

# Parliament of Victoria



## Action and influence

Teacher guide

# About this resource

There are different ways young people can be involved in civic life, even before they are eligible to vote. These activities can range from being involved in their local community through to working with groups and organisations to bring about change.

The questions and activities in this resource will help students to identify the different ways they can have their voices heard, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of these actions. These activities are designed to be flexible, where students can complete activities individually, in pairs, small groups or expert groups, or as part of class discussion.

# Participation, Advocacy and Activism

The “Participation, Advocacy and Activism” diagram prompts students to think about different people’s actions, including their own, and what impact and influence each action might have by itself and/or in combination with other actions.

**Civic Participation** – This involves getting involved in the community and is a rewarding experience that offers many benefits. It allows you to give back to issues you care about, make social connections, take part in democratic processes, and even learn something new.

**Advocacy** – Advocates and advocacy groups lobby others, for example legislators or organisations, to influence a particular issue. This is usually on behalf of a group who may not be able to advocate for themselves. Advocacy can take place over a short time or many years.

**Activism** – Activists take direct and noticeable actions to bring about change. Activism may have impacts on other people and bring immediate attention to an issue.

After exploring the three themes, you could ask students to consider whether the actions listed below are examples of civic participation, advocacy, activism, or a combination of these. They can use the Venn diagram to organise their thinking.



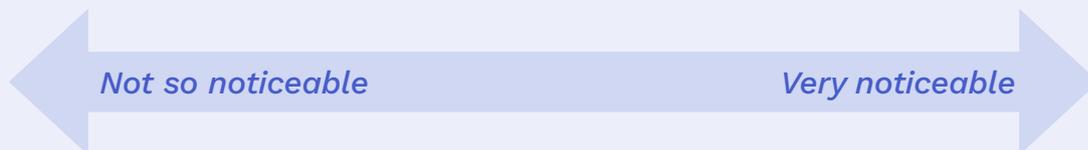
## **Example actions**

- Campaigning
- Writing a letter to the editor
- Citizen science surveys
- Volunteering
- Boycotting a product
- Displaying banners
- Making a submission to a parliamentary inquiry
- Protesting
- Striking
- Writing to a member of parliament
- Helping a neighbour
- Voting

You may like to add students' own examples and consider where in the Venn diagram the examples might sit. As students are discussing the various examples, students might like to use a continuum to answer the following questions?

- How noticeable is the action?
- How immediately does it bring about change?
- How much influence does it have?
- Who is impacted by the action?

For example:



## **Further questions**

- How important is civic participation, advocacy and activism for the community?
- What benefits are there for having active citizens?
- Is there one type of activity (participation, advocacy or activism) that is more important than the other? Explain your response.
- What would a society look like if there was little to no participation, advocacy or activism?
- Is 'by any means necessary' okay if people believe a law should be changed? Should there be limitations to what people are allowed to do when trying to change the law? Provide reasons for your response.

# Anatomy of an Action

As well as considering actions as participation, advocacy, and activism, it is possible to characterise actions, and the change they cause (their influence) according to their direction, pace and scale. It provides another angle from which to consider how an action is initiated.

## Direction: Bottom-up vs Top-down

Some actions are initiated at a grassroots level, meaning actions and change are driven by individuals or groups, usually at a local level. This could be members of a community who unite to oppose a development, or someone who starts an online petition to gather support for changing a law. These types of actions can be thought of as working from the ‘bottom-up’, in that they are initiated by people who may not have the authority to make change immediately without first garnering support.

On the other hand, some actions may be instigated by those with the power to enact change. As an example, parliament may change health and safety laws that affect groups of workers to reduce the likelihood of an accident or incident occurring. Similarly, an employer may make a decision that affects their employees. These ‘top-down’ actions have flow-on effects to people impacted by the change because they are enacted by those with the authority and power to do so.

### **Questions to consider:**

- Is one approach better than the other?
- Who has the power to lead change from the top-down?
- What types of issues do people often change from the bottom-up?
- Which approach do you prefer? Why?

There are times when people from grassroots initiatives and those in authority work together to achieve change. Committee Inquiries provide an opportunity for people from a broad cross-section of society to share their thoughts and expertise on an issue through the evidence gathering process at public

hearings. Other examples include councils that hold town meetings to solve a local issue, or organisations that run focus groups with their employees or a union to find solutions to a problem. These approaches may take time and require resources, however, they allow stakeholders to take action together to achieve change. As a result, everyone may be more willing to accept change.

**Questions to consider:**

- What barriers might prevent people in power and those from grassroots initiatives from working together?
- In what ways does parliament work with different groups to enact change?
- What are some of the benefits of two groups working together?

## **Pace: Incremental Change vs Radical Change**

Change does not always happen overnight. People might take action over long periods, which in turn leads to ‘incremental change’ – little changes along the way as part of a larger issue. Advocacy campaigns that lobby manufacturers to change their ingredients to make a product more environmentally sustainable are one such example. Online petitions or boycotts may encourage some, but not all, manufacturers to change their product. These small changes may eventually grow enough support that parliament changes laws to reflect community expectations. Alternatively, actions may lead to ‘radical change’ that happen at a much faster pace, for example, large rallies or events in the media that bring immediate and noticeable attention to an issue. In turn, laws or policies may be enacted at a quicker rate due because the issue is in the spotlight.

**Questions to consider:**

- Is one approach better than the other?
- Why might a person or group choose to change things incrementally?
- What actions lead to radical change?
- What actions lead to incremental change?
- Are there consequences for changing laws too quickly?
- Are there consequences for changing laws too slowly?

## Scale: Local to global

Our actions can impact and influence at many different scales. This offers another way to analyse an action or the change that arises from it. Some actions may be limited to your inner circle: family, friends, school, which others may take place on a larger scale: the wider community, the state, country, or indeed the world.

### Circles of Action

Using the action examples students have come up with, you might get them to consider on what scale the action takes place and on what scale change occurs. These may be the same or different, for example, a law change might take place on a larger scale (e.g., the State of Victoria), which has implications for those in the community or within your inner circle.



### Questions to consider:

- Who makes decisions that have the most impact or lead to the greatest change?
- Can an action made in your inner circle or community have an influence on a larger scale?
- Does an action always have an impact at every scale?
- Think of a decision that was made by parliament How did it impact?
  - You
  - Your family
  - Your community
  - The State of Victoria

Using any of the case studies in this resource, students can evaluate the impacts of a change on different scales, as well as where the action takes place by using the 'Circles of Action' thinking routine.

[Click here to link to the Circles of Action thinking routine](#)

# Understanding impact and influence

To help students consider the impact and influence of different actions, you may like students to explore different possible actions and the likely effectiveness of those actions to bring about change.

The first option asks students to consider different actions they could take to influence parliament, rank them according to effectiveness, and then complete a SWOT analysis of their chosen action.

The second option has students generate a hypothetical scenario including a cause, action and scale, and then evaluate the impact of the action, including trying to identify any unintended consequences.

The third option asks students to measure the impact of an action or actions, and consider the consequences of their actions.

## **Further prompts for class discussion:**

- Which actions are direct ways to influence what happens in Parliament (i.e. they involve having your voice heard directly)?
- Which actions are indirect ways to influence what happens in Parliament? (i.e. they may change public opinion or lead to more awareness about the issue)
- Looking at this list – they are all examples of ‘taking action’. How might this list help us move towards an understanding of the term ‘Active Citizen’?
- Why is it important to have ‘Active Citizens’ in a representative democracy?

## Option 1: Evaluating impact

Below is a list of some the different actions you could take to influence Parliament.

- Peaceful protest
- Organise a flash mob
- Email a politician
- Design a social media post
- Write a letter to the editor
- Make a website
- Contact your local MP
- Organise an art show
- Speak at an assembly
- Write an article for your local newspaper
- Make a speech
- Make a podcast
- Make a short film
- Create or sign a petition

Looking at the list of actions, answer the following questions:

- Are there ones that you were not aware of, or that you are surprised by? What examples of these actions can you think of? Did they help the person or people to be heard?
- How might these activities help to have your voice heard?
- Rank them in order of effectiveness. Why do you think some might be more effective than others?
- Which ones were most appealing to you? Why? Did this change after exploring the different actions more closely?

### **Analysing your action**

- Which methods do you think would be most effective?

## Option 2: Hypothetical scenario

they may use the matrix below to generate a hypothetical scenario and respond to the questions. Students roll a die to select an option from each of the three columns, which gives them a **cause**, an **action**, and a **scale**.

After considering how effective their action would be, students could pair up or form small groups with others who received the same cause and compare their responses to explore which action or scale could lead to the greatest change. For example, a small petition to change the school curriculum may be less effective than a large focus group designed to provide feedback.

	<b>Cause – the change you are trying to make</b>	<b>Action – the type of action you will carry out</b>	<b>Scale – how many people are involved</b>
	Campaigning against homework for students	Protest	Small
	Arguing for different food options at the school canteen	Writing a letter	Small
	Wanting more activities for young people in your neighbourhood	Petition	Medium
	Advocating for a change to the school curriculum	Media campaign	Medium
	Wanting to change school hours to become 10am-2pm	Attending a focus group	Large
	Giving students the option to study from home 1 day per week	Striking/boycotting	Large

Once students have a cause, action and scale, they can evaluate the effectiveness of the action by answering the following questions:

**Participation, advocacy, or activism**

Do you consider your action to be participation, advocacy, activism, or a combination of these? Why?

**Noticeable**

How noticeable will your action be? Who will notice it? How long will it be noticeable for?

**Pace of change**

Would your action lead to incremental or radical change? Why?

**Influence**

How much influence will your action have?

**Type of action**

Is there a different type of action that would be more appropriate for achieving your cause? If so, what action would it be and why would it be more appropriate? If not, why not?

**Scale**

Would your action be more effective on a different scale? Explain your response.

**Direction of change**

Would a bottom-up, top-down, or other response be more effective?

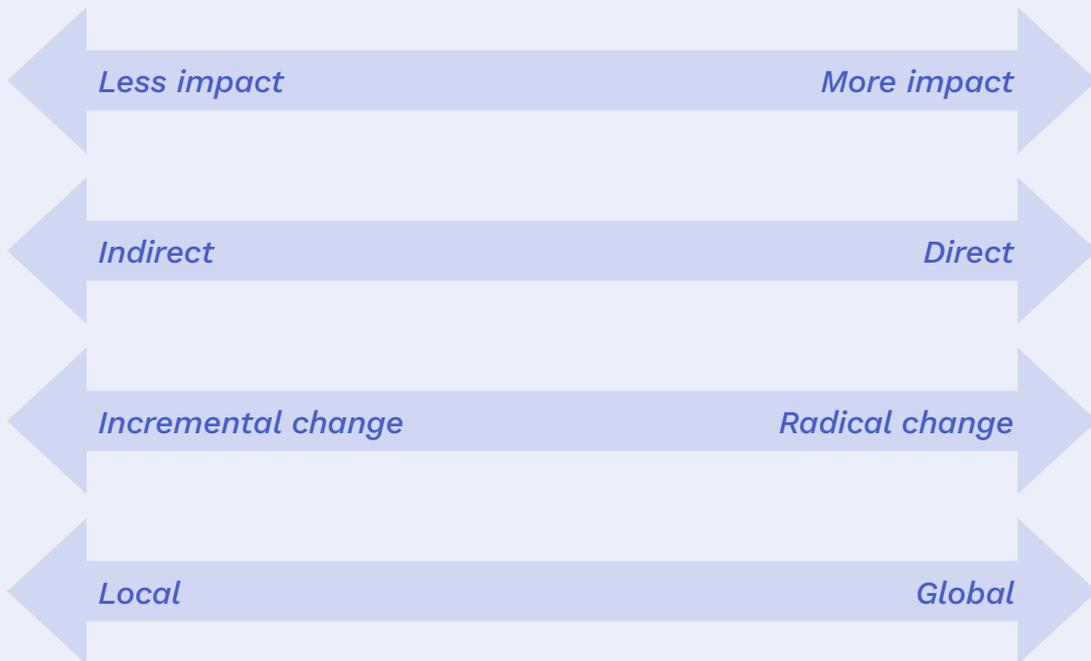
**Unintended consequences**

Would your action have any unintended consequences? What would they be and who would they most likely affect?

## Option 3: Measuring impact

Do all actions have equal impact? Do some actions work better for influencing certain issues or people than others? Predicting how effective your actions will be is important because it helps you to understand where to focus your efforts.

For each of your chosen actions, decide where they would fit on the following scales:



### Which action seems like it would be more effective? Why?

Some things to consider when thinking about which actions are more effective:

- How many people will your message reach using that action?
- How many people with influence will see your message using that action?
- How much time will you need?
- How much will that action cost?
- Would another action be more effective?
- Would a combination of actions be more effective?

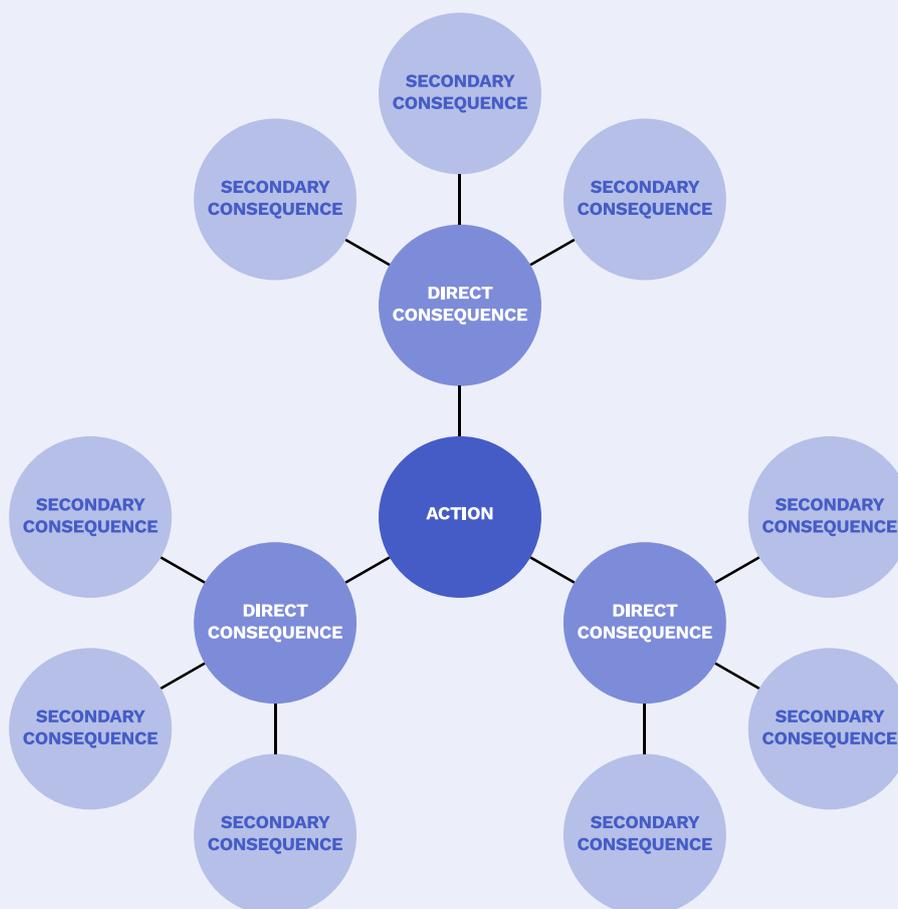
## Futures Wheel

A futures wheel is a concept map for predicting the consequences of an action and how different actions and consequences might relate to each other.

Consider one of the actions from your action plan and place this at the centre of your futures wheel. Building on this, identify four or five possible direct consequences that may result from the action. Draw a line between these consequences and the action at the centre of your page.

Then identify any secondary consequences that might come about because of your direct consequences and draw a line between it and the direct consequence it relates to. You can also make connections between other consequences you think might be related.

Here is an example structure for a Futures Wheel. You are not limited by this structure, for instance, you may like to make connections between multiple consequences. More examples and templates can be found at [mindtools.com](https://www.mindtools.com) and [creately.com](https://www.creately.com).



# Planning for action

This activity asks students to evaluate the different actions they can take to help have their voices heard. One way to introduce this activity is by asking students to brainstorm different actions they could take. Alternatively, students could use the actions listed in option 1, and potentially add new actions not listed.

## Design a plan of action to influence change

Creating a coordinated action plan can improve how effective your campaign can be. You may use the template below to come up with a list of actions and things to consider. You can add rows to this table as required.

Action	Audience	Rules/laws	Communication	Consequences
<b>What will you do?</b>	<b>Who do you want to see our action and who do you want to be involved in your action?</b>	<b>What rules/laws do you need to (abide) stick to?</b>	<b>How will you communicate with people in your audience?</b>	<b>What are 1 to 3 possible impacts of your actions?</b>
<i>E.g., Set-up an e-petition and a paper petition.</i>	<i>The petition will be seen by MPs, and I would like the petition to be signed by members of the community.</i>	<i>I need to protect the information of the people who sign my petition.</i>	<i>I will go door-to-door to encourage people to sign my paper petition and I will share my e-petition on social media.</i>	<i>I will not get enough signatures/ some people may not want to sign my petition. My petition is tabled in parliament.</i>

**Deciding on your audience?**

- Who is your audience? Is it one person, a few people, or many people?
- How much influence does this person or group of people have? (refer to Circles of Action)
- How might you contact them? And, are there any requirements for contact, e.g., particular forms that you need to fill out?
- Why would these people be interested in your cause or what you have to say?
- How might this action influence parliament?

**Selecting an action**

- Why have you chosen that action and how do you think it will help your voice be heard on your chosen issue?
- What is your message?
- What do you think the outcome of your action plan will be?
- Issues you would like to highlight, but also possible solutions
- What evidence do you have to support what you would like to see happen?
- What resources (help, time, money, materials) might you need to take action?
- What action would you like other people to take?

**Evaluating your action**

- Complete a SWOT analysis of your chosen action.

<b>STRENGTHS</b>	<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>	<b>THREATS</b>