

IFAS Leadership Development: Getting Involved in Public Affairs ¹

Elizabeth B. Bolton²

Recommendations for Leader Training

- Prepare to teach this lesson by reading and familiarizing yourself with the objectives, materials, handouts and exercises.
- Begin preparation several days in advance in order to secure whatever additional resources you need to make the lesson a “local” learning experience.
- Plan a learning environment with care so that the surroundings contribute to the achievement of the objectives.
- Begin on time, and end on time. Schedule a break at about halfway through the lesson.
- With each lesson after the first one, ask participants what they did as a result of the previous lesson. Record these!
- Introduce each lesson with an overview of how it fits into the overall major leadership development program.
- End each lesson with a summary and restatement of objectives. Explain what the participants are expected to do with the lesson after they leave.

- Heighten anticipation for the next lesson by sharing a brief description of it, but be cautious not to give too much away.

The IFAS Leadership Development Packet of eleven modules was developed for use by Florida Cooperative Extension agents. They were designed for training agents and officers, and not for general distribution to the public. Handouts for audience use are labeled and printed on white paper. These may be duplicated for use during class.

Each lesson is designed for a workshop approximately two hours long. Use your judgement on shortening or expanding various parts according to the needs of your participants.

Objectives

1. To encourage involvement in local public affairs.
2. To learn how to testify at a public hearing.
3. To learn techniques on how to write public officials.

Lesson Outline

Introduction and Overview of Objectives (20 minutes)

- *How to Use Power*

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Group Lecture and Exercise (45 minutes)

- *Public Hearings*
- *How to Make a Presentation*

Break (5 minutes)

Group Lecture and Exercise (30 minutes)

- *How to Write Government Officials*

Group Lecture and Exercise (20 minutes)

- *Update Your Legislative IQ*
- *Involve the Whole Family*

Summary and Evaluation

Total time 2 Hours

Lesson Plan -- Getting Involved in Public Affairs

Step 1 -- 20 minutes

State objectives and write them on the chalkboard.

Present *How to Use Power* as background for objectives. Emphasize that knowing how to deal with the power structure is a prerequisite to change problem solving and goal reaching.

Use *Points to Remember* as a summary of these steps. Write these on chalkboard.

Step 2 -- 45 minutes

Use *Public Hearings* for background lecture. Emphasize the purpose of public hearings, and that preparation is essential.

Discuss:

1. How many have attended public hearings? Have them describe experience.
2. How many have given testimony at a public hearing?

Use *How to Make a Presentation* as lecture for giving testimony at a public hearing. Ask participants to take notes on key points. Ask each person to attend a public hearing and evaluate various speakers using what they learned.

Then ask them to prepare a brief testimony for a real or hypothetical public hearing.

Step 3 -- 30 minutes

Present *How to Write Government Officials* as lecture. Have participants take notes on key points.

Use *How to Write Government Officials Exercise* as a handout.

Ask each participant to write a letter to a local, state or federal official using the points they learned in the lesson. Furnish with paper and envelopes. Ask if they intend to mail letters.

Be prepared to furnish names and addresses of all local officials. Use booklets included for state officials.

Step 4 -- 20 minutes

Use *Update Your Legislative IQ* as a handout and discussion guide.

Use *Involve the Whole Family* for brief lecture.

Re-emphasize key points made in each step and restate objectives.

Evaluate session. Ask for questions and suggestions. Adjourn.

How to Use Power

To make change happen, an organization must deal with a variety of power structures within the community. Knowing how to deal with power effectively is a key ingredient for reaching the goals of the organization.

Kinds of Power

EXECUTIVE POWER

The power to give orders and have them carried out is executive power. Elected officials, business executives, agency directors, and other bosses have executive power. Identify who can give the order you want to have carried out and find out how to reach that person. Be aware that any individual's power is limited; know how much you can reasonably expect.

FINANCIAL POWER

Money -- getting, giving or withholding it -- confers financial power. The government gets money by collecting taxes, and in return gives money or services. Lobbying

groups and special interest groups try to influence the way government uses this money.

In the private sector, banks, businesses, foundations, and funding agencies may collect money through income, investments or donations and give it out in profits or services.

Consumers and citizens exercise financial power when they buy, and when they choose not to buy, products or services.

INFLUENCE

Another kind of power is influence. It is exercised by the media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines), by organized groups (lobbyists, special interest groups, citizen organizations), by individuals (acknowledged experts, former officeholders, community leaders), and by the Grapevine (word of mouth).

LAWS AND REGULATIONS

Laws can limit or enable individuals' or organizations' power. They are made by legislators at the state and federal level and by ordinances and resolutions at the local level. Citizen pressure can change, eliminate, or help create new laws.

Regulations are made by government agencies to carry out laws. They set standards for how things may or may not be done. It is easier to change a law than to change a regulation because legislators are directly responsible to the public; bureaucrats who make regulations are not. Sometimes the only way to change a regulation is to make or change a law.

When establishing new community service programs, find out which laws and regulations apply. Compliance with regulations may raise the cost of providing a service.

TRADITION

"We always do it that way." Examine the traditional framework in your community. Does your project fit comfortably? Does it make minor changes? Or is it radically different? A project that differs a great deal from the way "we always do it" will require more explanation to the community before it will be accepted.

Power Clusters

Organizations and individuals who are all interested in the same thing form power clusters. For example, the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society and Florida Fish and Game Commission might all focus on wildlife issues. A power cluster is sometimes called a coalition.

Coordination with other agencies and groups interested in similar issues can strengthen your organization. A search for such groups may also reveal groups who oppose your goals. Knowing the opposition's arguments will increase your ability to deal with them effectively.

Power clusters communicate with each other and form power networks. For example, the oil and gas companies, the mining companies, and the lumber companies may form a network to focus on issues involving public lands. Individual members may also form networks. Find and join networks appropriate to your organization; they are often sources of advice and expertise for moving your program forward.

Identify the gatekeepers or information brokers within and among networks. These may be the administrative aide, the county clerk, the volunteer who serves on several committees, or anyone who gives and receives information for organizations. These are your resources.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL STRUCTURES

Formal Power Structures include people who hold offices, titles or executive power in government, the private sector or citizen organizations.

Informal Power Structures are composed of people who work for the formal power structures and people who can influence the decisions made by the formal power structures. These are administrative assistants, secretaries, consultants, etc. Identify them and keep them informed about your programs and projects.

HOW TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE POWER STRUCTURE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Talk to lots of people -- members of the formal and informal power structure. Find locations, such as restaurants, where important decisions are made informally. Attend meetings of the city council, the county commissioners, various boards, and the Chamber of Commerce. Take care to confirm information with more than one person. There may be conflicts between individuals and organizations of which you should be aware.

Points to Remember When Dealing with Power Structures

1. Acquire power.

It is up to you to acquire the power to do the job. No one will give it to you. Some may want it for themselves or their organizations.

2. Take responsibility.

Be prepared to take responsibility for management and for doing the real work. Identify how much work needs to be done and who is available to help. Organize people and tasks with attention to their skills and interests. Weed out individuals who want attention but do not want to work.

3. Get organized.

Get people together who are committed and willing to work. Get community support from those who may not be able to work on the project, but who will stand up and speak for it.

4. Do your homework.

Get the facts and figures to back your position. Check out other communities' activities related to your program. Know which laws and regulations apply to your program. Make sure your presentation is well-written and well-thought out. Have visual aids prepared in advance. Rehearse. Think of questions you might be asked and have answers ready for them.

5. Do not surprise public officials at public meetings.

Lobby with officials and members of the informal power structure ahead of time. Give them time to think over new ideas and evaluate them in relation to other issues they must consider.

6. Compromise, but set a bottom line.

Do not accept a compromise that will cause your project to fail. It will damage your reputation for future projects.

Prepared by Donna Davidson, Political Consultant to New Mexico FCL, Santa Fe, NM, 1982.

Public Hearings

There are many ways to make your voice heard in regard to public issues, but one very effective way is to testify at a public hearing. All levels of government conduct public hearings and can serve the following purposes:

- Provide citizens an opportunity to influence public decisions.

- Give individual citizens and groups a chance for person-to-person exchange.
- Act as a viable and useful part of the democratic process at every level of government -- local, state, regional and national.

Someone is listening.

Why Hold Hearings?

To communicate. The public body can find out what citizens think about an issue. Citizens have a chance to learn the attitudes of other citizens and of the officials. Often public bodies are required to hold public hearings for the purpose of information and citizen input.

To inform. Governmental bodies may hold a hearing to educate the public about an issue. Questions and discussion usually follow.

To learn. Some hearings are held to get help from the public in drafting laws or ordinances.

To get feedback. Officials may hold hearings to find out how well something is working, or to look at procedures and administration. These hearings may also be a response to a complaint.

Why Should You Participate?

It is your right and responsibility as a citizen to be involved. It is important for you to voice your concern and worry about a decision, or potential decision, of a public body and give reasons why it affects you and your family. Decision-making bodies may not have previously thought about your perspective.

Furthermore, you need to participate because you may have necessary data that have resulted from studies, surveys, budget information, etc. that can have impact on a governmental decision. You might want to act as a representative of a group that wants to make a statement on a public issue. Another reason to participate in a hearing is to show support or agreement with a decision or plan. This type of participation is too often overlooked.

When You Testify

GENERAL INFORMATION

- The first time is definitely the hardest. Standing in front of the microphone with all eyes on you. You will be amazed at how much easier the second time is.

- Be cautious of overspeaking. Choose your time wisely. When a government body hears the same person meeting after meeting, they begin to discount the comments.
- Avoid duplication. If several other speakers have already said what you planned to say, adapt your remarks by quickly summarizing these points and try to concentrate on a point that has not been highlighted.
- Know the issue. Do not just speak on the basis of a neighborhood rumor. Read the proposal, understand the implications, and talk to the opposing side. It is also appropriate to raise questions in your testimony.

GETTING READY

- Even if it is a local hearing and you are planning an informal, individual testimony, take the time to prepare an outline. You will feel more confident.
- Written testimony is important for a legislative hearing if you are representing a group. Prepare a neatly typed copy with your name, the name of the group, the issue and the date. Make copies for each member of the board or committee, and copies for the press.

SOME BASICS ON TESTIFYING

1. Identify yourself immediately. Stand, even if a microphone is not provided.
2. If representing a group, give the name in the first sentence. State the position of the group. Tell briefly how the members' opinion was determined.
3. Outline the problems as you see them. Give alternative suggestions or solutions.
4. Consider the financial aspects of the proposal. If you are making a costly recommendation, it may be wise to suggest areas where there could be a budget cut.
5. Mention positive aspects of the proposal.
6. Be clear, concise and brief.
7. If you have detailed, technical information, do not include it in the testimony. Mention it, and then attach it to the written testimony.
8. If relevant, refer to present laws of procedures and indicate how the proposal would affect those laws.

9. Be polite and calm. Getting upset and emotional is not productive.

10. Address one issue at a time. Take care of other issues on a different occasion. Do not wander off the subject.
11. Be prepared to answer questions about your testimony. If you do not have the information to answer the question, try to follow up after the meeting.
12. End your testimony with a one-sentence summary of your (or your group's) opinion. Thank the committee or board for the opportunity to testify.

AFTER THE HEARING

- Try to have a brief, polite word with members of the committee or board after the meeting.
- Consider a follow-up letter to the board. Perhaps a "letter to the editor" would be helpful.
- Depending on the time of a vote on the issue, other kinds of action might be appropriate follow-up to a testimony. Possibilities are: a petition drive, a survey, a planned tour, a coalition with other groups, a letter-writing campaign or publicity for future hearings.

A Final Word

Do not give up on public hearings if your point of view does not prevail. It is still important to participate. You can learn a great deal from participating in a public hearing about the issue, the government body, and supporters and opponents of the issue.

Adapted by Martha A. Snider, Instructor, Family Resource Management, Oregon State University for FCL Training Institute, 1982.

Reference: *Make Your Voice Heard* by Elizabeth Moore, Michigan State University, Extension Bulletin E-1372, N.D.

How to Make a Presentation

You have been chosen to give a presentation to communicate your group's stand on an issue at the local public hearing. How will I convince this group our plan will work?

The fundamental law of speech organization is: Give every speech you make **purpose** and **form**.

Listeners like speeches with a clear purpose that have form, and not ones that begin nowhere, ramble on in all directions and end up in the air.

Organization is Simple

OPENING/INTRODUCTION

The first section of your speech (presentation) should kindle interest from your audience quickly. Picture your audience as bored and your goal is to spark their enthusiasm to the ideas (plans) you will present. Of course, you will want to include the purpose of your presentation in your introduction, but do not include it in your opening first two sentences.

Good opening techniques to begin with are:

- a startling question or a challenging statement.
- an appropriate quotation, illustration or story.
- a display of some appropriate object or picture.
- a generalization that is attention-getting and ties in with your subject.

Avoid these common weaknesses:

- an apologetic statement.
- a story that does not directly relate to your topic.
- a commonplace observation delivered in a commonplace manner.
- a long slow-moving statement.
- a trite question, such as “Did you ever stop to think . . .?”

State your purpose. After your attention-getting opening, state the purpose of the speech and indicate in an organized manner how you will proceed. For example, “First I will present. . .secondly. . .and finally.” Make this concise and brief because the details will follow in the main body of your speech (presentation).

The main object of the opening/introduction is to get your audience’s attention, and to set the stage by briefly outlining what will follow.

MAIN BODY

Now that you have motivated your audience to listen, you are ready to present detailed factual support for your

purpose. Although time will limit what you can present, generally you should include in the body of your speech the following:

1. A statement of the facts.
2. Proof of this information.
3. A refutation of contrary view (if appropriate).

The body of your speech properly begins with some purposive general assertion about your subject, followed logically with facts and proof of this information.

Give your audience meaningful **for instances** to clarify the factual information. Keep examples concise and familiar to your audience. This requires that you know your audience, which must be accomplished by researching them.

The **for instances** can be given in story form relating a particular situation, interwoven with visual aids or by using colorful comparisons and analogies. For continued audience interest, use a variety of for instance forms.

Above all, remember that the body of your speech must have relevant substance to support your purpose. The following word usage can help:

Be concise by eliminating unnecessary words. Examples:

- Weak & Wordy -- “This is is absolutely and positively essential.”
- Forceful & Concise -- “This is essential.”
- Weak & Wordy -- “This is true beyond any possible shadow of doubt.”
- Forceful & Concise -- “This is true.”

Avoid trite and groping expressions, such as:

- “I believe I can say without fear of contradiction...”
- “What I’m trying to get at is. . .”
- “What I want to say. . .”

If you want to get at something, then do, and if you want to say something, say it.

Avoid repetitious expressions:

- “As I said before. . .”
- “And so may I repeat again. . .”

If you want to emphasize with repetition, then repeat without the lead-in statement.

- Be specific in your explanations and avoid being too general.

Use good conversational language and sentences in your presentation. This does not mean mediocre or casual, but rather sincere, direct conversation. To achieve this conversational tone, employ grammatical contractions such as “Wouldn’t you. . .” or “Haven’t you ever. . .”

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

End your presentation with a strong voice and show conviction to your ideas. Restate your major ideas in the same logical order they were presented. Remember your aim is to motivate your audience to understand the political situation, to agree and to act. Keep the concluding remarks concise.

Practice Makes Perfect

In organizing your information for your presentation, you will probably want to write out your speech. However, speeches that are read word for word usually fall short of motivating the audience. Thus, after writing it out, pick out the highlights of your speech, write them on 5 x 7 notecards and then practice by yourself or in front of family and friends. Give the information in a sincere, direct, conversational tone. Practicing will accomplish three things:

1. Practice allows you to experience the flow of the speech.
2. It gives you an idea of the time it takes to present your ideas. Often speeches have time limits, and a speech too long alienates your audience.
3. It helps build your confidence.

In persuasive type speeches, practice enough so that you do not have to rely on your notes. This allows you to concentrate more on your body language and gestures, and demonstrates that you have command of the subject presented.

Summary

In communicating your ideas through your speech, remember to give your speech purpose and form. Direct it to your audience’s interests.

Organization is a must.

1. Get your audience’s attention and tell them what you are going to tell them.
2. Tell them.
3. Tell them what you told them.

Finally, **practice, practice, practice**. Enjoy giving your presentation with high confidence. You do have something important to say.

Prepared by Martha A. Snider, Instructor, Family Resource Management, Oregon State University for FCL State Training Institute, 1982.

How to Write Government Officials

An elected official seldom tires of ideas from constituents. Letters from constituents do count, and the quantity and quality of mail has been known to reverse many government positions.

It is important that your government officials know your side of the story and how the proposed issue or action affects you. Government officials cannot read your mind, nor can they listen in on your conversations with your family, friends or neighbors. You must tell them. Do not feel your letter is unimportant and would impose on your representative. Government officials consider information and opinions given to them by their constituents in making up their minds on an issue.

Most appreciated are informative letters requesting action on a specific subject of real concern.

Guidelines for Letter Content

1. Write on one subject at a time.
2. First put your thoughts in draft form. Then delete the non-essentials and organize the letter into a brief, clear presentation. Try to keep the letter to one typewritten page.

3. Explain briefly who you are and why you are concerned. If you are writing for a group, give its name and membership -- numbers are important.
4. Explain briefly what action you think should be taken and why.
5. If you are writing to several officials on the same subject do not send mimeographed or identical letters. Individualize each. Use your own words.
6. If you are writing to a governmental official about a particular bill, identify it by number and name or content.
7. If you are writing about technical information, indicate your technical competence to do so.
8. Be courteous at all times, and personal when appropriate. Never threaten, directly or by implication.
9. Consider proper timing. Write shortly before or at the time the particular issue is being discussed by the decision-making body.
10. Close with a statement of thanks and an expression of continued interest in future action.
11. Do not limit your letter to support or opposition of a particular action. Send a note of appreciation to members of the decision-making body when you approve of their decisions. They like praise, too.

Prepared by Martha A. Snider, Instructor, Family Resource Management, Oregon State University for FCL State Training Institute, 1982.

How to Write Government Officials Exercise

Form to be Used

- Type or write legibly.
- Give your address and sign your name legibly.
- Use your own stationery (not company stationery or postage).

How to Address Letters

Addresses, salutations and closings for letters to various public officials are listed in [Table 1](#):

Things to Remember

A phone call to your government official can be just as effective as a letter. Use the same guidelines for communicating your concern, or interest, as you would in writing a letter. Above all, be organized and well-informed on the subject, so that you can be brief and courteous.

A follow-up letter of thanks is appropriate and welcomed by government officials. In this letter summarize the conversation, thus documenting the information, and thank the official for his or her time and interest.

Update Your Legislative I.Q.

Number of people: any number

Minimum time: 10 to 15 minutes

Materials: pencils

Purpose

Raise political consciousness of participants.

Process

Fill in questions 1 to 7 in [Table 2](#).

Tally points according to the scale

- 80 to 100 -- Almost a pro! Keep up the good work.
- 60 to 80 -- Keep looking. Become more informed.
- under 60 -- Contact your County Extension Office for more information on FCL

Involve the Whole Family

Today's children will become more active and involved citizens as adults if they start learning now about the political process and how to affect it. Parents should not depend on an occasional school citizenship class to develop the necessary awareness and confidence. Building that awareness is a long process. Listed below are ways families can interact together to foster interest and a sense of responsibility and possibility for citizen involvement.

Talk about issues. Elementary age children as well as teens can become intensely interested in issues that may affect their future or that deal with discrimination and injustice. State your own opinion, but also try to explain the views of the opposing side. Encourage them to question why people behave in certain ways.

Use cartoons. Political cartoons from magazines and the newspaper are an excellent starting point for discussion with junior high and high school students. Discuss one at dinner each night.

Reading the newspaper. Older children will benefit from reading the newspaper and listening to news programs. Follow up discussion is very important.

Campaign involvement. If you are involved in any kind of campaign, supporting an issue or candidate, let your child also play an active role. School-age children can do an excellent job of helping to distribute leaflets and stuffing envelopes. It will help them feel that they have played an important part.

Group involvement. If you are working with any kind of youth group, incorporate information about the governmental process. This is particularly important at election time. Groups such as the League of Women Voters have some quizzes, skits and demonstrations that could be useful. Check on the available 4-H citizenship materials.

Take part in meetings. Help youth to understand the local government. School boards and local government units hold meetings. Take youth to a meeting when an issue they can relate to is being discussed (changes in school rules, bike paths, building a teen center or pool, etc.).

Writing letters. When your youth feels strongly about an issue and has had a chance to think and talk about his or her position, encourage and facilitate him or her in writing a letter to the appropriate official. Help them to understand that one letter will not effect the desired change, but that elected officials need to hear from everyone.

Plan visits. Go to the state and federal capitols if possible.

Prepared by Beth Moore, Extension Specialist, Public Affairs Education for Families, Family Living Education, Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University.

Table 1.

LOCAL OFFICIALS		
Mayor The Honorable (full name) City or Town Hall City, State Zip Dear Mayor (last name): Sincerely yours,		Councilman or Councilor Councilman/Councilor (full name) City or Town Hall City, State Zip Dear Mr./Mrs./Ms. (last name) Sincerely yours,
STATE OFFICIALS		
Governor The Honorable (full name) State Capitol Building Tallahassee, FL Dear Governor (last name): Respectfully yours,	State Senator Honorable (full name) State Senate State Capitol Building Tallahassee, FL Dear Senator (last name): Sincerely yours,	State Representative Honorable (full name) House of Representatives State Capitol Building Tallahassee, FL Dear Representative (name): Sincerely yours,
FEDERAL OFFICIALS		
The President The President of the United States The White House Washington, DC 20500 Dear President (last name): Respectfully yours,	U.S. Senator Honorable (full name) Russell Office Building Washington, DC 20510 Dear Senator (last name): Sincerely yours,	U.S. Representative Honorable (full name) House Office Building Washington, DC 20515 Dear Congressman/woman (name): Sincerely yours,

Table 2.

	Possible	Your Score
1.Score 10 points if you voted in the last election	10	_____
2.Name a state Legislator or Senator representing you in your state legislature.	10	_____
3.Name your two Senators in the U.S. Congress.	20	_____
4.Name your Representative in the U.S. Congress.	20	_____
5.Score 10 points if you have been active on a local issue in the last year.	10	_____
6.List three state or federal legislative issues of prime concern to citizens in your area.	30	_____
7.Score 10 points if you have written any letters supporting or speaking against legislation in the last 6 months.	10	_____
Total	100	_____

Developed by Georgia Stevens Nerud, Extension Service, University of Maryland, 1981.