



Ambassador Public Policy

You want your voice heard. It's so important that one of your Leadership Journeys is about just that—speaking up about, and acting on, issues that are crucial in your world. And if you want your voice heard by government, it helps to know about public policy: the laws and government actions surrounding particular issues. To influence public policy, it's important to know how a citizen can work to affect change in her community, her country, and her world. This Ambassador Citizen badge is your opportunity to find out.

Steps

1. Find out how activists advocate for change
2. Engage as a global citizen
3. Dig into national or state public policy
4. Explore local or community policy
5. See public policy creation in action

Purpose

When I've earned this badge, I'll know about public policies and how I can influence legislation that matters to me.

Step 1: Find out how activists advocate for change.

Use this step as an introduction to public policy: Here's your chance to learn from a real change-maker. Consider an issue you care about—perhaps job creation, environmental protection, anti-bullying laws, veterans' rights, financial aid for college, or distracted driving—and pick a choice that will improve your understanding of the public policy surrounding it.

CHOICES — DO ONE:

Interview an activist. Find out how an activist for an issue you care about influences public policy. Have their campaigns for change been successful? What challenges did they encounter? What advice do they have for you?

OR

Watch a documentary or movie. Find one about an individual or group who pushed for a change in public policy, and screen it for friends and family. Afterward, discuss which tactics used were most successful in gathering support for the cause.

OR



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Read about women who changed the course of U.S. history. This could be a single biography or several articles about an activist like Rachel Carson, Eleanor Roosevelt, or Susan B. Anthony. Or it could be a book about female suffrage or other issue in which female advocates were instrumental.

For More FUN: Ask several girls to each imagine they're a famous female advocate, and hold a roundtable discussion about what you did and how you did it.

Step 2: Engage as a global citizen.

Take a closer look at how voices are heard around the world. Public-policy successes and challenges in other countries can give us information about how to approach issues of our own. Enhance your knowledge in one of these ways.

CHOICES — DO ONE:

Compare laws. Think about an issue facing policy-makers in America. It might be pollution regulations, marriage laws, or teen texting and driving. Now find out how the issue is regulated in three other countries. What are the biggest differences between public policy in the United States and abroad?

OR

Track a public-policy issue being challenged in another country. There are many laws currently being challenged in countries abroad. For instance, groups are trying to enact whale-hunting laws in Japan. Others are offering legal aid in places like Saudi Arabia, where laws limit women's rights in marriage choice, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Find one issue and follow its progress. How are the organizations trying to influence change? Are their methods successful?

OR

Explore an international NGO (non-governmental organization). This might be CARE, Heifer International, Doctors Without Borders, or the World Wildlife Federation. Find out how the group tries to change policy and what challenges are involved in trying to influence one issue across national borders. Who does this NGO lobby to effect change?

More to Explore:



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The World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts (WAGGGS) is the combined voice for 10 million girls worldwide. Check out the WAGGGS website to see how the organization advocates for girls globally on such issues as HIV, AIDS, human trafficking, education, and health. If you are interested, get involved in one of the efforts—or share what you find with younger Girl Scouts.

Step 3: Dig into national or state public policy.

Choose a national or state policy issue that matters to you. The goal of this step is for you to get an understanding of how one national or state issue is influenced by citizens, policy-makers, and the media. Whose voices are getting heard?

CHOICES — DO ONE:

Track your issue. For two weeks, follow the issue—from both sides—in at least three sources, such as national news, websites, and news magazines and newspapers. Pay attention to the people and organizations involved, the changes being advocated, the events, progress, and public opinion. At the end of the two weeks, write a list of the five most effective and least effective actions you noticed. Keep the list for future reference (you can always add to it!).

OR

Talk to an interest group that promotes your issue. For example, you could speak to the outreach staff at the American Medical Association, the Association of Women Engineers, or the AAA about their experiences trying to influence policy. Which campaigns have been effective? Which haven't? Take notes on tips and advice.

For More FUN: Talk to someone on the other side of the issue.

OR

Compare three different states' positions on your issue. For instance, driving age laws: In South Dakota, you can get a driver's license 3 months after you turn 14; in New Jersey, you must be 17; in California, 16. Some states allow people to carry concealed weapons. Use and possession of fireworks is regulated differently from state to state. There are even laws for how long students must stay in school: 7 states mandate education until age 17, but 29 states allow students to drop out at age 16! Write up a state-to-state comparison and note why the policy originated and whose efforts helped make it that way.

Step 4: Explore local or community policy.

You've looked at a national or state issue—but how is policy created in your own backyard? Who is making decisions, and who is influencing those decisions? In the years ahead, you'll



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be getting in on the legislative action—either as a voter or an active policy advocate. Get more informed right now.

CHOICES — DO ONE:

Attend a meeting. This might be a community organization, school board, or student council meeting. While you're there, consider these questions: What methods of stating a position seem most effective? Least effective? If a policy decision is reached, do you agree or disagree with it? Talk about your experience with your friends or family.

OR

Compare different local positions. Profile two opposing public officials or committee leaders on one issue. What level of influence does each leader have? What is their history? Share your thoughts on whose actions are most effective with friends or family.

OR

Visit your local legislator's office, or schedule a phone interview with them. If your legislator is not available, schedule a meeting with a staff member. Ask about how the public gives feedback, and what kind of feedback is most effective. What do they recommend as the best way for a citizen to get her voice heard?

Sidebar: Understanding Lobbying

A lobbyist is paid by a group—such as a corporation, a union, an organization, or a group of concerned citizens—to promote a specific position to policy-makers.

- It's the lobbyist's job to share information with legislators and influence them to vote a certain way. To do that, a lobbyist often pores through thousands of pages of bills and regulations and finds the best way to move their policy through.
- Lobbying is also performed on a state level, where lobbyists influence state legislatures, and on the local level with city council members and county commissioners.

Examples of people who hire lobbyists are:

- groups of teachers, firemen, or doctors
- organizations like the American Cancer Society and Girl Scouts of the USA

Step 5: See public policy creation in action.

Find the people in your community or state in charge of making or impacting public policy, and go behind the scenes. There's no better way to find out how you can change the system than by seeing how it's run from the inside.

CHOICES — DO ONE:



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Shadow a policy-maker. Follow a policy-maker for a day. Questions to consider:

What is a typical day like? Is this a career you'd like to have?

How do they hear from and get input from their constituents about an issue? How do they navigate the systems to make change?

What sources do they use? What statistical data? Where is it from? Who influences their fact-finding, and how?

OR

Volunteer at an office. Volunteer for a day (or more!) at a chamber of commerce, community organization, or branch of the local government. Talk to staff members about key policy issues, policy influencing, how they increase awareness of issues, and how they get data to use in building support for their causes.

OR

Interview a policy-maker. Check your newspaper or an online calendar for policy debates and meetings. Attend one, and take careful notes. Within a week, interview a policy-maker who spoke or another community official with an interest in the event. Use your notes to ask informed questions about the event's effectiveness in educating, convincing, or inspiring the public about the issue.

Now that I've earned this badge, I can give service by:

- Using my policy influence knowledge to earn my Gold Award
- Advising others on the most effective ways to advocate for change in my community

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