Suggestions for Establishing and Maintaining Contact with Local Public Policy Decision Makers

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Keep in touch with three important local public policy decision makers:
• Elected officials including county commissioners, county treasurers, city mayors, others
• Executive staff including county/city administrators and assistants to elected officials
• Citizen members of county budget committees who are likely candidates for elected positions

Consider the timing when interacting with budget decision makers:
• Six months after the annual budget is passed is the best time to communicate the value and impact of Extension education.
• Six months leading up to debate about the new budget likely will appear to be lobbying if you communicate the value and impact of Extension education.

Listen for public policy decision makers’ interests and concerns:
• Seek first to understand, then to be understood—Stephen Covey
• You will influence more people by being interested than by being interesting—Dale Carnegie
• Look for ways that decision makers’ interests overlap with both local and statewide Extension initiatives

Recognize that county faculty members usually focus on their program and leave public policy maker relationship building to the staff chair, however, you do not have the time and attention to do this alone:
• Help faculty and staff recognize and take advantage of opportunities to establish and maintain relationships with policy decision makers.
• Brainstorm ideas once or twice each year with faculty and staff for building relationships with policy decision makers.
• Solicit specific time-sensitive commitments (for example, “X by Y”) from individual faculty to initiate and maintain key relationships based on Extension program areas and the interests of policy decision makers.

For the most part, public policy decision makers care about research and education that make a difference in the lives of their constituents, not for their own sake.
• Budget decision makers have grown cynical about the value of individual testimonials because the individual may be the exception rather than the rule.
• Give budget decision makers credible evidence of impact and cost/benefit data.
• Communicate impact with data, short phrases, and carefully selected images.

Work closely with the county administrator and county commissioner liaison to prepare your annual budget. Maintain a policy of complete financial transparency.

Maintain the organizational “foot print” and stay on the radar screen of local and state policy decision makers. Sustain efforts to establish and maintain contact with local public policy decision makers:
• Attend county department head meetings regularly.
• Meet with budget decision makers on a quarterly basis. Look for opportunities to stay on their radar screen.