

How to Write Effective Government Submissions



This fact sheet summarises the Ask LOIS webinar on this topic, presented by Kerry Nettle Advocacy and Human Rights Officer, CLC NSW on 18 November 2014. This webinar can be viewed for free at www.asklois.org.au/webinars/past-webinars.

This fact sheet covers:

- What are government submissions?
- Style and format of submissions
- Submission structure
- Where to find government inquiries
- Do's & don'ts
- Reactive vs Proactive submissions

Terminology

- **Inquiries:** Governments, parliaments and other institutions conduct inquiries into proposed changes in the law. They ask organisations, experts and the public to tell them what they think of the proposed changes
- **Submissions:** The organisations, experts and public respond to government, parliamentary and other institutional inquiries by making submissions that outline **what they think the proposed changes in the law will mean for the communities they work with or are a part of**

Remember: Parliaments need information. You, as the experts, can provide this information

Format

Submissions can be:

- Written reports with recommendations
- Videos
- Pictures
- Audio files
- Tapes
- There is no set format. Be creative and innovative with your submissions
- Parliamentary inquiries often prefer submissions to be made online
- The details of how each inquiry prefers to receive submissions will be advertised with the information about the inquiry

Structure

Remember, the point of the submission and inquiry process is so that you can offer your expertise to the decision-makers. The best submissions:

- Are short and concise
- Begin with an introduction of your organisation
- Identify a contact person
- Clearly address the **terms of reference** of the inquiry
 - Focus on the terms of reference and the parts of the inquiry that are relevant to your experience
 - Provide answers to any specific questions raised by the inquiry
- Provide **case studies**
 - Do not underestimate the power of **case studies**. They contextualise the issues and stick in the minds of the decision-makers
- Provide **recommendations**
- Make your case studies and recommendations stand out, as they may be the only part of the submission that is read



Style

- Present your argument clearly
- Speak from your experience
- Use headings and sub headings
- Always spell check

Do's & Don'ts

- If you are invited to present evidence in person, do not read out your submission!
 - Introduce yourself and your organisation and have no more than three clear points
- Speak from your own experience
 - Tell your clients stories in a clear and powerful way to persuade your audience
- Do not use acronyms or assume knowledge
 - Use plain English to explain concepts
 - Target your pitch at your audience's level of understanding
 - Remember, MPs are often not experts in the area
- Consider involving clients, for example, inviting them to inquiries to tell their story or assisting them to write a letter to their MP or parliament if you think it will contribute to your point. Clients can also write their own submissions
- Submissions can be asked to be kept confidential but be beware that a parliamentary committee can decide to make a submission public regardless

Proactive Submissions

- You do not have to wait for governments or parliaments to ask for submissions for an inquiry
 - Eg, Changes to the Victims Compensation Scheme (now Victims Support) – as there is currently a focus on the 2013 changes in the media, groups may want to make a proactive submission to the government on these changes and how they have affected clients in practice
- You can present proposals or submissions to parliaments and institutions at any time
- Politicians like to be provided with solutions that will give them an opportunity in the media to be seen as assisting the public interest

Following-up on your proactive submission

- It's really important to follow up with politicians – they are busy people
- Make sure that your submission reached the correct person. An effective method is to ask the politician or whomever it is you are meeting with to direct you to the best person with whom you should contact
- Indicate to the politician or contact person that you are open to suggestions. While you are the expert, you must present your ideas in a way that works for them.

Where to find government inquires

- **Federal Parliament:** www.aph.gov.au
- **NSW Parliament:** www.parliament.nsw.gov.au
- **CLCNSW Inquiries Table:** www.clcnsw.org.au/cb_pages/inquiries_table.php