

Public Policy 201: Empowering Group Advocacy and Intervention to Influence Legislators

*Presented at the 12th Biennial Conference
of the Society for Community Research
and Action, held June 18-21, 2009 in
Montclair, New Jersey*

C. Corbett

Public Policy 201: Empowering Group Advocacy and Intervention to Influence Legislators

What is the Outcome Objective of this Workshop?

After this session, attendees will be familiar with a process or method of organizing an advocacy group to exercise public policy influence by directly engaging Legislators on an ongoing basis. They will have the knowledge and resources to:

- * potentially organize an advocacy group, such as through voluntary affiliation with a nonprofit organization representing the interests of an under-represented group
- * reach out to engage Legislators directly, or indirectly by empowering other members of the group
- * develop a cooperative relationship with Legislators to develop ongoing influence
- * potentially influence legislators on a bi-partisan basis and solicit from legislators documentation of their support

Public Policy 201: Empowering Group Advocacy and Intervention to Influence Legislators

How ? Four Learning Objectives of this Workshop

- 1) Promote awareness of Legal and Ethical Issues: Lobbying
- 2) Enable participants to organize an advocacy group and establish an outreach process to develop an ongoing working relationship with legislators. [*The Roadmap*; partnership model]
- 3) Enable participants to assist an advocacy group in identifying key legislators and committees relevant to their advocacy area of choice. [develop a legislative intervention plan or map]
- 4) Promote understanding of how to develop and document support from individual legislators on a bi-partisan basis in order to so empower an advocacy group. [sponsor, co-sponsor, vote, write letter of support]

Case Illustration: Proposed Use of Federal Stimulus Funds to enable disabled citizens to live in community; comply w/ ADA, Olmstead & Ch. 551 (Corbett, 2009).

Workshop designed to further exposure and proficiency objectives, as outlined in *The Community Psychologist* ,41(2), Spring 2008, p. 68

Public Policy 201: Intervening and Testifying in Legislative Settings

How ? Timeframe and Handouts

		<u>Attachment</u>
1) Legal & Ethical Issues:	10 min + 5 min Q & A	1
2) Organize & Empower Group:	15 min + 5 min Q & A	2
3) Draft Intervention Map/NY guide	5 min + 5 min Q & A	3,3a
4) Elicit and Document Support	10 min + 5 min Q&A	4
Conclusion w/ training implications	5 min +10 min Q & A	

Public Policy 201

Presenter Background:

- MA Community Psychology 1994
- Part time independent researcher: ARNOVA, ISTR, SCRA
- Volunteer Experience:
 - Chair Legislative Committee since 1999 on the Board of the Family Group Inc., disability advocacy for 1400 families of CFDS, largest such nonprofit in Albany, NY
- Work Experience:
 - Testified ~30 times as staff member of NY State agency: consumer advocacy and public policy regulation of public utilities.
 - Also, MA level practitioner: Employee Assistance Program Coordinator for Agency of 500 employees (20 yrs.) (NY' s EAP: Statewide workplace prevention model to promote employee wellness.)

Public Policy 201

Description of Attachments:

#1: IRS Guidance on lobbying from www.irs.gov.us

#2: *A Roadmap for Families*

Funding Services for Citizens w/ Disabilities: Your Part in Making the Process Work

#3: A Draft Legislative Intervention Map

3a: New York State Legislative Reference Guide (one page)

#4: Documenting Legislators' Support

Case Illustration: Soliciting Letters of Support. (Corbett, 2009)

Corbett, C. J. (2009). Direct Testimony of C.J. Corbett dated January 29, 2009 submitted at the Joint Hearing of the New York State Senate Finance and Assembly Ways & Means Committees on February 2, 2009 regarding the 2009-2010 Budget, Health & Medicaid Issues, Albany, N.Y., p. 1-50 with eight attachments.

Public Policy 201

#1 Legal and Ethical Issues:

- Intervening and testifying in legislative settings reflects an attempt to influence government action which could be at the local, state or federal level.
- The primary focus here is on state level intervention.
- States have widely differing views and regulations when it comes to influencing legislators and legislation which typically is called “*lobbying*”.
- Interventionists need be familiar with the regulations that apply whether local, state and/or federal to their situation which will vary by the particular role that they play.

Public Policy 201

#1 Legal and Ethical Issues:

What is “Lobbying”?

Lobbying is defined as an attempt to influence government action, which may be either by written or oral communication.

Some states (Delaware, Kansas & Texas) include providing entertainment, gifts, recreational events, food and beverages to legislators. Other states regulate disclosure of and amounts spent on such activities.

Source: Ethics: How states define “lobbying” and “lobbyist” by the National Conference of State Legislatures printed 5/12/09 from

www.ncsl.org/programs/ethics/lobbyingdefinitions.htm

Note: high level summary-- you must check your state’s requirements !

Public Policy 201

#1 Legal and Ethical Issues:

Who is a “Lobbyist”?

Accepting compensation is usually the primary issue.

Most states define a lobbyist as one who receives any compensation or reimbursement to lobby.

Some exceptions (Hawaii, Minnesota and New York) establish threshold amounts of money and time which if exceeded trigger the definition of a “lobbyist”.

Source: Ethics: How states define “lobbying” and “lobbyist” by the National Conference of State Legislatures printed 5/12/09 from www.ncsl.org/programs/ethics/lobbyingdefinitions.htm

Public Policy 201

#1 Legal and Ethical Issues:

STATE LEVEL: New York State Illustration

Statute: N.Y.'s "Lobbying Act", Created by Chapter 2 of Laws of 1999 (as Rev. 2003; 2005; 2007)

Effective January 1, 2006 threshold for registration as lobbyist increased from \$2000 to \$5000.

Individuals, entities or nonprofits that expend or receive greater amounts in a calendar year must register and report lobbying expenditures.

This does not place restrictions on lobbying efforts but does establish registration and reporting requirements.

Source: Lawyers Alliance for New York, Memo dated December 19, 2005, printed May 12, 2009 from www.lawyersalliance.org

Public Policy 201

#1 Legal and Ethical Issues:

FEDERAL LEVEL

If you are lobbying on behalf of an organization, such as a nonprofit organization, there are restrictions such as against participation in political campaigns.

Such involvement stands to threaten a nonprofit organization's tax exempt status-- even if you are acting in a volunteer capacity.

Nonprofit organizations have reporting requirements on their lobbying activities such as on their Form 990, filed annually with IRS.

Public Policy 201

#1 Legal and Ethical Issues:

Conclusion:

- The effort to influence government action through oral or written communication raises issues of lobbying and whether the interventionist is a “lobbyist”.
- Knowledge of applicable local, state and federal rules and regulations is necessary to comply with legal and ethical standards, as well as possible employer rules.
- Individuals should also be alert to conflicts of interest *or their appearance* and how they can be avoided or minimized.
- Interventionists need to consider the role they are contemplating playing, who they represent (individual, employer, nonprofit, government, etc.) and any regulations that are applicable.
- **Key Questions:** **Note:** *Depends upon your state & circumstances*
Where does interventionist lie on risk continuum? *Ideally zero to low.*
Should intervention be modified to eliminate or reduce risk? If so, how?

Public Policy 201

Before proceeding to Learning Objectives 2, 3 & 4 , designed to facilitate public policy intervention, the following information may help provide greater context.

The purpose is to briefly explain first, why I lobby and secondly, why other Community Psychologists may want to devote greater attention and effort to the practice of public policy intervention, particularly at the state level.

Public Policy 201

Why I Lobby?

The organizing effort described here involves disabilities rights advocacy, more precisely compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA) and US Supreme Court's Olmstead Decision of 1999, as well as Chapter 551, Article 25 of NY's 2002 law implementing Olmstead. *This is a matter of social justice for those least able to advocate for themselves— including my daughter Jennifer.*

Is there an Advocacy Issue Important to You?

The principles illustrated here, however, could be applied to many public policy interventions, *with a focus on the State level of intervention, i.e. with your State Legislature.*

Public Policy 201

Briefly:

What is the Olmstead Decision?

In 1999, the US Supreme Court affirmed in its Olmstead Decision that under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), individuals are unjustifiably institutionalized if given the proper supports, they could live in community based settings. That is, such institutionalization is considered discriminatory and in violation of the ADA and Olmstead Decision. The disabled have the right under Federal and State laws to live in least restrictive settings in the community.

Public Policy 201

What were the implications of Olmstead ?

States were required to administer programs in the most integrated setting to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. Thus, states may not deny community services to keep institutions at full capacity. No one should have to be institutionalized if they can live in a community with services.

*N.Y. State was, along with many others, in violation before 1992 as it had no plan to implement Olmstead. The situation has deteriorated. It is now **explicitly** non-compliant with ADA and Olmstead, as it does not yet comply with its own Chapter 551, Article 25 which was supposed to implement Olmstead and demonstrate Olmstead compliance. (Corbett, 2009*)*

* Testimony presented before the New York State Legislature on February 2, 2009.

Public Policy 201

Why is Public Policy Intervention Important?

1. Social change results from system level interventions
2. Government is a critical change agent, possessing the *power of taxation* to fund social change
3. Influencing public policy and legislation *which has the force of law* is highly challenging but can achieve significant pro-social change

Conclusion: effectively engaging government and legislators enables interventionists to influence public policy. This is an invaluable skill for CPs and anyone interested in creating system level change.

Public Policy 201

Why else is Public Policy Important?

Public Policy is important due to the central role of government in social problem solving.

The role of government can readily be operationalized in theories and models of social problem solving that can be developed to apply cross-nationally. For an illustrative example see Corbett, 2000*.

* Corbett, 2000. *A theory and practice of social problem solving*. Presented at the Annual Conference of the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, New Orleans, Louisiana.

Public Policy 201

What are some Goals and Roles of public policy activism by Community Psychologists?

Goals:

1. *Engage the political process*
2. *Promote new governmental linkages*
3. *Build new and varied constituencies*
4. *Rise above individual level of analysis-system change*
5. *Increase relevance of community research*
6. *Connect academic research to real world practice*
7. *Create new advocacy opportunities on behalf of under-represented groups– the disabled, un-insured, low income and any other group of concern*

Public Policy 201

What are some Goals and Roles of public policy activism by Community Psychologists?

Roles*:

1. *Research existing and draft legislation*
2. *Identify standard or “best practices” legislation*
3. *Contact state legislators; identify committees*
4. *Monitor public hearing processes*
5. *Participate in public statement hearings*
6. *Prepare and submit direct testimony before committees and task forces*
7. *Create a public advocacy coalition to help ensure legislation is drafted to further public interest.*

* Corbett (2001a). Public policy and healthcare conversions: New billions for community research. Paper presented at the Eighth Biennial Conference on Community Research and Action.

Public Policy 201

Given these Goals and Roles, how does one initiate or obtain access?

Identify one or more of the following:

1. Your issue (what is your issue: disabilities, uninsured, mental health, gender issues, low income etc.)
2. Your constituency (whose interests do you represent? Disabled, aged, gender issues, low income etc.)
3. Your access point (where can you get access or leverage? An established advocacy organization, a nonprofit, or directly with your state senator, assemblyman, congressman etc.)

Public Policy 201

Engaging Government:

1. What is your issue?
2. Whose interests do you represent? (constituents, allies)
3. How will you get access, influence and leverage?
Intervene with a group, coalition or individually?

Public Policy 201

As this relates to your area or interest:

1. **What is your issue?**

2. **Whose interests do you represent?**

This assumes either you:

1) align with an existing interest group or nonprofit

2) organize one on your own

See Attachment 2: A Roadmap for Families

3. **How can you get public policy access, influence and leverage?**

Meetings with Legislators

Public Policy 201

#2 Organizing & Empowering a Group

Attachment 2

A Roadmap for Families:

Your Part in Making the Process Work

Provides:

- Overview of political process
- Explains the role that a family member of a disabled person can play
- Provides info on how to contact legislators
- Motivates family members to get involved: budget cuts eliminate services for your disabled family member
- “If you as a family member do not act, then who will? If not now, then when?” **Note: this is not copyright protected so feel free to use it as helpful in organizing & empowering a group!**

Public Policy 201

#2 Organizing & Empowering a Group

Meetings with Legislators: How?

What are legislative settings?

- An elected official's District or satellite office
- A periodic legislative committee meeting
- A fundraising event
- A sponsored legislative breakfast
- Any community or social event

In other words, any setting with legislators presents an opportunity to reach out socialize, inform, etc. presenting an opportunity to build relationships.

Public Policy 201

#2 Organizing & Empowering a Group

Meetings with Legislators: Why

Two Primary Objectives:

1. Build relationships
2. *Educate, Inform and Influence* to advance your intervention goals

Public Policy 201

#2 Organizing & Empowering a Group

Meeting with Legislators:

A Note about Relationship building-

Legislators meet with many special interests, lobbyists, advocates and constituents.

Your motives are very much a part of how you are perceived and the relationship you cultivate.

Your influence will be greater, likely far greater, if you are seen as acting as a volunteer, an advocate for under represented populations and out of some greater public interest. This is the forte of a Community Psychologist— a most important thing you bring to the table.

Legislators value this.

Public Policy 201

#2 Organizing & Empowering a Group

Meeting with Legislators:

A Note about Relationship building-

Caution: if you are seen as acting more in your own self-interest, as a paid representative, ie. Advancing your own economic self-interest— you will be accurately perceived as more of a professional lobbyist. Be aware of your jurisdiction's regulations and comply with them. *Fines could apply if these regulations are not followed.*

Also, if you are representing a non-profit organization, check its bylaws for lobbying restrictions or prohibitions against lobbying.

Public Policy 201

#2 Organizing & Empowering a Group

Meeting with Legislators:

A Note about Relationship building-

Caution:

A Sample Non Profit By Law Restriction:

No substantial part of the activities of the Corporation shall be for the carrying on of propaganda, or otherwise attempting to influence legislation, and the Corporation shall not participate in, or intervene in, (including the publishing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of any candidate for public office.

Note: this by-law provision is necessary to protect the nonprofit organization and preserve its tax exempt status. Violations here could jeopardize this critical, protected status and the survival of the nonprofit organization.

Public Policy 201

#2 Organizing & Empowering a Group

Meeting with Legislators:

A Note about Relationship building-

Conclusion:

Your potential influence stems largely from legislators' assessment of your standing (who do you represent?) and your interests (what are you trying to achieve and to whose benefit or harm?).

If you represent valued constituents, and the broader “public interest” [not your self interests], expect both more access and influence.

Self-interest partisans can expect little of either and are often not well tolerated by legislators

Public Policy 201

Summary so far:

- ✓ #1 Legal & Ethical Issues Attachment 1
- ✓ #2 Organizing & Empowering Group Attachment 2
(*A Roadmap for Families*)

NEXT:

#3 Drafting a Legislative Intervention Map

Attachment 3

LASTLY:

#4 Elicit and Document Legislators' Support

Public Policy 201

#3 Drafting a Legislative Intervention Map

Steps to inform Intervention Plan:

- identify advocacy issue & group advocacy position
- identify relevant Assembly & Senate Committees
- identify chairs and member legislators
- identify geographic location of each and district(s)
- seek constituents: group members located within each
- determine which constituent(s) are best suited to reach out to relevant legislators : reach consensus on goal(s)
- identify advocacy group need: What do you want?
 - What is the “Ask” -that is documentable, *if at all possible.*
- request appointments to meet with Legislators or Staff
- *persist, persist and persist in getting the appointments*
- explain your issue(s), document and answer all questions and diplomatically be very specific in the relief you are requesting.

Public Policy 201

#3 Drafting a Legislative Intervention Map

Summary: A Ongoing Intervention Plan

Advocacy issue: compliance with ADA, Olmstead & Ch. 551 of New York State Law.

Advocacy Position: a) New York should comply with Federal and State Law, request Federal Stimulus Funds approximating \$450 million to fund community based housing and allow the mentally disabled to live in the community, in least restrictive settings *and* b) New York should establish legislation to enable nonprofit conversions with all resulting funds generated to be dedicated to Olmstead Compliance , funding associated out-year budget obligations. (Corbett, 2009)

Relevant Assembly & Senate Committees: Mental Health & Insurance Comm. of both.

What “Documentable Action” by Legislators is requested: Legislators are asked to:

- 1) personally endorse or support a request for use of Federal Stimulus Funds (ARRA of 2009) to eliminate/reduce the waiting list for residential placement of the mentally disabled to comply with ADA, Olmstead and Chapter 551, Article 25 *and*
- 2) support new legislation to enable nonprofit conversions in New York State where all proceeds will be devoted to an Olmstead Compliance Fund , providing new, incremental funding to support associated expenses in out years of the budget.

Legislators were asked to write such letter to Gov. Paterson and provide copy.

Public Policy 201

#3 Drafting a Legislative Intervention Map Attachment 3

Illustration of a Disability Advocacy Intervention

Insert information in chart form:

COMMITTEES

STATE SENATE

ASSEMBLY

	<u>M H/Health</u>	<u>Insurance</u>	<u>Mental Health</u>	<u>Insurance/Other</u>
Dem.		Breslin (M; L)	Weisenberg (M)	Schroeder (M)
Rep.	McDonald (M; L)	McDonald (M;L)	Corwin (M;L)	Butler (M)
Dem.			Schroeder (M)	
Rep.	/Farley (M)			/Jordon (M)
Dem.			Lifton (L)	/Reilly (M;L)
Rep.				/Tedisco (L)

Key: names in bold are Committee Chairs; Senate or Assembly Leaders

Dem. M (in person meeting *completed*)

Rep. L (legislator sent written letter of support* to Governor,
and provided a copy for verification, as requested.)

/**Kolb (M)**

Other Key Legislators:

Congressman Tonko (M;L)

* endorsed Federal Stimulus Funds to enable disabled citizens to live in the community and reduce the New York Cares waitlist.

Public Policy 201

Summary So Far:

- ✓ #1 Legal and Ethical Issues Attachment 1
- ✓ #2 Organizing & Empowering Group Attachment 2
- ✓ #3 Drafting Legislative Intervention Map Attch. 3

NEXT

- ✓ #4 Elicit and Document Legislators' Support
Attachment 4

Public Policy 201

#4 Elicit and Document Legislators' Support Influencing Legislators through Meetings/Testimony Potential outcomes for Community Psychologists?

- Inform and educate Legislators to increase their insight into social problems and offer possible solutions
- Build ongoing relationships with various Legislators, increasing future opportunities for influence
- Spur action by Legislators to propose, modify, co-sponsor or vote for legislation favorable to your advocacy interests
- Legislator could write a letter on your behalf

Public Policy 101

#4 Elicit and Document Legislators' Support

Influencing Legislators—

What kinds of Action may Legislators take??

- Establish a new Committee or Task Force where none previously existed [Legislative attention and resources]
- Provide funds to a particular interest group or non-profit [resources from discretionary legislative funds]
- Lend the support of their Office to the issue or organization [provides visibility, access, influence]
- Initiate legislative action based on their new insights [adopt your recommendations or a surrogate]

Public Policy 201

#4 Elicit and Document Legislators' Support Influencing Legislators—

What are four examples of specific, documentable actions that you could request of Legislators to advance your advocacy group's interests?

1. Ask Legislator to propose new legislation, self-sponsored
2. Ask Legislator to join proposed legislation and co-sponsor with another legislator
3. Ask Legislator to modify proposed legislation and co-sponsor
4. Legislator could write a letter on your behalf to advocate for your interests. *Case Illustration: Request Federal Stimulus Funds to build or purchase community housing for the disabled.*

Public Policy 201

#4 Elicit and Document Legislators' Support Influencing Legislators—

Documenting Legislators' Support

Case Illustration: from the Legislative Intervention Map

1. Legislators were asked to write a letter in support of a New York request for Federal Stimulus Funds for purchasing housing to enable the mentally disabled to live in the community. Specifically, legislators were asked to write to Governor Paterson in support and to provide a copy of the letter. This was deemed necessary because the application for and use of Federal Stimulus funds would require the support of the Governor of New York State.

Public Policy 201

#4 Elicit and Document Legislators' Support Influencing Legislators—

Documenting Legislators' Support

Case Illustration: from the Legislative Intervention Map

After testimony was provided and the hearing was held before the Senate Finance Committee and Assembly Ways & Means Committee, appointments were made with various legislators.

The Legislators were selected based on several criteria including the considerations as contained on the Legislative Intervention Map.

During the February through May 2009 period the meetings occurred. This is the “influencing process”, with the testimony before the New York State Legislature providing the primary basis for the meeting.

Public Policy 201

#4 Elicit and Document Legislators' Support Influencing Legislators—

Documenting Legislators' Support

Case Illustration: from the Legislative Intervention Map

Description of the Meetings:

- Meetings were with Assembly members themselves while the meetings with the State Senators and Congressman were with their Staff
- Meetings-- all constructive and collegial generally 45 to 75 minutes long
- Legislators were concerned about the assertion of non-compliance with ADA, Olmstead and Chapter 551, Article 25.
- Legislators were concerned about Comptroller's Audit misrepresentation
- Legislators were concerned about the broken promises of Governor to eliminate the waiting list so disabled could live in the community
- Legislators were concerned about the increase in waiting list to about 9000 when the waiting list was supposed to be reduced to zero by 2004
- *Legislators were very concerned about their own disabled constituents who are on the waiting list for community housing and their pending projects cancelled.*

Public Policy 201

#4 Elicit and Document Legislators' Support Influencing Legislators—

Documenting Legislators' Support

Case Illustration: from the Legislative Intervention Map

Brief Description of Influencing Process:

- My primary assertion was that NY was not in compliance with ADA, Olmstead and Chapter 551, Article 25. This made some uncomfortable.
- My assertion about the misrepresentation in the Comptroller's Audit also caused discomfort; documentation in testimony attachments was clear.
- **My focus was on remedy:** We must bring NY in compliance with Federal and State laws and use Federal Stimulus Funds to build housing for disabled to allow them to live in the community, as is their legal right.
- **Underlying Proposition:** Shouldn't we use Federal Stimulus Funds to bring New York State into compliance with Federal and State law AND eliminate the waiting list for housing, as the Governor promised in 1998?

Public Policy 201

#4 Elicit and Document Legislators' Support Influencing Legislators—

Documenting Legislators' Support

Case Illustration: from the Legislative Intervention Map

Description of Documentable Request:

- What concrete action step could I ask Legislators to take to fulfill goals?
- In past meetings, I have learned you are often given positive verbal feedback and indications of support— *but there is no tangible action taken.*
- **My Explicit Request:** “Will you support Federal Stimulus Funds to provide housing for disabled consumers, allowing compliance with Federal and State laws to substantially reduce the waiting list?” Will you write a letter to Governor Paterson documenting your support and provide me a copy? *This request had to be followed up multiple times.*
- **Outcome:** Commitments did not come easy or fast; seven legislators however did provide such letters with many endorsing my proposal with attribution. Others simply endorsed the recommendation(s), some in substantial detail, with one affirming use of conversion funds.

Public Policy 201

#4 Elicit and Document Legislators' Support

Influencing Legislators—

Documenting Legislators' Support

Case Illustration: from the Legislative Intervention Map

Summary of Letters Provided:

- Seven letters of support were sent to the Governor provided by:
 - My Assemblyman, my State Senator and my Congressman [Reilly; Breslin; Tonko]
 - 3 Assembly or Senate Disability Committee Members [McDonald, Corwin, Lifton]
 - 2 Senate Insurance Committee Members [McDonald; Breslin]
- Some letters attributed the proposal to use Federal Stimulus Funds explicitly to me, others presented the recommendations as their own.
- Some letters made reference to the State's legal responsibilities and the need to comply with the ADA and Olmstead Decision.
- Most letters referenced the specific size of the waiting list with various degrees of concern about its size and noting the need to reduce it.
- All letters were sent to Governor Paterson except one sent directly to the Governor's Recovery and Reinvestment Cabinet which administers Federal Stimulus funds

See Attachment #4 for copies of the seven letters from Legislators.

Public Policy 201

#4 Elicit and Document Legislators' Support Influencing Legislators—

Documenting Legislators' Support

Case Illustration: from the Legislative Intervention Map

Conclusion:

- Seven Legislators provided written support documented by their letters to Governor Paterson. *Influence resulted from cooperation.*
- Several Legislators are members of influential Committees that advocate for the rights of disabled citizens
- All legislators evidenced a concern about the waiting list and impact it was having on their mentally disabled constituents, particularly where residential placements for their constituents were cancelled
- Support from more legislators is needed and being pursued. *Only time will tell whether Governor Paterson will endorse the use of Federal Stimulus Funds to enable NY compliance with Federal and State Laws and allow the disabled to live in the community.*
- *If not, as the testimony warns, NY is significantly exposed to individual or class action litigation from disability advocates, the disabled, their families and many stakeholders in and outside of NY.*

Public Policy 201

#4 Elicit and Document Legislators' Support Influencing Legislators—

Documenting Legislators' Support

Case Illustration: from the Legislative Intervention Map

#4 Conclusion: final observations

- Influence occurred through the building of trust and cooperation
- A substantial building of relationships had occurred
- Legislators substantially benefitted from information and insight provided, that impacted them directly and personally because of the pain from their own disabled constituents
- While confrontational tactics and civil disobedience have their place (Corbett, 2006), it is clearly not with the “ongoing influence building” model proposed here.

Corbett, C. (2006). *Public policy action research; Intervening and testifying in legislative settings*. Paper presented at the First International Conference on Community Psychology held June 7-10, 2006 in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Public Policy 201

Conclusion w/ Training Implications:

Bolstering Public Policy Training for Community Psychologists

Following are several proposed ways to expand Public Policy training for Community Psychologists. Opportunities appear to abound to expand Public Policy training, advancing the practice of Community Psychology.

One possibility is to expand the form of dissertation research, such as outlined by Price & Cherniss (1977) towards yielding more useful products and which may require re-examining the criteria for academic achievement (p. 225), increasing practical relevance.

If this is done, many opportunities appear to exist that will advance the future trajectory and influence of the field.

Price, R. & Cherniss, C. (1977). Training for a new profession: Research as social action. *Professional Psychology*, May 1977, p.222-231.

Public Policy 201

Conclusion:

Training Implications: Bolstering Public Policy Training for Community Psychologists

Intervention Projects for Graduate Students

1. Volunteer to join a non-profit's existing Legislative Committee, serving their needs.
2. Propose to a non-profit without one to initiate a Legislative Committee (Use the Roadmap, Att. 2, as a template)
3. Seek internship at a non-profit with an existing legislative outreach function; offer to assist with expansion of its current outreach function. This could involve letter drafting campaign to organize and empower clients and families or contact/meet w/ legislators on issues of concern

Public Policy 201

Conclusion:

Intervention Projects for Graduate Students

4. Identify an existing Legislative Task Force on an issue of interest; request meeting(s) with relevant legislators to explore a potential role and graduate project

5. Identify an issue of interest; research other existing legislation. Example: examine and compare NY State's legislation implementing Olmstead. Identify and compare using CP values and principles. Identify improvements; redraft legislation; explore finding interested legislator

6. Research an area of interest, align with a key non-profit and search for advocacy or testimony opportunities

Public Policy 201

Conclusion:

Intervention Projects for Graduate Students

7. Identify a statewide coalition or Association that represents an issue or population of importance to you. Contact their legislative representative, usually located in state capitol; request interview. Solicit views on potential legislative opportunities for student volunteers. Inquire about non-profit affiliates seeking to expand their legislative influence. Develop a project to serve those needs.
8. Student can request meeting with their state assemblyman or state senator. Identify areas of responsibility, Committees they Chair. Determine if there are areas of overlap with student's interests and legislators that may lead to a legislative project.

Public Policy 201

Conclusion:

A Few Key Points:

Warning: success requires persistence. Three or four requests for meetings are not unusual before access is obtained.

Sometimes access is provided to a Staff member— which is an acceptable, and sometimes preferable, alternative.

A note about geographic location: Proximity to the State Capitol is very helpful, i.e. for attending Task Force/Committee mtgs. Legislators, however, have satellite offices enabling them to meet with constituents. Students and interventionists should be able to get access in their city, if they exercise persistence.

Public Policy 201

**Conclusion: Another Training & Influencing Opportunity:
Legislative Analysis can lead to Journal Publication—
*relevance to training, with potential to influence legislators.***

Illustration:

Research and analysis of competing legislative bills pertaining to healthcare conversions in New York State led, unexpectedly, to publishable research in *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* (Corbett, 2005).

In turn, the published, peer reviewed case study research provided a substantive basis for a recommendation contained in testimony before the N.Y. State Legislature, (Corbett, 2009; Attachment 6). This supported the proposed identification and capture of a new, incremental multi-billion dollar revenue source, on a recurring basis, to supplement disabilities funding. This provided basis to partially draft, and advocate for, new legislation.

This illustrates another way to incorporate public policy related research within graduate education requirements. It also shows the potential link between peer reviewed public policy research and influence on legislators and resulting public policy.

* Corbett, (2005). Stewardship of public assets under nonprofit conversion models. New York's Empire Blue Cross Blue Shield case study. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership*, 16(2), 153-169.

Public Policy 201

Conclusion

- Politics is *volatile* and *unpredictable*.
- Legislative intervention requires PERSISTENCE
- Influencing legislators on ongoing basis can begin w/ 5steps:
 - i. Identify your issue
 - ii. Identify your constituency/interest
 - iii. Align yourself with existing interest--or organize one.
 - iv. Identify your access points– key legislators & committees
 - v. Design and implement your intervention plan or map, identify your need and how that can be translated to a documentable action step by legislators. Deliver your request in person and persist, persist, persist.

Finally, engage w/legislators in meetings, hearings, and with testimony as you are able; actively participate– to exercise your own personal power in legislative settings and develop your maximum potential for influence.

Public Policy 201

Christopher Corbett
Independent Researcher

MA Community Psychology
1994

chris_corbett1994@hotmail.com