



Engaging with Government Policy and Procedures

Approved by the St Vincent de Paul Society NSW State Council on 10 July 2013

Version Control

Contact name	Role / position	Version number	Date	Review date
Paul Wilkinson	Policy Manager	1	July 2013	July 2015

Policy

All interactions with government politicians and officials must be undertaken in accordance with this policy. This policy applies to Society Members, Volunteers and Employees.

Purpose of the policy

To clarify how interactions with government should be handled by Members, Volunteers and Employees and to put in place a process to coordinate all Society interactions with Government.

Background

The Society of St Vincent de Paul NSW (the Society) is required to interact with all levels of government to carry out its work and activities and advocate on behalf of the people with whom it works.

The Society works with the government at Commonwealth and State level on a number of programs where funding is provided and to obtain support for the Society to deliver services in accordance with its aims and objectives.

Interaction with government includes:

- Advocating for a policy position
- Raising specific concerns
- Seeking funding for programs
- Inviting politicians and government officials to events and tour programs

The Rule 7th edition 2012, makes it clear that the '*Society does not identify with any political party*' (Part 1: 7.8) and therefore any dealings with government must take this into account. The Rule 1 (6.7) also states that '*When the problems Members encounter are beyond their competence or capacity, Vincentians may contact State Agencies, provided such action helps the Society in its struggle against injustice and respects the spirit of the Society*'.

As government introduces greater regulation and compliance measures for charities over the coming years, organisations including the Society will need to adopt increasing professional practices. This has been recognised in the Society's Strategic Plan 2013-2018 which was approved in late 2012.

One of the six strategic goals is 'Raising our Voice' through our actions and advocacy. As the Society embraces this strategic goal, it will become increasingly important for the Society to be seen to be speaking in a consistent and professional way as it deals with government at all levels and

uses these opportunities to better support the people for whom we provide services.

This policy and procedure is seeking to ensure that the Society optimises every opportunity of engaging with government and that processes are in place to be aware of every opportunity as it arises.

Scope

This policy covers engaging with government at all levels; Commonwealth, State and Local Government with both politicians and government officials. This policy is limited to those occasions where either a Member, Volunteer or Employee can be assumed to be acting as a representative of the Society.

It does not cover those occasions when an individual is acting in a private capacity. Engaging with government covers situations when a Society representative initiates contact or when a representative from government initiates contact.

For the purposes of this policy, engaging with government politicians includes all elected representatives including all those in opposition. Government officials includes all public servants employed in any capacity by government at any level-Commonwealth, State or Local Government.

Related policies

- The Media Policy and Procedures 2010
- Applying for external grants and other funding Policy 2013 (Currently in draft)

Responsibilities

- All Members, Volunteers and Employees are required to follow the Procedures which are included in this policy for all interactions with government politicians and officials.
- All interactions with Government Ministers or their Advisors must be notified to the State President. All matters of a potential national significance should be referred to the State Council President in all circumstances for possible referral to the National Council.
- All matters of a potential State significance should be referred to the State Council President and or Chief Executive Officer in all circumstances to determine how these should be handled.
- All matters of a local nature should be referred in the first instance to the relevant Regional Council President for referral to the Central Council President or Executive Officer to determine how these should be handled.

Procedures

This part of the Engaging with Government Policy and Procedures provides procedures for the application of this document. The procedure covers unsolicited approaches by government politicians and officials and situations where a Member, Volunteer or Employee has made a direct approach to any politician or official.

GOVERNMENT MINISTERS AND SENIOR PUBLIC SERVANTS

All discussions with Government Ministers or their Advisors or senior politicians and with senior public servants such as Chief Executive Officers, Secretaries or Director Generals and Directors, at Commonwealth and State level must be notified immediately to the State Council President or the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to determine whether any additional representation by the Society is required.

UNSOLICITED APPROACHES FROM AND TO POLITICIANS OR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS

In general Members, Volunteers and Employees may make an approach to any politician or government official on any Society matter as a representative of the Society if they have been authorised to do so.

Whenever a Member, Volunteer or Employee is either approached by any politician or a government official or initiates the approach themselves on any Society matter the significance or potential significance of the issue needs to be assessed and dealt with in one of the following ways:

a) National significance

All matters of a potential national significance such as a Commonwealth program and or of a major State significance such as a program or advocacy position should be referred to the State Council President or the CEO for possible referral to the National Council.

b) State significance

All matters of an actual or potential State significance should be referred to the State Council President or the CEO in the first instance to determine how these should be handled.

c) Central Council and local significance

All matters of a local nature (concerning a local program, activity or premises) should be referred in the first instance to the relevant Regional Council President for referral to the relevant Central Council President, or Executive Officer to determine how these should be handled.

RECORDS AND REFERENCE TO STATE COUNCIL

A record of all approaches received and made which are covered by this policy needs to be maintained at Central Council or at the State Support Office detailing:

- Date received or made
- Name and role of person receiving or making the approach
- Name of politician, government official and Department/organisation
- Brief description of issue
- How approach was handled including referral to State or National Council
- Outcome if appropriate

Details of all approaches to or from Government Ministers and their advisors as well as senior members of the opposition must be reported to each State Council meeting so that a register can be maintained at the State Support Office. This will be included in the State Council meeting agenda.

FUNDING AND MEDIA ENQUIRIES

All requests for funding or enquiring about potential financial support from the Commonwealth, State Government or Local Councils are covered by the Applying for external grants and other funding Policy 2013 (currently in draft).

All media related issues are covered by the *Media Policy and Procedures 2010*. This policy details media relationships and Section 2.5 comments on matters relating to government policy 'being a prerogative of State Council' and states that any matters of a political implication '*should be referred to the Communications or Community and Corporate Relations Manager in the first instance*'.

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information or assistance on this policy, contact the Policy Manager at the State Support Office.

References

St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of Australia, *The Rule*, 7th Edition 2012

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, *Our Society, Our Plan- Strategic Plan 2013-2018*

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, 2010, *Media Policy and Procedures*

St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, *Draft Applying for external grants and other funding Policy*