

Ensuring a Good Policy Decision

Advice Checklist for Utilities

Step 1: Understand and Support Policy Makers

Understand the issues and risks that policy makers are concerned about. Make sure that you address these issues. Demonstrate that you can manage conflict so policy makers will not feel exposed.

- **Develop a Positive Attitude About Policy Makers** - Assume policy makers are ethical and want to protect the interests of their constituents. Be willing to understand their motivations and concerns. Do not judge their actions and decisions as “politics” without giving careful consideration and attempting to understand their motivations.
- **Develop a Foundation of Written Support** - “Cover” and help policy makers be confident by developing a strong foundation of *written support*. Asking for written support encourages a deeper, stronger relationship.
- **Develop Political Champions** - Develop champions within governing bodies, especially if multiple governing bodies have jurisdiction or influence on outcomes.
- **Keep the Relationships Going** - Maintain a database of key audiences/relationships and periodically send them information updates. Keep communications simple and relevant to motivations, value, and investment.

Step 2: Build Strong Relationships

Whether policy makers, those who influence them, or opponents, the focus should be on building strong relationships.

- **Define Priority Relationships** - You can’t reach everyone. Prioritize people that policy makers listen to, represent a larger group, have been involved in past conflicts, or are likely to energize conflict.
- **Identify Early Supporters** - Early in the outreach process identify and seek out “early adopters” who are willing to give written support without having to see a long list of supporters.
- **Create Water Quality Confidence** - Create water quality confidence by becoming the trusted source of quality. Emphasize your water quality ethics and actions.
- **Turn Conflict and Opposition in Assets** - Seek out and embrace conflict and opposition as a path to stronger relationships, more committed supporters, and better outcomes. Create events *designed* to find opponents early. Finding opponents after significant capital has been committed to a specific project can be very expensive.

Step 3: Communicate with Purpose and Diligence

Make sure that communication activities have a stated purpose and create results that relate to ensuring a good policy decision.

- **Adopt a Collaborative Communication Style** - Do not waste your audience’s time by not listening and learning. Seek to understand people’s motivations and continue to ask “why.” Your audience has valid input.
- **Lead a Meaningful Dialogue** - Lead a meaningful dialogue about water supply reliability, the need for new water supply, and the options for creating new supply. Make sure your communications emphasize the problem and your commitment to solving the problem, not a “pet project.”
- **Pay Attention to the Media** - Reach out and develop ongoing relationships with the media. Do not only contact the media when you need something from them. Help them by being a good source of information and stories.
- **Understand Public Sentiments** - Document feedback and collect information from your audiences during all meetings. Compile and use this information to improve your message and help policy makers be more confident.