FIFTY ACRES

The Fifty Acres guide to government advocacy 2026

Guidebook: Practical guide for companies and organisations

June 2026

The new modern advocacy environment

The advocacy environment has changed. Organisations and companies can no longer rely on institutional credibility, technical expertise or access to decision-makers alone. Those things still matter, but they are no longer enough.

In 2026, government advocacy is taking place in a more fragmented, emotional and distrustful political climate. Communities are dealing with cost-of-living pressure, housing stress, social isolation, workforce shortages and rising frustration with institutions. At the same time, social media has changed who gets heard, how quickly issues move and what audiences expect from leaders.

The result is a new advocacy reality: influence is built simultaneously across government relationships, public legitimacy, media narratives, and community trust.

Effective advocacy now requires organisations to be credible inside the system and legitimate outside it.

What has changed?

Old assumption	New reality
Expertise creates authority.	Expertise matters, but audiences also want authenticity, visibility and lived experience.
Government is influenced mainly through formal channels.	Formal channels matter, but influence is now shaped by media, communities, social platforms and public sentiment.
Neutrality is always safest.	Excessive caution can be read as distance, hesitation or lack of conviction.
A strong report is enough.	Evidence needs to be translated into human, practical and politically relevant arguments.
The minister is the main target.	Advisers, departments, regulators, committees, local MPs and crossbenchers all shape outcomes.
Public pressure is a last resort.	Visibility can be useful, but only when it is connected to a clear outcome and a staged strategy.

Key takeaways

- Modern advocacy requires emotional clarity as well as technical credibility.
- Communities increasingly validate whether organisations have the legitimacy to speak on an issue.
- Government relationships remain essential, but they must be supported by clear public value and practical solutions.
- The strongest organisations know when to collaborate quietly and when to increase pressure.
- Government influence is strongest when the ask is clear, the evidence is credible, the community case is visible, and the engagement path is realistic.

How does the government actually work?

Audience	What they care about	What they need	Engagement tactic
Minister	Political priority, public impact, risk	Clear ask, strategic fit, media/political relevance	Meeting, letter, briefing
Adviser/Staffer	Practicality, timing, stakeholder pressure	Short brief, clear options, confidence	Direct meeting/call. virtual meeting
Department	Evidence, implementation, budget, risk	Data, case studies, operational detail	Submission, consultation, briefing
Local MP	Local impact, constituent stories	Electorate-specific examples	Site visit, local briefing
Media/public	Human relevance, conflict, urgency	Story, voice, clear consequence	Media pitch, op-ed, social content

Decision-maker pressure mapping

Stakeholder	What pressure are they under?	How can our issue help?
Minister	Media, election commitments	Show visible community benefit
Department	Delivery risk, budget	Provide implementation solutions
MP	Local concerns	Provide electorate stories

Use this guidebook as a live planning tool. Capture your first thoughts, test them, refine them and turn them into a practical government engagement plan for your organisation.

1. Identify your current advocacy mode

Before choosing tactics, be clear about where your organisation is starting from.

Some organisations are trying to build relationships before making a major ask. Others are trying to secure funding, shift policy, respond to a crisis, build public awareness or escalate an issue that has stalled.

The mode you are in should shape the strategy you choose.

Possible starting questions:

- Is the government already listening?
- Do we have a clear and realistic ask?
- Have we built enough relationship capital?
- Is there a public appetite for this issue?
- Are affected communities ready and willing to be visible?
- Would escalation help or damage the outcome?
- What does success look like in three months, six months and twelve months?

List current advocacy positions below:

Current objective or advocacy mode	What works?	What needs strengthening?

2. Define the change you want

Before choosing tactics, be precise about the outcome you want.

A clear advocacy objective does not need to be large. It might be a funding commitment, policy amendment, regulatory review, parliamentary question, department meeting, pilot project, committee recommendation, public statement or stronger relationship with a key decision-maker.

But it must be specific enough to guide strategy. A strong ask is specific, practical and easy to repeat. It should identify the decision-maker, the action and the reason.

Governments are balancing competing priorities, funding pressures and large volumes of information across multiple sectors. This means organisations frequently need to help policymakers clearly understand:

- The scale of their impact
- The needs they are responding to
- The pressure they reduce elsewhere in the system
- What communities would look like without their contribution

If you cannot explain what you want the government to do in one sentence, the advocacy objective is not ready.

From the list above, finalise your top three changes:

Change 1

Change 2

Change 3

What is the objective? Have a brainstorm with the following prompts:

Message element	Prompt	Notes
Issue	What is happening? What is the problem? Note: In plain English, nothing complicated	
People	Who is affected and how?	
Consequences	What happens if nothing changes?	
Solution	What is practical and achievable?	
Ask	What do we want this stakeholder to do?	

Write the most important objective for you:

Note: However, government engagement is usually most effective when communication is:

- **focused**
- **clear**
- **practical**
- **easy to understand quickly**

Use supporting messages to reinforce your core ask. These may explain the problem, the solution, the evidence, the data, the human impact or the action needed.

List supporting message below:

Supporting message 1

Supporting message 2

Supporting message 3



3. Who is your target audience?

Advocacy is not about speaking to everyone in the same way. Different audiences respond to different arguments. A value case may move one stakeholder. An economic or implementation case may move another. A local story may matter most to an electorate MP. A risk case may matter most to a department or regulator.

Your target audience can include:

- **Decision-makers:** People who can directly approve, fund, amend, regulate or influence the outcome.
- **Influencers:** People who shape the decision-maker's view, such as advisers, departments, committees, peak bodies, media, local MPs or community leaders.
- **Validators:** People or groups who strengthen legitimacy, including members, service users, lived experience voices, local communities, experts and coalition partners.

Different audiences need different levels of clarity, trust, and relevance. Consider:

- Who influences them?
- Who is directly affected?
- Who already supports the issue?
- Who needs persuading?

For each audience, consider: what they have the power to do, what they care about, what would make it easier for them to support, and what we want them to do next.

Audience mapping by listing down all potential target audiences:

Audience	Why they matter	What we need from them

From the list above, identify your top one to three audiences (those who actually has the power over the outcome):

Priority audience 1

Priority audience 2

Priority audience 3



IMAGE CAPTION

4. Build your dual case: human and system

Strong advocacy usually needs both a human case and a system case.

The human case explains who is affected and why it matters. The system case explains why the government should act and what action would solve the problem.

Stories create urgency. Evidence creates confidence. Together, they help government understand both the moral case and the practical case for change.

The human case, ask:

- Who is affected?
- What are they experiencing?
- What does this look like in everyday life?
- What is the emotional, practical or financial consequence?
- What does the government not currently see?
- Whose voice can make the issue real, with consent and care?

The system case, ask:

- What policy, funding, program or regulatory setting is causing or worsening the problem?
- What are the consequences of inaction?
- What cost or pressure is created elsewhere in the system?
- What solution is practical and achievable?
- What can the government do in the short, medium and long term?
- What evidence shows the solution would work?

Take a moment to brainstorm and list down what kind of evidence can support your organisation:

a.

b.

c.

5. Choose your advocacy mode

Effective advocacy increasingly depends on knowing when to shift between different modes of influence. Organisations do not succeed by remaining permanently collaborative or permanently confrontational. They succeed because they understand what the moment requires.

The advocacy spectrum

Mode	What works best?	Examples
Quiet engagement	The government is open, relationships are warm, and the issue can be progressed constructively.	Adviser briefings, department meetings, ministerial letters.
Coalition-building	The issue needs wider legitimacy or sector weight.	Joint letters, roundtables, peak body statements, shared submissions.
Public visibility	The issue needs attention, salience or community validation.	Media, op-eds, reports, social content, public events.
Direct pressure	The government is not responding, or the cost of inaction needs to become visible.	Targeted public asks, crossbench engagement, and parliamentary questions.
Escalation	Private engagement has stalled, and greater leverage is needed.	Public campaign, paid media, scorecard, petition, high-profile spokespeople.

Your chosen advocacy mode(s):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

6. How to build relationships?

The strongest government relationships are usually built consistently over time, not only during moments of crisis, funding pressure or public disagreement.

Governments are more likely to engage constructively with organisations they already know and trust.

Relationship-building does not always mean asking for something. It can mean sharing insight, offering practical evidence, inviting decision-makers to see the work directly, or helping the government understand an emerging issue before it becomes a public problem.

Relationship-building actions (recommended but not limited to):

- Invite local MPs and advisers to visit programs or community events.
- Share short updates on emerging community issues.
- Provide useful evidence without always asking for something.
- Participate constructively in consultations and reviews.
- Acknowledge government support positively where appropriate.
- Keep advisers informed about sector developments before they become problems.
- Follow up after meetings with concise, practical next steps.

Take a moment to brainstorm and list down what actions can support your organisation to build relationships:

a.

b.

c.

7. Arrange case studies and spokespeople

Putting a face to a story is a great way to get your audience to connect. It can evoke empathy, and foster a deeper understanding of what you're setting out to achieve. Think about who would be an appropriate fit as spokespeople or case studies. You can drive engagement by connecting your project to a human angle.

List your ideas below:

Spokesperson	Case study

8. Build your advocacy timeline

Good advocacy is shaped by timing. The government has rhythms: budgets, sitting weeks, estimates, committee inquiries, elections, awareness days, funding rounds and policy reviews.

Your timeline should connect your advocacy activity to the moments when the government is most likely to listen or act.

Note: Remember to add in key deadlines such as:

- Federal or state budget date
- Sitting weeks (Federal and State)
- Senate estimates or state estimates
- Committee inquiries
- Awareness days or sector events
- Elections (Federal and State)

Create your timeline below:

Month	Action	Purpose	Key deadline

9. Tips to connect with parliamentarians

Local stories and community insight are often more politically powerful than organisations realise.

Elected representatives are highly attentive to constituent experiences, local sentiment and visible community impact. National data can show scale. Local examples make the issue politically tangible.

The strongest advocacy often connects the two: national or system-level evidence, backed by local stories that show what the issue looks like in real life.

In the case that reading material is requested, which is often the case as the parliamentarians can be busy and prefer to read a brief before committing to a meeting. We suggest creating a simple 1-2 page brief that can be shared.

Guide:

Section	What to include?
Opening	One sentence explaining who you are and why the issue matters locally.
Local footprint	Programs, services, members, volunteers, workforce, sites or people supported in the electorate.
Local impact	Data or examples that show community value.
Community story	A short, concise story that makes the issue real.
Policy issue	What barrier, gap or opportunity needs government attention?
Ask	What you want the MP to do: visit, write, raise, meet, support, connect or advocate.
Next step	A specific follow-up action and contact person.

10. What channels can you use?

You need to understand more about the resources you have available and consider how they can support the socialisation of ask. Do you have social media accounts, a website, or perhaps some traditional advertising to help communicate your asks?

Tick the channels below and list anything else you may use to socialise or reinforce your ask:

- ☐ Organisational website
- ☐ Project Landing Page or Website
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Instagram
- ☐ Events
- ☐ Face-to-face meetings
- ☐ Engagement booths
- ☐ Petitions
- ☐ Traditional Advertising: Print, radio, TV, outdoor
- ☐ Online advertising
- ☐ Printed collateral e.g., posters, flyers
- ☐ Letters or Direct Mail
- ☐ Electronic Direct Mail (eDM) or emails
- ☐ Public relations or free media
- ☐ Sponsorship
- ☐ Speaking opportunities
- ☐ Door knocking

11. Turning ideas into action

You have done the strategic thinking; now it's time to move on to the implementation phase. Distribute an implementation schedule that includes the task, who is responsible, when it is due, and lists any crucial notes and deadlines. Now commence the rollout!

An example implementation schedule template is shown below. Feel free to use this or adapt it to suit your project and team:

Task	Responsibility	Due date	Notes

12. Keep on track

Hold regular work-in-progress (WIP) meetings with your core project team to ensure everyone completes their tasks on time and to answer any questions they have. You can also use these meetings to keep everyone informed and troubleshoot any issues together. Take action items from each meeting to ensure the team is clear on the priorities and next steps.

An example WIP document template is shown below. You can use this or create your own.

Action	Responsibility	Due date	Outcome

13. Measure your success

The key objectives you made at the beginning will help you measure and evaluate your success. Depending on your objective, you can measure data from your social accounts or the records of the number of meetings you had with political stakeholders. Take time to reflect on your project once it is complete and record any lessons learned. This will help you improve on your process next time. And always remember to celebrate your wins!

Below is an example of a measurement matrix – some of these may be relevant to your project.

	Organisational objectives	Communication objectives	Target audience	Strategy
Preparation	Your organisation's strategic objectives	Agreed objectives for public relations	Identified target audiences	Develop a PR plan Ongoing measurement to enhance strategy and tactics
		Implementation		
Segment	Data	Data analysis	Insight from data	Strategic implications of the insight
Audience	Psychographic	Networks, social media use, and consumption of content	Strategic approach to engage targets	Resourcing allocation to grow engagement
Media	Circulation, key message penetration	Distribution, readership, top messages	Coverage quality, audience reach, and the most effective messages	Is the approach effective in growing the quality and quantity of coverage? Should messages be re-evaluated?
Social media	Community management	Volume of engagement	Investment to manage the community	Resourcing allocation to grow engagement
Community	Ambassador activation	Ambassador reach, engagement	Effectiveness of ambassadors	Resourcing allocation for the ambassador program

Below is an example of a Policy and Influence Indicators checklist. Some of these may be relevant to your advocacy project.

Government engagement

☐ Meeting secured with minister, adviser, department or MP
☐ Follow-up engagement requested by government
☐ Adviser or department relationship established
☐ Site visit, briefing or consultation attended
☐ Government requested additional information or input

Policy and political influence

☐ Issue referenced publicly by government representative
☐ Parliamentary question, debate or Estimates mention achieved
☐ Included in policy review, inquiry or consultation
☐ Recommendation reflected in government discussion or planning
☐ Pilot funding, commitment or policy movement secured

Community and coalition impact

☐ Coalition or sector support increased
☐ Community participation or supporter engagement increased
☐ Lived experience voices or case studies activated
☐ New advocates, champions or ambassadors identified

Media and visibility

☐ Positive or constructive media coverage achieved
☐ Key messages reflected accurately in coverage
☐ Increased public awareness or stakeholder visibility
☐ Organisation recognised as a credible voice on the issue

Effective advocacy is rarely linear. Progress often happens through relationship-building, persistence, timing and incremental wins. Some of the most successful advocacy campaigns take years, not months.

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Thank you.

Jo Scard
Founder + Chief Executive Officer
+61 457 725 953
+61 2 6281 7350
jo@fiftyacres.com
fiftyacres.com.au

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