

How to make mass coordinated phone calls

“Dripping water hollows out stone, not through force but through persistence.”

– OVID

ACTION TOOLKIT

Make mass coordinated phone calls

Mass office calling can be a powerful tactic if deployed at the right moment.

GET PREPARED

Get your MP's number

To find your MP's number, visit www.acf.org.au/find-your-representative

Prepare a single question per call

For in-person events, prepare a list of questions, but for calls, keep it simple. You and your group should all agree to call in on one specific issue that day. The question should be about a live issue – e.g. a vote that is coming up, a chance to take a stand, or some other time-sensitive opportunity. The next day or week, pick another issue, and call again on that.

Organise people to call in

You can ask people in your group to call in individually whenever it suits them, or arrange a single day where everyone agrees to make the call. People are much more likely to do something when

they've made a commitment to another person to take an action at a particular time, so coordinating your efforts not only strengthens their impact but the likelihood of a shared commitment.

START CALLING

Find out who you're talking to

In general, the staffer who answers the phone will be a junior staffer in the office. If possible, it's best to speak to the legislative or policy adviser in the office – that's the person who knows the most about the issues, and works directly with the MP.

Most offices carefully monitor all the calls they get, so even if you only get to share your comments with the receptionist, you're still making an impact. Your concerns are most likely to find their way to the MP.



ACF members.
Photo: Ali Sanderson / ACF

SAMPLE PHONE CONVERSATION

Staffer: MP Sara's office, how can I help you?

Caller: Hi there, I'm a constituent from Electorate X. I want to share my concerns about MP Sara and what her party is doing to tackle climate change. Can I please speak to the relevant policy adviser?

Staffer: I'm happy to take down any comments you may have. Can I ask for your name and address to verify you're in MP Sara's electorate?

Caller: Sure thing. [Give name/address]. Can I ask who I'm speaking with?

Staffer: Yes, this is Jeremy Smith.

Caller: Thanks, Jeremy! I'm calling to ask what MP Sara and her party is doing to tackle climate change. Can you tell me what MP Sara is going to do about it?

Staffer: Well I really appreciate you calling and sharing your thoughts! I of course can't speak for MP Sara because I'm just a Staff Assistant, but I'll pass your concerns on to her.

Caller: I appreciate that Jeremy, but I don't want you to just pass my concerns on. I would like to know what MP Sara is doing to stop this. [If they stick with the "I'm just a staffer" line, ask them when a more senior staffer will get back to you with an answer to your question.]

Staffer: I'm afraid we don't take positions on party policies.

Caller: Why not?

Staffer: Party positions are the Minister and Prime Minister's responsibility. We have no control over them.

Caller: But MP Sara has the ability to speak out and say that this is unacceptable. Other MPs have done so. Why isn't MP Sara doing that?

Staffer: As I said, I can't speak for MP Sara.

Caller: It is everyone's business if our government backs a massively polluting mine that will kill our reef and destroy our children's climate. MP Sara is my elected representative, and I expect her to speak out on this.

Staffer: I'll pass that on.

Caller: Thank you for passing on my concerns. I find it unacceptable that MP Sara refuses to take a position on this issue. I'll be notifying my friends, family, and local newspaper that our MP doesn't think it's her job to represent us or actually respond to her constituents' concerns.

Keep a record of the conversation

Take detailed notes on everything the staffer tells you. Direct quotes are great, and anything they tell you is public information that can be shared widely. Compare notes with the rest of your group, and identify any conflicts in what they're telling constituents.

FOLLOW UP

Follow up with an email. All staff members in the respective state and federal parliaments parliament have the same email format. So if you know who you are trying to reach, you can easily reach them by email.

Political offices get massive amounts of email and they are very resentful of mass email tactics which activist groups use, which can actually cause their email systems to crash. Be persistent and passionate, but also put yourself in the shoes of the busy person you are trying to reach, and make sure that your communication will engage, rather than alienate.

REPORT BACK

Report back to your group and tell your media contacts what the staffer said when you called.

Tell us how it went!

Let's track our collective impact. Reporting your activity helps us understand the difference we are making. Include your attempts as well as your successes. All of these actions contribute to a public narrative that people care about rivers, forests, oceans and wildlife.

It's easy to track online petition signatures or social media reach, but often the most impactful actions taken by our community can be the hardest for ACF to track – like meetings with decision makers or published articles. We rely on you to report back!

Report your advocacy action on our simple form. You can use it every time you have an engagement with your MP – letters, phone calls, meetings and more: www.acf.org.au/reportback



Photo: James Thomas/ACF.