

Submissions

Organise

Writing a submission takes time, energy and good information - gathering skills.

Identify the issues

- What is the Government, District Health Board, Ministry, Council, or whoever proposing?
- Read the document and understand what it is about. Use a highlighter pen to mark the parts you are concerned about. Use small groups to discuss different sections. Brainstorm and talk with other groups who are also responding.
- Think about parts of the document that you agree with, as well as the parts you don't like.

Work out your response

- Work out exactly what you want and how it differs from the proposal.
- Identify the elements of the proposal you feel most strongly about. Be clear about why these are so important.

Work out your reasons and alternatives

- It is essential to have an idea of what would be better than the official proposals. Back up any ideas with reasons and an indication of how your ideas would be better in terms of efficiency, fairness and long-term benefits.

Write a draft

- Address your concerns to the right person. If this information is not written on the proposal, ring and check.
- Start by thanking the organisation for the opportunity to present a submission.
- Write a paragraph about who you are and your connection to the issue.
- Write a paragraph that summarises your submission – you may want to leave writing this until last, but include it at the beginning of your document.
- Make a formal request to present your submission orally or to speak in support of it at a meeting. State the names and titles of the people in your group who will attend. You may need to check where oral submissions are going to be heard, as this may involve travel.
- Congratulate the organisation on consulting with the community.
- Briefly outline the parts of the proposal you agree with.
- Then list your concerns by number and in detail. If possible, separate them out with bold headings and number the details or use bullet points.
- Using the same layout, address those concerns with some of your own solutions.
- Sign off with names and titles. If this is a group submission, or if it goes out under someone else's signature, you may wish to add a contact name as well.
- Print the first page on letterhead if you have one.

Last important details

- Don't forget to go back and complete your summary and insert it near the beginning.
- Have the draft checked carefully by everyone who will be a signatory to the final submission. Everyone has to support what is said.
- Check for grammar and spelling. Check the accuracy of any evidence you may have referred to.
- Write a letter to accompany your submission: Dear Sir/Madam, please find enclosed X number of copies of our submission to/on X. We do/do not wish to present an oral submission.
- Deliver/fax/post/courier to the right person at the right place.
- Make sure your submission will get to the appointed place on time. If it is going to be late, ring the organisation and ask for more time to complete the submission.

Letters to the editor

Letters to the editor are an excellent tool for advocacy. They give an opportunity to respond, correct or give your perspective on community issues and are a well read part of most newspapers.

Tips

- If you are responding to an editorial or an article that has been printed, try to respond within two or three days of publication. If you are passionate about an issue, don't be afraid to show it.
- State the argument you're rebutting, or responding to, as briefly as possible in the letter's introduction.
- Be aware of the length of your letter. Most newspapers have a word limit for letters to the editor and short, concise letters are always more likely to be published. Also, people tend to read the shorter letters first and then perhaps read the longer ones.
- Organise your letter logically. After recapping the argument, follow with a statement of your own position and then present your evidence. Close with a short restatement of your position or a strong comment.
- Use facts, figures and expert testimony whenever possible.
- Proof-read your letter carefully for errors in spelling, punctuation and grammar. Your piece is more likely to be published if it is error free.
- Try to view the letter from the reader's perspective. Will the arguments make sense to someone without a special background on this issue? Did you use technical terms not familiar to the average reader?
- Include your name, address, day-time phone number and signature. This information will not be published, but may be used to verify that you wrote the letter.
- Don't be discouraged if your letter isn't published. The editor may have received more responses on the issue than the publication can handle.

