



COMMUNICATING WITH DECISION MAKERS

No matter what the job, each WSU Extension staff member has a role in developing and nurturing relationships with local, state, and federal decision makers. The emphasis is on **COMMUNICATION** – between WSU Extension and policymakers. This information provides a basis for encouraging more active efforts within counties and among staff members to build strong partnerships with policymakers.

WSU Extension Administration (Director, Etc.)

- Work directly to assure the federal and state budget support necessary in order to maintain a vital, relevant and dynamic organization that extends Washington State University Extension to every county in the state.
- Orchestrate the communication and contacts needed, from counties, campus, etc. to build and maintain such support.
- Strengthen a network of communication with relevant statewide interest groups and with other policymakers (Executive Departments, etc.).
- Encourage county efforts to foster ongoing communication with policymakers.
- Communicate regularly with County Extension Directors about the current budget situation (including time lines when appropriate) and also about relevant interests and contacts that involve a particular county.

District Director

- Assist the staff in each county develop a strategy and action plan for implementation.
- Facilitate the sharing of information between counties in terms of specific legislators (this is particularly important when several counties share a legislator) and in terms of the various action plans.
- Encourage and support county efforts.
- Facilitate training and mentoring experiences as needed (e.g., facilitate visits to decision makers with county directors and staff.).

County Extension Director

- Coordinate the efforts for communication with all elected officials in the county. (Note: The implementation needs to be a shared responsibility, but the county director should know what is happening.)
- Orchestrate the effort to gain support for the county budget. Facilitate discussion among county staff members concerning the development of appropriate communications strategy for that particular county.
- Help the staff to regularly share, assess, and adapt such a strategy plan.
- Provide training, support, resources, etc. in order to help each new staff member develop a basic level of “political savvy” within the first few months of employment in the county. Introduce new staff members to local policymakers, as appropriate.

County Extension Staff Members

- Personally work to develop basic “political savvy.” This involves being politically astute but not-partisan and it primarily means that there is a need to carefully follow the news and pay attention to local people and issues.
- Get to know the aides of legislators (state and federal), particularly those who are concerned with your subject matter.
- Communicate with county director and other staff members concerning contacts with various policy makers. What are the possibilities for follow-up? What are the “connecting points?”
- Discover the policymakers (state, local and federal...elected and appointed) who are interested in issue areas where you are programming. Find ways to:
 - share information about programming efforts and issues of concern;
 - involve policymakers in educational efforts;
 - facilitate communication on such issues with their constituents;
 - encourage constituents to be politically aware and actively involved; and
 - work with policy makers concerning local problems/concerns.

WSU Extension Program Leaders and Subject Matter Specialists

- Discover the legislators and legislative aides, state and federal, who are working in areas of interest to you. Develop an ongoing, informal relationship focused on mutual information sharing.
- Involve such staff members, as appropriate, in programming efforts and share with them information that you gather concerning that specific issue area.
- Share any relevant insights or bits of information concerning the aide and/or the legislator with the local county director...and with the Extension director as appropriate (e.g. Sen. _____ expressed appreciation for _____ resources/program etc).

- Develop information networks with the various relevant interest groups (e.g. ag industry groups etc.) and agencies.
- Share information concerning such contacts with others (the appropriate county director, the district director etc.).
- Work with the county staffs in the relevant counties to help foster more contacts with policymakers concerning specific issues.