

Overview of Public Policymaking Workshop



Caitie Whelan

Nearly everything in life - from the air we breathe, water we drink, food we eat to the roads we drive/bike/walk and the skies we fly - is shaped by public policy.

- The core promise of American democracy is that we have a **say** in it.
- If you know how gov't works, you can help make gov't work **better**.
- Democracy doesn't just happen once every four years during a Presidential election; it is a **365-day enterprise!**
- Voting is the **first** step in the democratic process, but should not be the **only** step. **Understanding how to influence policy is the next step!**

3 ESSENTIAL TOOLS

TO HELP SHAPE THE LAWS YOU LIVE UNDER

If we are to make good on democracy's core promise that we get to have a say in shaping the laws we live under, it's key to know how to participate in the policymaking that happens between elections, when the bills that become the laws we live under are written.

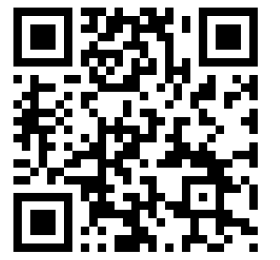
1. KNOW YOUR PEOPLE

We each have six politicians who represent us on the combined local, state, and federal level - they are our most direct voice to shaping the laws we live under.

1. **Local:** Commissioner/councilor or selectperson
2. **State:** One state representative and one state senator (unless you live in Nebraska where your state representation is just one state senator).
3. **Federal:** One U.S. House Representative and two U.S. Senators.

Congress is only passing **2% of bills**, so most of the country's policymaking is happening at the state-level. But only **20% of Americans** can name their state senator/representative. So if we reach out to them, if we are respectful and kind, we could make a real impact in shaping public policy.

FIND YOUR STATE AND FEDERAL POLITICIANS



3. KNOW THEIR DISTRICT

Politicians vote for things that benefit their district and their voters. If you want to know how a politician will vote on something, figure out how it impacts their district.

The more we understand about a politician's district - the major employers, industries, crops, natural resources, demographics, etc. - the more we can understand a politician's decision making.

When speaking with politicians or their staff, only use credible data.

2. KNOW THEIR POWER

Which level of government has power over your issue? Conduct a quick article search to find information on your issue and which politicians are being interviewed about it - whichever level of government that politician serves in is likely the level of government that has some say over our issue.

- Seniority
- Committee
- Productivity

For state and federal politicians (most local governments use committees differently than state legislatures and Congress)

- **Seniority:** Generally speaking, the longer a politician has served, the most power they have - to get their bills passed, projects funded, etc.
- **Committees:** For a bill to become law, it first needs to pass out of Committee, meaning Committee members are uniquely positioned to help or hurt a bill's destiny. It's super useful to learn what committees your politicians serve on. If there's an issue we care about that falls in the jurisdiction of one of their committees, they can be a potential ally to us.
- **Productivity:** Introducing a bill is easy - **17,817** were introduced last Congress. But passing a bill is much harder. Only 365 of those 17,817 bills (2%) became law. Before you reach out to a politician, figure out if they're serious about passing bills and getting stuff done.



KEY CONSIDERATIONS WHEN REACHING OUT TO POLITICIANS (and their staff)

Kindness & Respect

Approach your politician with kindness, care, and respect.

Not only is it the right thing to do, it is also much easier to be heard by politicians if we are decent and honest with them.

It is important to model the kind of values and behaviors we want and expect from them as they represent our community.

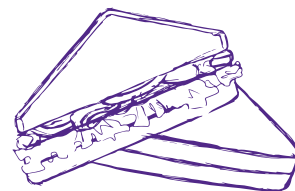
Speak Their Language

Everything we do with a politician signals to them if they can trust us or not. The more we speak their language and understand their reality, the more they will see we are a reliable ally.

- Address them using their formal title (Senator, Representative, etc).
- If reaching out via email, include your address so it's clear you're a constituent.
- Ask for a meeting when they are least busy (i.e. not in session)

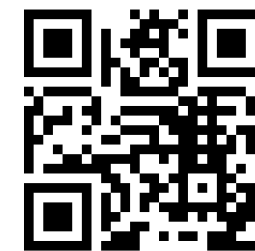
Thank You Sandwich

Use a thank-you sandwich. In the beginning, thank them for their service and work, then describe your request, then thank them for their time.



ADVICE FOR PREPARING TO VOTE

- Check out vote.org
- Ask people you trust what they are reading and sources they follow.
- After reading an article or posting, check-in with yourself. How are you feeling after you read it?



HELPFUL TERMS

- Legislator: politician
- Legislation: bills
- Legislature: where politicians work
- Policy: An idea or plan of action (in legislatures, the form this takes is a bill)
- Politics: The power to move that idea forward

We are building the world we want to live in as we are building it. We will not have a kinder world if we work for it unkindly.

Watch workshop the recordings here:



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