NCTSN The National Child Traumatic Stress Network

Effectively Communicating with Policymakers and Key Stakeholders about Child Trauma and the NCTSN:

A Guide for NCTSN Members and Partners

Many policymakers and stakeholders are involved in setting public policies to address the needs of children exposed to traumatic events and those who provide treatment and services. Communicating with policymakers, including elected and agency officials and staff, is an important way to educate and inform key decisions and policies related to children's mental health, healthy development, and child trauma issues. This resource offers strategies for fostering effective communication with key stakeholders.

Identify Your Issue and Develop an Effective Policy Change Strategy

Consider these basic questions about the change that you are seeking:

- What specific policy change related to children and trauma is needed and why?
- Are there both short- and long-term policy goals that need to be achieved?
- What preparation do you need to launch this policy change initiative?
- What are the fiscal and resource costs associated with this policy change?
- What outcomes will be achieved from this policy change initiative?
- Who are the potential allies in support of this policy change? Are there likely opponents?
- What are the policymaking climate and timing considerations?
- What strategies might be most effective in meeting your policy goals?

Consider consulting the NCCTS Policy Program and your organization's policy/public affairs team to assist in developing an effective strategy.

Review the federal guidelines regarding lobbying (http://ethics.od.nih.gov/topics/Lobby-Publicity-Guide.htm) with your organization and/or the NCCTS Policy Program to ensure appropriate compliance.

Identify Your Policymakers and Schedule Meetings

Determine if the issues are within the jurisdiction of local, state, or federal policymakers and how these issues may affect relevant levels of government. For elected officials, identify the policymakers who represent you in the locality where you are registered to vote and contact the schedulers in their offices to make an appointment. When applicable, identify yourself as a constituent and request an appointment with the staff responsible for the issues of interest. For agency officials, information about the appropriate departments and staff can be found online:

- Federal elected officials: http://www.senate.gov and http://www.house.gov
- Federal agency and department officials: http://www.usa.gov/directory/federal
- State and local officials: http://www.nga.org/cms/governors/bios and http://thomas.loc.gov/home/state-legislatures.html

The Importance of Policy Staff

While it is not always possible to meet with the elected officials or senior agency officers, meeting their staff members—who help set the agendas and guide policy efforts—is essential to the process of policy change. Establishing relationships with staff helps develop long-term allies and increases opportunities for communication about policy goals.

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The Basics of an Effective Visit with Policymakers

Visits with policymakers/staff are valuable opportunities to inform the policymaking process; they often mark the beginning of an important, mutually beneficial relationship. Consider the following strategies before, during, and after your communication.

Before Your Visit

- Determine your priorities for the meeting beforehand and be prepared to discuss your issues efficiently.
- Research the policymaker's personal/professional background and policy history by reviewing their official websites, biographies, and voting record (if relevant).
- Coordinate with the NCCTS Policy Program and the policy/public affairs team at your organization to gather and share relevant information about policymakers and the policymaking climate and calendar.
- Prepare an information packet for your policymaker/staff, including appropriate fact sheets and your business card.
- When preparing your materials for new contacts, assume that they are unfamiliar with mental health, child trauma, or the NCTSN.
- Be on time, but be flexible and prepared to wait or change the location or length of the visit.

During Your Visit

- Be concise and stay on message, as these meetings may be quite brief (i.e., 10-15 minutes).
- Clearly state the purpose of your visit early and make your request in specific terms before leaving.
- If your request has fiscal or resource implications, be prepared to discuss these costs during your visit.
- Share local examples (e.g., data about the issue, resource utilization in your district/state, illustrative anecdotes/ stories).
- Avoid technical or clinical jargon.
- Be positive and respectful, even if you disagree with the policymaker/staff.
- Focus on building a professional and trusting relationship with the policymaker/staff.
- Be confident, as your expertise and your NCTSN center are important to the policy discussion.
- Questions on different issues may arise; if you do not know an answer, say so and offer to follow-up.
- Remember to show appreciation and thank the policymaker/staff for their time.

After Your Visit

- Send a follow-up message to your policymaker/staff to express thanks and provide any promised information.
- Remain in contact with your policymaker/staff to update them on activities at your organization.
- Communicate with the NCCTS Policy Program and your organization's policy/public affairs team to brief them on the meeting and consider additional individual and organizational follow-up (e.g., site visit).

Resources

- NCTSN Policy Resources: http://www.nctsn.org/resources/policy-issues
- American Psychological Association—Advancing Psychology: A Psychologist's Guide to Federal Advocacy: http://www.apa.org/about/gr/advocacy/guide.aspx
- American Psychological Association PsycAdvocate® Module Series: http://apa.bizvision.com/category/psycadv
- Dirksen Congressional Center—Tips for Contacting Your Representative or Senator: http://www.congresslink.org/print_basics_tipsforcontacting.htm

For more information, please contact the NCCTS Policy Program at policy@nctsn.org or visit www.NCTSN.org.