

POLICYMAKER OUTREACH TOOLKIT

TIPS FOR POLICY MAKER OUTREACH A WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH TOBACCO PREVENTION AND CONTROL PROGRAM

Overview

This toolkit includes essential information that can help you be successful in advocating for and developing policies. The information and materials were created for the *You Have the Power: Achieving Success in the Political Process through Effective Communication with Elected Officials*; and *The Power of Policy: Advancing Chronic Disease Prevention and Control* workshops conducted by the Washington State Department of Health Tobacco Prevention and Control Program and Healthy Communities Washington Initiative, in coordination with the Washington Healthy Communities Resource Center in the Fall of 2009.

Tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure have decreased dramatically in Washington State since 2000. This is not the case for all populations. In fact, the results are greater tobacco-related disparities. When speaking to policymakers it is important to educate them on these disparities and why specific policies are needed to reduce them. Many policymakers at the national, state and local levels are actively involved in this work. Advocates should seek ways to incorporate messages regarding addressing these disparities as part of their educational, advocacy or lobbying efforts, as it can be persuasive with many policymakers. Changing policies can be a very effective strategy for improving health and reducing health disparities. However, policies affect individuals and groups in different ways. When advocating for or developing policies, think about any unintended consequences that might occur and seek ways to lessen their impact.

The information in the toolkit is designed to give you basic guidance on how to educate decision makers, policymakers, and state elected officials of the benefits of your local tobacco prevention programs as well as any relevant policy proposals. With the current budget crisis, policymakers more than ever have competing priorities, so being clear and strategic about your time with policymakers has never been more important.

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Topic Areas

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I. Policy Development Framework

- Background
- Partnerships and Collaborations
- Identify An Issue
- Determine Policy Options
- Review Feasibility Variables
- Develop an Advocacy Plan
- Implementation and Adaptation
- Evaluation and Analysis

Policymaker Outreach

A. Your Role in Policymaker Education

TIP: Advocacy and Lobbying are not the same – educating about an issue is not lobbying

Advocacy: Speaking up; to plead a cause, make the case for another.

Lobbying: Attempts to influence decisions of legislators about a pending piece of legislation.

Role Clarity

The first thing to do is determine your role; i.e. what “hat” will you wear to do what kind of communication? *Education* is a form of advocacy that, in this context, usually refers to someone that is providing technical information (i.e., research, program information) to a policymaker. *Advocacy* is a broad term that refers to any kind of persuasive communication or activity. *Lobbying* is a more formal term that is defined specifically in state and federal law. When a tobacco prevention contractor engages in activity that is paid for by the tobacco contract, that contractor is “standing in the shoes” of DOH and must, with very few exceptions, NOT engage in any formal lobbying. The contractor, using DOH funds, can still engage in *advocacy* and *education*.

If the tobacco contractor wants to engage in direct lobbying, **it is strongly advised** that the contractor find non-public discretionary sources to engage in such activity. Of course, individuals, on their own time, can always engage in lobbying efforts.

Here are a few things to think about with respect to your role as advocates. As noted above, much of what you are likely to do is *education* and *general advocacy*, not *lobbying*, but such efforts can still pay dividends for people, programs, and issues you care about.

1. **The Power of Education: Information and Interpretation – Wearing “Your Public Hat”:**

Educating policymakers can take many forms, but the kind of information noted below can be very influential in the policy development process:

- Giving background/history
- Sharing data and statistics
- Providing budget estimates
- Explaining what proposed changes in laws would mean
- Telling program success stories
- Educating the public
- Participating in local, state, or national associations
- Inviting policy makers to site visits (visiting programs are especially favored, as they can also be media opportunities for an elected official as well as the program)

- Explaining regulations and how they are developed
- Being accessible to advocates – helps you reflect their views accurately
- Mentoring others who do any/all of the above

Bottom Line: think of your job as including:

- Outreach:** You can and should reach out to community groups; help them be more effective advocates.
- Motivation:** By making laws and policies understandable, you motivate others to get involved and to speak up.
- Basic Tools:** Information about visits, letters, and [telephone trees](#).

Careful Communication: You can NOT:

- Abuse your role
- Speak for your agency unless it is your assigned job
- Trade on your position as an agency employee when lobbying as a private citizen
- Use public resources (e.g., computer, salaried time, copy machine) to lobby.

However, you do not give up your rights as a citizen to speak up on your own time, using your own resources and in your own personal style. And you DO have the right to help others be more effective advocates for themselves, their families, their communities, and the programs that help them.

2. Citizen Advocacy – You do have the right:

While tobacco prevention contractors are, in that particular role, clearly limited in their formal lobbying, they can exert influence in many other ways. For example, they CAN:

- Join groups or coalitions as “informational members” or unlisted members
- Influence unions as to their positions; participate through unions
- Exert influence through membership on faith-based community committees or as part of professional organizations
- Encourage family members and friends to play active roles
- Participate in local, state, or national advocacy groups
- Serve on non-profit agency boards and/or contribute to their newsletters
- Be part of letter and/or [telephone trees](#)
- Aid in issue campaigns, provide reports, statistics, etc.
- Help others understand the process as well as specific bills/policies
- Help organize retirees – they can talk about things current employees can’t (e.g. some current workers are bound by confidentiality; retirees are not)
- Attend lobby days – just be sure to take the day off if you plan to lobby
- Supervise interns, let advocates “shadow” you
- Speak at classes, congregations, PTAs, or other community groups.

- Distribute “tools” such as voter registration forms, League of Women Voter pamphlets, etc.

Additional Resources

[Lobbying and Advocacy WITH PUBLIC FUNDS](#), [PDF] Victor Colman, Senior Policy Advisor, Division of Community and Family Health, Washington State Department of Health, May 2004. A guidance tool that differentiates lobbying and educational activities when doing policymaker outreach.

[Guidelines for Advocacy: Changing Policies and Laws to Create Safer Environments for Youth](#), [PDF] CADCA, (Strategizer – A series of technical assistance manuals for community coalitions)

B. Know Your Policymaker

Do not underestimate the power of having genuine knowledge and understanding of the background and personal interests of the policymaker(s) you are trying to reach. The following information can apply to many types of decision makers (i.e., board members, elected officials, superintendents, etc.):

- What have they done, believed or fought for, that might be helped by supporting your issue? (An illness they or a family member has had? A charity they are involved with? A philosophy they often espouse?)
- How is your policymaker employed?
- What does his/her spouse do for a living? Do they have children? What do they do?
- What is your policymaker’s educational background?
- What organizations is he/she involved in?
- Which legislative committees does he/she serve on?
- Resources: If statewide, start with the [Washington State Legislature web site](#), as well as the pictorial directory printed by the legislature. Campaign material, the local grapevine, newspapers, Internet sites, and your personal network can help you learn more information about your elected official.

TIP: Remember, you don’t have any friends in politics, only allies

Alliances shift from issue to issue. Today’s foe may be tomorrow’s staunch supporter. Never burn your bridges. You may not always find it, but always look for some acceptable result for everyone involved in an issue. Perhaps Billy Frank, Nisqually Tribal Elder and Chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission said it best: “Everyone needs to see a future”

C. Crafting Your Message: Persuasive Advocacy

Think of this type of communication as persuasive education. Please remember this is not the time to tell every detail of your program. Package your issue: talk solutions; speak fairly; say it simply and directly. When preparing your “pitch” keep the following in mind:

- Be persuasive; keep jargon at a minimum, be concise and to the point, reinforce good decision making, communicate before decisions are made, and meet changing needs
- Build trust by being dependable and honest. Remember you represent others and do not forget what you communicate may be shared

- Pick your priority issue for discussion (Do not discuss multiple issues at the same time! What are the five words you want the legislator to remember?)
- Don't assume policymakers are as knowledgeable as you about your issue. What are the few most important bits of background they absolutely need to understand?
- If there is an argument about an issue, give both sides fairly
- Provide solutions and alternatives; not puzzles or problems
- Never argue the possibilities, i.e. "if's"
- Base your pitch on the facts. Unless you represent a victim's point of view, nothing turns off a policymaker more than an emotional argument without any substance
- Use local data. You can find county specific data, such as local statistics and activity sheets, for your county on the DOH contractor web site under [Assessment and Evaluation](#).
- Finally, rehearse your message; be able to tell your story in five (5) minutes.

Writing a policymaker:

- Identify yourself and your reason for writing
- Be brief—keep your correspondence to one page if at all possible (and stick to one issue)
- Tell the policymaker why the issue you are writing about is important to you
- If a statewide official, stress any local implications
- Be specific
- Report the good news too
- Use positive reinforcement

Telephoning a policymaker:

- Have your written message in front of you before/during the call
- As with letter writing, keep the message simple and concise
- Ask for specific action on the part of the legislator and make sure you know (or will soon be informed of) the legislator's position on your issue.

Informal Strategies:

- Invite a policymaker to address a meeting of your organization
- Invite your policymaker to visit a program that you administer or work in
- Recognition and awards
- Attend "town meetings" and other forums sponsored by your policymaker
- Volunteer to work in political campaigns.

Tip: Any policy development process is set up to answer three questions: You can help provide information to determine the answers to all three. It's part of the job.

1. Is the bill a good idea?
2. Is the bill a good use for tax dollars?
3. Is the bill able to win support of 51% of voters?

D. Meeting Tips and Tricks - Set up a meeting with a legislator and run it successfully

Making the initial contact is as easy as picking up the phone or writing a letter. Suggest a meeting place that is easy and comfortable for him/her; i.e. a local coffee shop or restaurant. The meeting should last no more than 15 minutes. Make your pitch. Keep in mind the following:

- Don't feel uncomfortable if you didn't vote for him/her. Legislators are elected to serve all of the people in the district. They want to be helpful regardless of your political affiliation or past votes
- Tell the whole story
- Always tell the truth about anything you are asked
- If you don't know an answer, admit you do not know the answer, but offer to get the answer and then follow-up promptly!
- Don't ask the politically impossible
- Make your request specific and reasonable, both politically and substantively. (e.g., will you sponsor this bill? Will you offer this amendment?)
- Don't discuss politics or personalities unless you are good friends.

Communicating About a Policy Idea:

- If you are contacting a policymaker about a specific proposal, do not assume he/she has every proposal memorized. Policymakers, especially those at the state level, must deal with hundreds of bills and can't be familiar with the details of each one. Be safe; assume he/she has little or no specific knowledge about the bill
- When supporting a specific idea, ask where the policymaker stands on it. As a constituent, you have a right to know
- Learn how to count. Don't be misled by an evasive answer. A reply such as "You've got me 99 percent convinced", or "I'm voting with my friends", often translates into a vote against your position
- Be a closer. If your policymaker is still noncommittal after your discussion, ask when he/she plans to make a decision and what information you can provide to help in the process. Be polite, but persistent. Do NOT leave without clarifying the position of the policymaker
- Create a reason to follow up – this will ensure a reminder opportunity on the idea or issue
- Be prepared to answer questions

Preparing Testimony:

- Do your homework
- Know your facts
- Be prepared to be brief (perhaps as little as 30 seconds)
- Find out who else is testifying at the same hearing with you. If they are opposed to your position, anticipate and counter their arguments in your testimony
- Determine the best person to serve as the witness who presents testimony
- Include in your testimony evidence to support your position; i.e. real-life examples of the impact of the legislation, and alternatives for those areas of the legislation that you oppose
- If you are asked a question and do not have the answer, say so.

Additional Resources

[*You Have the Power: Achieving Success in the Political Process through Effective Communication with Elected Officials*](#),

Julie Peterson (WHCRC/TPCP Fall 2009 training workshop slide presentation) (PDF)

[*What You Can Tell Your Legislator*](#) (sample DOH Talking Points) (PDF)

[Link to Local County Data/Fact Sheets](#)

E. Determining the Messenger

It is prudent to have multiple community members communicating with local legislators regarding the importance and outcomes of your program. Community partners, program beneficiaries, and others who are directly involved or benefit from your work should be solicited as advocates. Once you receive clarification from your agency regarding your own parameters around communicating with legislators on behalf of your agency, also strategize with others that may also meet with your local legislators to communicate program benefits. Groups usually should be no more than five. One person should be designated as the spokesperson. The spokesperson should be prepared to give a brief overview of the program, outcomes (local data rules!), and a short story illustrating program success to engage the legislator or staff person. A fact sheet that has four to five program outcomes and contact information should be prepared in advance and presented during the meeting.

F. Tracking Legislative Session

The legislative session moves quickly and it can be difficult to track bills and know when to advocate for your issues. The easiest way to stay on top of tobacco issues is to sign-up for advocacy alerts. The American Heart Association and American Cancer Society both employ full-time lobbyists who track tobacco and lobby tobacco issues during session. You can sign up for advocacy alerts by clicking on the links below. Please do not use program resources to send/receive advocacy alerts.

[American Heart Association](#)

There are annual lobbying days. For example in this current legislative session, Awareness and Education Day was Friday, February 5, 2010. Information will be distributed via sign-up to their system or you may contact Lucy directly.

Lucy Culp, Washington Government Affairs Director

American Heart Association/American Stroke Association - Pacific/Mountain Affiliate

Office: 206-834-8658

Cell: 360 -870-4016

lucy.culp@heart.org

[American Cancer Society](#)

Lobby Day was Tuesday, January 26, 2010.

ACS can send lobby day information via their action network.

Erin Dziedzic, Washington State Government Relations Director
American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACS CAN)
Office: 206-674-4114
Cell: 425-466-5177
Erin.Dziedzic@cancer.org

Legislative Hotline: 1-800-562-6000 to leave messages for your legislators.

To track bills: www.leg.wa.gov

G. Sample Presentations About Local Program

Fact sheets are important tools to share during your meetings with policymakers and/or their staff representatives. Your fact sheets should emphasize the points you are making about your program, initiative, bill, or budget item. A good fact sheet includes:

- Brief, clear writing (no more than 1-2 pages in length)
- Short paragraphs (2-3 sentences) or bullet points
- Jargon-free language and spelled out acronyms
- Citations for all research references.

Sample marketing materials and resources

[Link to Local County Data/Fact Sheets](#)

[County Contractor Newsletter Template](#)

[Sample Talking Points](#)

Swiss cheese Press Releases – *contact your DOH TPCP Contract Manager for specific examples*

H. The Need for Follow-up

Be proactive -- never underestimate the power of effective follow-up. Remember - you are trying to build a relationship with the policymaker and their staff. Nothing creates trust better than doing what you said you would do during the meeting:

- Immediately after the meeting, record what occurred—who you met with, issues discussed, responses received, and any follow-up needed
- Write a thank-you letter to the official. Summarize points made and include any follow-up information requested
- Don't expect a policymaker to remember your name and face. Introduce yourself every time you meet
- Keep up your contacts
- Keep aware of opportunities
- If your policymaker has an electronic newsletter, sign up to receive it
- Attend Town Hall meetings with your state legislators
- Send new program outcomes or press releases to key policymakers
- Invite key policymakers to programs or activities you are holding.

Fundamental Policy Development Components

I. [Policy Development Framework](#)

- Background
- Partnerships and Collaborations
- Identify an Issue
- Determine Policy Options
- Review Feasibility Variables
- Develop an Advocacy Plan
- Implementation and Adaptation
- Evaluation and Analysis

BACKGROUND

The work of public health has been divided into three core functions: *assessment, policy development, and assurance*. These functions are interconnected, and none can be successful without the others. Policy development is the core function that has received the least amount of attention in public health education, practice, and continuing education. At the same time, intentional and strategic policy development is becoming a central tool and focus for public health, especially with regards to primary prevention via changes in personal behavior.

In an era that demands evidence-based action in health care, it is important to use a systematic process to ensure effective decision-making. The proposed [policy development framework](#) attempts to connect four large elements of policy development: *partnerships and collaboration, prioritizing policy choices, advocacy, and policy implementation*. At the same time, this framework shows the interrelationship among assessment, policy development, and assurance activities. The following narrative will help describe how to best use the framework in the real world of policy development and implementation.

At the outset, some definition of terms is needed. While **“Policy”** is usually considered to be in the domain of government (bills, statutes, ordinances), private institutions also play a role in public health prevention; **“Environmental Prevention”** uses policy interventions to create or change social and physical environments that support healthy, safe behavior; and **“Systems Change”** refers to the process of improving the capacity of a system or group of systems to work with multiple sectors to improve some aspect of the health status for all people in a defined community. Think about all of the health-related policies in the workplace sector, i.e., second hand smoke, infectious disease restrictions, or having fragrance-free areas. While some of these directives can be driven by government policy, the workplace as a private setting is another venue where formal policy and environmental or systems change can be created to effect change.

PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS – STAGE 1

These concepts are not new to the work of public health. However, nurturing these relationships takes on a different cast when placed in the policy development framework. Here, the goal is not program design and implementation, but rather sorting, promoting, enacting, and implementing policy change. While public health has learned that their voice alone in the policy change process is not sufficient, their input is still critical in all stages of policy development. The question here is “who is involved and how?” Thus, building coalitions and partnerships as an explicit way to effect policy change becomes a critical feature in successful policy development.

POLICY ANALYSIS AND PRIORITIZATION – STAGES 2-4

These concepts are typically called out in most policy development models. Stage 1 identifies an issue - public health is very comfortable with much of this work –defining issues and discussing the relative merits of various proposals. Data is obviously a critical element to define a policy issue. In stages 2 and 3 two questions are asked: one, **should something be done?** (i.e., is there an issue that needs to be tackled?); and, two, if so, **what should be done?** The first question relates to the need for core public health information/data (the burden of disease, the urgency, the perceived need), while the second includes issues around the level of policy needed, evidence-base, affordability, and community acceptability.

Health Disparities When speaking to policymakers it is important to educate them on these disparities and why specific policies are needed to reduce them. Good policies can be effective tools in addressing disparities. They can also result in unintended outcomes that can make the disparities worse. It is important when developing, advocating for or implementing policies to be thoughtful about both the intended and unintended consequences of each policy.

Additional Resources

[Link to Local County Data/Fact Sheets](#)

STAGE 4 continues the analysis by asking: **can it be done?** These concepts are less typical as they wade into the murkier waters of politics, advocacy, and some early forecasting of policy implementation. A critical element is the notion of political, programmatic, and social feasibility and opportunity. Sometimes, finding (or creating) political opportunity can be a critical factor in this part of the equation.

ADVOCACY – STAGE 5

Developing an advocacy plan is another essential requirement for getting the idea or policy priority into law. Key questions to think about: *Do you have a legislative champion? Who are your key statewide partners that will effectively communicate to stakeholders? Do you have grass roots support? Do you and your partners understand your role in advocacy and lobbying?*

Evaluation must be thought of prior to policy implementation. The key questions here are; what is your baseline and how will you measure the results? Do not forget that the media and the impacted communities are two groups with critical roles in telling the story of those results.

Additional Resources

Swiss cheese Press Releases - *contact your DOH TPCP Contract Manager for specific examples*

[Template newsletter](#)

[Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids](#)

POLICY IMPLEMENTATION – STAGE 6

At the other end of the framework is perhaps the least intuitive aspect of the model. Implementation includes two major ideas: policy implementation and evaluation. Implementation asks the question “what type of support is needed?” Understanding how a policy can be placed into current reality – how it is to be operationalized – is one major component of implementation. Again, the media and the impacted community are two groups with potentially critical roles, especially with regards to enforcement. Successful policy implementation is often dependent upon clear, consistent and sustained enforcement. Media and community members can help keep the issue at the forefront of the entities charged with accountability and enforcement. Further, in some settings, community members can be the local “eyes and ears” and assist with enforcement efforts. The interests of the media and the affected community can also begin the process of assessing policy impacts, which in turn could lead to policy modification.

Additional Resources

Swiss cheese Press Releases – *contact your DOH TPCP Contract Manager for specific examples*

[Template newsletter](#)

POLICY EVALUATION – STAGE 7

The other main component is evaluation – Can any anticipated policy changes be measured? “What happened and what difference did it make?” In this era of heightened accountability, the ability to set up and tell an

outcomes story is central to sustained policy impacts. To be clear, both these concepts – implementation and evaluation -- are critical to assess when analyzing policy options, and not after the policy was enacted.

In sum, successful policy development requires good ideas that are based on credible evidence (data) and can be implemented and measured in the real world, driven by mobilization strategies that can include multiple partners and coalitions.

Tip: Policy development is a fluid process. It doesn't happen overnight and sometimes it can take years to see the fruits of your efforts. Don't be discouraged when you don't see immediate change.

Additional Resources

[The Power of Policy: Advancing Chronic Disease Prevention and Control](#), Victor Colman and Robbi Kay Norman (WHCRC/Healthy Communities Washington November 2009 training workshops slide presentation) (PDF)

[Health Policy Guide](#), TTAC and Center for Health Improvement

POLICY DEVELOPMENT: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

