

Influencing policy

Working through the first four sections of the workbook, your group may have identified an issue they would like to work on. Once the group has an understanding of what policy is and how it affects food security, this section describes a process that can be taken to increase your ability to influence policy.

The process of influencing policy can be broken down into four broad and interrelated steps:

- 1 Do your homework – know your issues, goals, supporters and opposition
- 2 Identify and engage stakeholders and develop networks – make connections between different people and different groups
- 3 Know the policy process, policy tools and public policy makers
- 4 Take action!

The worksheets provided in this section will help you with each of these steps. Use them to help you describe your issue, know the policies you need to address, and where to go, who to approach and what to do to make things happen.

You may go back and forth between the steps (and the worksheets) during this journey but completing them all will help you have the best chance at policy change.

The *Food for Thought* on page 50 gives examples of many policy change strategies that we learned about in our environmental scan of policy change activities across Canada.



Key Term

Stakeholders

People who are interested in, or affected by, an issue and who want to be involved in looking for solutions.

Step 1.

Know your issues, goals, supporters and opposition

The more you know about your issue and the clearer you are about what you want to achieve, the more effectively you will be able to make your case. To make a strong case for doing something about your issue, you must present your issue with statistics, information and stories that show:

- 1 how many people are affected;
- 2 how broad the impact is (for example, its impact on health, economy, environment, community, etc.);
- 3 how long it has been going on and what will happen if it is not addressed by public policy.

The information and activities in *Sections 1* and *2* of this workbook will help you become more familiar with the broad issue of food security, pinpoint the key issues that affect you, and begin to come up with your views on what needs to be done to address your issue. For example Activity 2.1 “What does food insecurity affect”, can be used to show the many impacts of food insecurity.

Where to get evidence to support your case:

- Community service directories identify other groups, agencies and organizations that are working on similar issues/problems.
- Population health status data are often available from your local government statistics agency, public health unit, district health councils or health research organizations in universities.
- Socio-demographic data provide information on key social and economic variables in your community (e.g. household income, education level, food bank use). This information can allow you to compare your community to others in your province or across the country.
- Research studies including needs assessments, research reports and journal articles can help you to get to know your issue. This type of information can be located through searches at reference libraries or keyword searches of on-line databases such as Medline or PubMed.
- Newspaper or magazine articles can provide information about the problem or issue. Paying particular attention to articles that refer to controversy surrounding the issues will help you to identify your supporters and/or opposition.

Adapted from: Health Communication Unit at the Centre for Health Promotion, University of Toronto, 2004

- The internet can also be a valuable tool for researching an issue and examining differing perspectives. Typing key words into a search engine like www.google.ca can uncover a wealth of information and ideas. In *Section 7 Resources and Tools (page 81)*, we've included a few helpful websites to get you started.

Know who your supporters are

At this stage, it's also very useful to get to know who your **supporters** are and who you might approach as supporters. Contact them and tell them about the work your group is doing. Discuss how your goals may be similar to theirs and try to gain their support for your work. See below for ideas for who your possible supporters might be.

Understand your opposition's point of view

Getting to know your **opposition** can help you to understand their viewpoint —remember, you don't have to agree with it, just understand it. This insight can help you to focus your arguments and activities in the most effective ways. It can also show you what areas people with other points of view will focus on and help you direct your research so you'll have information to counter their position.

Possible supporters:

- **Citizens** — community members affected by or interested in the issue
- **Volunteer and Non-profit Organizations** — locally, provincially, nationally and internationally
- **Businesses and Industry**
- **University researchers** working in the area
- **Media** — local or independent media groups, individual journalists
- **Government** — departments, divisions, working groups, politicians
- **Professional Associations and Organizations**



What we learned...

Tips for influencing policy from food security initiatives across Canada

- Celebrate the small successes — policy change can be a long, demanding and sometimes difficult process.
- Think big but stay focused — there are many issues to be dealt with.
- Know the political process — learn how government works.
- Meet with policy makers — don't be afraid of politicians.
- Use the media — it can be a prime driving force for shaping public opinion and political agendas, but before going this route seek assistance from others who have experience with media and be sure to communicate clear and accurate information.
- Build broad public support — there needs to be pressure for policy change from outside the political system.
- Identify a champion — someone either within the political system, or someone outside of it who knows the system.
- Develop clear messages and avoid an adversarial approach that blames or attacks certain people.
- Let policy makers know what they can do to address the issues. Develop action steps and follow through on your efforts.

“You can't be all things to all people... keep the same message... be aware of what your focus is.”

“In the end, that's what clinched the deal for us ... one councilor became very excited about what we were doing and really moved for us.”

“I don't think bra burning gets anybody anywhere.”

“It is like the drip of water and it is going to eventually create a hole in the rock.”

“The process, the structure and how government works, that is really important.”

“The Minister, at the end of the day, needs to know that the work is supported on the outside.”

“If you're going to be an activist, you have to act.”

NSNC/AHPRC Food Security Projects, 2003

Step 1 - Worksheet 5.1 Know your issues, goals, supporters and opposition

Working through this worksheet will help your group to more fully understand your issue/problem and start to identify stakeholders.

Issue/Problem: Setting: Population:

1. What is the extent of the issue/problem? (How many people and/or systems does it affect?)	4. How long has it been an issue/problem?
2. Why is it an issue/problem?	5. What has been done to try and resolve the issue/problem in the past? Are there policies that specifically target this issue?
3. What has contributed to the development of the issue/problem?	6. What could happen if this issue/problem is NOT dealt with?

7. What needs to be done about it?	10. Who might support you or have similar perspectives on this issue/problem?
8. What is your goal(s)?	11. Who might oppose, object or have a different perspective on this issue/problem?
9. Who else thinks this is an issue/problem?	In one sentence, describe, in a bit more detail, your issue and how you would like to see things change. <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Adapted from The Health Communication Unit at the Centre of Health Promotion, University of Toronto, 2004

Step 2.

Identify and engage stakeholders and develop networks

Once you have an understanding of how policy is made, and who makes policy related to your issues your next move is to “advocate” to get your issue on the agenda of the relevant policy makers.

This is where your research, insight and commitment to your issue pay off. You can have an impact in policy development if you know your issue, present your ideas and evidence clearly, and are prepared with solutions.

Any argument is more persuasive if there are many voices supporting it. Broad support is particularly important when you are trying to get your issue on a politician’s agenda. If you can convince a politician that he or she will please many voters by acting on your issue, you are more likely to win over the politician. Building networks and involving groups and individuals who also have a stake in the issue can bring that “bigger voice” forward.

Politicians may agree to a certain policy action but it may never be implemented. One big voice, including many stakeholders who are working on the same issue and advocating for the same cause, can be a key factor in keeping an issue on the policy agenda. A united, consistent voice can help to make sure the issue remains in the spotlight.

Key Term

Advocacy

A combination of individual and social actions designed to gain political commitment, policy support, social acceptance and systems support for a particular health goal or programme.

World Health Organization, 1995

Step 2- Worksheet 5.2 Identify and Engage Stakeholders and Develop Networks

When moving forward on an issue/problem there are certain people or organizations that you may want to involve. Brainstorm, using this worksheet, as to who this might be.

Issue/Problem:

<p>1. Who are your potential partners on the issue/problem?</p>	<p>3. Who is going to benefit from or be affected by this issue/problem (e.g. single parents, those on low incomes, seniors, farmers, etc)?</p>
<p>2. Who has been—or is now— involved in similar issues/problems?</p>	<p>4. Who are the key stakeholders—in government and in the community—for this issue/problem?</p>

Adapted from The Health Communication Unit at the Centre of Health Promotion, University of Toronto, 2004

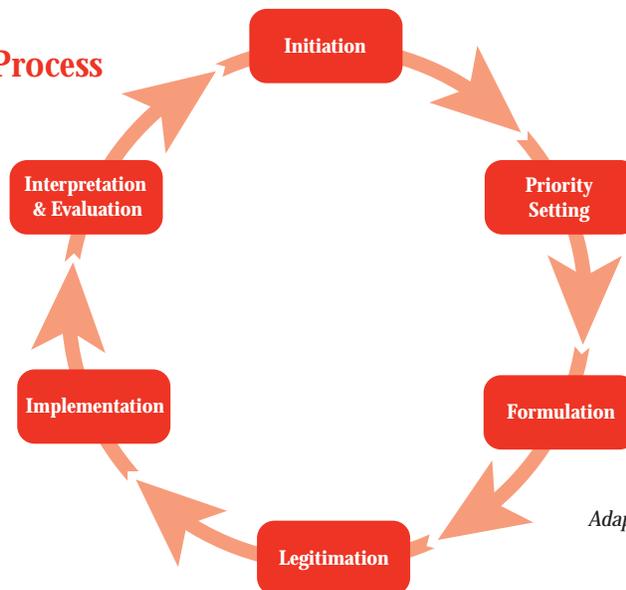
Step 3.

Know the policy process, policy tools and public policy makers

The policy development process at the government level can be lengthy and complex. It helps to understand how an issue becomes a policy issue and what happens from there.

Here is an example process of how public policy is made. It shows how long and complex it can be.

The Policy Process



Adapted from: O'Neill

Key Term

Public Policy Process

The process through which legislators or bureaucrats identify an issue and develop a public policy to address it.

Initiation

An issue is brought to the attention of policy-makers and possibly put onto the political agenda if it is a public policy issue.

Priority Setting

The issue is looked at in terms of the many competing issues that need to be acted on.

Formulation

Policy goals are set and the policy direction is developed.

Legitimation

Research is done to determine what has been done in the past, what has been successful and what hasn't worked. The policy is written.

Implementation The policy is put into action.

Interpretation and Evaluation Under ideal conditions the effectiveness and impact of the policy are monitored and evaluated. However, this is the part of the policy process that often does not occur.

Policy Tools

In *Section 4*, Activity 4.3 helped participants think about various policy tools used to address issues. Refer back to this activity on page 38. You could use this activity again if you get stuck.

Locating Public Policy Makers

Since all levels of government—federal, provincial and local —make public policy, deciding which level of government to approach is a critical step. You need to locate the people who are responsible for developing policy on the issue you are interested in. It helps if he or she is interested in your issue and willing to move it forward on the policy agenda. But even if the policy maker is not initially sympathetic, it's your job to try and change his or her mind!

It's a good idea to establish and maintain good relations with the policy makers you deal with —whether they agree with you or not. Influencing policy can sometimes take a long time, and in the long run you'll be more effective if you make as many friends —and as few enemies —as possible.

Who are the key public policy makers?

Local

Mayor
City Councillors
Members of special committees

Provincial/ Territorial

Elected officials
Premiers
Department
Ministers

Federal

Senators
Prime Minister
Members of
Parliament
Department
Ministers

Aboriginal Governance

Chiefs
Councils
Minister of Indian
Affairs

Step 3-Worksheet 5.3 Know the Policy Process, Policy Tools and Public Policy Makers

Knowing the policy process, policy tools and public policy makers is essential when trying to move your issue/problem forward. Use this worksheet to help you brainstorm.

Issue/Problem:

1. Which level of government is involved in the issue/problem?	3. Which elected officials are involved and where do they stand on the issue/problem?	
2. What departments are involved or have something at stake?	4. Who are the key stakeholders—in government and in the community—for this issue/problem?	5. What are the possible policy tools you could use to address the issue/problem?

Adapted from The Health Communication Unit at the Centre of Health Promotion, University of Toronto, 2004

Step 4.

Take action!

At this point, you've identified your issue, done your research, and identified the relevant policy makers, stakeholders and potential partners. The next step is to develop an action plan.

Worksheet 5.4 is a check list to help you think about what strategies you might use in your action plan and make sure you are ready to act. Strategies for action are outlined in *Section 6* on page 61.

You can use Worksheet 5.5 to help you plan. You may have more than one strategy so photocopy this sheet to use for each one.



In 2002, the Healthy Child Committee of Cabinet of Manitoba mandated the establishment of the Northern Food Prices Project. The purpose of the project was to submit a report to the Committee identifying strategic options to address concerns about high food prices in northern Manitoba. Strategic options focused on reducing the retail price of nutritious foods such as milk and milk products (including infant formula and lactose-reduced products), fresh fruits and vegetables, meats, whole grains and other staples to northern citizens.

Northern Food Prices Report, 2003

Step 4 — Worksheet 5.4 Checklist for action planning

Policy change occurs when a number of factors come together at the right time, with the right people. You can set the stage by being aware of these factors and trying to bring as many as possible into play.

Key Factor	Do we have this?	If no, what can we do to get it? <i>See Section 6 for possible strategies</i>
Supporting information		
Important research		
Recent reports and documents		
Examples of successful policies or guidelines		
Timing		
Interest in issue from person with authority		
Political opportunity —election, public hearings, Royal Commission, etc.		
Perception of issue as a crisis		
General consensus that change is needed		
People have started talking about the issue		
Organization		
Links between stakeholders		
Positive connections between interested groups		
Influential group is involved		
Interested groups have sufficient resources		
Interested groups have motivation and energy		
Interested groups are open-minded and flexible		
Advocates are working together and agree on actions to take		
Message		
Agenda for action is clear		
Messages are clear		
Issue can be presented as a story		

Worksheet 5.5 Making an action plan

Action Plan Template			
Issue			
Goal			
Partners			
First Step			
Action planned			
Tasks	Who will do each task?	Resources and supports needed	Completion date
What's next?			
Action planned			
Tasks	Who will do each task?	Resources and supports needed	Completion date