

3

KEEPING THEIR JOBS

The job of politicians is to represent their constituencies at their particular level of government. To continue doing this job they need to get re-elected every 3-4 years (or longer if they're in the Senate or some Upper Houses).

The six months leading up to an election, or immediately following a state or federal budget, can be good times to target politicians, who will be wanting increased community engagement at this time.

Highlight to politicians that by engaging with your station they will be engaging directly with their constituents in a meaningful way.



“Community radio provides a valuable vehicle for politicians to use when spreading their message and engaging with the community. But more importantly, community radio is a wonderful way for us, as community leaders, to listen to what people are concerned about; hear their views and ideas.”

Julie Owens, MP for Parramatta and former CEO of the Australian Independent Record Labels Association (AIR).

WHAT CAN POLITICIANS DO?

People often unrealistically expect politicians to be able to solve their problems, not understanding what different politicians can actually do, either within government, a political party, or in the community. Having an understanding of exactly what politicians can and can't do is crucial.

IN THE COMMUNITY

COMMUNICATION AND OUTREACH

All politicians have a communications allowance that they use to connect with their constituents, often via email or direct mail. They will also invariably have strategies to reach different parts of the community, including by hosting events, round tables and even sending cards to people on their birthdays.

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Local representatives are frequently asked to attend and speak at events occurring in the community, from café openings to citizenship ceremonies. This provides politicians with a wide network within their local area.

FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

In some legislatures, particularly at a state level, a certain amount of money is put aside per electorate to give small grants to community and not-for-profit organisations. Local politicians can play a key role in deciding where this money is spent.

DIRECTLY FOR YOUR STATION

There are a number of ways that politicians can interact directly with community radio stations:

1

ON AIR

Regular scheduled appearances will cement your station as a conduit between a politician and the community. Even occasional news interviews will help connect your listeners to what happens in state or federal parliament. Politicians may purchase sponsorship minutes to promote their activities (depending on your station's sponsorship policy).

2

OFF AIR

Extend an invitation for politicians to visit your station and see what you do first hand. If you run fund-raising or other station events, invite politicians to attend and make a contribution via a short speech.

3

CONNECTIONS

All politicians have networks they are connected to and communications systems in place to reach them. Make sure you're on your MPs email or media lists, keeping an eye out for events and opportunities.



“In an age of media consolidation and attacks on journalism, the alternative voices provided by community broadcasters are more important than ever and a vital part of our media landscape. Community radio provides a diversity of news, views, music and technical skills development in communities all over Australia. I was a community radio volunteer before politics, and I've seen the importance of local media for grassroots politics. For many communities, community radio is the only local voice.”

Scott Ludlum, Senator for Western Australia and Greens Spokesperson for Communications.

IN THE HALLS OF PARLIAMENT AND COUNCIL CHAMBERS

There are a number of ways that your local politician may be able to advocate for your station and community in parliament. Sometimes you just need to ask.

FEDERAL	Legislation	MPs often look for ways to make their speeches on legislation relevant to their local community.
	Question Time	Whether your MP is able to occasionally ask a locally relevant question will depend on their seniority.
	Private Members Statements	Every MP gets these periodically. Most use them to talk about notable events or organisations in their community.
	Motions	Can be used to obtain public acknowledgement of something that has happened in the community. For example congratulating your station on its 25 year anniversary.
	Committees	Standing committees are largely based on ministries and the particulars of the budget. Special purpose committees can sometimes be established into contentious issues.
	Petitions	MPs can table petitions signed and presented to them by their constituencies. Petitions are not an end unto themselves. They need to be accompanied by a community engagement and communications strategy.
STATE/ TERRITORY*	Legislation	Same principle as in federal parliament. Politicians love being able to mention local constituents and organisations in legislation debates.
	Question Time	Similar to in federal parliament.
	Motions	Similar to in federal parliament.
	Private Members Statements	Similar to in federal parliament.
	Community Recognition Statements	Some legislatures regularly give members a short period of time to make formal non-political recognition of the work done by community and not-for profit groups in the local area. This could very well include your station.
	Petitions	Similar to in federal parliament.
	Committees	Similar to federal parliament but based on state and territory ministries, budgets and issues.
LOCAL COUNCIL**	Motions	All councillors can put motions on the agenda of meetings to change council policy on particular issues. These are invariably focused on in the local area.
	Development Applications	Relating to proposed construction works to new or existing properties, DAs can often be contentious points of conflict between residents and the developer.
	Budget	Geared towards service delivery within council boundaries, local budgets have a direct impact on what happens in the local area.
	Advisory Committees	Local council committees often have members of the community sitting on them alongside councilors. These committees are ways for the community to feed directly into issues that are relevant for them, for example disability access, the environment, traffic, youth and seniors.

* The exact actions your state MP is able to take will depend on which state/territory they are in.

** Different councils will have different practices and procedures.

PROMOTING COMMUNITY RADIO

When you are talking to your politicians, you need to be prepared to promote community radio. This means becoming familiar with talking about the sector generally, as well as how your station fits into both the sector and the community.

COMMUNITY RADIO

Not-for-profit

Income goes into developing station

Large numbers of volunteers

Restricted advertising

Funded by a mix of subscribers, sponsors, fundraising and govt. grants

Primarily local content

Independent/community run

Run by locals

Easy for community to get involved

Collaborative

COMMERCIAL RADIO

For profit

Income goes to shareholders

Primarily professionals

Lots of advertising

Funded primarily by selling advertising

Mainly generalist content

Subject to corporate/government influence

Run by corporations or bureaucrats

Community kept at arms length

Combative

“ Since its beginnings community media has been local media — the voices of communities that echo their interests and concerns. ”

Dr Rhonda Jolly.



SO WHAT IS COMMUNITY RADIO?








Community radio stations are operated in the community, for the community, about the community and by the community. Communities can be geographical — for example based around a city, suburb or town — or they can be centred on a particular area of interest, like religion, ethnicity or age.

Over 5 million people listen to community radio every single week. The average listener is as varied and unique as the average Australian.

According to Professor Michael Meadows community broadcasting in Australia empowers audiences “to re-engage in the processes of democracy at the grass roots’ level creating social coherence through diversity”.

DEVELOPING LOCAL INFORMATION

- If you had two minutes to ‘sell’ your station to a local representative or potential sponsor, would you be able to do it? Practice ‘elevator pitches’ like this and have them in your back pocket for when the case arises.
- Factsheet A: *Introducing Community Radio* and Factsheet B: *Community Radio and Government* have been designed to be able to handed directly to politicians and give them an overview of what community radio is.
- Create a 1-2 (maximum) A4 page primer about your station, giving a quick snapshot of your station. Things to include:

- | | |
|---|--|
|  Principles and vision | One to two sentences getting at the core of your station’s values and reason for being. |
|  Audience and reach | Who is your station targeted at? How many people do you reach? Are there other methods of communication other than broadcast? |
|  Organisational structure | Highlight the relationship between the board, station management, any paid staff and volunteers. Demonstrate the importance of volunteers to the organisation. |
|  Variety of programs and personalities | Overview the breadth of programs you broadcast and the variety of people who produce them. Don’t include everyone’s name, but consider highlighting one or two key presenters or programs that typify what your station does. |
|  Community outreach | Highlight the ways that the station interacts with the community, e.g. working with local council, broadcasting from live events, providing career and skills development. |
|  Achievements | List station milestones such as years of operation, successful events sponsored, and awards won. |
|  Ways to get involved | If someone wanted to get involved at the end of reading your info sheet, could they? Supply contact information and list three ways someone can engage with your station, for example: become a member or volunteer, attend an event, make a donation. |

COMMUNITY RADIO IN CONTEXT

MEDIA OF THE PEOPLE: BROADCASTING COMMUNITY MEDIA IN AUSTRALIA

by Dr Rhonda Jolly, Department of Social Policy



Australia has one of the highest concentrations of commercial media ownership in the world and it has been argued that this has led to a dearth of sources of opinion from which people can glean information and make informed decisions about politics and social issues.

The existence of public service broadcasters has helped to counter a lack of media diversity and the rise of new forms of social media has delivered another means through which alternative viewpoints can be aired. A further source of media diversity, one often overlooked, is the community media in all its forms.



What defines community media is the subject of considerable debate. It has been described in many ways—as participatory or citizen media, radical media or alternative media.

One thing is agreed—community media contributes significantly to the pool of media voices available. Community broadcasting in particular, as an alternative medium to public service and commercial media, fosters citizen participation and helps to preserve cultural diversity, while promoting an overall ‘Australian-ness’.

Most importantly, since its beginnings community media has been local media – the voices of communities that echo their interests and concerns.

Survival is difficult for broadcasting community media because they most often operate on small budgets, receiving a fraction of the support which the Federal Government provides to public sector broadcasters and operating largely as a result of support from the communities they service.

The broadcasting community media in Australia is more a source which fosters participation than radical idealism; it is the voice of ordinary Australians who mostly do not seek to reorient the world, but to ensure everyone gets a ‘fair go’.

It is alternative in that it provides a form to promote cultural diversity within the framework of an overall national culture and in that it delivers strong local voices in a media environment which is increasingly homogenous.

From the Parliament of Australia Parliamentary Library Research Paper ‘Media of the people: broadcasting community media in Australia’, by Dr Rhonda Jolly. Published 2 April 2014. Available online: www.apf.gov.au

GETTING YOUR WEBSITE RIGHT



RTRFM – www.rtrfm.com.au

Perth-based RTRFM has a website which puts many commercial radio stations to shame. The site has a strong and consistent style throughout. The design is responsive and so displays well on mobile phones and tablets.

The station produces a diverse range of programs across music, politics and culture, which are complemented by regular live events. The rotating slider on RTR's home page ensures that visitors to the site focus on the events, programs and activities that the station is currently highlighting.



2BBB Bellinghen – www.2bbb.net.au

Located in the beautiful Bellinger Valley in Northern NSW, 2BBB FM's website is still a work in progress but they've got most of the basics right. No matter what page you visit you can access 2BBB's program schedule or donate to help the station.

2BBB also tells its stories using pictures. Accompanying the text chronicle of the station's 30-plus year history is a series of images and photographs. Images of your station's past and ongoing activities are an excellent introduction to what you do.



3CR Melbourne – www.3cr.org.au

Long-running Melbourne radical station 3CR uses images well on their responsive website. The station has a sign-up form to their e-newsletter on their homepage, as well as a feed from their blog that lets people know the most up-to-date information.

3CR's 'People' section of the site not only has a great picture of the Committee of Management, it also clearly lists station staff, outlining their roles, responsibilities and providing contact details.



Radio 4EB – www.4eb.org.au

Brisbane's only multilingual radio station doesn't have a fancy website, but it is very easy to find out what you need. The site has clear menus across the top and down the side of the page.

Radio 4EB's 'Get Involved' section is organised in a Q and A format that makes it crystal clear what is involved in being a volunteer at the station and how to get further information.

Need help building or improving your station's website?

Visit cbaa.org.au/radio-website-services

TOOLS OF ENGAGEMENT

Like with most other campaigns, a successful political engagement campaign will combine a variety of different strategies.

Some will involve direct engagement, others will be more indirect, but by combining a variety of different strategies you will ensure that your political engagement strategy has the best chance to build a relationship between you and your representatives that benefits both your station and the community.

It's all about choosing which method is the most appropriate on which occasion.

In this section are a series of tactics you can use to engage with politicians.

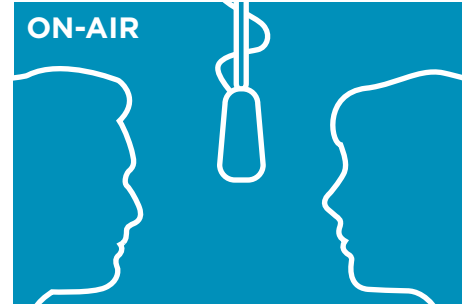
MEETINGS



Face-to-face meetings are a good way to introduce politicians to yourself, the station and your needs.

- Plan to meet local politicians regularly. Once a year would be ideal.
- At the station is the ideal location, providing numerous secondary opportunities, for example for photographs and engaging online and traditional media. However, the politician's office will be most convenient for them, and can be more suitable for some types of request.
- Keep it brief. Politicians are often over-scheduled. Aim to have said everything that needs saying within 30 minutes.
- Know what you want in advance. Meeting for a general chit-chat is counter-productive.
- Follow-up 1-2 days later with an email, thanking them for the meeting and alluding to any promises or commitments that were made.
- Take along key materials, e.g. a one page primer about your station and Factsheets A and B of this toolkit.
- Be prepared for occasional last-minute cancellations or delays.

ON-AIR



The most obvious way for politicians to engage with your station, and a starting point for a strong relationship.

- An ideal situation would be having your chosen politician come in or phone in periodically to chat about what's been going on in parliament or on council and take calls from listeners.
- Politicians with hobbies or special interests may enjoy appearing on air and NOT talking politics; instead talking about music, sport, literature or something else.
- When politicians are chasing media on particular issues they may be able to provide news grabs or give a short interview.
- Indirectly, reading portions of politicians' media releases or updating on their activities on air can help encourage them to appear at some point in the future.
- After politicians appear on-air, follow up with a thank you message and relay any positive feedback you have received.
- Try and book the next appearance immediately post-encounter, or at least get a commitment for another appearance soon.



Whether you're hosting, attending or covering an event, make sure to touch base with any politicians there.

- At an event you are both attending, make sure you go up and 'touch base' with the politician. Have in mind a few things to refer to, e.g. a reference to your last interaction (to jog their memory), mention of something they've been doing in their job (to acknowledge the work they do) and an invitation to engage at some point in the future. Don't try and monopolise their time. Everyone will want a piece. Follow-up 1-2 days later.
- At an event you are covering, record some of their content. This could be news-grab style, where they promote, reflect on or praise the event. If they give a speech, record it. Even if it's not broadcasted, it can make good online content. If a council or political media adviser is doing their job correctly, they will be trying to get two bites of the media cherry out of events. The first is the lead up, the second in the reporting. If you notice your local politician isn't doing this, you might need to become a little more proactive.
- At an event you are hosting, try and give them a job to do, e.g. being the MC or an auctioneer. At the very least, acknowledge their presence and thank them publicly for attending.

STATE GOVERNMENT BACKS COMMUNITY RADIO STATION

Successful political engagement from Melbourne community radio station Triple R in the first half of 2015 saved the station from having to try and raise over \$400,000 or find new premises.

The issue was a development proposal across the road from Triple R's studios in East Brunswick, Melbourne. In late 2014, the developer submitted plans to build a six-storey structure, including dwellings and a café, to Moreland Council.

In Triple R's submission to the process, station manager Dave Houchin highlighted 'serious concerns' regarding the impact of the development on the station's ability to broadcast, in particular the interruption to the signal from the station's 1.8m antenna. The station was facing costs of \$425,000 to move the radio mast.

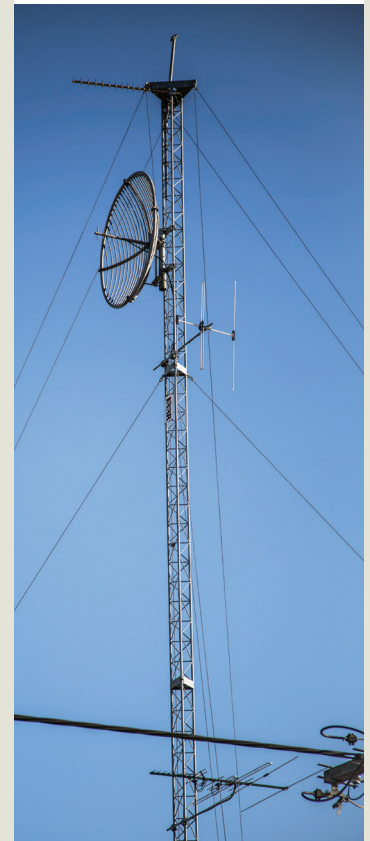
Mooreland Council approved only a four storey building on the site, which would protect Triple R's ability to broadcast, but the developer was unsatisfied. They took their proposal to VCAT, the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal, hoping for approval for the full six-storeys.

Dave Houchin and Triple R then began to ask the Victorian state government for support, while continuing to be backed by Mooreland Council. As Greens Councillor Samantha Ratnam said in *The Age*, "It is really important to protect our greatest community assets, of which community radio is one."

Following advocacy on behalf of Triple R from Council and local Labor MP Jane Garrett, Victorian Planning Minister Richard Wynne called in the application and an independent panel subsequently recommended that only a four-storey structure be built.

"I'm proud that we've been able to secure 3RRR which is a community icon driven by passionate volunteers," Ms Garrett said in *The Age*.

102.7 FM
THREE
TRIPLE
RRR



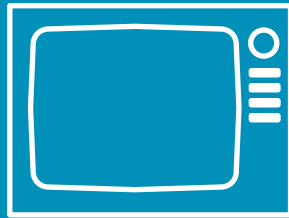
ONLINE MEDIA



The Internet and online communication tools present a number of opportunities for political engagement.

- Maximise your use of communications channels to both engage with and keep up to date with relevant politicians. Ensure you are 'liking' and 'following' their social media channels. Sign up to their e-newsletter.
- Engage with their communications channels: liking, sharing and redistributing their content where appropriate.
- Ping or reference politicians when you do relevant online communications, and sign them up to your e-newsletter if you have one.
- During station promotion periods, ask politicians to share your online campaign collateral via their communications channels.
- Set up a Google Alert or some other kind of monitoring, so that you keep up to date with your chosen representatives' media appearances.

TRADITIONAL MEDIA



Despite the digital age, television, newspapers and commercial radio remain important news sources.

- Due to its nature, community radio can straddle the line between news-outlet and news-item. Turn political engagement into a traditional media opportunity. For example, a politician's station visit could be a good opportunity to get local or specialist paper to write up a station profile, with a great picture of you and the politician, of course!
- Make sure you are on the list to receive politicians' media releases.
- Politicians' media appearances can also become content for you to use, even if you don't talk to them yourself. For example, an opinion piece by a politician often gets plenty of bounce across multiple news outlets.
- Build relationships with your local newspapers, TV stations and other outlets. Pitch stories to them where appropriate.

FUNDRAISING



Politicians can benefit community radio stations financially both directly and indirectly.

- Directly engage politicians in your fundraising activities.
- Ask them to share your campaign materials with your networks, appear at events, in promotional material and donate money (of course).
- If you have more than one politician who is willing to engage constructively, plan a variety of different activities rather than having them all make a ten-minute speech at your annual fundraising dinner. This can not only avoid potentially awkward situations involving political or personal incompatibility (or both), it also acknowledges that different politicians have different audiences that they appeal to and can attract to your station.
- Make sure your local politicians are aware of any sponsorship opportunities they can take advantage of, for example to advertise community engagement forums.



“Most politicians pride themselves on being connected to the community, yet often their connections to community broadcasting is fairly limited – particularly when it comes to understanding just how connected that broadcaster is at a local level to its target communities.

It is very much in the interests of community radio stations – and the communities they represent and work for – to improve those connections, and improve politicians' knowledge of the unique and irreplaceable role community broadcasting plays in so many different ways.”

Andrew Bartlett, fmr Senator for Queensland and Leader of the Australian Democrats.

DIRECT MESSAGE



Direct emails and letters remain the next most effective communication forms after face-to-face conversations and the telephone.

- It's good to get in the habit of both snail- and e-mailing politicians.
- In written correspondence, keep the tone appropriate to the message you're trying to convey, rather than the relationship you personally have with them.
- If the politician has appeared on air or visited the station for the first time, send a follow up email a day or two later, thanking them for coming on and alluding to some kind of future contact.
- If a politician has participated in a fundraising drive or MC'd a station event, send a short formal letter on letterhead thanking them for their involvement and their support.
- Make sure you're on the mailing list for any hardcopy materials that come out of the politicians' office, and send them yours. Update them on station milestones and other significant activities formally.
- Depending on your relationship, if you see the politician do something good, send them a quick (i.e. short) email congratulating them for it.

CASE STUDY



STATE GOVERNMENT PARTNERS YOUTH STATION



By partnering with the Victorian State Government, youth-run media organisation SYN are now able to expand their activities and provide young people from across Victoria with the opportunity to develop skills and career pathways in radio broadcasting, multi-platform screen content and digital media.

The four-year \$400,000 funding partnership was announced live on-air on 18 February 2015 by the Victorian Minister for Youth Affairs, Jenny Mikakos MP.

SYN is a youth-run media organisation providing training and broadcast opportunities for young people to produce radio and television programs and capacity building activities for young volunteers who perform management and operational roles at SYN.

The new program includes a radio broadcasting mentoring initiative and training workshops for staff and young people volunteering at community radio stations. These workshops cover areas such as technical production, radio content development training and best practice youth participation for radio broadcasting.

The new and enhanced SYN Media Community Radio program will provide an opportunity to increase young people's participation in radio broadcasting, not only in metropolitan Melbourne, but across rural and regional Victoria.

"SYN has a long history of lobbying and getting face time with the Minister and Shadow Minister," SYN General Manager Tess Lawley says. "Engaging with government needs to be evidence based and focused on the role the station plays in the community."

HOW TO ENGAGE

Partisan politics can be a vicious business and stations are right to tread carefully. The best way to keep the politics out of it and create meaningful relationships with people of all political stripes is to create a political engagement plan and stick to it.

KEEPING THE POLITICS OUT OF IT

Some stations may be reticent to get involved with politicians because of, well, the *politics*.

Politicians may feel the same way, if they feel that station managers, board members or presenters have certain voting tendencies.

The key really is in how you talk about your station and the way you approach political engagement.

If the politician sees you as combative, and wanting to debate issues all the time, they are less likely to engage.

But if they see you as generally interested in their point of view, and wanting to help get that point of view to the community, that's a different story entirely.



Let MPs speak openly to their constituents rather than try to pressure them into giving answers.



Engage in friendly discussions of issues and policies rather than the 'politics'. Engage heavily with local issues.



Be sensitive to the needs of politicians and also different political allegiances. Politicians from different political parties may not enjoy sitting next to each other at a fundraising dinner, for example.



When tackling issues, present it to politicians as 'an opportunity to share their point of view'.



Broadcast disclaimers before politicians appear on air, making it clear that their views might not necessarily be the views of the station.



MAKING A POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT PLAN

Devising a political engagement strategy covers similar elements to every other type of strategic planning or campaigning that you do. Include political engagement as part of your regular strategic planning process, or set aside dedicated time for it. A few things to consider:

1

SET SHORT AND LONG-TERM GOALS

These will be determined by your current relationship with your targeted representatives. In the short-term, try and be realistic – don't expect too much from yourself or them. In the long-term, shoot for the stars!

2

DEVISE AND ASSIGN TASKS

Every idea you have, whether a three-day music festival or writing a letter asking for funding, will need a series of steps to get them completed. The first time you do something, write down the stages involved, so you can delegate it to someone else next time.

3

PRODUCE ASSETS

The factsheets in this toolkit are just a starting point. You'll definitely also need a leaflet or similar which overviews your station in a way a politician will understand. Other useful assets include social media branding and shareable graphics, t-shirts and pull-up banners.

4

CREATE A COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

This will work alongside your goals and task-lists. The biggest mistake anyone ever makes is assuming that everyone is listening to them. Chart your available communications channels (social media, traditional media, email, snail mail, etc.) and make sure you have actions assigned along the way to make the most of all of them.

5

DON'T DO IT ALL YOURSELF

Including your board of directors, staff and volunteers in any planning process can generate new ideas, foster a sense of teamwork and create a sense of ownership over a campaign. Advocacy is a role that board members can excel at. Staff and volunteers involved in planning a strategy will be enthusiastic about implementing it.

DIRECT FROM THE SOURCE



“As President of the CBAA I've often been told by members that they highly value the strong advocacy role that we play as the peak body of the sector. We've seen the benefits of that through the successful Commit to Community Radio campaigns, securing additional funding for digital radio and dodging the commission of audit recommendation of funding abolishment, along with many other successes.

Our strength has been the relationships that member stations have in their own communities, in every electorate around the country. Our advocacy network is powerful. To get better at advocating for community radio is to build those relationships in the community and with our elected members. It happens at the station level, each and every day.”

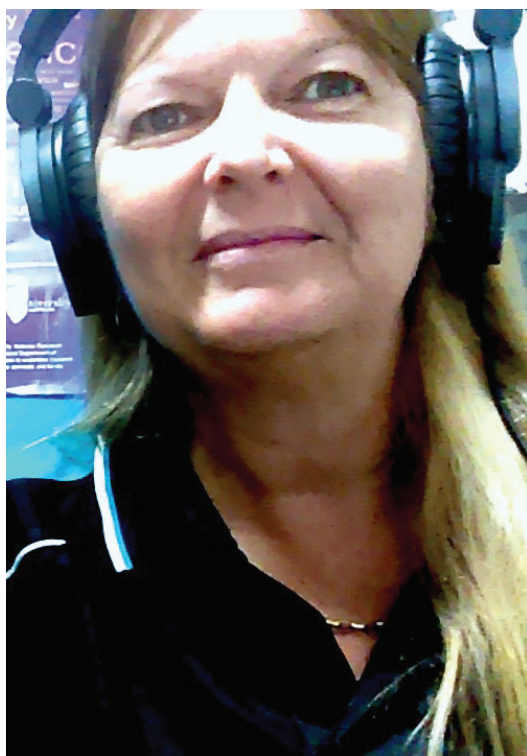
Adrian Basso, General Manager of PBS Radio and President of the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia

“We usually emphasise that our interest is more particularly on local concerns but also an update on the 'goings on' at Spring Street and in Canberra in a big picture sense.

Something the Nationals State Member and the Labor State Upper House Member for Northern Victoria are doing quite well is calling for fairly apolitical responses from all residents about such things as train schedules, mobile phone reception, the impact on local business from our most recent Grand Final eve public holiday, Uni and TAFE issues for country students and similar.

This helps make for good discussion when they come in.”

Mark Perrott - President Mitchell Community Radio.



“Political engagement is very important for radio stations to undertake on a regular basis with elected representatives from all three levels of government, as it provides a personal and realistic perspective of issues that may be relevant to their particular region in some capacity - and also gives an insight into issues that their community may not have access to through the usual channels.

Politics after all is part of life and the more informed and up to date each station is with the latest news items, it ensures then that the station's broadcast community receives the correct and factual information in a professional manner at all times.

Never be afraid to comment on issues, and understand that is totally acceptable to have an opinion - but remember to always state that it is 'your opinion', when touching on particularly contentious issues... Don't be backward in coming forward and make that call to your respective local, state and federal representative to establish that relationship today.”

Michelle Mac Nevin, GEM FM.

SUMMING UP

There is a lot of information in this toolkit, as well as useful tips and advice, which we hope helps you and your station engage more effectively with your local political representatives. Finally, here are 5 key ways to approach political engagement:

1 Patiently

Revenge is not the only dish best served cold. Political change happens slowly, so too political engagement. Building a relationship with politicians takes time. Don't overwhelm the MP with information or requests. Focus on the key pieces of information that will communicate exactly what you want to say at a particular point in time. Be conscious of when your local council meets, and when state and federal parliaments sit.

2 Strategically

This may sound obvious, but having a plan is useful. Include political engagement in your regular planning sessions and develop a political engagement strategy. Start with long-term goals, then map out the steps that can be taken to get there. Return to the strategy each year and review how it went. Revise as necessary. This also applies to individual events.

3 Purposefully

It's really easy to engage with a politician and think that the engagement itself was a positive outcome. This may be true in initial stages, where you might not ever have met the politician before or engaged with them, but interaction swiftly becomes pointless if it is not purposeful. Have a clear idea about what you want, and make sure the politician knows it too right up front.

4 Regularly

This is possibly the most important point. Regular meaningful contact is vital to maintaining strong relationships. When you build your political engagement strategy, make sure it includes a communications schedule, which diarises regular contact points between you and local representatives.

5 Personally

Political engagement, like pretty much everything else, is all about personal relationships. Focus on areas of common interest between you, the politician and the station. Try and get representatives personally involved with the station. Successful stations engage MPs to become ambassadors, partners, friends of the station, sponsors, supporters, etc.

NOTES

USEFUL CONTACTS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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