

GOVERNMENT RELATIONS TOOLKIT



**WORLD
RUGBY**



Why do we need to understand government relations?

Understanding government relations helps rugby organisations build bipartisan support, secure funding, influence policy, strengthen partnerships and improve reputation, turning community impact into practical outcomes for unions, clubs and members.

1) What is Government Relations (GR)?

Government Relations (GR) is a discipline utilised by organisations to engage with local (municipal) / state (province) / federal (national) governments to influence outcomes and advance their interests.

It combines strategy, advocacy, stakeholder management and communications, and is most effective when together:

- it is deployed through a planned programme of engagement; and
- there is a clear understanding and alignment across your organisation of its purpose and deployment.

The purpose of engaging in GR is to shape decisions, influence and/or secure support relating to a particular issue, outcome or project relevant to your organisation.

GR has the potential to generate additional revenue or deliver cost savings, either directly (through investment into an existing project or programme) or indirectly (through policy / regulatory changes that reduce cost and/or improve efficiency).

Effective GR is a long-term, relationship-based discipline that requires patience, planning and disciplined execution.

Where to start – understanding your system of government?

Countries will differ in the system and structure of government, including levels of government and how responsibilities are divided. To be effective and ensure you are maximising your efforts, first determine what level of government you should be engaging and where your issue / project best sits (parliament / ministerial / department / agency etc).

Generally, each level of government will have different constitutional and legislative powers,

roles and responsibilities. Each level of government will also have their own budget and funding pool, decision-makers, influencers and bureaucratic structures and processes to navigate.

Generally, the division of roles and responsibilities at each level of government is as follows.

Local government / councils / municipalities

Permits, leases, facility upgrades, local participation programmes and grants, smaller events (local and regional carnivals and tournaments).

State/Province

Policy, programmes and investment in sport (community and high performance – including funding of state institutes and sports bodies), health, education, tourism and economic development, planning, grants, state, national and international major events.

Federal / National

Whole-of-country programmes and policy and sports investment frameworks (community and high performance – including funding of national institutes and sports bodies), education curricula, integrity and safeguarding, visas and citizenship, sports diplomacy, and major events.

2) Where and when to use GR?

In the Rugby context, there is a role for effective GR at every level of the game – from local clubs, provincial / state associations, professional clubs, national bodies/ member unions and World Rugby.

This could involve engaging with government around:

- **Project or Programme Funding:** seeking investment to support a local club initiative, rugby in schools initiative, a community rugby programme or deployment of a national or international participation programme (such as T1 Rugby). This could take place through a structured grants process or through discretionary avenues (for example, general engagement, unsolicited proposals, or ministerial/departmental discretionary allocations).
- **Infrastructure Funding:** seeking investment into club facilities – change-rooms, lights, pitch upgrades through to investment into high performance facilities (to support pathways and professional programmes) and stadium infrastructure to support hosting national and/or international rugby. Like Project and Programme Funding, this could take place through a structured grants process or through discretionary avenues.
- **Event Funding:** to support a state or national championship, securing the rights to host test matches or international fixtures / series (for example, Pacific Nations Cup or WXV Global Series) or major international events (for example, SVNS World Series, U20s Championships and Rugby World Cup).
- **Policy & Regulation:** to advocate for change to policies and regulation that have the potential to impact or benefit your organisation and the game. This could be at a local level (such as changes to permit or compliance processes or facilities access) through to state and national issues (such as taxation, insurance, broadcasting and matters relating to integrity (anti-doping gambling regulation etc)).
- **Reputation Management:** to maintain the trust and confidence of government in your organisation and/or to counter misinformation.

Engagement with government should be proactive and planned wherever possible. In some cases, you may also need to respond to, or react to, a particular matter (including responding to a government inquiry or emerging issues).



3) Establishing effective GR

Successful GR blends a strong proposition and process (the technical side) with credible behaviours and actions (the relational side). Importantly, your engagement should be taken from the perspective of government being a partner of your organisation, rather than a banker or fixer of problems.

When organisations engage holistically with this mindset and stay alert to shifts in policy, local

politics, geopolitics, economic/budget settings and media commentary, they are establishing a framework for success.

Whether working on a short-term or long-term project, being proactive or responding to an issue at any level of government, effective GR remains grounded in the same process and principles.

4) The technical process – a 4-stage framework to build your GR approach

Step 1: Define your project and your request

This step should be undertaken for any level (local/state/federal) and type of engagement (grants/discretionary) to develop a clear rationale and aligned position within your organisation. Once developed, it will inform your collateral to support your engagement (proposals/selection criteria/talking points/media releases/stakeholder updates).

Define your reason:

- Why are you engaging with government (see section 2 above for potential reasons and drivers for your engagement).
 - Describe the project or issue you are seeking to address – consider how it is framed – is it an opportunity or a problem to solve?
- Public value: explain why government should care (health, youth wellbeing, inclusion, social cohesion, education, economic impact/tourism, job creation, national/civic pride etc).
 - What are the relevant specific policies/strategies your project supports or needs to navigate?
 - Gather case studies, testimonials, data and insights/statistics that support your opportunity/problem definition.

Outline your Objective(s):

- What you are seeking to achieve by when (for example, Approve \$250k in funding by Q4 for T1 Rugby in Schools Pilot in your region; Commitment to invest in a new high-performance centre by [X date]; Issue a letter of support for [Insert National Union] to host WXV Global Series by [X date]).
- This step is important in informing the planning, advocacy and delivery phases (see below). **State of Play:**
- What is the status of the project – what can you deliver or contribute to the project or issue, what is already in place, what funding (if any) have you secured?
- Note that often a project will have higher prospects of success if there is a contribution towards the project – whether through direct investment or in-kind services. Also consider what you can provide the government as a partner, including:
 - Access to a cohort of registered participants – players / officials etc. What is the size of the cohort / demographics / location (for example, are you providing access to a cohort in an area that is politically significant or a priority for government (for example, a priority electorate/constituency/district)?

- Customer Relationship Management (CRM) / database of members / fans to promote any form of investment / issues resolution.
- Access to owned digital / social media platforms.
- Association with existing partners / local business etc.

Action required:

- What specific government action is required (where applicable – who needs to decide or sign what by when to achieve your defined objective(s)).
- Outline the benefits and opportunities that will flow from obtaining government support or a favourable decision (for example, participation → health outcomes; coach education → safer sport and better player experience; events → economic impact through visitor nights and spend). Alternatively, what are the risks of inaction or an adverse response to your engagement? Either way, best practice is to ensure this is presented objectively supported by data/insights.

Step 2: Plan & understand

Identify which tier(s) of government you need to engage and what pathway and process applies:

- Grants Process: review the grants available at each level of government, confirm eligibility, criteria and purpose of the grant – what programmes do you have which align with this purpose, required information, deadlines and terms of participation (contact points, Q&A process, allowable advocacy (ie local MP / representative).
- Discretionary / Proactive engagement: map policy and politics – seek to understand how the request helps government solve a problem or achieve a policy objective (if the issue is sensitive, identify impacts and mitigations). Also consider the framework, timeframe and approach that is preferred to ensure the expectations of the government stakeholder are met from the first engagement – meetings (in-person or virtual) / initial correspondence / initial meeting with advisers or officials before Ministers etc.

Develop a stakeholder matrix (in a simple register with fields for role, stance, last contact, next action, risks) by:

- Decision-makers: people who can approve or decline within parliament and/or the bureaucracy – for example, President / Prime Minister, portfolio minister, Governor / Premier, treasury/finance, mayor/council, senior officials such as Secretaries / Director-Generals and CEOs).
- Influencers: those who can shape the thinking of decision-makers (positively or negatively) – for example, officials, advisers, local MPs/councillors with portfolio interest, shadow ministers, minor parties, industry bodies, unions, curriculum authorities.
- Community Voices: groups to inform, mobilise to draw attention and to provide support (in print or in person – such as attendance at an event or meeting). This could include schools, clubs, governing bodies (State and National Unions), World Rugby, sponsors, members, players, local MPs or representatives.

As part of this process, identify individuals within your organisation that may already have an existing relationship in place with an identified stakeholder – understand their relationship and the ability to utilise that relationship as part of your advocacy and capture this in your matrix.

Develop relevant collateral to give effect to your project and request:

- Letters, proposals, fact sheets, educational materials, guidelines, data and insights, cost proposals and responses to grant criteria etc.
- This also includes crafting your narrative and key messages (informed by Step 1) to support your grant response and/or engagement with stakeholders - make it clear, concise, consistent.
- If funding is being sought, prepare an evidence-based, itemised budget that aligns to your deliverables and timeline, with clearly stated assumptions (unit costs/volumes, salaries/overheads), quotes or benchmarks, and an appropriate contingency.
- Also consider:
 - whether letters of support from Influencers and Community Voices (such as National Unions and World Rugby) can provide extra weight to your engagement and advocacy.
 - use of media and community allies (opinion pieces, digital content and third-party endorsements) – but always consider whether this form of activity is additive or will inadvertently create issues with decision-makers.

Build a timeline establishing key deadlines, target dates for engagement (and with whom) and decision making:

- When developing the timeline consider events within your organisation that can be leveraged to engage Decision Makers and Influencers and to brief Community Voices – ensuring invitations are extended with due notice.
- Also consider key moments in the political or government planning cycle that could assist or impact your engagement and advocacy – such as elections, budget cycles, and when parliament is in session or sitting.
- Most importantly, be realistic internally and externally around the time required to achieve your objective through your engagement. Obtaining successful outcomes through GR takes time – even through a grants process. Unless there is a burning platform that requires immediate action, setting short timeframes to achieve your objectives is unlikely to yield the desired results nor be perceived favourably by government.

Step 3: Develop & advocate

- Grants Process: prepare the final submission (with all required attachments) by the deadline.
- Work through your stakeholder matrix: contact offices and relevant government departments to set up meetings. Note that if grant rules limit contact, follow those rules.
- Deploy your collateral: to stakeholders: decision-makers / influencers / community voices and/or within the formal grant submission.
- Track everything: monitor progress against your objective(s), share feedback, identify gaps and/or opportunities (including to refine your proposal).

Step 4: Finalise & deliver

- If successful: announce outcomes appropriately; thank all parties; develop the relevant contractual documents and commence the project delivery. Throughout the project term report on progress, identify opportunities to involve Decision Makers in key moments (openings, milestones, events, presentations) and maintain relationships.
- If unsuccessful: seek feedback and look to refine your project. Where possible, maintain constructive relationships and establish opportunities for re-engagement including at events which showcase your organisation and/or project.
- Seek to maintain relationships and keep them warm post-decision with quarterly, no-ask updates.

5) The relational principles - behaviours that build influence

Listen actively: meetings are for intelligence gathering as much as pitching.

Build GR literacy and capability: ensure that there is an awareness of GR across your organisation – not only the project that is underway but the purpose, objectives and impacts that a successful GR programme can have.

Be observant about the broader political/media landscape: what are the key policy issues for the level of government you are engaging, what are their objectives; be willing to adjust tactically without losing your strategy or project objectives.

Be authentic, show courtesy and be strictly bipartisan: it is often the case that you need their support more than they need yours. Also be alive to and realistic about the time that it can take to navigate government process to achieve your objective – this should be understood across your organisation.

Invest in relationships: It is important that government feels that they are being engaged as a partner, not a banker of last resort or being backed into a corner to solve your problem.

Be honest, consistent, and deliver on commitments: Be open and transparent about your objectives, follow-up after every meeting, send promised information within 48 hours and confirm outcomes and next steps in writing.

