

Writing to Elected Officials

Personal letters or emails to elected officials can be effective tools for change. Whether you are writing individually, on behalf of your library, or as part of a letter-writing campaign, following these guidelines will help you write an effective advocacy letter. Following these general guidelines is a letter template you may also find useful for guiding your efforts.

Style

- Ensure you are using the correct style of address for the official. If you are unsure of how to address someone, the Government of Canada's [Styles of Address](#) guide is a useful tool.
- An original letter can be more effective than a form letter, so try to use your own words.
- Personalize and include your own relevant experiences.
- Two to three Specific points about your issue to explain your position.
- Concise is most effective (one page is best).

Content

- State purpose/objective at the beginning and briefly introduce concerns.
- Describe your interest in the issue and any relevant credentials.
- Include questions that provoke response.
- Ask for more information or clarification on the official's position.
- Request a commitment to a specific action, and give a rationale for your request.
- Thank the official for any positive action they have taken in the past on this issue.
- Request that the official respond to your letter.

Other tips

- Stick to one issue per letter.
- Stay on topic. Do not jump from issue to issue.
- Remember to use appropriate language. Do not threaten, abuse, or use derogatory terms.
- Do not use specialized language or technical terms that make your issue inaccessible or difficult to understand.

Letter Template

[Sender's address]

[Date]

[Recipient's address]

Dear *[MP/MLA's name -- include honourific!]*,

My name is *[your name]*, and I am *[the library manager of/on the library board for/a patron of]* *[your library's name]* in *[name of town or region]*. I am writing to you today to draw your attention to *[briefly describe your reason for writing]*.

This issue is important because *[here is where you will go into further detail about your issue or concern. Provide concrete facts, statistics, and other information to back up your claims.*

- *Bullet points are also appropriate for clarity*
- *But not too many - still aim to be concise*
- *A few strong points will make a better impact than a laundry list of complaints.]*

As a *[library manager/board member/library user]*, this issue is important to me for several reasons, including/such as/because... *[use personal examples or stories here]*.

I am asking that you *[describe how you would like the official to act. Vote for or against a bill? Support a policy change? Be specific]. [Ask the MLA or MP to respond to your letter.]* If you have further questions or need clarification about this issue, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

Sincerely,

[Your name]

[Your contact information, including address, phone number, and email address]

Sending Emails

Sending an email to an elected official is equally as effective as writing a letter. Your official's office will handle both in the same way.

When writing an email, you will generally follow the same standards as for a written letter. The email should be concise and focused. Ensure you are using the correct style of address for the official. Use appropriate language (again, treat this like writing a letter), and ask the official to respond to your message.

Additionally, include your address and postal code so that the MP or MLA is made aware that you are their constituent.

Letter-Writing Campaigns

Letter-writing campaigns are highly effective tools for demonstrating that many people feel strongly about an issue. This puts pressure on decision makers to consider the letter writers' perspective. However, letter writing campaigns are most effective when used as part of a broader campaign strategy. When planning your letter-writing campaign, consider other tactics that will also be useful in raising awareness for your goals.

When planning a letter-writing campaign:

- Decide who the letters will be directed to. Make sure this person has the power to make (or influence) the decision you are asking for.
- Decide what action you want the letter recipient to take.
- Consider who the decision maker is most likely to be influenced by: MLAs and MPs are likely to be influenced by voters, while businesses (for instance, publishers or e-resource sellers) are more likely to be influenced by customers.

Remember, **quality over quantity**. While providing a form letter or template can be an easy way to engage more people, letter-writing campaigns are most effective when each letter demonstrates that the writer really cares about the issue. Encourage participants to use their own words and tell their own stories.

When you are encouraging people to write their own letters, you can help them by:

- Providing them with a briefing document outlining key points they can make in their letter, including:
 - A clear, concise demand. What is the letter writer asking the decision maker to do?
 - A small amount of background information to back up the demand

- Providing an example letter to help guide their own letter-writing, but encourage them to use their own words.
- The contact information of the recipient.

If you choose to create a standardized form letter that people are only required to sign and mail, remember that:

- Emails and postcards are the easiest to produce and have people send from their own address -- all they require is a signature and postage (if sending a postcard) or to be copy/pasted into an email.
- Leaving an option for people to include their own (brief) comments is still important, but only if you are confident people will use it -- a blank comment box will make it look as though the sender does not care deeply about the issue.