

How to Create a Petition (Offline)

A petition is basically a request for action. Collecting signatures demonstrates community support for change or public dissatisfaction with a government policy.

How is a petition useful to advocacy?

Petitions give voice to community concerns on a particular issue, and put forward specific requests to influence government decision-making. There are many online petitions on the internet, but offline petitions can be useful if you want your petition to be officially tabled in Parliament. Your petition can ask the House of Representatives to introduce legislation, or to revoke or amend current laws, or to take action for a certain purpose or for the benefit of a particular people.

How do I create a Parliamentary petition?

To be eligible for presentation to the House of Representatives the petition must:

- be addressed to the House of Representatives;
- refer to a matter on which the House has the power to act: federal matters;
- state the reasons for petitioning the House;
- contain a request for action by the House.

While anyone can create a petition, there are certain rules and regulations about how to prepare a petition for the House of Representatives.

Requirements:

1. For each petition there must be a principal petitioner even if the petition is sponsored by a group. This is a person who initiates, sponsors and organizes the petition and is required to put their full contact details and signature on the first page of the petition.

If in doubt about the form of the petition, the principal petitioner should contact the Petitions Committee Secretariat while developing a petition to make sure it complies with the regulations and will be accepted. The contact details for the Petitions Committee Secretariat are:

Ph: (02) 6277 2152

Fax: (02) 6277 4627

Email: petitions.committee.reps@aph.gov.au

2. The following rules also apply:

- The terms of the petition must not exceed 250 words. The terms refer to the subject of the petition and the reasons for the petition. The terms must be placed at the top of the first page and the request of the petition must be at the top of every subsequent page.
- The terms of the petition must not be illegal or promote illegal acts. The language used must be moderate.
- The petition must be in English or be accompanied by a correct translation.

Regarding Signatures:

- Each signature must be made by the person signing in his or her own handwriting. Only a petitioner incapable of signing may ask another person to sign on his or her behalf
- Signatures must not be copied, pasted or transferred on to the petition or placed on a blank page or on the reverse of a sheet containing the terms of the petition.

For a comprehensive checklist of regulations for your petition visit:

http://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/petitions/house_of_representatives_petitions

How have offline petitions been used in successful advocacy campaigns?

Here are case studies of three very different offline petitions.

Case Study 1: The Big.

The biggest petition ever presented before the Australian House of Representatives was part of a campaign in 2000 against a new tax on beer. The petition had 792,986 signatures and was part of a multi-million dollar corporate campaign which successfully convinced the Senate to block the tax. But you don't need to be funded by big corporations to make an impact!

Case Study 2: The Bold.

The Jubilee campaign, coordinated by TEAR Australia, brought together churches, charities and community groups to advocate for the crippling debts of developing countries to be forgiven. The Jubilee 2000 petition gained 370,000 Australian signatures, the largest ever foreign policy petition presented to Australian Parliament. The signatures had been collected by thousands of volunteers visiting churches and universities across Australia.

Globally, the Jubilee movement convinced world leaders to cancel billions of dollars worth of debt, to help heavily indebted poor countries to break the poverty cycle. As a result, countries like Uganda, Malawi, Zambia and Tanzania abolished primary school fees and could afford to make education free for all children. Mozambique introduced free immunisation for children.

Case Study 3: The Beautiful.

In 1963, a famous petition was tabled before the House of Representatives on behalf of the Yolgnu Indigenous people of Yirrkala in the Northern Territory. This beautifully crafted petition combined bark painting, English and Yolgnu languages and was decorated with Aboriginal designs. The petition requested the Parliament to recognize that their traditional land was under threat from mining. As a result of this petition the Parliament established a select committee to

investigate the issue.

Although this petition was not directly successful, it was profoundly significant as the first documents bridging Commonwealth law as it stood then and the Indigenous laws of the land. It was part of a broader ongoing movement calling for change which eventually resulted in constitutional amendments in 1967, the statutory acknowledgment of Aboriginal land rights in 1976, and finally the overturning of 'terra nullius' by the High Court in the 1992 Mabo Case.

