Office expenses

Parliamentarians are provided with a budget for office expenses and may claim the expenses listed below each financial year.

Stationery, flags and nationhood material and wreaths

A parliamentarian may purchase office stationery and supplies to support the conduct of their parliamentary business.

Flags, flag lapel pins, portraits and other specified nationhood material may also be purchased for presentation to constituents and organisations. It is expected that there will be an element of formality in the act and/or ceremony where the parliamentarian presents these items.

Did you know?

Stationery, supplies, flags, portraits and nationhood material can be purchased directly through the contracted office supplies provider, currently COS. For access to the online shopfront COSnet, complete form 132.

A parliamentarian may purchase wreaths, for example, for ceremonial purposes. Reimbursement can be sought through PEMS.

Minor office equipment

Minor office equipment including accessories, consumables, repairs and maintenance may be purchased.

Please note it is a parliamentarian's responsibility to ensure work health and safety risks are not introduced to their office. For example, chair mats may only be purchased if recommended following an ergonomic assessment.

Publications

A parliamentarian may purchase or subscribe to print or electronic publications for the conduct of their parliamentary business. Consideration must be given to the nature of the publication and necessary quantities required. A parliamentarian cannot claim publications which are for their or another person's personal benefit or commercial purpose such as purchasing publications or other items to distribute to constituents or community groups, in bulk or individually.

Additional telecommunications and ICT

The Department of Parliamentary Services (DPS) provides and manages the majority of ICT equipment and services provided to parliamentarians. DPS should be contacted in the first instance in relation to the provision and maintenance of ICT equipment. ICT provided by DPS is not subject to the office expenses budget.

Where ICT requirements go beyond the items generally provided by DPS, additional ICT equipment and services may be sourced and provided as an office expense. DPS has a Parl ICT catalogue that provides a range of ICT equipment, such as high specification ICT and laptops, that can be supported by the Australian Parliament House (APH) Network and serviced by DPS. The cost of these additional expenses will be debited against the office budget and may be subject to asset recording and management requirements. Additional ICT equipment and services not procured through DPS are not claimable as an office expense and will not be supported by DPS or the APH Network.

A parliamentarian may also purchase the following as an office expense:

- ICT accessories, such as storage devices, portable power banks and camera lenses for mobile devices
- software, including associated servicing, training and backup services
- cloud-based services, including storage and software.

Livestreaming equipment

Livestreaming equipment may be used to produce, communicate and distribute podcasts and similar streaming services. This includes, but is not limited to, the design, recording and distribution of electronic material. A parliamentarian should be mindful that the use of livestreaming equipment, including any content created, is subject to the overarching PBR obligations.

The material must not include any statements or information that is prohibited. For example, the livestreaming or podcast must not be used for any commercial purpose, such as promoting or advertising a business or commercial enterprise such as a constituent's business. It must also not be used for production or placement of content for broadcasting on television, must not solicit votes or financial or other support and must not provide instruction on how to complete a ballot paper in a referendum or election.

Printing and communication

To allow for communication with constituents, a parliamentarian can access a range of printing, production, distribution and communications expenses such as:

- printing, including postal vote applications and business cards
- distribution of postal vote applications, including reply paid envelopes
- creation of material for inclusion in printed material, electronic material or audio posters, including translation services, design, artwork, photography, video, and sound production and recordings
- placement of content in printed and electronic publications
- content development, edit and proof reading services for the purpose of printed or electronic material
- producing and maintenance of audio posters
- virtual town halls
- email distribution services
- SMS broadcasting
- AUSLAN interpreting and closed caption services.

A parliamentarian can also claim expenses relating to the establishment, maintenance, and monitoring of their own website, creation of social media content and advertisements.

Did you know?

There are a number of conditions relating specifically to printing and communication with a parliamentarian's constituents including:

- printing must be on paper no heavier than 700 grams per square metre, or flat magnetised material
- printing must not solicit votes for another person, subscriptions or support (other than volunteering), membership in a political party, provide instructions on how to complete a ballot paper or pursue a commercial purpose.

More detail on what can and cannot be claimed is available on the IPEA website.

Postage meter charges, delivery and freight costs

Each electorate office is provided with a franking machine used to print postage directly onto mail with credit provided by Australia Post. Parliamentarians will need to maintain a private arrangement with Australia Post for this account. A parliamentarian may claim courier or other freight transfer costs, from the office expense budget, for the purposes of transferring documents and other small items related to their parliamentary business between their offices.

Mobile office signage, facilities and equipment

A parliamentarian may claim signage, facilities and equipment to assist in conducting their parliamentary business at a mobile office within their electorate, for example at a stall at a shopping centre, community fair or market. Mobile office facilities and equipment may include a marquee to provide coverage when conducting parliamentary business outdoors, site fees and other necessary items such as a table and chairs, or the cost of an exhibition booth for indoor events.

Did you know?

Venue hire, such as function rooms, community centres and halls, is not claimable as a mobile office expense.

Contacting and surveying constituents

The following can be claimed as an office expense for the purposes of contacting and surveying constituents:

- email distribution services
- SMS broadcasting and survey services
- placement of content in printed and electronic publications produced and distributed by third parties including local and national newspapers
- postal services from Australia Post
- conducting virtual town hall meetings
- datasets that would assist in contacting constituents
- data validation services for the purpose of communicating with constituents
- online survey tools
- conducting interactive voice response phone survey.

Media monitoring services

Media monitoring services may be purchased to support the conduct of parliamentary business. A parliamentarian is responsible for arranging and maintaining these services directly with the monitoring supplier(s).

Radio, Auslan interpreting and closed caption services

For members of the House of Representatives who represent a provincial or rural electorate, as defined by the Australian Electoral Commission, broadcasting on regional community and open narrowcast radio services are claimable. There are several conditions that must be met including:

- the spending is for regional radio only (commercial, community, or certain narrowcasting services), and not for anything broadcast in the ACT
- the radio station's broadcast area must overlap with the parliamentarian's electorate
- the parliamentarian can only spend up to one-third of their annual office budget on radio content.

Auslan interpreting and closed captioning services may only be purchased as an office expense when existing Government services, such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme or the National Relay Service, cannot reasonably provide the services.

Expenses that cannot be claimed

The following list includes examples of types of expenses that are not claimable:

- communication or engagement strategy development
- social media consultancy and marketing services
- costs not directly associated with creating the content of the electronic material, for example, hair styling and makeup for video production
- professional networking website memberships
- venue hire for physical or face-to-face town hall meetings
- fundraising activities
- data products and data validation services that do not relate directly to communicating with your constituents
- livestreaming equipment and accessories for broadcasting on television
- material that includes barcodes, QR codes and/or links that refer or direct constituents to material that does not satisfy your PBR obligations.

Claiming office expenses

Office expense claims can be submitted to IPEA through PEMS.

Claims should be submitted with:

- A valid tax invoice that clearly sets out the supplier, description of the goods or services provided, quantity, unit cost, total cost (including GST where applicable) and the date of purchase or service period. Where services are provided over a period of time, the relevant service dates or period must be included. All pages of the tax invoice must be submitted and statements/receipts will not be accepted in lieu of an invoice.
- Invoices must contain sufficient detail to demonstrate the nature of the expense and how it relates to parliamentary business. Where invoices are bundled or multiple items, a breakdown should be provided if requested.
- If claiming a reimbursement – proof of payment (e.g. a payment receipt or a bank statement extract showing payment (including any associated transaction fees), where the tax invoice is also provided).
- If the claim relates to a printed item or electronic material – a sample, printer's proof or final print-ready copy, transcription of any audio, and if the item is not in English, an English translation.
- If the claim relates to website development, design or upgrade – the URL of the website.
- If a claimed item was previously assessed under the pre-claim assessment process - the IPEA reference number.
- Date of delivery.

Where a claim is made against the office budget, the budget is debited based on the date the goods or services are received or delivered, not when the expense is ordered, invoiced or claimed.