

HOW NFPS SHOULD ENGAGE WITH GOVERNMENT:

Strategies, tools and frameworks for long-term success

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Executive summary

This paper has been developed to support non-profit, social purpose leaders and Boards to examine just how well prepared their organisation is to work effectively with government – and to provide a framework and tools to respond to the fast changing policy, funding and legislative environments of our modern world.

No matter the size or scope of an organisation, those that thrive through tumultuous and transitional periods know to link government engagement activities to their strategic objectives and have structural systems that are embedded and aligned across the organisation.

We explore how to frame asks from a political perspective and understand that everyone has a role to play in government engagement. As the social and non-profit sector represents the diverse needs and voices of our community, it is a critical responsibility held by leaders in this space, and organisations must understand how to frame their asks through the political lens for genuine impact, outcome and systemic change.

How you and your organisation respond to an external crisis, shocks or change of government will depend on what sort of organisation you are and what resources you possess.

In this paper you'll be able to identify which archetype your organisation fits into and then use the resourcing provided to assist with planning and capacity building around government relations, regardless of size. The tools within have been developed to provide an assessment of current capacity, practical approaches to skilling up around government engagement and conversation starters to help address all the risks and opportunities that go with government engagement. There are handy checklists for Board, Management and Operations to make sure you've covered all the bases and information to help you delineate roles, define objectives and embed the systems needed to be most effective.

If structural and systemic change is genuinely required to make our society a better place, our sector will be critical in making sure government see the potential, opportunity and energy the non-profit sector can mobilise.

Contents

Chapter 1: How should non-profit organisations manage government engagement in times of crisis?	4
<hr/>	
Chapter 2: What is your instinctive response to a crisis?	6
Five archetypes	7
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Chapter 3: Best practice government engagement	11
<hr/>	
Chapter 4: Building your strategic response to a crisis	15
Four core functions	16
Four-part strategic plan	19
KPIs and roles	20
Archetype recommendations	21
<hr/>	
Chapter 5: Establishing structural and systemic frameworks to support your strategy	22
Processes and planning	23
Mapping and data	24
Framing	25
Campaigning	26
Leveraging events	26
Social media	27
Archetype recommendations	28
<hr/>	
Conclusion	29
<hr/>	
Government engagement checklists	30
Board checklist	31
Management checklist	32
Operations checklist	33
<hr/>	
About Neil Pharaoh	34
<hr/>	
About Perpetual	35

Chapter 1

How should non-profit organisations manage government engagement in times of crisis?



The world has faced extraordinary crises in recent years. A world-wide pandemic, national bushfire and flooding emergencies, wars, global financial crises, climate change catastrophes, not to mention the usual cycle of elections and leadership changes have all buffeted the community sector significantly.

Times of crisis, political change or economic disruption all have immediate and flow-on impacts for non-profit organisations of all sizes. Existing markets for products and services can swell or disappear overnight, and consumer and donor behaviour changes rapidly and everyone from government to the person on the street is affected.

Major societal events – be they political, environmental, social, economic or some combination of all – typically result in funding disruption or uncertainty for the community sector. When that funding disruption comes from government, the impact can be enormous for community service providers.

In the charity sector, government funding is critical. Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) financial data indicates that in 2018 nearly half (47%) of the sector's revenue came from government (including grants)¹.

When that funding is impacted, the critical services provided by our community sector are at risk. It is for that reason alone that in times of crisis, the capacity for a non-profit

organisation to effectively engage with government becomes critical.

Good government engagement requires non-profits to build relationships with key stakeholders at all levels of government – Ministers, Members, Departments and the Political Parties themselves. As a key voice for community, it is critical that non-profit and social purpose organisations have strong strategies that enable them to feed into government thinking on policy and regulation. If social purpose and not-for-profit organisations do not engage in this discussion then society as a whole is worse off.

Times of crisis also provide unique opportunity. Long-standing legislative and regulatory barriers can be discarded in days where change had been demanded for years. During times of crisis, non-profit organisations find themselves at the coalface and as such they have a unique opportunity to speak directly to lawmakers. In these moments, a prepared non-profit organisation can have meaningful conversations with governments and in doing so can help to shape community outcomes. It is for that reason non-profit Boards and Executive teams need to understand how to prepare their government relations approaches for the unexpected.

So, what can non-profit leaders learn from those engaging effectively with government?

¹ Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, May 2020, Australian Charities Report 2018, www.acnc.gov.au/tools/reports/australian-charities-report-2018

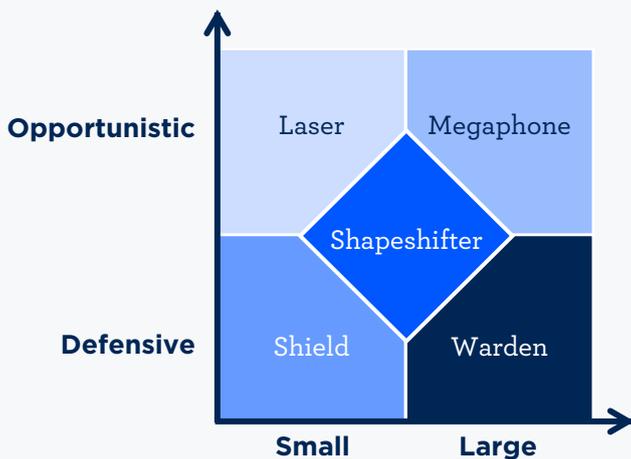


Chapter 2

What is your instinctive response to a crisis?



Five archetypes



Megaphone

- Large, well-resourced organisation
- Established systems and processes and considerable donor base
- Public is familiar with brand and you put together eye-catching campaigns
- Active government engagement team with significant connections
- Instinctive crisis response: Swing into action immediately, consulting with government or media, scaling up campaigns and looking for new opportunities



Laser

- Small but nimble organisation with limited resources
- Systems and processes honed to work as effectively as possible
- Earning a name in the sector for doing things differently and that donors feel 'value aligned' to
- No dedicated government engagement resource but flexible approach to influencing policy and securing funding outcomes
- Instinctive crisis response: investigate new technologies and non-traditional ways of building support and donor base, while adapting systems and processes to a new landscape



Warden

- Established organisation with considerable resources
- Government and funder engagement systems in place
- Small, dedicated team for government engagement
- Strong brand awareness with various levels of government
- Instinctive crisis response: Double government campaigning efforts while maintaining existing systems and processes



Shapeshifter

- Small to medium organisation with growing base of donors, supporters and partners
- Comfortable pivoting between traditional and new ways of doing things
- Flexible approach has achieved success with campaigns and government
- Publicly known for many things but not one thing in particular
- Ad hoc approach to government engagement
- Instinctive crisis response: do whatever works to survive, taking a flexible approach but worry that your voice might not be being heard



Shield

- Small to medium organisation, a little newer but have already achieved considerable success
- Lean operation with some established systems for government engagement
- Small but loyal base of donors and partners
- Reasonable brand awareness without being a household name
- Instinctive crisis response: Decreased capacity to dedicate to government engagement with all resources focused on keeping the organisation afloat

Thinking about the methods you currently utilise to engage political stakeholders and measuring them against your instinctive response to the deep challenges of a cataclysmic event, which of the following groups do you fall into?



Warden

You are an established organisation with deep and long-standing resources. You have a system of engaging government and funders that has been very successful over the years and has led to you having a wide network of established support, a large staff and a long list of donors to whom you send regular communications and campaigns.

You know the people you always go to for a meeting to present your asks and you are very successful at ‘pressing the flesh’ at those occasions. Your organisation may have strong brand awareness in philanthropy and within local, State and Federal Government already. You likely have a small, dedicated team for government engagement, although there may not be much interaction between that department and Executive on a day to day level.

Crisis Response: A now preoccupied government may be harder for you to reach and your usual government connections may be busy dealing with the day to day of the crisis. Your instinctive approach is to go back to basics – double your efforts in campaigning, make more of an effort to get to your government stakeholders and try to extend your reach while maintaining existing systems and processes. You must protect your community stakeholders and your castle!



Shield

You are a small to medium organisation that may be a little newer on the scene but have already achieved considerable success. You have a solid base of donor and partner support and have had several significant funding successes. You have reasonably good name recognition in the sector without being a household name and are respected for your activities and way of doing things. You run a lean operation but have some established systems for government engagement, possibly one person with some level of responsibility. You don't have a go to person for government but have had success in setting up meetings when needed. You run traditional funding campaigns and are pretty good at finding the ‘point of difference’ that makes your campaign stand out and appeal, so you have a small but loyal following.

Crisis Response: Your organisation may be financially tested. You don't have the financial reserves of the larger organisations, but like them you may face a rapidly shrinking pool of donors and funding. In these moments your team feels like they need to work even harder to deliver services, reach donors and just get the regular things done. You may not feel like you have the capacity to focus on getting to government with asks. For the moment as all your resources are needed to keep your organisational ship afloat. Hand me the bailing bucket!



Megaphone

You are a substantial and well-resourced organisation, with a large staff, established systems and processes and a considerable donor and partner base. The public is familiar with your name, you are the master of putting together an eye-catching campaign and may have advocated publicly for social change on issues you care about in the past. You have a small but active team for government engagement and have made significant connections within government over the years, which you are confident you can call on when needed.

Crisis Response: You are the type of organisation that swings into action immediately. You are likely to be a vocal voice in consultation with government stakeholders or in the media, whether calling for help for the sector or detailing the significant impact this crisis is having on your operations. You understand the need to scale up your campaigns and appeals and actively examine the landscape for opportunities – whether this means expanding your reach, availing yourself of any available government support quickly or taking up the opportunity to step into a gap left by circumstance, such as the emergence of a new market or platform. Because what do they say? The best form of defence is attack!



Laser

You are a small but nimble organisation, without huge financial resources or a very large staff, but you have honed your systems and processes to work as effectively as possible and you are always keen to embrace new structures or technologies. You are earning a name in the sector as an up and coming organisation, one that isn't afraid to do things differently and one that donors feel 'value aligned' to. You don't really have a dedicated government engagement resource but tend to set things up when needed and then go in confidently. You're flexible, you may have tried everything in the past, from a targeted campaign to influencing policy through community action. You have achieved some good funding outcomes from government, but your major success comes from agile campaigns to your donor base.

Crisis Response: You may have had to really sit down and redraw your strategy when dealing with this crisis. You are investigating new technologies, building up your support and donor base in non-traditional ways and doing your best to adapt systems and processes to the new landscape. You feel you are having more initial success in dealing with this crisis than many other small organisations but are wondering how you sustain this into the long term. Find the Gap!



Shapeshifter

You are a small to medium sized organisation with a growing base of donors, supporters and partners. The hallmark of your organisational strategy is that you have never been afraid to mix it up. Sometimes you prefer the traditional way of doing things, sometimes you like to break the mould and go in a different direction. Because of this flexibility, you have had success in cutting through with your campaigns and have achieved some notable gains with government. However, you sometimes worry that you run the risk that by being a bit of an everyman – you are not necessarily publicly ‘known’ for anything in particular. You have an ad hoc approach to government engagement activities and may not have a dedicated person for government engagement.

Crisis Response: You may take a ‘whatever works to survive’ point of view. You have tried ramping up traditional campaigns but are also trying to build and nurture a following of supporters that may not convert to potential donors in the future. You might feel like you are having reasonable success in navigating the crisis because of your flexibility, but worry that your voice is not being heard and that some of the support options offered by government will not necessarily apply to you. There’s a danger in looking too good!

So, now that you know roughly where you fit – what’s next? And what actions can be taken by the different levels of your organisation to forward your government engagement strategy and objectives and ensure a successful outcome in times of crisis?

Chapter 3

Best practice government engagement



During times of crisis, government will pivot away from the day to day business of policy making to give full focus to the crisis. During this time the political clock is paused and there is likely to be little systematic interaction with stakeholders regarding policy formulation, funding or programmatic changes. If your organisation is stressed by the crisis, you may have urgent need for funding or regulatory change. But before you can effectively achieve those aims, you need to use this pause to get your government engagement systems in order and review and update your strategy. Why? So that when government are ready to listen again, your case for assistance will be ready to go, structured and compelling.

Here are some government engagement basics:

Government engagement is everyone's responsibility

Being actively involved in government engagement hasn't traditionally been seen as an automatic part of either Board or Management's duties for most organisations. Many executives don't see themselves as being responsible for, or even terribly involved in, the day to day activity of government engagement. During a global or national crisis, this oversight can cost your organisation. Align your government engagement activities to your organisational strategy, tie it to your Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and clearly define what everyone should be doing to further your government engagement objectives.



Government engagement is most effective when it is a whole organisation affair.

Examine systems and strategy

You may need to redraw your picture of what great networking, political access, campaigning and influence look like. Major funding or policy wins are unlikely to be achieved easily. Success in this arena requires building, maintaining and strengthening of relationships over a long time, ideally at multiple altitudes of government.

Assess your government stakeholder framework: do you have stakeholders across each of the following five key areas?

- **Ministers, executive and shadow ministers** – those who run government, or could run government in the future
- **Members of Parliament** – MPs and Senators, anyone elected to parliament who you could potentially get on board to champion your cause to the decision makers
- **The political parties themselves.** Being smart and nonpartisan actually means involving each side properly. Policy committees, interest and associated groups, state or federal conferences and bodies through to local branches, all of them have a role
- **Policy departments** – treasury, health, education, science etc. This is where the nuts and bolts of policy will be hammered out, so it's vital to try and have a voice in the process
- **Central agencies** – Prime Minister and Cabinet, Treasury, Finance and Premier and Cabinet (and related bodies) are all critical stakeholder cohorts to engage

Engaging with the public service is a critical part of government engagement. Building relationships at every level of a department will gain you insights into ministerial preferences, key processes and trends and future policy directions, opening up opportunities for collaboration and partnership. When approaching policy departments, it is vital you engage with the right level of government. Depending on the size of your organisation and its relevance to a policy department, your Board members can and should engage with Secretaries, Deputy Secretaries and Executives. Management should be engaging with Executive Directors, Directors, Assistant Directors, Chief Advisors and Chief Officers within your chosen policy department and Operational team with departmental managers and their staff – the people who are subject experts and have direct responsibility for policy and program areas.

Build in-house capability

It is crucial that the capability exists in-house to build enduring, sustainable relationships across all areas of government, which are owned and managed by your Management and team. This allows you to build a bank of government engagement knowledge and skills within your organisation. How can this translate into action? Build capability by providing government engagement training to a range of people within your organisation, including your Board, Management and Operational staff.

Electorate mapping

Do you collect postcode data on your clients, donors, supporters, Board members, staff, volunteers, visitors and/or other stakeholders? A politician may have an understanding of what your business does, however it is highly unlikely that they know the number of touchpoints your organisation has with their constituents. Without this information, the reach, influence and relevance of your organisation is unclear and probably underestimated. Electorate mapping opens up the opportunity for you to engage politicians in dialogue that is strategic, structured, evidence-based and relevant. It is simply a matter of de-identification of postcodes, collation on the basis of an electorate and framing it from a political standpoint. Your stakeholder data can then be overlaid with other research and insights to demonstrate the importance of a particular issue to a politician's constituents. Presented with this information, politicians can immediately understand the impact that your organisation has in their electorate, particularly for marginal seats. This may change their awareness, position and actions when it comes to your organisation, industry and even sector.

Impact mapping

Collect information and data on measuring the impact of the crisis on your organisation. Map and cost that impact (whether positive or negative) on you and your sector as it impacts you. What project cancellations, loss/increase of revenue, impact on staff hours or reduction/increase of clients, donations or service provisions have you encountered? What is the subsequent loss/increase of revenue flowing into the community or localities where you serve (or spend)? The purpose of mapping the crisis now is to build a tangible, credible and compelling case for government support or funding when the occasion presents itself.

Activate your supporters

Get your staff, volunteers, members and donors to make some noise to their local media and/or approach their local, state and federal MPs. You need to start getting the word out that there is a case to be made for you receiving support or funding, and to start demonstrating your footprint in their various electorates.

Finally, check if your organisation is listed on the lobbyist register

By law, anyone lobbying to government on behalf of a third party must be registered on the government lobbyist register and, in the process, declare all clients that they have done paid or pro bono work for. Consequently, many non-profit and social purpose organisations are unwittingly finding themselves listed on the lobbyist register, despite their lobbyist relationship having already ended. This can be both damaging to your reputation and potentially put future funding, contracts and partnerships at risk. Many organisations listed are unaware they are on the register, so it is critical you check to see whether you are in this situation. The Federal register is available at <https://lobbyists.ag.gov.au/register> but each state has their own register to check also.

Archetype recommendations



Wardens

It's particularly important for you to ensure that everyone across your organisation has a role and responsibility for government engagement and that capability is built in-house. Make sure all the details of your political footprint and crisis impact are mapped, not just the larger overview. Consider activating your supporters to advocate for you rather than doing it all yourself.



Lasers

It's particularly important to examine your influence across the five areas of government, it may need targeted expansion. Comprehensively map your organisation's political footprint, which may be either larger than you realise and something you can leverage more. Take care to fully map your crisis impact so that your voice can be heard and check the lobbyist register in case you are unaware of being listed.



Shields

It's particularly important for you to build substantial in-house capability for government engagement that involves everyone across the organisation. Focus on electoral mapping to work out exactly how big your political reach and spread are. Reach out to your supporters in different ways to motivate them to act on your behalf.



Shapeshifters

It's particularly important to map the full reach of your political influence across the five areas of government and ensure you are engaging government at the right level. Ensure you are building in-house capability that is structured and systemic. Map both your political footprint and crisis impact in detail so you can clearly present a case to politicians and achieve cut through.



Megaphones

It's particularly important for you to make sure your political mapping goes to a level of detail, to be able to present more than just what the public or politician already see. Ensure you are building depth of in-house government engagement capability, knowledge and skills. Check the lobbyist register to avoid reputational damage.

Chapter 4

Building your strategic response

Organisations tend to attempt to engage with government in one of two ways:

- 1 Leverage their networks, existing relationships, influence and the size of their organisation to attract special/extra funding from government that supports traditional business models and locks in the status quo; or
- 2 Look to innovation, change their focus from financial support to member building, leverage social media and activate a community organisation model, encouraging their base to raise their voices in support and advocate on behalf of the organisation, while knowing these supporters may convert to donors in the future.

Aspects of either or both strategies may be appropriate for your organisation.

Regardless of which strategy you choose, a non-profit Board should be monitoring the function, insight and leadership of its organisation's government engagement through the lenses of four core functions:



Four core functions



Strategy

Know yourself

This should be easy. Clearly articulate your organisation's story, vision, purpose and quantify the value you deliver. You need to not just understand the impact you create, but also effectively communicate this externally, so government cares about your agenda.

Know your context

Which government stakeholders will you engage? Who are they and what are their priorities and interests? What is the shape of your legislative landscape? What major regulatory reform is on your horizon? Who are the other big players in your sector? How are they moving at this time?

Define your strategy

The Board should set the strategy for government engagement. Do you want policy change, regulatory change, funding or legislation? How does it align with your strategic plan and purpose?



Finance

Board oversight of every aspect of government engagement is critical, in particular for organisations heavily dependent on government funding. Not allocating sufficient resources from a Board level towards continuing or rolling over funding may create financial risk for the organisation and its sustainability. Ensuring key milestones, reports and other deliverables attached to government contracts are delivered accurately and in a timely manner is critical to the Board discharging its governance responsibility. A proactive Board will actively monitor government advocacy, funding and policy initiatives (perhaps through a sub-committee), in conjunction with and supported by the work of Management.



Risk

Just as almost any organisation has reputational, financial and organisational risk, so too do you have government risk. Whether it's a change in funding models, policy, legislation, or regulation; movements in departments and key contacts; or a change of government, every one of these scenarios contain both potential risks and opportunities that a Board should monitor. This is particularly important in times of crisis where the prospect of regulatory risk is extremely high.

Developing and incorporating government engagement into your risk framework is easy: use your current risk framework (likelihood and impact are the most common axes used on risk matrixes) and load in all of your government risks and opportunities, and how you manage, mitigate or measure them. Look at the following:

- Build an influencer matrix for your priority jurisdictions, including key political decision makers and potential risk factors to do with their position on issues
- Build a sector matrix to be able to articulate your importance against other key non-profit players
- Build knowledge around electoral cycles and government funding terms
- Restructure Board meetings to allow for a “policy and asks discussion” on the agenda
- Recruit new Board members with proven government relations experience, ideally from both sides of politics
- Ensure policy changes are highlighted in Board papers
- Find opportunities for other advocacy players to present and speak at Boards
- Schedule team information sessions to ensure everyone is on the same page



Governance

Government engagement governance is a critical function. This includes the performance of the CEO and the leadership team, and ensuring that policies, procedures, strategy and risk are all balanced, calibrated and reviewed by the Board. Government engagement should form a key part of things like the CEO's report – what government stakeholders have they met? What proposals and discussions and messaging documents have been prepared? What framing and systems are in place to ensure the entire organisation has a structural and systemic approach to government engagement? What Customer Relationship Management (CRM) or data monitoring systems are in place? Is your strategy up to date? Asking the right questions and ensuring government engagement is high on the agenda is necessary to ensure you are meeting your governance requirements.

More broadly, are you investing sufficient resources in people working in and around government engagement? Do you have the capability and capacity to deliver? Which brings us to...

What should I invest to achieve engagement outcomes?

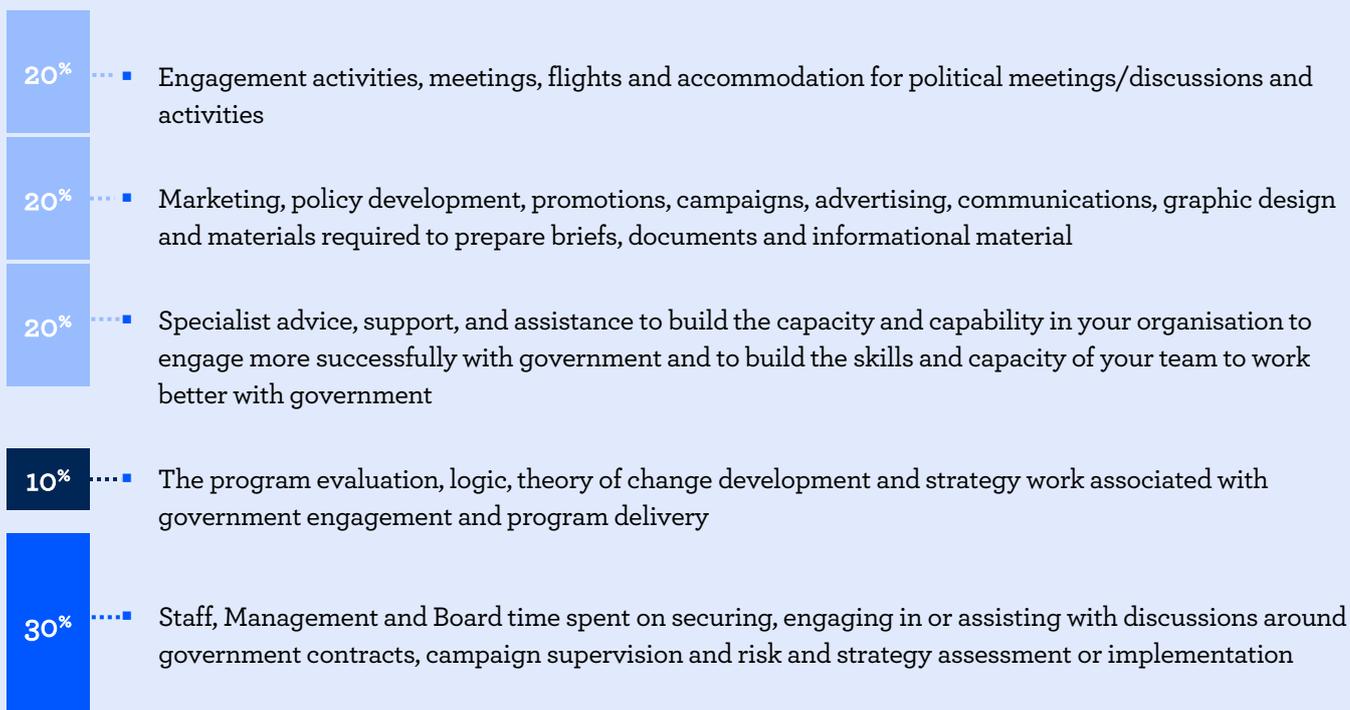
Whether we are talking ordinary regular government funding, funding asks (during election cycles or in times of crisis) or special/extra crisis funding from government, receiving funding always comes with a corresponding organisational cost. This 'investment' in securing, maintaining or renewing funding typically runs at about 10% of the desired funding.

You may be unaware that you are already spending money to gain money, but when you examine and measure those activities that are a normal part of securing funding – the one day per week spent by the CEO in meetings to chase funds, those few hours of each Board member's time, trips to Canberra, brochures and design – you will see you are likely already making the investment, just perhaps not measuring it. Ten % is a good number to get around the Board table and Management team and often represents the genuine cost of securing and then possibly re-securing funds from government.

When securing new funding (including crisis funding), a breakdown of your 10% investment spend looks like:



You may be unaware that you are already spending money to gain money.



Many organisations already build this 10% investment into contracts as overheads, but if you don't currently account for investment to gain funding, you should. Being explicit about this investment mitigates both your financial and non-financial risk.

Four-part strategic plan

To ensure effective government engagement that is aligned to organisational aims, Management should develop these plans, with regular input and oversight from the Board, we would suggest drawing up a four-part government engagement strategic plan.



Does your organisation have a four-part government engagement strategic plan?

1 Objectives

The first part of your plan covers what you want; what you need; why you are doing it; and why it is important. Often this clarity is lacking – there may be variance between Board and Management as to what the objectives actually are and your lists of projects and investment returns may not be up to date or strategically aligned. You need to be as specific as possible with the requests you make to any level of government, local, state or federal. What short, mid and long-term projects do you want to partner on? And for each time horizon, what is the low, medium and large investment you are seeking from government? Asks should always be specific, actionable and measurable.

For further clarity around some of these points and additional context around non-profit fundraising, you could also read [Jump on Board: High performing not-for-profit boards in fundraising](#)².

2 Tactical

The second part of your plan outlines how everything relates to politics – what are you doing on the ground? Where do you exist and operate? In addition to mapping your impact and footprint to political touchpoints and aligning them with your government engagement agenda, you should do your research on the political landscape. Economic models, cost benefit analyses, regulatory impact statements, legislative and electoral timelines and regulatory understanding are all part of this step.

3 Problem

The third part relates to framing the issue or ask within a political, media and policy framework. Take the issue away from being about you, but have a strategy in place for engaging the media that aligns with your objectives. What is the problem you are solving? How will it look in a media release or government announcement? How do you present your case for achieving your objective? How you frame your argument will make a huge difference to the outcome of your campaign. Change your language so that what you're saying hits home and back up your message with credible evidence – by providing data and insights or by inviting a politician to personally see a problem or opportunity for themselves.

4 Solution

The final part is to position your organisation as the solution to a political problem, and present viable options to government which support your objectives. Your solution options must be measurable, actionable, meaningful and intentional and you should always position them towards the areas of mutual benefit.

² Melissa Smith, commissioned by Perpetual, November 2019, Jump on board: High-performing not-for-profit boards in fundraising, www.perpetual.com.au/insights/white-paper-a-new-approach-for-australian-nfp-fundraising

KPIs and roles

Government engagement should be a whole of organisation KPI, with everyone at every level having a role to play. Examine your current systems and processes. How can you engage your entire organisation into government engagement? Take the time to embed government engagement skills and knowledge into performance and development plans across your Board, Management and Operational team. Spend time with each functional lead to investigate

options for engagement within their space – for example look at ways to increase donor engagement through political processes with your Donor manager.

There are detailed checklists as to exactly which government engagement functions should be the responsibility of your Board, Management and Operational team in chapter six of this paper. But broadly, these should be the delineation of roles:



Board: Government engagement strategy, defining government engagement objectives, developing government engagement four-part plan (with Management) monitoring the risk, finance and governance aspects of government engagement activities, signing off on investment spend.



Operations: Embedding and use of government engagement systems, including electoral postcode mapping, politician research and data insights, developing and updating 12-month government engagement activity plan, leveraging events and social media and impact mapping.



Management: Ensuring government engagement objectives are aligned across organisation, developing four-part government engagement plan (with Board), examining existing government engagement systems and structures and initiating improvements, managing the investment spend, developing and setting framing language around asks and issues and campaign/election cycle strategy and overview.

Archetype recommendations



Wardens

It's particularly important for all executives to take an active part in aligning government relations objectives to overall strategy and developing the four-part plan. Make government engagement a whole organisation responsibility, tying to KPIs and making sure everyone knows how they will contribute. It's very important to examine your ask from a government or media point of view rather than your own and shape your language accordingly.



Lasers

It's particularly important to make sure you are paying attention to the traditional areas of risk, governance and finance. Take the time to develop a key political stakeholder network that is highly strategic and has depth across the areas of government. Pay particular attention to the tactical section of your four-part plan, to be able to fully chart your political footprint.



Shields

It's particularly important to achieve clarity of objectives across your organisation and to examine the regulatory landscape carefully for anything that could adversely impact your organisation. It's also important to acknowledge and incorporate a 10% investment spend to actively build your government engagement functions. Focus on key government stakeholders and really target your language towards them to better your chances of return.



Shapeshifters

It's particularly important to take the time to really define your organisation's voice, story and personality so you can articulate them clearly to politicians. Make sure your objectives and government engagement strategy are aligned across the organisation and that you incorporate an investment spend in a structured and measurable way.



Megaphones

It's particularly important to examine and build your political influence network across the five key areas of government, so you are not always using the same channels to engage. Develop a sector matrix to be able to carefully build a case as to why you deserve available support and always position yourself as the solution to a problem rather than a noisemaker.

Chapter 5

Establishing structural and systemic frameworks to support your strategy

Processes and planning

Are your current processes for government engagement structured and systemic, or is your approach ad hoc?

Are you leaving the entire function up to one person or a small team and is there regular interaction between that team and Board and Management? Do you have knowledge and understanding of government engagement embedded across your organisation?



Are your current government engagement processes structured, systemic and automatic?

Your CEO should have oversight of, and input into, your government engagement frameworks and processes, to ensure objectives are aligned across the organisation and your government engagement function is adequately resourced. Regular meetings with your Operational team should cover:



Audit of systems and processes – to ensure ongoing and automatic, whole organisation engagement.



Developing government relations protocols – how will you manage your government engagement and who will have responsibility for the different processes?



Stakeholder engagement – which political stakeholders will you engage across the five key areas of government? Are any in a marginal seat? Who will engage them from your organisation?



Do you have partnerships with other organisations or businesses that you can leverage to magnify your voice and build a greater network of influence, expertise and passion? Can you leverage your community outreach to demonstrate positive impact to politicians?

Once you have determined your key government stakeholders, research them. You should know their priorities, interests and position on key issues. In all your dealings with politicians, remember that they are well-intentioned humans who generally want to help.

Develop a 12-month government engagement activity plan, which outlines your target audience and engagement activities, and update it quarterly. It can be simple or sophisticated, depending on your resources and objectives.



Prepare background briefs on politicians in preparation for meetings or events

Populate your plan with ongoing and regular activities that will build politicians' awareness and understanding of your organisation and its works, and will encourage long term relationships. Recommended government engagement activities include:

Examples of Government Engagement 12 Month Plan Activities

- **Develop a fact sheet about your organisation** that details your footprint in their electorate – using electorate mapping data and generated insights
- **Send an update to your MP** with news of your recent progress, projects and other items of interest
- **Automatically invite government stakeholders** to your organisation's events
- **Organise a meeting with a politician**, policy department or political party representatives to discuss a particular issue
- **Invite key politicians to visit your premises** to learn more about your work, meet your employees and to see your impact first-hand
- **Send regular communications** – event invitations and thank you notes, your organisation's newsletter or annual report, letters of support. Make sure they are relevant to the person you are sending them to

- **Encourage key supporters and Board members to reach out to their MPs** and detail why your organisation's work is important to them
- **Share a politician's newsletter** on your social channels (ensure both sides of politics)
- **Provide input into relevant Royal Commissions**, including verbal or written submissions, feedback on draft reports and monitoring the implementation of recommendations
- **Organise for an organisational representative to attend a local branch meeting** (ensure both sides of politics)

Crisis Response: During times of crisis, government and private donors may not be in the position to offer the financial support they normally would. In addition to looking at ways to grow existing funding or locate new sources of available funding, consider using this time to develop your base as members, supporters and advocates for your organisation, which you can then grow into donors in the future. Consider virtual and local community mobilisation, utilising your social media, and investigating new models, new platforms and new technology.

Also, make a decision as to who the organisation spokesperson will be, should you be directly adversely impacted by a crisis. Preparing how a media enquiry will be answered or how communications to members, staff, customers and clients will be shaped will place you in the strongest possible position, should the worst occur.

Mapping and data

To be able to frame your organisational asks politically, you first need to frame your organisation politically. This involves mapping all the inputs and outputs across your organisation in relation to the political electorates you reside in, to determine your electoral footprint and political pressure points.

Your organisation will already be collecting a large amount of postcode data as part of its everyday activities, such as address details collected from your staff, partner organisations, donors, volunteers and clients. It is simply a matter of taking those postcodes, anonymising them, mapping them to local, state and federal government areas / electorates and then studying them for insights or trends.

In your meetings with a government stakeholder, you will be able to present your case, for example "Our organisation has 280 donors living in your electorate, they have told us that (issue) is really important to them and that they would support any progress on (action)". Translating ideas into numbers (and therefore votes) will deepen a politician's understanding of your work and impact in their area and motivate them to act on your behalf. Implementing systems that automatically collect postcode data is an important first step in this process.

A good timeframe for achieving the mapping of all your organisational inputs and outputs politically is three years.



Develop a concise flyer detailing your organisation's works and achievements that you can present to every political connection to give them an instant snapshot of your organisation.

The political mapping of your organisation should cover three main areas – electoral postcode and positive impact mapping within your organisation and external crisis impact mapping.

Framing

Carefully choosing the language you use for both organisational asks and any kind of communication to government, so that it lands effectively with your political target, will vastly increase the chances of you achieving your objectives. Employing good framing techniques on every interaction has the potential to influence donor, media and public opinion – something that can really make the difference in times of crisis.

A great deal of research currently exists around the neuroscience of framing and how it can impact your outcomes and it is something that non-profits could really benefit from utilising more.

When choosing how you will frame an issue or communication:



Look at your funding or regulatory ask –

If you were to position this ask as a ‘problem’ that needs to be solved, how does it look politically? How does this problem look from a donor, media or public perspective?



Look at your potential political champions –

Who are they? What interests them (read their maiden speech)? Have you engaged them a few times as part of regular engagement activities before diving into your ask?



Look at your sector – Is this a problem unique to your organisation? Or do others in your sector have the same problem? Is this a sector wide problem?



Position your organisational ask as the solution to the problem – by offering viable options that support your objectives. Back them up with the empirical evidence and data you have collected by framing your organisational inputs and outputs politically.

The golden rules for government framing are:

- Find your middle ground and focus on **mutual benefit**
- **Make it simple and relevant** to those you are talking to
- **Back it with empirical evidence** (postcode data or case study examples that you can show the politician)
- Keep it real and engage with **goodwill and heart**



Build longer term relationships with your key government stakeholders, so that when you have an ‘ask’, the ground work has already been done. When we talk government stakeholders we talk about five groups – Ministers and Shadows, Members of Parliament, Policy Departments, Central Agencies and Political Parties themselves.

Campaigning

In times of national or global crisis, campaigning for financial or regulatory support from government operates very similarly to election campaigning, also a regular time of (smaller) crisis. Use this opportunity to speak directly to lawmakers and would-be lawmakers about your wish list. Define what you want clearly and effectively communicate it to those who make the decisions.

Develop a basic campaign/crisis framework.
Be sure to include:



Context – Who are your industry groups? Do you have a relationship with any of them? Who opposes the desired change/outcome? Should you win them over or actively oppose them? Who supports the desired change/outcome? How can you use that?



Your position – What are your political assets (any activities which engage constituents)? What are your current engagement activities? What political leverage do you have?



Targets – Who are the key players you need to influence across the five levels of government? How can you best influence their position? What's in it for them if you achieve your aim? Have you appealed to their interests?



Media – How will people respond to this campaign/ask? How can you engage interest? What is 'the story' behind this campaign? Is there public pressure to complement the campaign?

Next, develop the messaging, materials and documentation. Things sound different to different sides of politics: where do your projects fit? Who are the stakeholders? What portfolio are you speaking to? How does it relate to local MPs and how can you persuade

and engage both sides of politics? Putting everything into a short, sharp executive summary, rather than a long-winded policy document, will ensure it gets read by the people you are trying to reach.



The way you shape any organisational communication will have a huge impact on its success.

Check your resources. Do you have the time, staff and money to carry out this campaign effectively? How much will this campaign cost? Who will take responsibility for the different elements of the campaign? How will you evaluate the success of this campaign?

The final step is to run your campaign, whether that consists of social media, letters and meetings, building a website, paid advertising, focus groups, events or everything in between.

Leveraging events

As part of your 12-month government engagement activities planning, make sure you engage with local councillors and State/Federal MPs to hold events together or involve them in your regular events. Build engagement activities around the event. Share newsletters and stories in the lead up to the event, organise media coverage of the event that features the politician and follow up the event with thank you cards, newsletter items (in both your organisation and the politician's newsletters) and media stories.

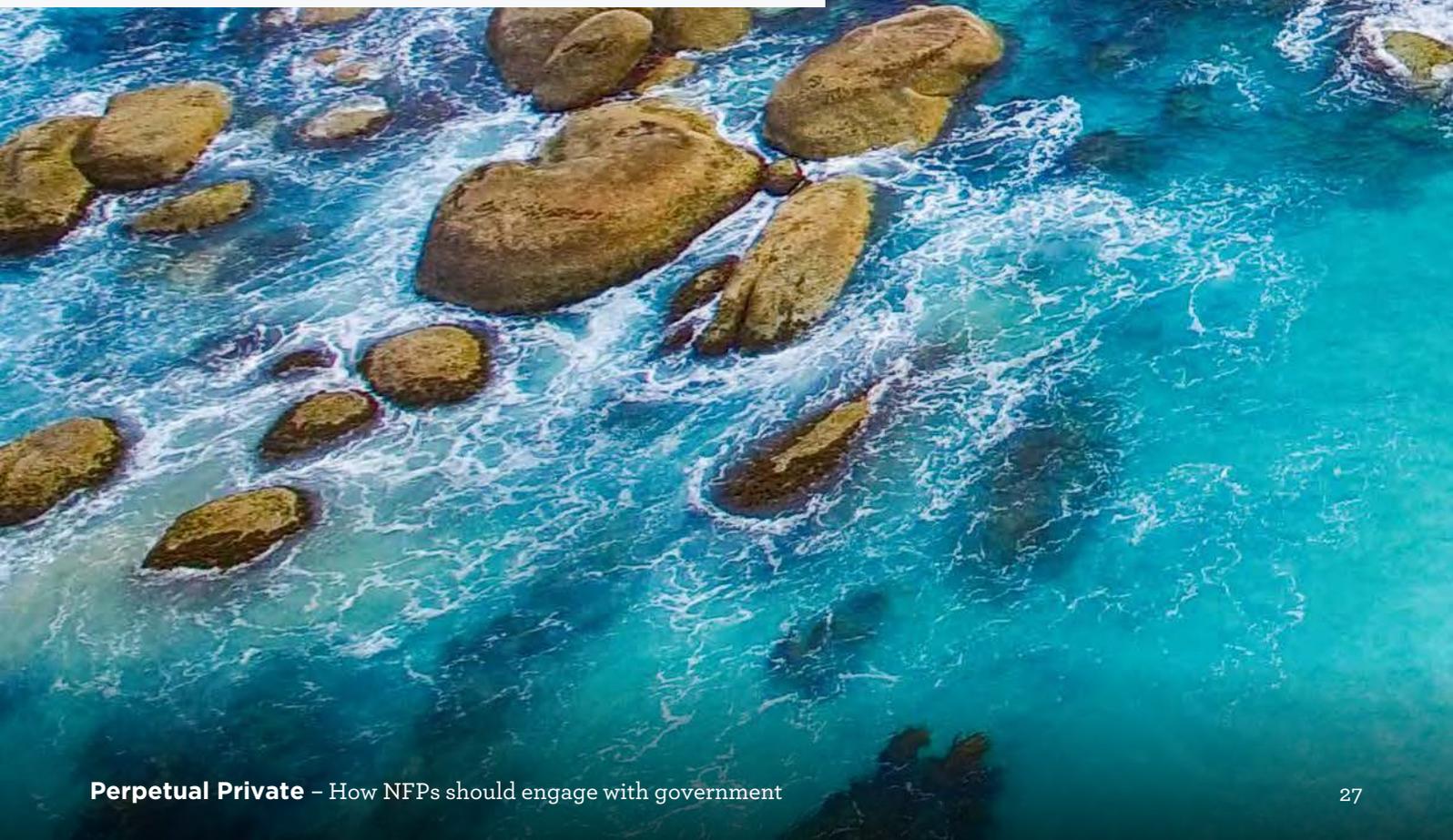
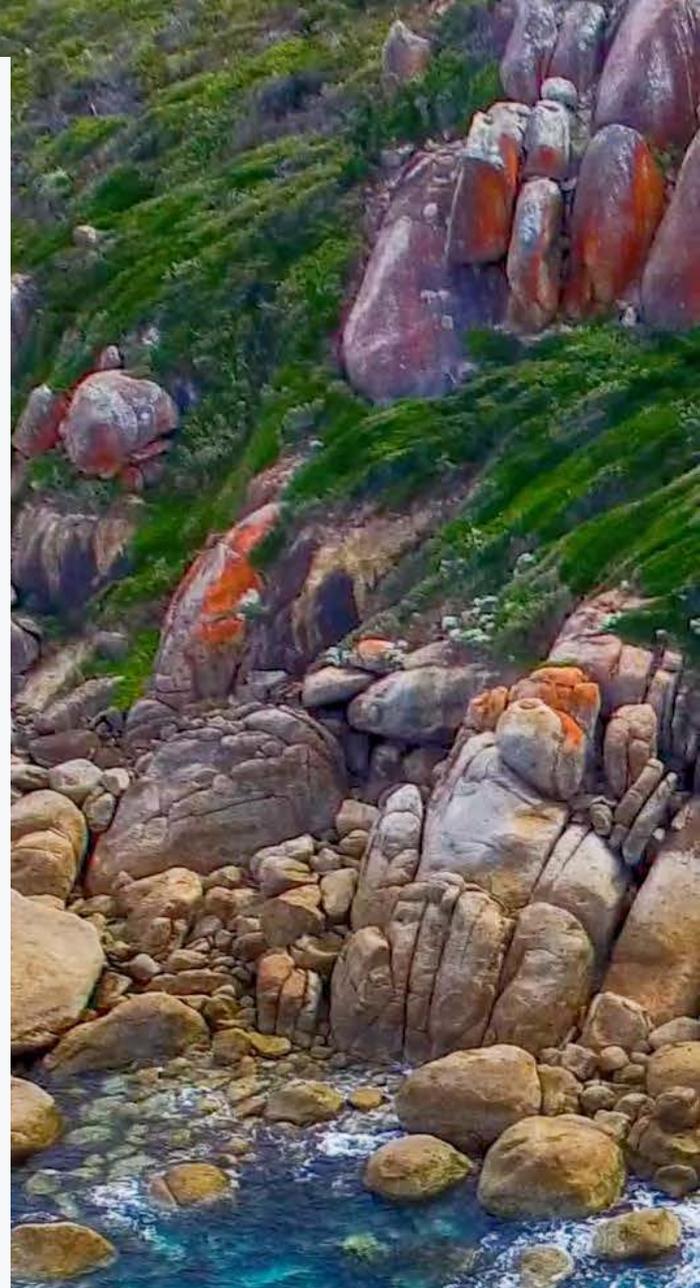
Have you got meetings lined up with relevant policy departments? Can you make that meeting part of a larger event (for example a leadership trip to Canberra) or hold related events around that meeting (such as cocktail parties or brunches) that you can invite politicians, organisational ambassadors and Board/Management to, to discuss issues informally?

Social media

Utilising your social media effectively can be a huge part of your government engagement toolkit, especially when face to face access is limited by a crisis. Develop social media pieces that are targeted to government – visual infographics highlighting your organisation’s strengths, profile pieces and publicity pieces discussing your issue.

How can you leverage your social media to amplify your voice to government at this time? Use the data and insights you have collected to demonstrate your footprint and impact. Reach out to your supporters and transform them into advocates. Encourage them to write emails, follow politicians, pick up the phone and reach out to their local media or to their local, state and federal MPs.

Harnessing the power of people’s voices in times of crisis may benefit you more than traditional funding drives. Take the time to examine innovative platforms and technologies: are there new products out there that you could use to reach and grow your supporters more effectively? Can you utilise them to scale your current campaigns up? Virtual organising and growing your support communities promotes connection and may allow you to achieve the cut through that is so difficult to get in a crowded crisis landscape.



Archetype recommendations



Warden

It's particularly important to have regular meetings between your Operational team and Executive to discuss government engagement strategy and provide overview of systems and activities. Make sure you are always engaging both sides of politics and leverage both your events and your political assets. Make an effort to mobilise your supporters into becoming advocates for your organisation.



Shields

It's particularly important to audit systems and processes to ensure they are working optimally. Seize the opportunity to develop sector partnerships to broaden political reach and magnify your voice. Develop case studies to back your asks with empirical evidence and leverage your social media by developing engaging, relevant pieces targeted to politicians.



Megaphones

It's particularly important to research political stakeholders thoroughly so you make every access opportunity more likely to succeed. Use your profile to build larger events around key political meetings or invite politicians to tour your premises and see your work. Pay attention to how your issue will look represented by the media and frame your language carefully.



Lasers:

It's particularly important to embed skills and knowledge across the organisation and develop structures and protocols for government engagement. Make sure you have an organised and regular program of ongoing communications with politicians and have allocated sufficient resources to deliver your campaigns.



Shapeshifters

It's particularly important to identify potential political champions and automatically invite them to your events. Make sure you are maintaining a voice in policy making or Royal Commissions in areas that affect you. Take care to clearly define what your short, medium and long term asks are so you can communicate them effectively.

Conclusion

Times of crisis will highlight any gaps in your current government engagement strategy, systems and activities while also providing you with a window of opportunity to examine and rebuild your systems, as government puts the usual transactions of policymaking on hold to deal with the crisis. Depending on what sort of organisation you are, you may respond to a crisis by either doubling down on your existing processes or by adapting to the new environment in any way that you can.

Regardless of your instinctive response, getting your government engagement strategy and activities right at this time is absolutely critical. Don't let the ever-present risk of the situation overwhelm you, take a moment to examine your

political influence across the five main areas of government with an objective eye and to embed structural and systemic processes that further your agreed objectives and are aligned to your strategy. In your campaigning to government, frame your argument thoughtfully, use language that establishes common ground and promotes cooperation and back your messages with empirical evidence.

And finally, get everyone involved. Crises bring about a feeling of 'all being in this together.' So activate and unite every level of your organisation to achieve your government engagement goals and unlock the outcomes that may help you navigate and prosper in what can be most difficult times.

Government engagement checklists

Board checklist: are you doing all of these?

Strategy

- Have you defined yourself as an organisation and examined the political and competitive landscape around you with regards to government engagement?
- Have you done your research on your political landscape and compiled information on key political stakeholders from the five key areas of government, as mentioned in chapter 3?
- Have you defined your government engagement strategy and developed short, medium and long term government engagement asks that you all agree on and are aligned across your organisation?
- Have you developed a four-part strategic government engagement plan in collaboration with Management for your organisation?

Risk, Governance and Finance

- Are you monitoring government engagement activities across your organisation?
- Have you added and developed government engagement risks into your organisational risk matrix?
- Are you including government engagement in your governance activities and reporting?
- Have you as an organisation allocated sufficient resources to continuing or rolling over funding?
Are you incorporating a 10% investment spend?

Roles and KPIs

- Are you embedding government engagement knowledge and skills into every level of your organisation?
- Have you tied KPIs to government engagement objectives and activities across the organisation?
- Are you personally engaging politicians and policy departments, and at the right level?

Management checklist: are you doing all of these?

Strategy

- Are you clearly defining your government engagement objectives, agreeing them with the Board and aligning them to strategy across your organisation?
- Do you have short, medium and long term asks that are specific, measurable and actionable, ready to go?
- Have you collaborated with the Board on developing a four-part government engagement strategic plan?
- Have you defined your political targets?
- Are you looking for opportunities to build partnerships with other organisations in your sector facing similar issues?

Processes and Planning

- Are your government engagement processes structured and systemic?
- Are you building capability and capacity for government engagement within your organisation, at every level?
- Do you have protocols for government engagement and does everyone have a defined role to play?
- Have you examined your stakeholder and partner networks?
- Do you have an organisation spokesperson for the crisis?

Mapping

- Have you mapped all organisational inputs and outputs to relevant electorates to provide data and insight evidence?
- Have you mapped your political influence?
- Have you mapped your organisation's positive impact?
- Have you mapped the impact of the crisis on your organisation?

Framing and Campaigning

- Are you framing your asks/issues from a political perspective and using language that will find common ground and hit home?
- Are you presenting your organisation as a solution to a political problem and backing that solution with empirical data evidence?
- Have you developed a campaign framework?
- Do you have the resources to effectively run your campaign?

Roles and KPIs

- Are you personally engaging politicians or policy departments, and at the right level?

Operations checklist: are you doing all of these?

Strategy

- Do you have a 12 month government engagement activities plan that you update quarterly?
- Have you determined with Board and Management who your key political targets are and who will reach out to them?

Processes and Planning

- Have you researched your key political stakeholders?
- Are you building your base of members and supporters, which you can later convert to donors, and mobilising them to act on your behalf?

Mapping

- Do you have systems in place to track, collate, map and analyse postcode and other data?
- Are you mapping all your organisational inputs and outputs, positive impact and crisis impact politically?
- Do you automatically invite key politicians to your organisation's events? Can you collaborate with your MP to hold an event together? Can you build associated events around scheduled political meetings?
- Have you developed a short, visually appealing flyer detailing your works and achievements?

Framing and Campaigning

- Are you framing all your communications politically and using language that will connect?

Social Media

- Do you have social media pieces targeted towards government?

Roles and KPIs

- Have you defined what roles everyone will play in your government engagement activities?
- Are you organising regular government engagement training for every level of your organisation?

About Neil Pharaoh

Neil Pharaoh is a government engagement and campaigning guru with a depth of experience in social purpose, government, public policy, and advocacy. Having led corporate affairs, business development and marketing teams, he has been the driving force behind leading social policy and advocacy campaigns, as well as national and international philanthropic and development work, in child welfare, education, refugee and LGBTI issues.

Neil is a founding director of philanthropic group, GiveOut, and was national co-convenor of Rainbow Labor, where he led the internal campaign which achieved over 200 legislative and regulatory reforms, including changing the Labor Party's position on marriage equality. Neil was featured in the Deloitte '2018 Outstanding 50 LGBTI Leaders' list and ran for parliament in 2014 and 2018 as the Labor candidate for Prahran, Victoria.

A principled and ambitious leader with a passion for creating social purpose strategies that synergise and amplify business, government and community outcomes, Neil has proven success in delivering industry and country-first outcomes.

After many years working across the not-for-profit, private and government sectors, both in Australia and internationally, Neil co-founded **Tanck**, a social purpose consulting firm. In a few short years he has already delivered a range of highly successful government engagement, advocacy, business development and funding outcomes for a variety of clients spanning different sectors. United by shared purpose, he is committed to building highly motivated, engaged and effective teams within social purpose organisations.

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About Perpetual

Perpetual is one of Australia's largest managers of philanthropic funds, managing \$2.8 billion in charitable funds as trustee for over 1,000 charitable trusts and endowments (as at 30 June 2020). In the 2020 financial year we distributed more than \$100 million to not-for-profit organisations on behalf of our clients.

We provide individuals and families with advice on establishing charitable foundations and structured giving programs and also assist charities and not-for-profits with financial governance, investment advice and management.

As an experienced trustee and wealth manager of charitable funds we understand the ongoing needs and challenges facing both philanthropists and not-for-profit organisations. When it comes to advice, investment management and trust establishment, our team of specialists offers a partnership with tailored advice and strategies designed to meet the unique needs of not-for-profit organisations and donors alike

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