STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING AND SUPPORTING LEGISLATORS

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OVERVIEW

- Legislative Process
- Avenues for Researchers’ Engagement
- Example: Research to Policy Collaboration Project
AGENDAS AND ALTERNATIVES

▶ The legislative agenda
  • Not a linear process
  • National mood
  • Media’s short attention span
  • Quantifying problems and attaching acceptable solutions

▶ Alternatives – a range of possible solutions
  • Small, incremental steps toward changing status quo

▶ Consensus building: persuasion and bargaining
  • Political champions – support and use their influence to garner colleagues’ support

Kingdon, 2012
POLICY WINDOW

- **Brief periods of opportunity**
  - Advocates to push pet solutions or attention to specific problems
  - Flexibility and adaptability is necessary

- **Shifts in Policy Arena**
  - Agendas and plausible alternatives align
  - Changes in political offices

- **Example: Affordable Healthcare Act**
  - Democrat President, Senate, and House
  - Healthcare became a public priority during the election

Kingdon, 2012
LEGISLATIVE ARENA

- **Committees** - Specific Jurisdiction boundaries
  - Senate
  - House of Representatives
- Caucuses – common legislative objectives
- Interest Groups – unified, external voice
- Bipartisan / non-partisan practices - Equal inclusion of both parties
- (Un)Written rules and etiquette
  - Partisan norms
  - Transparency vs. “Middle of the night”
  - “Turf” and credit
LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

1. Referral to Committee
2. Committee Action
3. Subcommittee Review
4. Mark up
5. Committee Action to Report a Bill
6. Publication of a Written Report
7. Scheduling Floor Action
8. Debate
9. Voting
10. Referral to Other Chamber
11. Conference Committee Action
12. Final Action
13. Overriding a Veto

Find info about existing bills at the Thomas Library of Congress: https://www.congress.gov/

http://congress.org/advocacy-101/the-legislative-process/
Most bills die in the committee of the chamber the bill was introduced

- 4% of bills became law in the 110th Congress (2007-09) (Sunlight Labs)

**Mark-up** – legislation is debated, amend, or re-written (in committee)

**Hotlining** – Senate approval by unanimous consent

**Conference** – Resolving differences between chambers (Senate vs. House versions of legislation)
HOW RESEARCHERS CAN PLAY A ROLE

- Before Committee (e.g., model legislation)
- During Committee (e.g., expert testimony)
- On the floor for a vote (e.g., advocacy)
- After it becomes law (implementation, appropriations, regulations)
AVENUES FOR ACTION

- Correspondence and Relationships
- Policy briefs
- Congressional Briefings
- Expert Witness Testimony
- Model Legislation
CORRESPONDENCE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Schedule a meeting with Staff
- By committee or in your district
- Persevere – you may have to request a meeting many times
- Staff have more flexibility when Congress is out of session

Prepare yourself
- Investigate the legislators’ priorities
- Frame a key message
- Provide resources
- What follow up will you asking of the staff?

Set realistic expectations
- Policymakers respond to a range of stakeholders, not just scientists
- You’re not likely to change their values
- Focus on where there’s common ground

Relationship Building Strategies
- Put on your non-judgmental hat
- Active listening
- Non-biased objectivity
- Transparency
POLICY BRIEFS

- Target audience - Informs recommendation development (e.g. feasible?) and frame

- Comprehensive but short: 1-2 pages (~1500 words plus reference list)
  - Short, catchy title
  - Appealing layout with CLEAR key points (highlighting key points in bold; use bullets; graphs)

- Practical and Action-oriented with viable recommendations

- Analysis-driven
  - Facts and evidence (e.g., quantify problem)
  - Multiple reputable sources

- Examples:
  - Ensuring Evidence has Impact (Implementation brief by NPSC)
  - Health Disparities for LGBT Youth (by APA)
CONGRESSIONAL BRIEFINGS

- Panel of speakers on a specific issue
  - Engaging presentations for lay-audiences
  - Handouts and/or powerpoints

- Planning – 2 months out:
  - Identify Congressional sponsor
  - Invite Congresspersons from both parties – BIPARTISAN
  - Reserve a room on Capitol Hill
  - Confirm speakers
  - Announce and advertise

- Examples:  [http://www.npscoalition.org/#!congressional-briefings/cee5](http://www.npscoalition.org/#!congressional-briefings/cee5)
EXPERT TESTIMONY

- Call for Testimony
  - Public document
  - Issued by Assembly, Senate, Committee, Task Force, or Agency

- Review:
  - Target audience (e.g., bi-partisan? For a specific committee?)
  - When (evening vs work day)
  - Location
  - Participation rules (e.g. time limits; need for approval)
  - Written testimony requirements
  - Multiple witnesses

- Timely response

- Cite and attach relevant publications

- Involve the press

MODEL LEGISLATION

- Development of rules, regulation, or legislation
  - Assess / modify existing legislation
  - Draft new legislation
  - Problems well solved in one community can be applied to others

- Guide for drafting legislation
  - 4 types of legislation
  - Sections within a bill
  - Provisions

- Other drafting manuals, including those for different states

- Examples:
  - National Juvenile Justice Network and Reclaiming Futures

Chris Corbett, 2015
RESEARCH TO POLICY COLLABORATION PROJECT (RPC)

Goals: Translating Research into Policy

- Prepare research-oriented professionals for working as knowledge brokers (Dobbins et al., 2009)
- Initiate productive, working relationships between researchers and legislative offices

Methods

- Legislative Needs Assessments
- NPSC Member Recruitment
- Webinar trainings
- Rapid Response Meetings on Capitol Hill
- Follow-up tasks
Progress to Date

- 10 researchers met with 10 offices (teams of ~5)
- Provided over 100 resources based on offices’ interests
- Planning a briefing on strategies to combat opiate epidemic
- Planning a hearing on dual-status youth
- Planning four research briefs
- Consulting on pending legislation

Reflections

- Some matches between researchers and offices were better than others
- Immense planning doesn’t negate inevitable curve balls

Future Directions

- Manualizing the approach
- Replicating in other content areas
- Research and evaluation of the approach
FINAL REMARKS ON INTERACTING WITH LEGISLATIVE OFFICES

CITE AND PROVIDE RESOURCES!

- Legislators lack time to chase down key sources or documents

Respect Legislative staffers

- Realistically, you will work with staff, not legislators

Be Prepared

- Bring materials to share, stick to the key message

Be Flexible

- Don’t be surprised if you’re asked about another issue or concern

Express gratitude

- Send a Thank You Note