

Organizing a petition



As a member of the Council, there's a good chance you'll find yourself working on a petition at some point, whether it's one your local chapter has crafted, one the national office has put together or one that an allied group is circulating.

Petitions are a tactic that have long been used in democratic struggles to raise grievances with people in power. They are a simple, straightforward organizing tool and a good way of introducing ideas and getting people involved. They send out a message that there is strong support for your cause, which encourages officials to take notice.

A petition clearly explains your concern, then demands that the person, organization or government responsible do something about it. The power of a petition comes with the number of people who have signed it. Below are some basic guidelines on petitioning that will help you get the best results.

Before you get started

Get in touch with us

If you plan to circulate a petition under the Council's name, please get in touch with us first. Another chapter may have done a similar one that could give you some ideas. Also, we would appreciate receiving a copy before it goes out.

IMPORTANT NOTE from the national office

Please call us before circulating any petition under the Council's name. We'd like to talk about your plans, and we'd like to have a copy too.

Thanks.

Is it official or unofficial?

A petition can be unofficial and aimed at an individual, corporation or group, or it can be an official one aimed at a government. If it's aimed at a government it must follow a special format. You don't want to go through all the effort of creating and circulating a petition only to have it declared unacceptable when you try to deliver it, so find out what the official guidelines are (see page 40).

Time it right

As is the case with almost any tactic your chapter chooses, your petition should have a clear time line. You'll want to present the petition when it will have the biggest impact. Think about when that is, then think about how long it will take to write the petition, how long it will take to get all the signatures you want, and so on.



Writing the petition

Identify the problem

Before writing, identify what the problem is and how you want it solved. Beyond the issue itself, you need a clear goal.

The order

Lay out your principles and your arguments in the first sections. Start with general principles and progress toward more specific arguments. At the end of the petition, put down your demands—what you want those responsible to do about the problem.

Keep it short

The clearer and shorter the petition, the better. People are more likely to read something that is short and to the point.

Circulating the petition

Getting it out there

Decide how best to circulate your petition. You could take it door-to-door in your neighbourhood, pass it around your workplace, take it to groups involved with the issues or who would agree with your point of view, visit local stores or businesses that might be supportive, and have it to sign at an event you are hosting on the issue. For ideas on how to distribute your petition, don't hesitate to call the national office.

Getting it back

Before you give out your petitions, be clear about how you are going to get them back. If you give copies of the petition to other people or groups to collect signatures, make sure the deadline and instructions for returning them are clearly written on the petition itself.

Presenting it

If there is a strong community link to the issue, the local media might be interested in your presentation of the petition to your local Member of Parliament or some other community figure. At the same time, you may want to ask the MP or community member if he or she will sign the petition, or support the remedy of the petition publicly.

Requirements for submitting a petition to the federal government

- The petition must be on a standard paper size, such as letter or legal. It can be handwritten, typed, printed or photocopied.
- You must address your petition to the House of Commons. It cannot be addressed to the Prime Minister or any other individual member of government, unless you are simply presenting it to them as an individual, instead or formally in Parliament.
- You cannot attach anything else to the petition, such as documents, news clippings, maps, pictures or any other matter.
- The petition must concern a subject over which the federal government has some authority. You cannot, for example, petition the House of Commons in Ottawa to change a municipal zoning by-law.
- The petition must contain a request that calls on the government to take or refrain from a specific action. You cannot demand or insist that Parliament do something. You can, however, petition, call upon or encourage the House of Commons to take action on an issue.
- Your petition must contain a minimum of 25 valid signatures of Canadians. Everyone who signs the petition must include his or her signature, name, and city or town and province of residence.

Some useful contacts you may need

For any question about petitioning the federal government, call:
The Clerk of Petitions in Ottawa at (613) 992-9511

For numbers of people and departments in Ottawa call:
**Government of Canada Telephone Assistance
(613) 954-8211**

For general inquiries, call:
House of Commons General Inquiries (613) 992-4793

To get the name and telephone number of your MP, call:
Elections Canada at 1-800-463-6868

To find your MP's e-mail address, go to:
www.parl.gc.ca/36/sm-e.htm

To send mail to your MP, use the following address (remember, there's no postage necessary):

**(Your MP's name)
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario
K1A 0G5**

I'M SORRY, DID I SAY FIVE "PAGES" OF SIGNATURES? I MEANT TO SAY FIVE **BOXES**



