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Abstract

Building Partnerships and Communicating with Policymakers

by Jeanne R. Davis

Advisory council members are often asked to assist in building partnerships and communicating with policymakers. The purpose of this lesson is to review the strategies for establishing support for the Cooperative Extension Service within a changing environment. First, it is important to understand the changing political situation. Second, advisory council members must be universally knowledgeable about the Cooperative Extension Service and be adept at participating in long range strategies that include action plans for communication at each political level.



Building Partnerships and Communicating with Policymakers

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Objectives:

- Demonstrate communication techniques for building partnerships with policy makers.
- Develop a plan of action for building partnerships and communicating with policy makers.
- Forge stronger partnerships with local, state and federal public officials resulting in increased understanding, communication and support for Extension.

Advance Preparation:

- Review lesson plan.
- Review handouts, PowerPoint slides and slide notes for presentation.
- Duplicate handouts and evaluation form.

Materials Needed:

- Computer and projection device
- PowerPoint presentation
- Flip chart and markers
- Handouts

Time Needed:

- Preparation: 2 hours
- Presentation: One hour

BACKGROUND

The political environment is constantly changing. We must understand these changes and determine how to effectively build support through a continuum. The Cooperative Extension Service has no control over many environmental factors such as economic changes, energy crises, environmental concerns, or the accelerating costs of medical care, but the Cooperative Extension Service can control the way it presents its message in this changing political environment.

Most elected officials seldom tire of hearing from their constituents. Long term relationships are essential to building support with policy makers. The more they know about Cooperative Extension and its impact on their communities, the more they can respond to any communication.

*“One person can make a difference, and every person should try.”
John F. Kennedy*

This lesson engages advisory council members in thinking about the Cooperative Extension Service from a policymaker’s view. Some of the key points to consider are:

- Availability of public funds is cyclical with the economy. As a result, there is more emphasis on accountability for public funds. The question is whether the Cooperative Extension Service is a priority program that justifies future funding.
- Accountability focuses on the impact (value) of Cooperative Extension programs. The emphasis is on specific outcomes, not generalizations.
- Policymakers are interested in and supportive of programs that have a future impact on society. Historical contributions are of little interest. The Cooperative Extension Service must conduct programs that are seen as contributing to significant economic, community and social issues.
- The American population wants changes in government programs. People believe that government is inefficient and wasteful of their tax dollars.
- Building and maintaining a strong base of support is a continuous process. It is not adequate to build support only at the time of a crisis. There must be constant public relations activity in prosperous times and lean times.
- The Cooperative Extension Service must package its message around special interests. Effective communication must be stated in terms of the issues of interest to the public and public officials.
- Many new public officials do not understand or support the Cooperative Extension Service. There are many new individuals, many of which do not have

rural or agricultural backgrounds or have direct experience with Cooperative Extension programs.

- The Cooperative Extension Service needs to re-examine its support base. As programs focus on new issues, the challenge is to build an expanded support base around the issues and yet maintain the traditional base.
- The Cooperative Extension Service advisory council members and clientele need to be able to interpret the results of the Cooperative Extension Service efforts and be empowered to communicate accomplishments to ensure sustainability.

INTEREST APPROACH

Announce the news that local policymakers have made it known that they have just secured “special funding” to address some of the issues affecting community. (15 Minutes).

- Ask the group to identify as many current issues as possible affecting their communities. Write answers on a flip chart.
- Asterisk the issues for which Extension could provide available resources and/or partner with local policymakers to affect change.
- Discuss ways Extension could be a viable resource for addressing the issues affecting community. Discuss how this would be communicated to policy makers.
- Discuss how Extension could enhance programming efforts with “special funding.” Discuss how this would be communicated to policymakers.
- Share the sad news (they probably figured it out) that there is no “special funding,” but the reality is that we must look for ways to plan to communicate our successes and abilities, and also our needs while building partnerships with policymakers.

LESSON

- Use the PowerPoint “Building Partnerships and Communicating with Policymakers” with the corresponding notes pages to guide the presentation. (15 minutes).
- Share copy of “Steps for Meeting with a Public Policymaker.”
- Share copy of “Communication Guidelines for Corresponding with a Policymaker.”
- Discuss “Do You Know Your Policymakers?” information sheet. (10 minutes).

Tip for Using this with your Council

- Break into small groups to complete policy maker information sheet and action plan.

LEARNING APPLICATION

Assist participants with completing at least one plan of action for building partnerships with policy makers using the “Communicating with Policymakers: Plan for Building Partnerships.” (20 minutes).

- Use “Communicating with Policymakers: Plan for Building Partnerships,” part 1 and part 2.
- Ask the participants to complete at least one plan of action/contact needed for communication with a policymaker.
- Ask for discussion on how the plan could be implemented for their situation and their role in the implementation.

REFERENCES

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- Bolton, E.B. (2005). “About IFAS leadership development: Choices for political action at the local level.” Retrieved September 22, 2008 from <http://edis.ifas.ufl.edu/HE750>.
- Chamber of Commerce of St. Joseph County. (2004). “Communicating with public officials.” Retrieved September 22, 2008 from www.sjchamber.org.
- Greater Pittsburgh Arts Council. (2007). “Communicating with your legislators.” Retrieved September 22, 2008 from www.pittsburghartscouncil.org.
- Klumpp, M. & Riley, J. Understanding extension and advocacy. University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.
- Warner, P. (1996). Strategies for effective communication with public officials. University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

HANDOUTS

- PowerPoint notes
- Handout 1: “Steps for Meeting with a Public Policymaker”
- Handout 2: “Communication Guidelines for Corresponding with Policymakers”
- Handout 3: “Do You Know Your Policymakers?”
- Handout 4: “Communicating with Policymakers Plan for Building Partnerships.”
- Evaluation form

POWERPOINT

- Use the PowerPoint “Building Partnerships and Communicating with Policymakers.”

EVALUATION

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Steps for Meeting with a Public Policymaker

1. Call for an appointment. Know the protocol! Do not just walk in and expect to see the public official. When setting up a meeting, be clear about the subject you want to discuss. No one likes surprises. This allows a person to prepare for the meeting or have the staff member who is responsible for the issue area(s) available. Remember if you cannot meet with the official; arrange to spend time with the staff.
2. Be organized. Have an agenda. Be specific. This keeps the meeting from going astray. Remember, your meeting is creating an image to the official and his or her staff about you or your group. Therefore, seriousness and knowledge of the issue are important. Do not overstate your case. Be informative and factual. Give reasons and provide supporting materials.
3. If you are a part of a group meeting, have a pre-meeting, to discuss which topics will be raised and who will present each. Choose one person to lead the conversation and see that the agenda is followed.
4. Be appreciative. Acknowledge previous support and current action.
5. Always be a good “listener.” The comments and questions should provide insight into a strategy for follow up materials on what to include in another meeting. Remember, the individual needs his/her concerns and issues understood as much as you do. This does not mean you have to agree with his/her views or compromise your position.
6. Be on time and do not take more than the allotted time for the meeting unless the elected official initiates the continuation. Time demands are very great. Being organized will ensure your discussion of the issue(s) will cover the critical aspects regardless of the time limitation.
7. Be understanding. An agenda will help to keep everyone on the subject. Do not be timid; ask how the policymaker stands on the issue or on specific aspects. If he/she opposes your position, listen to the arguments, for it may provide insight into developing further issue strategy. Put yourself in the policymaker’s position.



Empowering Advisory Members: Building Partnerships - Handout 1

8. Be courteous. Always be polite but remember elected officials are people just like you. Most of the time they are “generalists” on issues. It is highly unlikely they understand the issue as well as you. Discuss the issue with them, do not lecture or be defensive. Generally, the assistants are generalists on issues too.
9. Leave a fact sheet—make it concise. Relate impact of the program on his/her constituents.
10. Appropriate follow-up. Always send a note of thanks for elected official’s time. Highlight positive response to any of the issues.



Communication Guidelines for Corresponding with a Policymaker

Preliminary Correspondence/Actions

- Write a “congratulations and looking forward to working with you” letter to each newly elected official.
- Provide maps for use of staff and volunteers, identifying the elected officials within the targeted geographic region.

Communication Formats and Guidelines

- 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*

- E-mail/fax Guidelines

When using e-mail to communicate with policymakers, be sure to include your name and address at the top of the e-mail message. This enhances the

chance of a response, because policymakers can easily see your residence and know if you are one of their constituents.

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).

Remember, that while e-mail and fax seem like an easy way to contact elected officials, not all will respond to these formats. Many officials still prefer hand-written notes or personal letters via the U.S. mail. Knowing your public policymaker's preferences concerning written correspondence is encouraged.

- Telephone Calls

Make sure you have developed a relationship or acquaintance first before attempting to phone your public official. A telephone call can quickly verify the position of your policymaker on issues important to Extension.

- Identify yourself and organization and your role in communications.
- Be brief and specific about points you need to make concerning accomplishments, funding needs, or issue of concern.
- Listen as well as speak. Find out what additional information the policymaker may need for decision-making.
- Remember that often times a staff member or Congressional aide will answer the call. Be sure to speak to the one who can handle the issue you are calling about.
- Follow up with written correspondence referencing communication points from telephone call.



Do You Know Your Policymakers?

LOCAL

CITY/COUNTY _____

NAME THE LOCAL POLICYMAKERS FOR THE CITY/COUNTY YOU SERVE

1. _____ 5. _____

2. _____ 6. _____

3. _____ 7. _____

4. _____ 8. _____

WHEN DO THE POLICYMAKERS MEET? _____

STATE

NAME THE STATE REPRESENTATIVE(S) FOR YOUR LOCAL JURISDICTION, ALSO THE DISTRICT (number) HE/SHE REPRESENTS.

POLITICAL PARTY _____

COMMITTEE(S)/LEADERSHIP _____

EDUCATION/OCCUPATION _____

WHERE DOES HE/SHE LIVE? _____

WHEN DID HE/SHE FIRST TAKE OFFICE? _____

PERSONAL INTERESTS _____

NAME YOUR STATE SENATOR(S) AND DISTRICT (number) _____

POLITICAL PARTY _____

COMMITTEE(S)/LEADERSHIP _____

EDUCATION/OCCUPATION _____

WHERE DOES HE/SHE LIVE? _____

WHEN DID HE/SHE FIRST TAKE OFFICE? _____

PERSONAL INTERESTS _____

FEDERAL

NAME THE FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVES FOR THE CITY/COUNTY YOU SERVE

1. CONGRESSIONAL (include direct number) _____

POLITICAL PARTY _____

COMMITTEE(S)/LEADERSHIP _____

LOCATION OF CLOSEST FIELD OFFICE _____

HOME (city or county) _____

NAME AT LEAST ONE OFFICE/FIELD STAFF PERSON

CLOSEST FIELD OFFICE _____

WASHINGTON, D.C. _____

2. SENATORS

NAME

NAME

POLITICAL PARTY

POLITICAL PARTY

COMMITTEE(S)/LEADERSHIP

COMMITTEE(S)/LEADERSHIP

LOCATION OF LOCAL OFFICE

LOCATION OF LOCAL OFFICE

HOME (city or county)

HOME (city or county)

Empowering Advisory Members: Building Partnerships - Handout 3

NAME AT LEAST ONE FIELD/OFFICE STAFF PERSON

NAME

NAME

LOCAL OFFICE

LOCAL OFFICE

WASHINGTON, D.C.

WASHINGTON, D.C.



Communicating with Policymakers: Plan for Building Partnerships

Determining an Action Plan for Communication

- Planning to communicate organizational accomplishments/needs should include arranging/attending one-to-one meeting with elected officials.
 - Extension organized strategies for individuals to meet policymakers include:
 - In the Cooperative Extension office
 - Invite to special interest meetings
 - Invite to tour local Cooperative Extension office
 - Invite to open house
 - Include on mailing lists
 - Develop an awareness all year long—through other efforts
 - In the community
 - Invite to Extension education or program event such as a field day or youth activity—ask them to bring greetings
 - Hold informational coffee/breakfast/luncheon meetings
 - Hold an information session for staff
 - Provide a tour of Extension programs
 - Ask elected official to serve on a committee
 - Provide official with copies of appropriate news releases or resource materials
 - Encourage Extension advisory board members to communicate to elected officials their story about Extension
 - Send personal letters/invitations to attend Extension programs
 - Interview the policymaker about needs and concerns of constituents, Extension’s role in the community and how best to keep them informed
 - Hold “ask the public official programs” to discuss a specific issue
 - Ask the policymaker offer their opinion on a specific issue
 - Invite policymaker to be present at recognition activities
 - Other activities

- Events, not organized by Extension, that provide opportunities to meet public officials include:
 - Attend meetings or events where elected officials will be present. Introduce yourself, and if appropriate, invite decision maker to upcoming programs, communicate to him/her about positive program happenings related to shared interests.
 - Request information and/or assistance related to shared interests
 - Other activities—take advantage of informal opportunities
- Keep appropriate administrators informed of contacts with policymakers.
- Periodically review contact and involvement with each elected official.
- After initial meetings with policymaker, develop more in-depth strategies for building relationships with the elected official or official's staff.
- At every staff and council meeting, report communication efforts and progress with policymakers.

Action Plan Follow-Up

- Work to summarize reports and accomplishments quarterly or annually for coordination at local and state levels.
- Partnering with an agency or organization for the first time should include time to communicate Extension's organization and mission for exploring opportunities for further cooperation. This also applies to new staff within an existing agency.
- Utilize the plan to keep other special interest groups and politically active volunteers informed of Extension's accomplishments and future vision.
- Write a thank you note to any outgoing policymaker – you never know what continuing influence one may have!





Communicating with Policymakers: Plan for Building Partnerships

Goal: *Forge stronger partnerships with local, state and federal public officials.*

1. Which level of government? Each level requires a separate plan.
_____ local/county
_____ state
_____ federal

2. What are the major factors that influence Extension's relationship with their officials?

For example:

- Are they or their family members users of Extension programs?
 - How long have they been in office? Are they new?
 - What are their interests?
-
3. What can be done to forge a stronger partnership?



Communicating with Policymakers: Plan for Building Partnerships

Name of policymaker?	Who is responsible for action?	What actions/contacts are needed?	Where/when will communication happen?

**EMPOWERING ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS:
BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS
AND COMMUNICATING
WITH POLICYMAKERS**

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The Changing Political Environment

- Understand the changes
- Determine how to build support
- Interpret and communicate accomplishments

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Principles Guiding the Strategy

- Multi-levels/multi-audiences
- Investment in the effort(s)
- Leadership roles and responsibilities
- Real life examples and personal experiences

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Meeting with a Public Policymaker

- Know the protocol
- Be organized
- Be specific
- Be courteous
- Appropriate follow up



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The Message

- Education—programs based on knowledge/research of university
- Access—the door to the university
- Relevance—helps people improve lives
- Linkages—partnership and network
- Value—an excellent investment!

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Steps to Communication and Building Partnerships with Policymakers

1. Preliminary correspondence/actions
2. Communication guidelines
3. Know your policymakers
4. Developing an action plan
5. Follow through with assignments and timeline



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Summary

- Building partnerships with public policymakers involves communication strategies within the organizational structure.
- Developing and implementing a plan with multi-strategies/multi levels should be exercised on a continuum.
- Stronger partnerships with policymakers will result in increased understanding, communication and support for Extension.


