

# COMMUNICATING WITH POLICY MAKERS

## Objectives:

- ✓ Encourage advisory council members to actively engage in influencing policies at the local, state, and federal level that pertain to Extension Service programs.
- ✓ Identify techniques that advisory council members can utilize to effectively communicate with public officials at the local, state, and federal level.

## Advance Preparation:

- ✓ Secure the names, email addresses, office mailing addresses, and office phone numbers for all policymakers at the local, state, and federal level who serve your county/district/state. Each state will have a URL for state legislative member information. For example, Mississippi information can be found at: <http://www.ls.state.ms.us>
- ✓ Locate Websites that provide legislative issues that are relevant to your county/district/state. At the federal level, legislative information can be viewed at <http://thomas.loc.gov/>

## Materials Needed:

- ✓ Copies of the six techniques for communicating with policymakers (see lesson) for each participant.
- ✓ Copies of the names, email addresses, office mailing addresses, and office phone numbers for local, state, and federal policymakers who serve your county/district/state for each participant.
- ✓ Copies of a 20% budget cut scenario for your county (see interest approach).
- ✓ Copies of a Website(s) that provide legislative information relevant to your county/district/state for each participant.
- ✓ Copies of a sample letter format for corresponding with a policymaker (see lesson) for each participant.
- ✓ Three markers and three flip charts.
- ✓ Computer with Internet connection and connected data projector.

## Time Needed:

- ✓ One to two hours

## BACKGROUND

Elected officials at all levels of government should base their policy decisions on the interest of the general public they serve, but seldom do they know what the public believes. Advisory councils, in most states, play a major role in advocacy for Extension Service programs. This lesson includes some basic guidelines and techniques for communicating with policymakers. These include: email, face-to-face meetings, FAX, letters, telegrams, and telephone calls.

## INTEREST APPROACH

Provide a copy of a scenerio that indicates your state is planning to cut the Extension budget by 20%. Furthermore, your state Extension administration has informed you that this state cut will eliminate the 4-H and F&CS agent positions in your county in order to meet the budget shortfall.

Ask each participant to determine the course of action that should be taken based on this information. Allow five minutes for review and then you will discuss it as a group.

Once the five minutes are up, say “I don’t think these two positions are needed in the county, and this should pose no problem for programming in our county.”

This should create some discussion, then tell them this isn’t really true. The key point is to emphasize the importance of communicating with policymakers. If this situation really did occur, would your advisory council have the tools/techniques necessary to communicate effectively with policymakers? Would they know how to contact these policymakers?

## **LESSON**

Distribute the Handout that list the names, email addresses, office mailing addresses, and office phone numbers for local, state, and federal policymakers currently serving your county/district/state to participants.

Distribute the Handout that list Websites that provide legislative information relevant to your state to participants. Connect to the federal Website: <http://thomas.loc.gov/> and discuss this information.

Distribute the Handout regarding the six techniques for effectively communicating with policymakers to each participant and discuss each one.

**Email:** When using email to communicate with policymakers, be sure to include your name and address at the top of the email message. This enhances the chances of a response because policymakers can easily see your residence and know if you are one of their constituents.

**Face-to-Face Meetings:** A successful visit with a policymaker involves: specific purpose of the visit, an appointment, an agenda, a designated spokesperson if a small group is visiting, knowledge of the policymakers position on the topic you wish to discuss, prompt arrival, information you can leave with the individual or his/her staff, and appropriate follow-up.

**FAX:** Before sending a FAX it is a good idea to call and ask a staff person if you could send (name the specific item-fact sheet, letter of support, statistics which support a particular stance).

**Letters:** The most popular choice of communication with policymakers. Effective letters include: the purpose of the letter in the first paragraph, be courteous, specific which includes key information, and address only one issue in each letter while keeping the letter to one page.

## **SAMPLE LETTER FORMAT FOR CORRESPONDING WITH A POLICYMAKER**

Your name

Mailing address

Date of Letter

Name of the policymaker (Representative, Senator, Member of Congress)

Their office mailing address

Dear Representative, Senator, .....:

**Paragraph 1** – Introduce the writer and state the purpose of the letter.

**Paragraph 2** - State the position supported. Use examples and facts to support the position.

**Paragraph 3** – Describe any action requested. Ask for the policymaker to respond saying what he/she intends to do.

Sincerely yours,  
Your signature

**Telegrams:** Western Union has special rates for public reaction to legislative activity. These include: public opinion message (up to 15 words), mailgram (up to 100 words), and night letter (one to 100 words).

**Telephone calls:** The practical communication method when time is a factor. Tips include: ask if he/she knows when action on the measure is expected, explain that you are the legislator's constituent and state an opinion about the issue, ask how the legislator plans to vote, and suggest a position for the legislator to take.

## **APPLICATION**

Using information in the interest approach, divide the participants into three groups. Ask group one to draft an email message to their state representative, group two to draft a letter to their state representative, and group three to draft a mock phone call to their state representative. Ask each group to elect a spokesperson and a person to record their information on a flip chart.

Ask them to address the budget cut and the fact your county will lose the 4-H and F&CS agent positions as a result.

Allow the groups ten minutes to complete this exercise.

Ask the three groups to present what they have prepared.

Discuss the format they used. Did it address the techniques/components covered in the lesson? What type of content did the groups use for examples and facts to support these two positions?

Wrap up with a Question and Answer session to bring closure to the discussion.

## **REFERENCES**

*Public Policy MANUAL.* The American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences, Office of Public Policy, 1997.

## ROLE IN ANNUAL BUDGET PROCESS

Your help is needed in providing vital feedback on the **SEAL Curriculum** you have just completed. Please take a moment to complete this survey.

For each of the topics listed below, in the LEFT column, circle the ONE number that best reflects your LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING before the **SEAL Curriculum**. Then, in the RIGHT column, circle the ONE number that best reflects your LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING after the **SEAL Curriculum**.

### LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING

	Poor 1	Average 2	Good 3	Excellent 4
Level of Understanding	<i>BEFORE</i> the Program		<i>AFTER</i> the Program	
Understanding of the techniques to effectively communicate with public officials at the local, state, and federal level	1	2	3	4
Understanding that advisory council members can actively engage in influencing policies pertaining to Extension Service programs	1	2	3	4

**Intentions.** For the following behaviors, check the box that describes what you plan to do as a result of the **SEAL Curriculum**.

Behavior Change	Yes	No
Will you use these techniques to communicate with public officials at the local, state, and federal level?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Satisfaction.** Check the box for the statement that best describes your thoughts concerning the program.

Satisfaction	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
The subject matter was timely for me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The speakers were effective.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The information was practical to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I can go and use the information I learned today in my organization.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Overall, this was a very educational program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**What is the most significant thing you will apply (feel free to list more than one)?**

**Do you feel like what you learned provides you the ability to lead more effectively? (Circle the best answer)**

YES

NO

- Please explain your answer or provide an example.

**Please provide any additional information on the back.**

*Thank you very much for your time!!!*