

Elements of an MP Job Description

5 minute read

In this third article we have a look at the elements of an MP job description.

This is a generic role description. For frontbenchers there will be additional ministerial responsibilities. Opposition frontbenchers will also have different responsibilities. Members of the government executive will have the added tasks related to leading the government. Leaders will have ceremonial functions. These additional roles and responsibilities are position specific and sit beside the MP's core responsibilities, which are the ones set down here.

To come up with this list, we reviewed the outputs from the Democracy in Action! Conversations from the ACT election, and did some internet searching, and discovered and compiled the following set of roles and responsibilities. They fit into seven broad domains across the three main roles:

Constituency Roles

1. Constituency Representation and Support,
2. Facilitates Community Participation,

Parliamentary Roles

3. Legislative Duties,
4. Government Scrutiny and Oversight,
5. Committee Participation,
6. Public Communication, and

Party Roles

7. Fulfil Party Responsibilities,

We have divided the constituency role into two parts, representation and support and facilitation of community participation because that is central to achieving our constitutional objectives.

Each of these roles is detailed here.

4.1. Constituency Representation and Support:

- Demonstrate genuine respect for and understanding of the members of your community, especially those in disadvantaged groups.
- Develop an in-depth understanding via facilitated community participation (see below) of your community and the issues that affect them; and then provide feedback to them on action taken on issues identified.
- Reflect and advocate for the collectively identified interests and priorities of your constituents in the national, state, or territory parliament, acting as a spokesperson for local concerns and issues.
- Set targets for what you want to achieve as an MP and hold yourself accountable by regular and visible updates and reflections to your electorate.
- Assist constituents with issues relating to government services or policy impacts.

4.2. Facilitates community participation

- Genuinely engage with, consult and facilitate community participation of constituents in your representative work, listening and regularly seeking input from the community via a range of methods including but not limited to: surveys, regular meetings, town halls, focus groups and deliberative forums.
- Particularly, use participatory democracy tools and processes to educate and engage citizens about how they can participate in democracy by collaborating with you.
- Provide regular feedback to the electorate community on all aspects of your work and share the progress on commitments.
- Gather feedback from constituents on your performance.
- Engage with local organizations and attend community events to stay informed about your constituents' needs.
- Collaborate closely and negotiates with the community on policy issues, canvassing and promoting new ideas with them in relation to planned actions and legislation.
- On contentious issues is able to host participatory democratic processes with constituents to find new ground that most constituents are able to consent to (no paramount objections) because you have explained the reasoning of the position to all agreeing and dissenting constituents.
- Discern and represent the community's collectively agreed views, while being aware of and acknowledging dissenting views.

4.3. Legislative Duties:

- Attend parliamentary sessions to debate and vote on proposed legislation.
- Participate in discussions, committees and debates to develop, amend, and repeal laws.
- Draft and propose new legislation for the benefit of constituents and/or addresses national issues.

4.4. Government Scrutiny and Oversight:

- Analyse and monitor government policies to ensure they align with the public's interests and the public good.
- Examine government activities and expenditures through parliamentary committees and other mechanisms.
- Monitor and challenge the executive branch to ensure accountability and transparency in government operations. This includes questioning ministers and participating in inquiries.
- Question and hold government officials accountable through inquiries, reports, or debates.

4.5. Committee Participation:

- Serve on specialized parliamentary committees to delve into detailed policy work or investigate specific issues.
- Collaborate with other MPs and experts to produce findings and recommendations.

4.6. Public Communication:

- Maintain transparency by providing regular updates on legislative activities and decisions to the public.
- Engage with media and social platforms to communicate key issues and foster public understanding of political processes.
- Inform the public of the efforts you are making to initiate and pass bills, question public officials and government officers.
- Communicate the reasoning used when voting in favour of public good issues against the wishes of local constituents.
- Communicate openly the contacts you have had with lobbying groups and others attempting to influence policy and legislation about what these groups want and how that is weighed up against what serves the public good.
- Deal with dis- and misinformation by explaining the reasoning behind your own position and also identify what still remains uncertain and needs more evidence.
- Model robust debate in democracy whilst treating people with respect.
- Stand up to power holders and influencers in respectful ways that acknowledges the position and interests of the power holders and equally demonstrates the more important interests of their constituents and the public good. Can also explain when the media distorts these matters with calmness, assertiveness and balance.

4.7. Fulfil Party Responsibilities

- Contribute to party policy and strategies formulation.
- Advocate for changes to party policy based on the needs of constituents and the public good.
- Promote party objectives and policies within your constituencies and in the media.
- Balance party responsibilities with the constituent representative role.

In the next article we explore some of the questions that need some further consideration in finalising the job description and beginning to think about the conversation to decide on a few candidate questions.