



**Victorian
Public Sector
Commission**



How to brief your minister

What to consider when writing a brief or communicating with your minister

Starting with a brief

Your organisation should have a process for developing and providing ministerial advice for matters of significance.

In most cases, you'll write a formal brief for a senior VPS executive to approve and present to your minister. A written brief ensures there's a record of advice provided to government and about any decisions made.

If you're an executive or an officer and you feel unsure about raising a matter, ask your manager. A senior executive with the right level of authority and judgement will decide if you need to brief your minister.

Alternatives to briefs for executives

Executives can use other options to communicate with the minister and their office. For example, speaking in person or using emails, SMS or digital messaging platforms.

Where possible, only use these options when:

- more information is needed to prepare a formal brief
- you're responding to a request for technical or factual information

- you're providing supplementary information after you've provided advice or a brief.

These exchanges don't replace the thinking that goes into providing formal advice. For example, when you write an email be mindful that it likely doesn't convey all the expert advice available that may be included in a formal brief. If you're in doubt about whether formal advice is being sought or offered, try to limit your exchanges in favour of developing a formal brief.

The use of these other methods should be agreed to in protocols between the office and your organisation first.

What to consider in your brief

In addition to this advice, check what guides and templates your organisation has to inform the style and content of your briefs.

Significance

If you identify a [matter of significance](#) or one is brought to you, decide if you need to brief your minister. If you're an officer, discuss this with your executive first. If a minister or their office advises that a brief isn't required, that alone shouldn't determine if you brief them on a matter that has been judged to be significant.

Think about the impact of not briefing on a matter and what the risks of that are.

If you're an executive, brief the minister if you think it's necessary as part of your duties in the [code of conduct](#) to provide frank, impartial and timely advice.

In almost all cases if a minister or their office requests a brief you'll provide the advice as requested. An exception would be if the request is for political advice. If you feel you've been asked to provide political advice or are unsure, speak with your executive.

Brevity

Briefs should be concise and only include the most important information to support the minister to make a decision.

Ministers have limited time to consider your brief. In addition to their ministerial responsibilities, they have parliamentary duties and must represent their electorate.

Clarity

Be clear and succinct. Think about what your minister needs to know to make a decision.

Write in [plain English](#) and include your recommendations, key issues and background information.

Timeliness

Give your minister and their office enough time to consider your advice and make a decision. Your organisation's briefing protocols should detail these timelines, as agreed with the minister's office.

If your minister needs advice before you have all the relevant information, a senior executive can decide whether to brief at that time and send more information later.

Consultation

Ensure you've got input from the relevant people across your organisation as well as other parts of government. This can include asking for clarification on the intent of any request for a brief while it's being drafted.

Always collaborate with others if an issue or decision may affect their team's work or if your brief involves a matter where another area is the lead.

In some cases, you may need external expertise and stakeholder feedback to give the minister accurate advice.

Content

Ensure all your briefs include:

- analysis
- evidence
- consultation with relevant experts
- any legal requirements for the minister to validly exercise a power under legislation
- understanding of risks and how they will be managed
- options to proceed
- a clear recommendation and decision for your minister to make.