

How-To: Local Council Motions

A toolkit for passing council motions on Gaza

We acknowledge that APAN works on unceded First Nations land.

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Introduction

Why Council Motions?

As a part of our national campaign to seek a ceasefire, humanitarian aid and support for Palestinian rights and self-determination, we are calling on supporters all around the country to join a nationwide effort to raise and pass local council motions that support Gaza and Palestine.

This toolkit will give you guidance on how to raise a local council motion that:

- a) acknowledges the genocide in Gaza
- b) commits your council to taking action in calling for a ceasefire and ending the genocide.

Councils provide a public forum for issues of wellbeing and benefit to their diverse communities. By supporting and passing a Gaza motion, they send a strong message that they are committed to their communities' collective values of social justice, peace and social cohesion.

Councils provide the closest opportunity for political engagement constituents can have with an elected representative - it is the most straightforward and easiest to organise. Gaining council affirmation of a cause is a great step towards legitimising it.

Introduction

Why Council Motions?

Councils have often supported national and international issues of significance, and a motion in solidarity with Palestine during this genocide is no different. Many councils have already passed a Palestine solidarity motion - it's now time for the rest of the country to get on board.

A nationwide wave of outrage and action at local council level sets a precedent for the Federal Government to act to meet its obligations to constituents, the international community seeking justice for Gaza, and to Palestinians.

How-To:

Get a council motion passed.

It's important to recognise that each council is different, with different politics, processes and constituents. Unfortunately, there is no straightforward, one-size-fits-all process for getting a motion passed.

Ultimately, successful motions are the result of community collaboration, learning, adaptation, local knowledge and an understanding of a specific council's dynamics. Start this process by mapping out this information, and using your best judgement to consider which strategy might work best in your context.

What has worked for the neighbouring council may not work for yours. But through good research and collaboration between great local minds you can devise clever and creative tactics that will give you the best possible chance at success.

And even then, you may not get the motion through on the first go. If this is the case, don't be disheartened. Consider it a learning opportunity, take a moment to reset, and start again!

Step One

Understanding Council Motion Process

A motion is essentially a formal suggestion debated and voted on at a council meeting.

Motions should be clear, concise and specify action.

Generally, a motion will be brought on by a councillor, and must be seconded by another councillor before it can be scheduled for debate. The motion should be presented to the council in writing at least a week before the meeting alongside any supporting materials.

At the meeting, a motion can be reworded or amended by the introduction of another motion, which in turn can be amended by another motion, This is usually how a motion becomes watered down and its original purpose lost. It is therefore important to try and get the motion passed quickly to retain original intent and meaning.

It will be important for you to work with the councillor presenting your motion to ensure the wording is both strong, and broadly acceptable by other councillors.

You can find more information about your specific council and its meeting schedule by visiting its website.

Step Two

Preparation is Key

Find a group of people to help out. While you could do all this work by yourself, it's much easier and more enjoyable to share the workload with a group.

Many of you are already be members of community groups, but if not, it could be useful to look for allies in your area. The most obvious and the first port of call should be Palestinian community groups, but you could also try looking up local Amnesty groups, refugee rights groups, Greens groups, or multicultural societies.

It's always best to try to collaborate or consult with members of your local Palestinian community, to ensure their voices, lived experience, needs and aspirations are reflected in the motion.

Once you have formed a group, it's a good idea to sit down and work out roles and responsibilities, and make sure you are all on the same page about your objective. If you aren't able to find people to work with, reach out to us at APAN. We may be able to find some APAN supporters close-by to give you a hand.

Step Three

Find a Champion Councillor

Finding a councillor to champion the motion might require some research if you're unfamiliar with your councillors, however doing so will make the process of navigating your council's processes, and building support for the motion within council significantly easier.

Ideally, you will find a councillor who is already speaking out on Gaza but if not, look for a councillor who is reliable, trustworthy and compassionate and shares some of the same values as you.

Start by sending them an email outlining your argument and what could potentially be in the motion, and if possible, arrange a meeting to discuss in greater detail. You will need to have good arguments ready to support your ideas, but also need to be flexible and consider the views and advice of the councillor. Often compromise is essential to getting a motion up at all.

Ensure your councillor understands that the motion is not just symbolic but also clearly commits the council to taking action. Acknowledgment without action sends a message that inaction during genocide is acceptable.

Step Three cont.

Find a Champion Councillor

If you have difficulties finding a councillor willing to take this on, it may require some persuasive lobbying to show the councillor that this is genuinely important to the local community. You can take some ideas from page 15 + 17 - 18 of this toolkit, or get in touch with us at APAN for some advice.

Getting the wording of the motion right may be difficult, especially when dealing with a conservative council. We recommend using the basic framework provided on page 20 as a starting guide.

It's important that the motion is strong and clear, while recognising that the wording may inevitably change as it is debated. Please get in touch with us at APAN for guidance on wording.

Work with your councillor to ensure that the motion is tabled for the next council meeting.

Step Four

Do your Research

You will likely meet opposition from at least some of the other councillors, and the motion may not pass easily. But with preparation, you can ensure that you've got the very best chance of success.

Undertake some research on your council members and try to answer the following questions:

- How many votes will the motion need to pass?
- Who are your councillors - Who is likely to support, who is likely to object? Are there any councillors who may be persuadable, or on the fence?
- What are the demographics of your local area, and how might they influence the outcome?
- Is there a precedent for a motion like this at your council? What happened?

You can use previous council minutes, social media and news articles to inform your research, and don't forget to ask your councillor as they will have the best insider intel on council dynamics.

Hopefully, you will find that there is a strong contingent of supportive councillors and a few that are persuadable with a bit of lobbying.

Step Five

Lobby your Council

Once you have an idea of your council's dynamics, you may need to undertake some targeted lobbying prior to the meeting - particularly focusing on persuading those councillors who might be sitting on the fence. You will need to show those councillors that this motion has community support, and is the right thing to do.

How you undertake this lobbying will be up to you.

A few possible suggestions are:

- Send an email outlining the motion and putting your case forward. You could also include links to relevant reports, news articles or media releases.
- Phone councillors to speak to them personally about the motion. You may even like to ask for a face-to-face or Zoom meeting.
- If your motion wording is particularly strong and you think your councillors might be receptive, you can also ask APAN for a letter of support.

Remember to use your time wisely. It's a waste of your time trying to persuade councillors who are loudly opposed. Similarly, it's not the best use of time to spend hours speaking with councillors who are already supportive. Those that are persuadable are your best bet.

Step Five

Lobby your Council

Usually there will be time to hear from community members during or before the meeting. This provides you with an opportunity to make a final appeal to your councillors.

Diverse voices

It is important that you highlight impacted voices during this time - particularly Palestinian voices.

The most persuasive arguments are often made by those who have lived experience or are subject matter experts. These experiences should be diverse, so try to find a range of people to speak during the council meeting.

For instance, in Ballarat, councillors heard from a Palestinian healthcare worker, local mosque members, a war refugee, a young person, and a local mother. This array of personal stories succeeded in persuading councillors to support the motion.

Conversely, leaning too heavily on political arguments may fail to convince.

Remember, speaking to common human values and lived experience is much more persuasive than facts and figures.

Step Six

Mobilise the Community

Like everything else, this requires a nuanced approach that considers your council's attitude and local context. Not all mobilisation tactics will work in every scenario, and some could even be detrimental.

Despite this, it's important to show your councillors in one way or another that there is widespread, heartfelt community support.

Many of the best, most creative, authentic and persuasive tactics will come from community members putting their heads together, so make sure to brainstorm this with your local community.

APAN would love to assist you in mobilising your community. Don't forget to keep us in the loop about your plans so we can support you.

Step Six

Mobilise the Community

Some suggestions for mobilising and showing community support:

- Holding a rally, demonstration or silent vigil outside the council meeting before the motion is debated.
- Filling the council chamber public gallery with supportive, kufiyah-wearing residents.
- Setting up a mass email campaign targeting all or some of the councillors via DoGooder (which has a two week free-trial - enough time to drum up a good number of emails!)
- Holding a social media blitz, where citizens post their support for the motion and tag the relevant councillors.
- A letter-writing campaign, where community members get together to write letters en-masse in support of the motion.
- Petitioning the council officially, or unofficially.
- A beautiful public poster campaign where councillors and the community can see the outpouring of community support for the upcoming motion.
- A concerted mass effort to write press releases and letters to the editors of local newspapers and speak on talkback community radio.

Step Seven

Feedback and Reflect

Regardless of whether the motion succeeded or not, don't forget to take a moment to celebrate your hard work to this point. You've made an incredible show of support for Gaza and learnt a lot. You can always re-strategise and start again, if your first attempt at passing the motion wasn't successful

Make an effort to thank any councillors who supported the motion, including the one who put it forward. Building a relationship with them is equally important.

Make sure you let APAN know what happened, and we can help you strategise your next steps.

Dealing with Pushback

Making the case that Gaza is a council issue

ARGUE PRECEDENT.

Find past examples of your local council weighing in on similar issues in the past. Some common issues that your council may have passed motions about are declaring a climate emergency, marriage equality, support for Julian Assange, or support for Ukraine. When you have found a precedent, it will help to include any quotes made by the councillors about why supporting the motion was important.

REFER TO THE DIRECT IMPACT ON RESIDENTS.

Find your state's Local Government Act or the Councillor Handbook, which usually contain statements outlining the role that councils must play in representing the interests of diverse communities. Then, you can establish that there are people in the community who are directly impacted by the Palestinian genocide. Using the Act or Handbook, note that councillors are expected to serve their constituents' interests and work alongside other levels of governance.

NOTE INDIRECT IMPACT TO RESIDENTS.

After establishing how it is directly impacting certain residents, you can likewise make the argument that it is indirectly impacting even more of their constituents. The easiest way to prove this is via a petition, but you could also find such a number of sympathetic residents by referencing the members of your local Palestine advocacy group.

Dealing with Pushback

IT COULD BE COUNCIL BUSINESS.

Many local councils around Australia are using suppliers and companies that are on the Boycott, Divest, Sanction list - like HP Computers. This means that councils, whether they realise or not, are complicit in the oppression and murder of Palestinians by doing business with these companies.

It is also important to check if any of the weapons or parts manufacturing companies that supply to Israel are operating in your local LGA. If they are, it means your council is benefiting from rates paid by these companies.

ESTABLISH PRECEDENT AROUND AUSTRALIA.

Since October 2023, a number of local councils around Australia have passed motions in support of Palestine, so there exists many precedents for Palestine solidarity motions in Australia. It's a good time to give examples of the types of motions being passed – you can find links to some existing solidarity motions on APAN's website.

ARGUE CHANGING EXPECTATIONS OF LOCAL COUNCILS.

In the past, Australians may have wanted and needed less out of their local councils, but as the world has advanced with technology, communications and ease of travel, what impacts us has grown exponentially. The Australian Catholic University did a study that exemplifies exactly this and you can bring this to the attention of your local council. We have included this study in the resources section of this toolkit.

Dealing with Pushback

Dealing with accusations of anti-semitism

Anti-Zionism and the criticism of Israel for its abuse of human rights and international law is not antisemitism.

As a movement, we abhor racism or discrimination of any kind, whether it be Islamophobia, anti-Palestinian racism or antisemitism. As a movement, we commit to identifying and challenging antisemitism wherever we may find it.

However, we need to make sure that accusations of antisemitism are not used as a way of shielding the Israel and the Israeli Government from criticism for its historical oppression of Palestinians or its genocide in Gaza, nor silencing calls for Palestinian justice.

Criticism of Israel is based on government and military actions, not Jewish identity. Refusing to allow the conflation of anti-Zionism with antisemitism is a critical step in reshaping the narrative and providing the space for a genuine discussion about Gaza and Palestinian rights.

Motion Text

Basic motion to adapt for your council

This sample text is for guidance around wording and content only. Most council motions need to be short, direct and specific, and it can help to focus on a few specific actions or points of recognition. Work with your group and supportive councillor to determine the wording that will be best for your local context.

That Council,

- 1. Mourns the tragic and horrific loss of civilian lives in the current conflict and utterly condemns the targeting of civilians.*
- 2. Notes that this conflict has been ongoing since 1948 and has resulted in not just the occupation of Palestine but the displacement of millions of Palestinians from their homeland. October 7 was not the beginning of this conflict.*
- 3. Writes to the Prime Minister and Foreign Minister calling on the Australian Government to:*
 - a) Strongly condemn the war crimes being carried out by Israel against the Palestinians in Gaza.*
 - b) Call for an immediate ceasefire and an end to Israel's indiscriminate bombing.*
 - c) Call for the immediate lifting of the siege on Gaza to allow Palestinians in Gaza to have unlimited access to food, water, fuel, electricity, medical supplies and construction materials to repair damaged homes and civilian infrastructure.*
 - d) Advocate for all Palestinian and Israeli hostages to be released.*
 - e) Advocate for a political resolution to the decades-long conflict which includes an end to Israel's illegal occupation of Palestine in order for there to be a just and sustainable peace.*
 - f) End all military, economic, political and diplomatic ties with the state of Israel until it complies with its obligations under international law.*
 - g) Write to the Embassy of South Africa thanking the state for its leadership and advocacy in filing its genocide case at the ICJ.*

Motion Text cont.

Basic motion elements to adapt for your council

- 4. Notes that boycotts, divestment and sanctions are legitimate, non-violent tactics used by individuals and organisations to pressure foreign governments over human rights abuses and war crimes, including Israel's brutal and illegal colonisation of Palestine.*
- 5. Receives a report to explore options for council to cancel contracts with companies that support or profit from Israel's illegal occupation and settlement of Palestine, including companies that supply equipment to the Israeli Defence Force.*
- 6. Amends the Community Flag Schedule outlined in Council's Flags Policy by raising the Palestinian flag.*
- 7. As a representative of this diverse, multicultural, and multi-faith community, council name commits to actively standing against all forms of racism, including anti-Palestinian racism, Islamophobia and antisemitism.*
- 8. That this council and its delegate will actively endorse and support the motion raised at the National General Assembly of Local Governmental Associations from July 2-4 in Canberra.*

Case Study:

Ballarat:

Friends of Palestine Ballarat successfully worked with its councillors to see the successful passing of a solidarity motion at Ballarat Council. This motion was introduced by a Greens-endorsed councillor. The conservative attitude of the Ballarat Council meant the Friends of Palestine group members needed to be cautious when developing their campaign and lobbying strategy.

Rather than staging a rally on the night of the council meeting – something the group felt might not have been well received in the local community – they focused on communicating the impact the genocide had had on members of the local community, including Palestinians, refugees, local youth, mothers, and a teacher. This focus on common humanity and values was instrumental to the motion's success.

As group member Mark noted, "Our strategy was not 'one-size-fits-all,' but required customisation to the specific context and audience. **Our approach underscores the importance of understanding the audience, fostering meaningful connections, and presenting a united front in advocating for a cause.**"

Extra Resources

State Council Legislation

Victoria

<https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/as-made/acts/local-government-act-2020>

New South Wales

<https://legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1993-030>

Queensland

<https://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/view/pdf/inforce/current/act-2009-017>

Northern Territory

<https://legislation.nt.gov.au/Legislation/LOCAL-GOVERNMENT-ACT-2019>

Tasmania

<https://www.legislation.tas.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-1993-095>

Extra Resources

Western Australia

https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/statutes.nsf/main_mrtitle_551_homepage.html

South Australia

https://www.legislation.sa.gov.au/_legislation/lz/c/a/local%20government%20act%201999/current/1999.62.auth.pdf

The Changing Role of Local Government in Australia Australian Catholic University

<https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2023-02/apo-nid321483.pdf>

Boycott, Divest, Sanction List

<https://www.google.com/url?q=https://bdsaustralia.net.au/un-list-of-complicit-companies/&sa=D&source=docs&ust=1714616598172117&usg=AOvVaw33sOrzlGA51q8AfDBz1V8E>

DoGooder

<https://dogooder.co/>

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