



A Citizens Guide to Child and Family Focused Public Policy

Policy making in the U.S. is shifting from federal to state and local levels. The rationale behind the shift is that better decisions can be made by those closest to the situation. Better decisions can only be made if people making, or influencing, the decisions do so knowledgeably.

Engaging as citizens in decision making affecting children, families and the communities in which they live is a goal of the American Association of Family Consumer Sciences. In 1997, the Smithsonian featured the history and effect of such work in it's exhibit, "From Parlor to Politics." The exhibit noted that the profession *enlarged the circle of influence from the home into public arenas bringing reform to matters affecting families.*

To continue that tradition, the Public Policy Committee of AAFCS offers this citizen's guide for engagement in public policy.

What can a citizen do to become involved and contribute to wise policy making so the focus is on child, family and community well-being?

- A Understand** --the situation
 - the legislation existing or proposed
 - the community values regarding well-being
 - the needs & assets among children, families and communities
 - the capacity to provide private and public assistance
 - the costs and benefits of these alternatives
- B Consider** the costs and benefits of becoming involved in policy making
- C Act** on your reflective thinking!!

How can a citizen organize to effectively contribute?

- 1. Become** knowledgeable through the "Five Is": Learn about federal, state and/or local legislation using these components:

- Information** Gather facts about the situation
- Issues** Identify issues involved in the situation
- Impacts** Analyze likely consequences for people
- Implications** Consider possible effects on people and organizations
- Imperative** Ponder the call for action presented by the situation

2. **Agree** on a set of principles for making decisions.
3. **Consider** the use of “well-being” as a framework for picturing the conditions in which children, youths and families live, learn and work in your community. Using the best available research-based data, fill that framework with a “picture” of the situation in your community by placing numbers or information in the following categories:
 - In Crisis**—Many basic needs unmet—extensive assistance needed
 - At-risk**—in danger—additional assistance needed to prevent crisis
 - Safe**—basic needs met—some assistance for maintenance
 - Thriving**—needs and some wants met—likely to sustain self-sufficiency
4. Using the same well-being framework, identify the sources of assistance available to your community members from the following categories:
 - Public Sector:** Federal, state and local government
 - Private Sector:** For-profit business, not-for-profit business and organizations
Individuals and Families
5. Explore all possible alternative courses of action while thinking about the extent to which they represent the community’s values as reflected in the identified principles.
6. Select the alternative that best fits the needs in your community and builds on personal, family or community assets in keeping with the principles you’ve identified and the capacity available to make the alternatives happen.
7. Work with other citizens—youths and adults, women and men of diverse experience, spirit and purpose, from all sectors of your community—to make the wisest public policy decisions.
8. Continue to stay involved as the policies are implemented. Continually revisit the situation, the principles, the need, the assets, the alternatives and the consequences of policy to make changes as appropriate.

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