GET YOUR VOICE HEARD

A Guide To Active Citizenship In Australia
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The Centre for Multicultural Youth is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia.

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Introduction

Purpose of this guide

This guide aims to encourage and empower young people to get their opinions heard and get involved in making change in their communities. It presents some of the most common ways of voicing your opinions and starting change, no matter how big or small.

This guide explores what being a “citizen” means, and whilst it covers some of the basics about participating in Australia’s democratic processes and the different levels of government, it also introduces many other ways of advocating about issues you care about.

Whether a formal citizen of Australia or not, there are many ways you can practice “active citizenship” and contribute to your community. Whether you want to be heard in your school, neighbourhood, country or any other community you’re a part of, this guide is a good place to start learning how.

Concepts of Citizenship

What is “citizenship”?  

Citizenship generally refers to the various aspects and practices of our lives that connect us with a certain place, most often a nation. These practices can be cultural, legal, political or social, and the way that we participate in these different practices forms how we practice our citizenship. Generally, to be regarded as a citizen of a nation one must be living or have lived in a country for a significant period of time (e.g. a few years).

A citizen could also be any person who is identified as a part of the community, whether they have been granted formal citizenship or not. It often refers to those who have migrated to a country on a permanent basis, but have not completed an application to be legally recognized as a citizen.

Sometimes, citizenship refers specifically to those who have been granted the legal status of “citizen” of a particular country. This is a more formal understanding of citizenship.

If someone has attained a legal status of citizenship in a country, it means that they have certain rights and responsibilities as a member of the community. This formal understanding of citizenship can be attained by either being born in a country, being a child of a legal citizen, or by application which requires completing certain eligibility requirements (such as living in a country for a long period of time before applying). Formal citizenship comes with certain rights and responsibilities that others do not have, such as voting, running in elections to government and using an Australian passport, to name a few.

Being an active citizen

In this guide, we refer to “active citizenship” as being actively involved in making your community a better place. Rather than just accepting the current situation, you actively participate to ensure issues you care about are addressed. This means you speak up about things that are important to you. This is known as advocacy. Having the right to speak up for yourself is an important part of what it means to be in the Australian community.
Australian Government

Australia is a representative democracy, which means that eligible citizens vote to elect representatives to make laws and policies on their behalf. Elected representatives form the parliament or local council, and make decisions on issues affecting the people they represent.

Australia is a federation, which means the six states have joined together to form a federal government.

There are three levels of government in Australia, including federal (national), state/territory, and local governments. Each level is responsible for different issues, and can make laws about these. However, some responsibilities are shared, such as roads, environmental management and public health issues.

Even if you aren’t eligible to vote, it is important to understand the various levels of government, as they have different responsibilities over issues which may affect you. It helps to know what those responsibilities are if you want to participate in voting or contact someone in government about issues you care about.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Federal Government</th>
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<tr>
<td>Decision making body: Federal Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leader: Prime Minister</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower House: House of Representatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper House: Senate</td>
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The Federal Parliament is divided into two “houses”: the House of Representatives (Lower House) and the Senate (Upper House). In order for a law to be made, the law needs to be approved by both houses. The House of Representatives consists of 150 members who represent smaller divisions or electorates around the country.

The Senate consists of senators who represent whole states or territories. There are 12 senators for each state, and 2 for each territory (76 total including 72 state senators, 4 territory senators).

<table>
<thead>
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<th>State or Territory Government</th>
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<tr>
<td>Decision making body: State Parliament</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leader: Premier</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lower House: Legislative Assembly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Upper House: Legislative Council</td>
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</table>

Most state parliaments are divided into a lower and upper house, much like the federal parliament. In Victoria, the lower house is called the Legislative Assembly and the upper house is called the Legislative Council. In order to create laws regarding state issues, the law needs to be passed through both houses.

<table>
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<th>Local Government</th>
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<tr>
<td>Decision making body: City councils / Shire councils</td>
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<tr>
<td>Leader: Mayor / Shire President</td>
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Most state parliaments are divided into a lower and upper house, much like the federal parliament. In Victoria, the lower house is called the Legislative Assembly and the upper house is called the Legislative Council. In order to create laws regarding state issues, the law needs to be passed through both houses.
How to Have Your Say

There are many ways to get your opinions heard and influence issues you care about. One way is through voting representatives to the various levels of government. Another is to stand for elections. However, these are restricted to those who are formal citizens of Australia, and they are not the only way to have influence.

Whether you are a formal Australian citizen or not, there are many other things you can do to influence government or any other institutions (such as schools or businesses) that impact things that matter to you.

Here we have included some information about elections in Australia as well as some other options for getting your opinions heard and creating change.

Elections in Australia

Why vote?

Voting is how Australian citizens choose who to represent them in parliament or local council. Voting helps to make sure everyone’s opinion is counted.

Voting is a fundamental democratic and human right. It is also compulsory for eligible Australian citizens.

It gives you the power to choose the representatives who will make laws and policies that affect how you live. It is your chance to have a say on a variety of important issues, by voting for the candidates who best share your views. If you don’t vote, you are letting others make the decisions for you about how you and your community should be governed.

Who can vote?

Voting in Australia is compulsory for every formal citizen of Australia who is 18 years and over. You are only allowed one vote per person, and you are not allowed to vote on behalf of anyone else. Eligible citizens enrol to vote (register) before the election day in order to vote.

How does voting in Australia work?

Voting in Australia is done by a ballot system. This is where enrolled citizens on a set day go to a voting centre to write their vote on a piece of paper. Your vote is always confidential and anonymous, so that no one can force you to vote for a certain person.

If you are away or sick, you can send a postal vote in the mail.

Voters from a certain area (called an electorate or a ward) choose a person to represent them from a list of candidates. The winner of the ballot becomes the representative for that area. Voting is done by a preferential voting system. In this system, voters number the choices of candidates from their first choice (number 1) to their last choice.

A candidate will be elected if they get the most first preference votes (number 1). If there is no clear first preference winner then all the preferences are counted to find a winner.

How often do you vote?

In Australia, there are three levels of government elected at regular intervals.
The Federal Government is elected every three years. In these elections, citizens elect both a representative to the House of Representatives (Lower House) and representatives to the Senate (Upper House). The Government of Australia will usually decide the date of the federal election.

The State Government is also elected every three years, but at different times to the Federal Government. For States that have two houses (such as Victoria), citizens elect representatives to the State’s Upper and Lower Houses.

Local Governments are elected every four years. Citizens elect representatives to councillors on their local council.

**Standing for elections**

Those who are enrolled to vote and who meet certain requirements may choose to stand for the elections and be voted for. You need to live in the area for which you are standing and pay a fee to submit your nomination to be a candidate. Every eligible person has the right to stand for election, as stated in Section 18 of the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006.

“Every eligible person has the right, and is to have the opportunity, without discrimination... to have access, on general terms of equality, to the Victorian public service and public office.”

For more information about voting, standing for elections and the levels of government, visit the Victorian Electoral Commission’s website, at www.vec.vic.gov.au.

**Advocacy**

While voting for a representative in government is one way to promote issues you care about, there are also many other ways to ensure your voice is heard within a democracy. Promoting or supporting a cause or issue to bring about change is called advocacy.

You can advocate on issues that concern you, another individual or group of people. Advocating on behalf of a group of people is known as collective advocacy. When you advocate on behalf of another group, it is important to get their permission and work with them to ensure you accurately represent their concerns.

**Why advocate?**

Advocacy is about being an active citizen. As part of a democracy, it is important for people to voice their concerns or problems so that there can be positive changes made to address these issues. While electing a member of parliament that represents your issues may be one step to make changes, often it is not enough for your voice to be heard. Advocacy is another way to voice your concerns about certain issues and is an important part of participating in your community.

Advocacy seeks to create awareness about certain issues in order to bring about change. It can be about something in your local school, your community, your state, the whole of Australia or an international issue.

**Being taken seriously**

Sometimes, it can be hard to be taken seriously as a young person. Sometimes, others think that young people don’t have enough knowledge or skills to make a valuable contribution,
or that involving them isn't important.

They are wrong!

Young people are a great asset in our society because they bring fresh perspectives and opinions to contribute. They have many strengths and skills to offer and have the right to be involved in making decisions that affect them or issues they care about. They have a diverse range of interests and are more likely to support actions that allow them to be heard and involve them in the decision making process.

For more ideas about the importance of ensuring young people are heard and represented, see the series Taking Young People Seriously, produced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria and the Victorian Government Office for Youth.

**Fair representation**

When you are advocating, especially on behalf of others, it is important to ensure that your efforts accurately reflect the needs and ideas of those whom you represent. Wherever possible, those affected by the issue should have the opportunity to participate in advocacy.

For example, if you are campaigning for improved safety on public transport, you might identify young women as among the most affected by the issue. Young women should therefore have the opportunity to participate in the campaigns and contribute to the ideas being presented. You may identify a range of people that the issue concerns, and should aim to include them.

Including those most affected by the issue you are addressing helps to ensure they are accurately represented in the advocacy work. This does not mean that advocacy should exclude those not immediately affected by the issue. Their contribution is also valuable, as more people involved can often make advocacy work more effective.

**How to advocate**

Advocacy can take many forms. It can be as simple as talking to a friend about something you care about. It can be as complicated as coordinating a global campaign across many countries. It is important to remember that all forms of advocacy are important, and that everyone has a chance to participate and have their voice heard. It does not matter if you are a young person in school or a member of parliament; you can still strive to make your community a better place.

Below is a list of some different ways you can advocate about an issue or cause. This list does not include everything, but will hopefully give you a starting point and you can get as creative as you like about how you advocate.

**Write a letter...or a few**

Writing a letter to the people who make decisions about the issue important to you can be an easy first step for advocacy.

Writing a letter will educate the reader about your issue and let them know that there are people who care about this issue. In the case of MPs, writing a letter helps the MP better represent you in the parliament. A letter doesn't have to be long or complicated, but there are a few steps to consider when writing a letter:
» Write to the relevant person. Depending on your issue, you might write to your local MP, the Minister for your particular issue (e.g., Education or Immigration) or the head of a department, organisation or company. If you want to change something in your school, for example, you might address your letter to the principal. Writing to the relevant person helps ensure that your issue will be read by a person who is in charge to make the changes. Make sure you use their correct name, title and address of the person you are sending it to. If writing to a government representative, you can find the names, titles and addresses on the relevant government websites.

» Introduce yourself and make it personal. It is more effective if you write your own letter and explain why the issue is important to you. MPs receive many letters a week, so writing a letter from a personal perspective will help show that you care about this issue. If you are writing as a group, explain what your group is about and what you do. Use your own words and don’t just copy from another person.

» Keep to the point. A simple and short letter is more effective and more likely to be read. It is likely the reader has many other letters too, so you only have a short time to get your point across.

» Be polite and respectful. While it is good to be passionate about a certain issue, attacking, threatening or being rude to the reader won’t help you in convincing them about your issue.

» Provide your contact details. This is important so that they can respond to you and explain how they are addressing your issue. It can be an email or postal address. You may also want to include your phone number if you are comfortable talking about your issue over the phone. Make sure you also include your full name.

» Get other people to write letters. While one letter is a good start, it can be more effective if you get a group together to write many letters. The more people who write about this issue the more effective it may be. It is best if every letter is individual and not just an exact copy.

» Follow up. It may take time before you get a response to your letter. Be patient and give them some time before contacting them again. If you do not hear from them after a fortnight, you can try contacting them to remind them about your letter. You could write another letter or email, or make a short phone call to ask if they have read your letter. Even once they reply, you can write another letter a couple of months later to see how the issue has progressed.

Sample letters:

To the Honorable Minister of Foreign Affairs,

I am very concerned about the risk of use of nuclear weapons throughout the world. Although some steps towards a nuclear free world have occurred, it is extremely worrying to hear that a number of countries have refused to implement a disarmament program to reduce their nuclear weapon stockpiles.

I believe that Australia should be making extraordinary efforts to lessen this risk. Could you please advise how the Government will put significant effort through political, diplomatic and technical support for a nuclear free world?

Regards,

Tom Nguyen
Arrange a face-to-face meeting

Making a personal visit is a great way to show someone that you are passionate about a certain issue. It may be difficult to meet with people with high-profiles (such as the Prime Minister), but local MPs, community leaders or company managers may often meet with you or send a representative. The below points can be used to prepare for any face-to-face meeting with someone you are advocating to:

» Request a meeting. Visiting a local MP is as simple as calling their office and asking for an appointment. You can find the contact details of your local MP on the internet. Sometimes the MP may be busy, but you can see an assistant. Sometimes the MP may see you directly. If you show up at their workplace without an appointment, the chance they will see you is much lower.

» Be prepared. Know what you want to say and be prepared to answer questions. Make sure you speak from your own experiences and explain why this issue matters to you. Have your key messages written down on a note pad - that way you are less likely to forget what you wanted to say. You may need to research in newspapers or online about what your local government has done in relation to the issue you are interested in.

» Write notes. When ringing up your local MP or visiting their local office make sure you take notes about what is said and who you spoke to. Write down the name of people you have talked to, collect business cards and any other source of information you receive so you can follow up.

» Follow up your meeting. After your meeting, follow up with a courtesy call or email to thank the MP for the meeting and to clarify all your questions and points made in your meeting.

» Provide your contact details. This is crucial if you are expecting further communication after the meeting. You can provide your phone number, email or postal address.

To the Principal at Melbourneville High School

Dear ....(insert name)....,

I am a Year 9 student at Melbourneville High. I would like to request that a prayer space for students is set up in the school.

As a Muslim student, it can be hard to practice my faith because there is nowhere for me to say prayers on the school grounds. When I talked with other students from various religions, they also told me in that they would like somewhere quiet where they can pray or meditate.

Given Melbourneville High prides itself on celebrating the diversity of cultures and faiths amongst its students and staff, it would be good for the school to appreciate their diverse needs including the availability of a common prayer room.

Can you please let me know what the school will do to support religiously diverse students in this way?

Thank you,

Farnaz Naghdy
Example:

Emilia is 18 years old and is interested in environmental issues. She decided to talk to her local MP about the issues she is concerned about. She called her local MP office and made an appointment to meet the MP.

Before the meeting, she researched more about these issues and collected some articles from newspapers highlighting the issue. She also made a list of things she wanted to say and prepared with her friend.

Although she was nervous and was afraid she would forget what she wanted to say, she was able to remain calm and collected and used her notes while talking to the MP. During the meeting, the MP suggested she get in touch with a local group that share her concerns and work together on environmental issues.

A few days after the meeting, she sent her MP an email to thank him for his time and restate the things she talked about in the meeting. Emilia felt that the MP listened to her concerns about the environment, but wanted to do more. She joined the local environment group and with them continued to advocate about environmental issues to the local government, in her school and local community.

Create or sign a petition

What is a petition?

A petition is a formal request for action.

Petitions are usually submitted to a person or group in a position to make decisions or take action, such as a government official or principal. A petition expresses a point of view and usually invites others to sign their name and signature to show support for this opinion.

Petitions can be an easy way for large numbers of people to join a cause and bring about change.

Petitions can be placed up in local community areas for people to sign themselves, or representatives may ask others to sign a petition and explain more about why it is important. Many petitions are done online, with links to the petition shared through social media.

Who can submit or sign a petition?

Anyone can submit or sign a petition. However, like any advocacy work, the most effective petitions include those who are most affected by the issue or action requested.

Tips for writing a good petition:

» Keep your petition title clear and short. Eg. “Australia should recognise indigenous people in the Constitution.”

» Make sure you address the petition to the relevant person or group.

» Tell people why they should sign and provide information about the issues. Use facts, figures and examples to inform the public and gain their support for your cause.

» Keep your petition content clear and short.

Online Petitions

Many websites allow people to develop a petition online, which can also be signed online. These can then be sent or taken to the relevant person. Below is a list of some useful online petition websites, which also have many examples of successful petitions:
Create or join a campaign

Campaigns are events or actions designed to promote a cause or create change.

Campaign events can include holding a concert, doing a fun run or any other event that aims to create awareness. The most successful events are ones which are creative and manage to gain media and public attention.

Campaigns can also be created online. The internet and social media provides great access to a large amount of people, and if your campaign is successful (goes viral), millions of people may see it. However, even if small, an online campaign can be a great way to inform people about your issue.

A simple way to create an online campaign is to start a group or page on a social network, such as Facebook, and ask your friends to join it and share it. You can post information, photos, videos, relevant to your issue, as well as campaign events you may organise. Many online campaigns have their own websites with information about the issue, and how to get involved.

Example of a campaign: Live Below the Line

Live Below the Line is an annual anti-poverty campaign, which challenges participants to feed themselves on the equivalent of the extreme poverty line for five days.

The goal of Live Below the Line is to raise widespread awareness by enabling participants to gain a small insight into the hardships faced by those that live in extreme poverty.

Live Below the Line also raises money for poverty reduction projects across the globe. Funds raised in the first Live Below the Line campaign are being used to fight poverty through education initiatives in the developing world and education and advocacy projects in Australia.

Visit www.livebelowtheline.com.au to learn more about this campaign.

Join a committee

A committee is a group of people that meet together for a shared reason or to do tasks together.

Every committee is different. They might include people of different ages, genders and cultures, or who have specific experience in an area. Committees exist in organisations, companies, schools, communities and government.

Committee members are often chosen or elected by those they assist. Some committees are open for anyone to join. Some you have to apply for.

Committees can have a big influence over the activities of an organisation or community. Some committees make decisions and take action, while some make suggestions to others about what they can do.

Joining a committee gives you the opportunity to work in a team, represent your community, develop skills and knowledge, meet new people and support others.
A number of organisations have youth committees, including many local councils. These can be a great way of making sure that young people’s ideas are heard by the organisation and that young people are included in the decisions they make. Here are just some examples of youth committees in different organisations:

» Centre for Multicultural Youth – Youth Advisory Group
» Youth Affairs Council of Victoria – Youth Reference Group
» Headspace – HY NRG (Headspace Youth National Reference Group)
» VIYAC – Victorian Indigenous Youth Advisory Council

**Form a youth group**

A youth group is a group of young people who have decided to come together to work on a certain task or issue.

Starting a youth group can be a great way to work together to advocate about an issue. Like a committee, members develop team work skills and may act as representatives for others. Youth groups are traditionally less formal or structured than committees.

Working as a youth group sends a strong message that the issues you work on are important to young people, and that young people have the capacity to make a difference.

See CMY’s Youth Kit: A Resource for Youth Leaders resource for more information about how to form and maintain a youth group.

**Forming a Youth Group Case Study: Asunta**

Asunta is 19 years old. She and many of her friends are of African backgrounds. One day, she saw a news story on TV which she felt unfairly and negatively represented the young Africans involved. Many others at her school and in her community were talking about the story, and she felt inspired to do something to increase the positive representation Africans in Australia.

She approached the Centre for Multicultural Youth to see what could be done, and a consultation involving young Africans and the State Government was arranged. Asunta and some of the other young people at the consultation felt so passionate about the issues that they decided to form a youth group.

This group became the Sudanese Australian Youth Action Group (SAYAG). They now seek to support, empower and promote young African Australians. They do this by advocating for their issues, hosting their own consultations where others can voice their opinions, and organizing events such as an African Careers Day for young people to learn about career pathways and an African festival, to promote positive representation of Africans in Australia.

**Attend a group protest or rally**

Rallies and group protests are when people gather together in support of a cause or against an action or decision.

Protests and rallies usually involve a large number of people, but can also be a small group, and are usually held in public spaces that will attract a lot of attention, such as the city streets, or at the place which is affected by the issue.

People at protests often hold signs and banners with messages about the issues that concern them. Others may play music or have public speakers talking about the issue.

In Australia, protests are legal and the right to protest is considered an important part of
being in a democracy.

If the protest is going to be large or be a disruption to the public (where cars can’t drive on the roads, for example), it is important to inform the local council and police, so that they can be aware of any issues. Even if the protest is meant to be peaceful, there might be some who choose to be violent, and so police may be there to protect people.

**Example of a protest:**

The Australian Government was considering funding cuts to Australian universities. In order to show their views against these cuts, one thousand university students gathered in Melbourne and Sydney as part of co-ordinated, nation-wide protest. The students marched through the CBD with banners and signs against the cuts. There were also speakers at the event speaking against the cuts. During the protest, A Monash University Student Association representative told the crowd in Melbourne that Australia had one of the most privatised tertiary education sectors in the world. While Police were present at the protest, there were no incidents of violence.

**Become a volunteer**

Volunteering is when people give up some of their time to work for an organisation or group that they care about, usually without being paid.

By volunteering, showing that you care about others or that an issue is important to you. Being a volunteer often involves practically helping others to achieve a common goal, meet a need or solve an issue.

Some people choose to volunteer so they can be actively involved in something they are passionate about.

There are countless places that need volunteers. Some common examples include an animal shelter, youth camps and programs, schools, and community groups or organisations. Some people choose to volunteer overseas, for example with an international organisation in a developing country.

There are many benefits of volunteering, including:

- Making a difference to others
- Gaining new skills and experience, which you can put on your resumé
- Meeting new people and friends
- Improving communication and teamwork skills
- Building your confidence
- Learning more about issues and how to raise awareness about them

There are many websites with various volunteering opportunities, but a for good place to start check out www.govolunteer.com.au. If there is a specific organisation you would like to volunteer for, check their website to see if they have volunteer opportunities available or give them a call.
Volunteering Case Study: Albert

Albert came to Australia from Uganda a few years ago. When he was studying English, he participated in a program called Ucan2, which supports newly-arrived young people from refugee backgrounds. As part of this program, the Centre for Multicultural Youth (CMY) invites volunteers who are either from Australia or who have been living here for a while to meet with the program participants, help them practice English and help them get to know more about life in Australia.

When Albert finished the program, he went on to start studying a Diploma in Youth Work. He decided that he wanted to become a Ucan2 volunteer himself, to help other young people who were new to Australia, and gain experience with a youth focussed organisation. He went through volunteer training and learnt the skills he needed to support young people. He learnt about the challenges faced by different newly-arrived young people and what kinds of services and programs can help them in resettlement, and became a great example for other newly-arrived young people.

Albert also wanted to help make sure that CMY always works to meet the needs of young people. He applied to join CMY’s Youth Advisory Group so he could share his knowledge from his own experience of coming to Australia, and his knowledge gained as a volunteer. Albert now volunteers with both Ucan2 and the Youth Advisory Group, which he can now put on his resume as he applies for jobs in the youth work field.

Have a conversation!

It sounds simple, but having a conversation about issues that matter to you – even if just with friends and family – is one of the most important ways you can spread awareness and advocate.

Conversations can be casual, but there are a few tips to keep in mind, which may help you get support from those around you:

» Personalise your issue. Explain why this issue is important to you. Explain how it affects you, and how it affects others. People relate best to personal stories – so, if you can, try and use stories of people you know of who have been affected by this issue.

» Relate to people’s interests. Try connect your issue with something that your friends and family are interested in. For example, if you are concerned about racism and your friends are interested in sport, try talking about the issue of racism in sport.

» Know options for getting involved. So you’ve been telling people about your important issue. Now what? You need to be prepared to tell people how they can support your cause. You might suggest that they talk to others about the issue too, to spread awareness. If there are relevant events happening, give others the details. If you’re not sure what to do, consider some of the options in this guide and discuss ideas with your friends and family. Remember, they’re more like to get involved if they have helped come up with the idea!

Use the media

Traditional forms of media includes television, radio, print (eg. magazines & newspapers). It is very common for online social media networks to be used as well. The media can be used as a powerful tool of communication. It helps to get your message across at a faster rate and to the right audience.
Unfortunately, negative stories can often be the most popular stories. Try to be proactive about getting your message across and not reactive. That is, don’t just wait around for something else to happen first before you contact the media with your message.

When trying to decide which media may be best for promoting your cause, consider these points:

» **Television:** A key attribute to getting a story on TV is the visual nature of the story – can the cameramen get some good footage? Would viewers prefer to watch it on TV or rather read it in the paper, or hear about it on the radio?

» **Radio:** Radio is a great medium to get short, key messages across. Keep an eye out for current issues and see if you can promote your event/views in such a manner that it’s topical (what everyone is talking about). Community radio stations are always looking for content, and can be a great way of targeting specific audiences. For example, you can contact youth radio stations like SYN FM to reach young people with your message, or approach specific cultural stations for issues relevant to particular cultural groups.

» **Print:** With print, you have a variety of channels to get your story across. There are national, statewide and local papers. It can be very competitive to get your story in the paper. Local papers and magazines (e.g. Leader and Weekly) are often looking for interesting stories that are relevant to their local community and that have good pictures, so they can be a good place to start. Some local papers also have a section where you can promote community events for free!

» **Social Media:** Sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, hi5, LinkedIn, MySpace, etc. can be a fantastic way of reaching other young people with your message. Each social media platform reacts a little differently to events, so it’s a good idea to research how different social media platforms operate. Here are a couple of the biggest ones:

  ◊ Facebook (www.facebook.com) is the largest social networking site in the world and a great way to share important issues with others. You can create a page dedicated to your issue, and invite others to like the page to receive updates you post. You can also promote your events and invite people to attend through Facebook. The great thing about Facebook is the ability for others to continue sharing what you post, which helps spread the word wider than just those you know.

  ◊ Twitter (www.twitter.com.au) is good for creating very short messages and getting others to share (retweet) it on their Twitter pages. You can also direct messages to other people, such as MPs, via Twitter.

You can also be really creative with how you use online spaces. Perhaps try making a video and upload it to YouTube (www.youtube.com) or create a blog at www.wordpress.com.

**How do you get the media’s attention and convey your message?**

» **Media release (or press release)** - This is a page of information sent to the media to give an organised group’s views on an issue or promote a product or service. Your media release should not only contain the most relevant information about what you want to promote, but should also be pitched in such a way that the potential story will serve as an interesting read to the general public. Journalists
receive hundreds of media releases every day so make sure yours is newsworthy enough for a journalist to pick up.

The first paragraph of your media release should contain the “5 Ws” –

» WHO (who’s involved in the project/event),
» WHAT (what is it about),
» WHY (why are you doing it),
» WHEN (when is it being held), and
» WHERE (where is it being held).

Things to keep in mind when writing a media release:

» Keep your sentences short, sharp and simple
» Write in past tense
» Avoid using acronyms and confusing words
» Include an interesting quote from a relevant person about your project.
» Keep it to one page
» Always include contact details in case a journalist wants more information
» Have one introductory sentence about your release at the start. This introductory sentence should be sharp and strong enough to get the journalist’s attention.
  Eg. Homework clubs play a key role in the education journey of a migrant or refugee young person, many of whom do not use English as their primary language.

• Media tip offs – These are short alerts to inform journalists of upcoming events. They are usually done 4-5 days prior to the event and would need to consist of precise and accurate information regarding your event. You would need to provide contact details of a representative (which could be yourself) for the media to contact should they wish to cover the story/request more information.
Getting Started

We hope that you have found this guide helpful for learning about elections and advocacy in Australia. As you can see, there are many ways to get your voice heard!

Sometimes, it can be hard to know where to start. Try thinking about what activities you are already doing, and whether you can include some of the above ideas in those activities. You can also talk with your friends or family to see if they want to get involved with you.

If you want to talk more about any of the ideas in this guide, or need help getting started, feel free to contact the Centre for Multicultural Youth, where the staff can help connect you with others or opportunities to get involved. CMY also provides training for young people who want to get involved in advocacy.

Good luck, and remember, you CAN “get your voice heard”!