Scouts Victoria

Guidelines for Local Political Engagement

".....all members of the Movement shall promote Government and community recognition of and support for Scouting and its Purpose and Principles [P&R P 8.1 (d)]...."

So, where do we start?

As a Movement we encourage all levels of Scouting to get to know their government representatives at all levels (Local, State, and Federal), as it is:

- a chance to share our stories and create more awareness of Scouting;
- an opportunity to seek support for our programs and facilities, and
- an educational opportunity for your youth to learn more about the local Council, State/Territory and Federal Government processes.

With the release of the Scouts Australia Resilient Youth Survey data we are now, more than ever, in a prime position to strengthen and further our message.

But we need to do this wisely

In Scouting we should be:

Politically engaged but non-partisan

When we represent Scouting, we put our personal views aside.

- We treat all parties equally, if we invite one candidate to our ARAP, what about the others?
- We welcome pledges to support Scouting, but we treat them cautiously and while we welcome offers of support, we need to be careful we don't endorse or support any candidates or political parties.
- We do not involve ourselves in any election materials like brochures, posters and billboards.
- The Scout brand, our uniform and youth members must not be used to support any candidate or political party.
- When Scouting appears in social media, we gratefully acknowledge the support of our government representatives and candidates, but we do not endorse them.
- We also work hard to balance our social media posts, so political party events get equal coverage.

Be Strategic

When approaching government be clear about your objectives. The what, the why, the where and the how should be considered to ensure that your communications are targeted to outcomes. This will ensure that you have a specific ask with a goal in mind.

Also, you should canvass if the ask might suit another department or level of government better and if a recommendation on who is most appropriate to approach and an introduction if possible. This is how government works.

Coordinated

It is vital that Scouting Members are aware of all local political engagement, in particular when a Government enters any caretaker period. If you are approached by MPs or candidates wishing to make a Scouting-related announcement, or even if it's just local political candidates visiting a Section meeting or attending a Group or District event, please consult with your Branch Office ASAP before it happens. (They may be able to assist with information, or promotions such as social media.)

United

Branches often have a wish list of projects they are seeking help to fund. It is critical to not derail the broader efforts by making any upcoming elections a referendum on your new kitchen! Your gain could cost other Scouts millions.

Please do not seek support for your pet local project without checking first with your local Branch Office

On Message

There are two 'safe' areas to engage with politicians:

- Our general messages on how Scouting contributes to the broader State/Territory community (the benefits to the whole State/Territory, not just what we get out of it as members).
- Stories about your local Scout members (as leaders in their schools and other bodies, their community service, their achievements, major adventures by your Group, etc).

Respectful

Politicians have a tough job, long hours, criticism, and plenty of challenging issues. Regardless of our personal political views, show respect to all who provide this community service. This includes the example we set our youth members, in our words and actions.

Prepared

If you have local government representatives visiting, please ensure that:

- youth and others know who they are, and what they do (avoid embarrassment);
- any youth who will speak with them or be involved in other ways (e.g. scarfing up, demonstrating an activity, or thanking them for attending) are fully briefed and rehearsed;
- your event is well-organised so it runs smoothly, as a positive example of Scouting.

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Opportunity

Apart from voting, election days are a great opportunity for fundraising activities[1] such as democracy sausages, raffle tickets, etc. If your Scout Hall is a polling booth, that's easy. If not, you might like to approach a local polling site and do a partnership deal.

Messages

We tell young people that Scouting is adventurous, fun and inclusive.

We tell parents that Scouting is about skills for life.

We tell educational bodies that Scouting is the largest provider of non-formal education.

We tell the wider community that those involved in Scouting are likely to be more resilient both as youth and later as adults.

Politicians want to hear how Scouting will help them, local communities and the broader State/Territory.

Messages like:

- Scouting develops your State/Territory's future leaders. (In Scouting everyone gets a turn at developing leadership - unlike schools and sport.)
- Scouting helps build communities and social cohesion.
- We welcome all. We are diverse and inclusive, and represent the broader community.
- We are growing in outer metropolitan areas, and re-generating in the inner suburbs.
- We are opening new Groups in country areas.
- Scouting is growing in many communities.
- Our database includes thousands of recent members, and many more highly active each week.
- Scouting is contemporary.
- Our values have lasted more nearly 120 years, but our program is always evolving.
- Scouting is active in and out of doors – rather than being screen-based.

Involvement of Youth

Youth members are the best ambassadors for Scouting. If your Group is asked to provide youth members for any political announcement:

- Ensure all youth and parents involved give their informed consent.
- Ensure they understand it is about promoting Scouting, not endorsing a political candidate or political party.
- We are simply acknowledging a promise of support and that we would do the same for another party which wants to help Scouting.

Also, please ensure that your youth members present well in dress and behaviour and are coached before the event. For example, they could be assisted with speaking notes.

Annual Report and Award Presentations (ARAPs)

It is worth remembering that well-run, youth-focussed ARAPs are a great way of involving local government representatives (local Council, State/Territory and Federal). This is more important where the timing of them coincides with any upcoming election

Options for their participation include:

- Acknowledge them all in the welcoming comments, and, at the end, thank them again for attending.
- Ensure they are hosted by trusted people from the time they arrive to the time they leave. This includes during refreshments, rather than be left to their own devices.
- Introduce them to as many members of the Group/District/Region as possible. (That's what they're there for.)
- Ask one 'neutral' person to respond to the annual report on behalf of all the community guests. This might be the local Mayor, rather than a politician or candidate. However, let every community guest have the opportunity to say a few words.
- Most importantly, show they are appreciated and welcome!
- Ensure your ARP is a strong representation of the messages of Scouting and stories of local success.

Branding and Photography

Scout Groups may be offered a free marquee by an elected politician. These are very generous offers however they often mean that the politician's name will appear on the marquee. When accepting such offers please request that the Group Name appear on the marquee and that the words 'supported by...' pre-fix the politician's name.

For further advice regarding branding please contact your Branch Office.

Elected politicians and candidates enjoy having their photographs taken. They are freely shared on social media. In the event of the Government entering a caretaker period prior to an election, please ensure Scout members refrain from appearing in photographs for candidates that could be perceived as promoting one political party over another.

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Seeking help with a Grant

Your local Councillor, State and Federal MP may be able to assist your Group with a financial grant for your Scout Hall, campsite or activities. Email or telephone your local Member. Contact their Office to offer to brief them – better still, invite them to your Hall or activity to show them where you need their help.

If you are successful with the grant application, remember to thank them for their support. Invite them to the opening or event to show how the money has been spent. Remember they will enjoy photos to include in their newsletter.

Most importantly, remember to acquit your grant on time. If you don't you will jeopardise your, other Groups', and your Branch's, chances of receiving future financial support.

If the grant is substantial in dollar value you may consider engaging a specialist grant writer to help you as a third of all grants do not even get read because of inaccuracies with the writing formats. Writers are not overly expensive and can greatly improve your chances of positive government funding outcomes

Charity Status

When engaging with local politicians please remember your Branch is registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC). The Charities Act (Cwth) 2013 requires that a charity not promote or oppose a political party or a candidate for political office.

Let us know

If you have a Minister coming out to your Group or have a photo opportunity please let us know via email exec.manager@scoutsvictoria.com.au

Acknowledgments

This Fact Sheet has been adapted from FACT SHEET 20 – GUIDELINES FOR LOCAL POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT - The Scout Association of Australia Queensland Branch Inc and from the Scouts Victoria guidelines created in 2018