

Petitions

This topic explainer discusses how petitions are created and what the Legislative Assembly does with them after their delivery.

🎯 Learning goals

- Petitions are a direct way Canberrans can request their local parliament take a specific action.
- The ACT uses two forms of petitions which, if they comply with the Assembly's rules, trigger a written government response and – maybe – a public inquiry

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What is a petition?

A petition is a written request signed by ACT residents asking the Legislative Assembly to take a specific action. It is one of the direct ways for Canberrans to interact with their local democracy.

How are petitions created?

The Legislative Assembly accepts two types of petitions:

- **Paper petitions**—created using a template from the Assembly website that is printed out, signed in-person, and delivered physically once complete.
- **E-petitions**—created using a web form on the Assembly website where, after being approved, they are available online to be shared and signed digitally.

Standing Orders – the Assembly's rule book – set out specific rules that apply to creating either type of petition and collecting signatures including that they must use a specific format, that the requested action must be an issue that the Assembly has power over, and that only ACT residents without certain criminal convictions are allowed to sign.

An extra rule for paper petitions also requires that every printed page must be the same.

Once a petition is complete, they must be delivered to a Member of the Assembly for presentation. The original signed pages of a paper petition must be delivered in person. E-petitions are automatically 'delivered' once they reach their closing date.



What does the Assembly do with petitions?

For a petition to be presented in the Assembly chamber, it must be sponsored by a Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). The person in charge of a petition is responsible for asking an MLA to sponsor it (for e-petitions, this is required before it can be put online for signatures).

Before it can be presented, the Clerk – parliament’s chief secretary – checks and certifies that the petition meets all the rules. It is then presented at the start of the next sitting day, with its request and the number of signatures read out in the chamber. MLAs can then speak about the petition.

After this, a copy of the petition (without the signatures) is sent to the relevant minister who must provide a written response to its request within three months. Additionally, if a petition has 500 or more signatures, the terms are also sent to the relevant committee who can choose to hold an inquiry into its request.

What if a petition doesn't meet the Assembly's rules?

Petitions that don't meet the Standing Orders' rules (e.g., they contain signatures from people who don't live in the ACT) are considered out-of-order.

Out-of-order petitions are often still presented to in the chamber. However, because they don't meet our rules, these petitions are neither automatically referred to a committee nor referred to a minister for a written response.

Classroom activities

There is one activity associated with this topic available on our website:

- [Activity: Petition your principal](#) ( PDF 167KB)

Other resources

There are a range of other helpful resources available on this topic, the best of which we have compiled below:

- [\[ACT\] Webpage: E-petitions](#) (parliament.act.gov.au )
- [\[ACT\] Factsheet: The ACT in Australia's three levels of government](#) ( PDF 233KB)