



Best Practices in Communicating with Policymakers

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We live in a society exquisitely dependent
on science and technology, in which
hardly anyone knows anything about
science and technology.

--Carl Sagan

Creating An Effective Communications Strategy

Why contact policymakers?

- Inform them about an agency, program, or survey.
- Seek increased funding.
- Address a policy issue.
- Resolve problem affecting constituents.
- Demonstrate how data can inform policies.

What federal policymakers care about:

- **Jobs, jobs, jobs**
 - Research and Data through the lens of economic impact will get their attention
- **Health and Well-being of Constituents**
 - Diseases from Alzheimers to Zika
 - Opioids
 - Environmental hazards/natural disasters
- **Issues relevant to Committee Assignments**

Education vs. Advocacy

Education—informing others about research and research activities.

Advocacy—requesting a specific action, such as support for legislation, funding, or other policy-related action.

Key to Successful One-on-One Meetings with Policymakers

BEFORE the meeting:

- Identify appropriate staff contact to request meeting.
- Get to know your target! Read bio to understand member's background, legislative priorities, and committee assignments.
- Reconfirm appointment and provide staff with appropriate background materials.
- Tweet positive note to office expressing enthusiasm about meeting.
- Designate a group leader to initiate and conclude meeting.

Key to Successful One-on-One Meetings with Policymakers

DURING the meeting:

- Say Thank You for meeting & (if applicable) for supporting our interests.
- Relate comments to policymaker's interests, district or state, and committee assignments.
- Assume policymaker is not familiar with agency, program, or survey you are discussing.
- Provide specific examples (preferably applied) of how the agency's data or programs are being used to meet the needs of constituents and/or improve the quality of life in the district or state.
- Be flexible—changes in location or staff person can happen.
- Complete meeting within allotted time (usually 15 to 20 minutes).
- Have one-page fact sheets or other brief materials to leave behind summarizing the issue and the requested action.
- Stay positive and away from politics—especially campaign politics!

Key to Successful One-on-One Meetings with Policymakers

AFTER the meeting:

- Email a thank you note to staff person, summarizing outcome of meeting and providing contact information for anyone who attended.
- Provide any requested follow up materials with thank you note.
- Tweet at office a follow up note thanking the policymaker for the meeting and thank them if they agreed to support your position.

Creating An Effective Communications Strategy

“The Population Association of America and Association of Population Centers are two affiliated organizations that together represent over 3,000 behavioral and social scientists and over 40 federally funded population research centers nationwide.

Population scientists include demographers, economists, and sociologists who conduct research on population trends and the individual, societal, and environmental implications of population change.

Population scientists rely on data produced by the Census Bureau to conduct their research and research training. Thus, we are eager to talk to you today about the agency’s important work and its current funding challenges.”

Your meetings will be successful if you can:

- Convey who you are representing and why you requested the meeting.
- Explain clearly the agency, program, or survey.
- Explain the “ask” in clear, concise terms.
- Relate “ask” to issues important to policymaker, district and/or constituents.
- Impress upon staff implications of funding cuts or delays.
- Recognize time constraints, remain flexible and positive.

Communicating Effectively with Policymakers

Show and Tell: Using Visual Aids

- Concise handouts
- Data Visualization



Communicating Effectively with Policymakers

An effective handout will:

- Use clear, concise language
- Focus on **findings** rather than **process**
- Make findings accessible
 - Prominently placed and Explicit
- Be visually appealing
 - Use data visualization if possible
- Include data and funding sources

Communicating Effectively with Policymakers

When preparing handouts, Don't:

- Use overly complicated graphs
 - *Label appropriately*
- Use jargon
 - *If must use acronyms, spell them out*
- Leave reader guessing about findings/outcomes
 - *Don't "bury the lead"*

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THE FRAYING OF THE FAMILY SAFETY NET *

Family Members Are the First Line of Defense When Someone Needs Help, BUT...

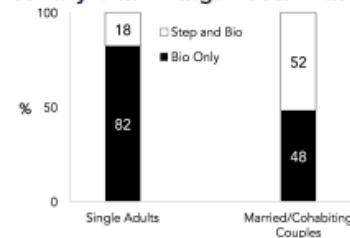
Support between Family Members Depends on the Type of Relationship

- Adult children in stepfamilies are less likely to help parents
- Parents in stepfamilies are less likely to help adult children
- Americans prefer to help a married adult child than a cohabiting adult child by "doubling up" in their home

Sources: Panel Study of Income Dynamics and Vignette Study. Wiemers, Seltzer, Schoeni, Hotz, and Bianchi, "Stepfamily Structure and Transfers between Generations in U.S. Families," under review. Seltzer, Lau, and Bianchi, "Doubling Up When Times Are Tough: A Study of Obligations to Share a Home in Response to Economic Hardship." *Social Science Research*, 2012.

Stepfamilies Are Common

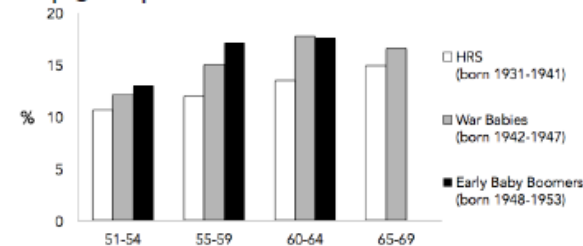
Nearly 1 in 5 single adults and 1 in 2 married couples have a stepparent or stepchild



Percent of Families with at Least One Parent or Adult Child

Sources: Panel Study of Income Dynamics. Wiemers, Seltzer, Schoeni, Hotz, and Bianchi, "Stepfamily Structure and Transfers between Generations in U.S. Families," under review.

Step-grandparenthood has increased over time



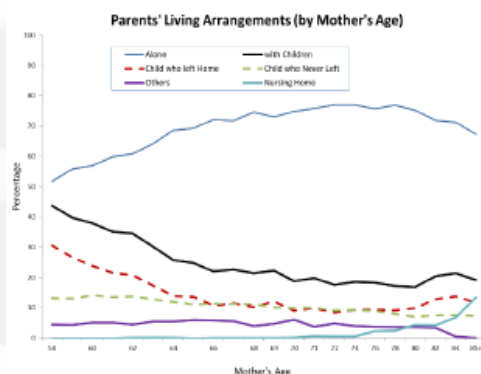
Percent of Women Who Are Step-grandmothers, by Age and Birth Cohort

AMERICAN FAMILIES & THE WELL-BEING OF THEIR MEMBERS

V. Joseph Hotz, Arts & Sciences Professor of Economics, Duke University

- Families play key roles in well-being of its members.
- Understanding these roles & obligations & when & how well they work are crucial to design of public policy.
- Below, we summarize several studies of the relationships between parents and their adult children.

Children are still living with their older parents in the 21st Century, but it's no always an easy life for the parents.



Source: Wiemers, Blanchev, McGarry & Hotz (2017) "Living Arrangements of Mothers & their Adult Children over the Life Course," *Research on Aging*. PSID Data.

- 25% of parent(s) live with (adult) children when mom is 65 & 21% when she is 85.
- 12% are living with children who never left!
- Moms over age 70 are significantly more likely to live with children if one or more of them are disabled, i.e., on SSI. 11% of parents have adult children who are disabled; it is 21% of those who live with their children.
- Thus, the continuing dependence of children for some older parents, especially moms, represents a serious challenge to this well-being of many in the aging baby boom generation!

Parents help fund their children's college education, but they & their children are taking on debt to do so.

Parental Financial Help for Children's College by Parental Housing Wealth		
Parental Wealth Quintiles	% of Parents who provide help	Avg Transfer amt per Child
Bottom 20%	18%	\$1,552
21% - 40%	17%	\$1,746
41% - 60%	24%	\$2,022
61% - 80%	33%	\$8,264
Top 20%	48%	\$20,503

- Costs of attending college in U.S. have risen faster than rate of inflation for past 35 year.
- As a result, student debt has risen. In 2010, over 40% of younger Americans had such debt.
- Parents play a vital role in helping fund their children's college education, although it differs substantially by parental wealth (see chart) & income.
- Parents who help finance kids' college have taken on substantial debt to do so & continue to hold it well after child's college years.
 - The good news: Children of parents who help are more likely to graduate!
 - The not so good news: Their children still have significant student debt of their own.

Population Science in Tennessee



The University of Tennessee's Center for Business and Economic Research prepares county-level population projections for the State of Tennessee. These estimates are vital for understanding future tax revenues in our state and planning for economic and population growth. To produce these projections, Nicholas Nagle uses data from the **Decennial Census** and the **American Community Survey** to understand trends in state-to-state migration for different age groups. He also uses birth and death records from the **CDC** to understand trends in birth and death rates.



At the Urban Dynamics Institute at Oak Ridge National Laboratory, Nagle is also using Decennial Census and American Community Surveys to develop models to better prepare us for natural disasters and terrorist attacks, estimate neighborhood and household energy demand, and better understand travel and commuting decisions.



Also at Oak Ridge National Lab, Stephanie Bohon works with UT's Joint Institute for Computational Sciences to develop advances in supercomputing that allow population scientists to build better models combining data from the American Community Survey with other data such as **NSF's Panel Study of Income Dynamics** and satellite imagery from **NASA**. These models are used for a range of purposes including work force development, alternative energy solutions, and disaster preparedness.



At the University of Memphis, Wesley James uses **Compressed Mortality Files** distributed by the **CDC** to examine the social determinants of health and mortality in rural America. James also receives funding from the **Department of Education** in order to evaluate **Promise Communities** that improve the opportunities and outcomes for children living in under-resourced communities. Similarly, Laurie Meschke at the University of Tennessee receives funding from the **Health Resources and Service Administration** to ensure that rural communities have enough well-trained nurses to meet their needs.



At Vanderbilt University, Mariano Sana uses the **Current Population Survey** to examine the effects of immigration on the employment prospects of US-born workers. He also uses the Decennial Census to estimate the foreign-born composition of the STEM workforce. Sano's work, funded by the **National Institutes of Health** has also been used to improve research

Other forms of engagement

Letters

- Send via email using office's electronic inbox
- Personalize
- Include a clear "ask."

Town Hall Meetings

- Follow guidelines provided by office.
- Be brief, positive, and clear about "ask"
- Prepare and conduct appearance at town hall as you would a one-on-one meeting.

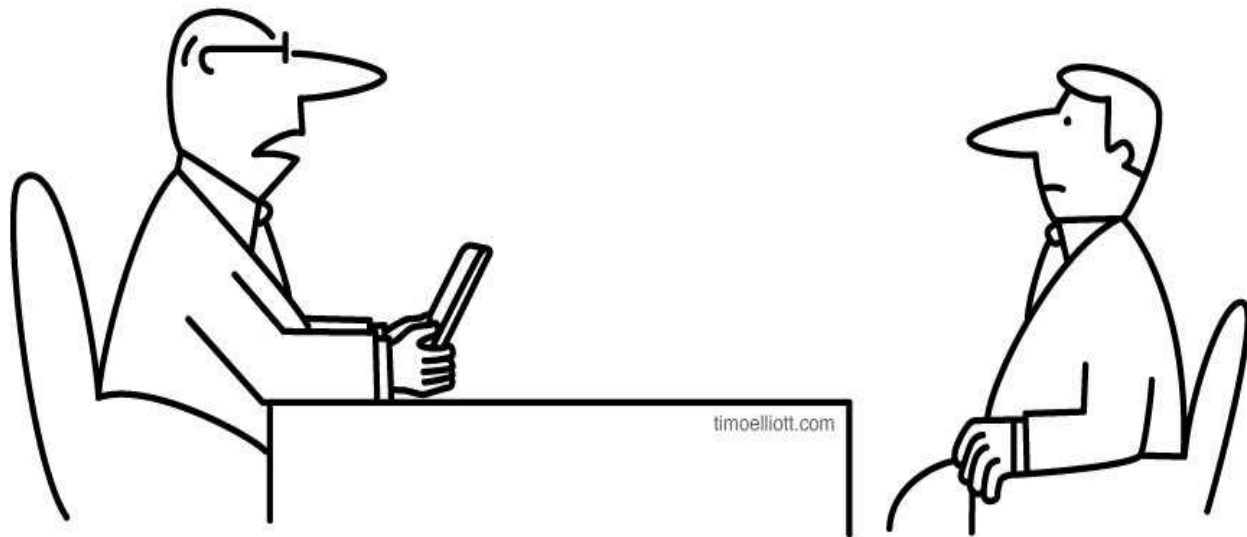
Social Media

- Be positive
- Use as a forum for sharing and conveying information.
- Provide links to helpful background information.

Coordinate Outreach...

- Work with your University's federal affairs office
 - They can provide strategic advice about staff contacts, policymaker priorities, ongoing communication
 - Ensure that your outreach coordinates with other University priorities
 - Can elevate your center's profile within the University

Creating An Effective Communications Strategy



*“No, I’m afraid we can’t ‘just make the data up’
—this is business, not politics...”*



“When I feel the heat, I see the light!”

– (Ret.) U.S. Senator Fritz Hollings

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