



## LOCAL COUNCIL GUIDE



### Tips for winning over your local council on community sponsorship

Amnesty's 'My New Neighbour' refugee campaign calls on the Australian Government to expand and improve the Community Sponsorship Program (CSP). We need community sponsorship funded in the 2019 budget, and for community sponsored places to be additional to the existing humanitarian intake.

**Why are we focused on local councils then?** Because change at a local council level may send a powerful signal to state and federal parliamentarians, and the media, about the public support for community sponsorship.

In order to do this, we need groups to engage their community and lobby their local councils to support an improved CSP.

We've spoken to current and ex local councillors, and activists who have worked with local councils, to create this guide on local council engagement. Every council is different so make sure you map your community and research your council before making asks of them.

### How local councils and councillors operate

- A lot of councillors are part time.
- They don't have staff – they pick up the phone themselves so they are more accessible than other levels of government.
- They want to hear from you and often want to meet with you too.
- They are more likely to care about an issue and put it forward if you can demonstrate community support for the issue.
- Party affiliation at the council level is usually not as strong as at the state and federal level, so it's easier for councillors to work across parties. It's less about party politics and more about the merits of an issue. Councillors are often not bound by party policy when they vote.
- Each council has its own charter so find out how they function. Some mayors are elected by councillors, some are voted in and some councils rotate the position.
- if one councillor or the Mayor says no, don't be disheartened. Try another councillor.
- Ask councillors to move motions. Even if they fail to pass, it gets your issue on the agenda.

## You know who your council are and how they function. Now to get their attention!

- The best way to engage with councillors is through conversation. Build familiarity and a strong relationship. This will make you persuasive and influential when it comes to asking them to do specific things.
- Different local councils are organised in different ways. research the council, see what ward or municipality you are in and find your local Councillor and who represents which geographical area. Some councillors also have a specific portfolio or area of interest they are focused on.
- Go to events and introduce yourself. You don't have to have an ask every time. Having some casual conversations with decision-makers and building a relationship is powerful.
- Invite the mayor or a council member to one of your action group's events or meetings. it lets them know your group is serious and working hard on this issue.
- Consider what public support or recognition tactics you can use to amplify the commitment your councillor/council is making. Reciprocity is important so think about how you can positively and publicly acknowledge their commitment. Media is critical throughout this campaign and this is just one example of a time it should be part of your campaign strategy.

## Getting a meeting: to do list

- Collect enough actions to make sure your council has to pay attention and that you can't be ignored.
- Approach your local Amnesty school and university group to come with you. Councils will be really interested to hear from local students and it paints a strong picture of the breadth of support there is.
- Prepare what you are going to say in the meeting. Make sure you have done your research. Have someone take minutes so you remember what you need to follow up on.
- Make sure you know what your ask is and what you want the outcome of your meeting to be. Keep it simple and keep the ask central to your conversation.
- Take along a copy of the [CSP Handout for government](#).
- After your meeting, make sure the council follows through on any promises made. Schedule other opportunities to continue the dialogue with those that still need persuading.

**Right:** The Wodonga community gets behind a better plan for refugees at the Rural Australians for Refugees Conference, April 2018. © AI

**Previous page:** Supporters celebrate after the ACT Government passed a motion supporting improved community sponsorship in March.



## What should I ask my local councillor to do?

- Ask them to put forward and pass a motion asking the Federal Government to expand and improve the CSP. If the motion passes, go back to your councillor and ask them to send a copy to the local paper (another strategic media moment) and to send a copy to their local federal MP.
- Lead community discussions about shared sponsorship options eg. either sponsoring refugees as an organisation, or encouraging other businesses and organisations to do so. At the same time ask them to promote the positive impacts refugees make to the community.
- Write to the local Federal MP and the Federal Government, asking them to expand and improve the CSP.
- Take a motion to the annual Local Government Conference.
- Get the council to promote the campaign in their local promotions, such as including a paragraph in the rates notice, council newsletter and website. Ask them to put up a banner at the town hall and possibly even hold a banner raising ceremony.

## What if my council isn't supportive/ thinks this isn't their job?

- Remind them that it is their job to represent the interests of their community and to lead at a local level. If you have shown your councillor the community support for CSP, this is easier to argue.
- Highlight what other councils are doing on this issue.
- Find out if there is one person on the council who might be supportive and approach them. Or if there is a connection to your council through another community leader approach them to take up the charge.
- Ramp up local media interest. Your council will pay attention to what is being said in the pages of your local paper, and how often.

Activists in Devonport meet with their Councillor Tammy Milne and member for Braddon Justine Keay. © Private



## LET US KNOW HOW YOU WENT!

Hearing about your meetings with council members not only shows us all your great work, it helps inform Amnesty's meetings with Federal MPs. Please take time to [fill in the MP engagement form](#).

## USEFUL RESOURCES Check the [Amnesty website](#) for:

- 'My New Neighbour' activist toolkit
- community sponsorship handout for local government
- frequently asked questions
- video explainer on community sponsorship
- [tips on avoiding burnout](#)
- petition sheets
- [activism training calendar](#)

**AMNESTY**  
INTERNATIONAL 

DEFENDING HUMAN RIGHTS

Amnesty International Australia

[www.amnesty.org.au](http://www.amnesty.org.au)

[supporter@amnesty.org.au](mailto:supporter@amnesty.org.au)