

Guidelines on Selecting a Support Group Patron

What is a patron?

A patron is an ambassador for your Support Group – and by extension an ambassador in your community for Parkinson's NSW.

A patron is a person who formally agrees to lend their name as a way of providing credibility and support for your organisation.

They are not a member of your Group and do not play a formal role in its operations.

Instead, they consent to the use of their name on your letterhead, in correspondence and for fundraising purposes. They will also attend selected events and be visible in the community supporting your Group and Parkinson's NSW.

The most effective patrons will have a long history of association with Parkinson's or your Group and should be well-informed about the work Parkinson's NSW does.

How to select a patron

Think carefully about the sort of patron who would best fit in with your Group and our shared vision, mission and purpose:

Vision – Our aspiration

Quality of life now, as we work towards a community free of Parkinson's.

Mission – Our focus

To enhance the quality of life of people living with Parkinson's.

Purpose – What we do

To connect people living with Parkinson's with life-enhancing support and services.

When choosing a patron, it is important to keep in mind the best interests of both your Support Group and Parkinson's NSW.

A person who is a colourful local personality, or one who has recently become well-known in your community, may later fall from grace after involvement in a scandal, receiving negative media coverage, or somehow causing offense to people within your community.

In that case, when their reputation falls so does your Group's – along with that of Parkinson's NSW. It is therefore essential not to choose a patron based solely on their personality or current popularity.

Rather, you will benefit most from a patron with a long track record of dignified behaviour, social stability, community service, and a relationship with Parkinson's in some form.

A local politician can certainly open doors and enhance your Group's visibility.

However, you must be very careful to avoid your Group becoming involved – or appearing to be involved – in any political party or campaign. If that happens, you will be alienating those members of the community who do not support that party.

How to approach and induct a patron

Once you have identified someone within your community who has the right profile, influence and networks that would benefit your Group and Parkinson's NSW, approach them with a letter.

A sample approach letter is provided on the following page. It sets out who you are, who you represent, what you do, and why you are seeking a patron.

If you have someone within your Group who knows the potential patron, that person can then follow up the letter with a personal conversation to ascertain whether the target patron is interested in the role. If the person you've approached is keen, follow up with a more extensive conversation to clarify expectations on both sides.

This should be followed with a letter of agreement that includes confirmation of:

- How much time the patron will commit to us each year
- The type of events or activities we would like them to support
- Permission to use their name in association with the organisation
- The fact that they are not required to attend Group meetings and will not carry any governance responsibilities or liabilities.

If we want a patron to be effective for your Group, we need to help them. That includes providing them with briefings and written information about what your Group and Parkinson's NSW does, and why and how we do it.

Sample approach letter to a potential patron

<Mr/Mrs/Ms Name>
<Address Line 1>
<Address Line 1>
NSW <Postcode>

Dear <Name>,

I am writing to you as Leader of the <Name> Support Group.

Our organisation supports people living with Parkinson's, their carers and family members in the <name> area. We provide opportunities for participants to share feelings, resources and experiences, as well as opportunities to meet new people.

This supports their health and wellbeing as they live with Parkinson's and helps to break down feelings of social isolation.

Parkinson's is a progressive, degenerative condition of the central nervous system. Symptoms can be managed with medication, exercise and other forms of therapy and support. However, as yet there is no cure.

We have been operating with the support of the state peak body Parkinson's NSW for <number> years and feel that now is the time to raise our profile within the community in order to reach and assist more local people with Parkinson's.

I have therefore been asked to approach you to see if you would consider becoming the patron of <Name> Support Group?

I have enclosed some information about us as well as the address of the Parkinson's NSW web site which gives a good indication of the work that we do.

I would be delighted to have the opportunity of telling you more about us and would be pleased to meet with you at a time and place of your convenience.

Please contact me on <phone number> if you would like to discuss this proposal further.

Sincerely,

<Name>
Support Group Leader

Sample confirmation letter to a selected patron

<Mr/Mrs/Ms Name>
<Address Line 1>
<Address Line 1>
NSW <Postcode>

Dear <Name>,

Thank you for meeting me on <date> and agreeing to become the Patron of the <name> Support Group.

We are delighted to have your support and believe that together we can provide more comfort and support for people living with Parkinson's in our community. This letter confirms the matters we discussed.

You can expect from our Support Group:

- An update phone call or letter from a member of our Leadership Team once a quarter.
- An invitation to two meetings annually and one other event per year.
- All promotional materials and letters using your image or sent in your name will be sent to you for approval prior to distribution.
- To have any of your inquiries promptly dealt with by a member of our Leadership Team.

As Patron you will:

- Grant us permission to use your name as Patron for the purposes of local publicity, community outreach and fundraising.
- Commit to support our Group by <insert requirements e.g. permission to use name in association with fundraising and event invitations, attendance at annual event such as Unity Walk, etc>.
- Not be required to attend regular Support Group meetings or take an operational role in the organisation.
- Not incur any governance responsibilities or liabilities related to the operations of <name> Support Group.

As agreed, your commitment will last for <X years OR until such time as the arrangement is terminated by either you or us>.

It would be appreciated that if you wish to end the agreement that you give us as much notice as possible – at least six months to avoid unnecessary expense in relation to amending publicity materials. We will in turn reciprocate except in exceptional circumstances.

I appreciate that you are very busy, but I would be happy to arrange an induction to our organisation and Parkinson's NSW and arrange for you to meet key individuals.

If you have any queries or questions now or in the future, don't hesitate to contact me on <phone number>.

Thank you once again for agreeing to become the Patron of the <name> Support Group.

Sincerely,

<Name>
Support Group Leader

For more information from Parkinson's NSW on how to select and communicate with patron for your Support Group, contact:

Felicity Jones
Support Group Coordinator
T: 02 8051 1900
E: felicity.jones@parkinsonsnsw.org.au