

Ambassador Public Policy

Citizen

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 the 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.

“In too many instances, the march to globalization has also meant the marginalization of women and girls. And that must change.”

-Hillary Rodham Clinton, U.S. Secretary of State

“I'm a huge proponent of exchanges - student exchanges, cultural exchanges, university exchanges. We talk a lot about public diplomacy...It's extremely important that we get our message out, but It's also the case that we should not have a monologue with other people. It has to be a conversation, and you can't do that without exchanges and openness.”

-Condoleeza Rice,

former U.S. Secretary of State

Every step has three choices. Do ONE choice to complete each step. Inspired? Do more.

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 about which you care – 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.

CHOOSE ONE:

Interview an activist. Find out how an activist for an issue about which you care 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

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 issues 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.

CHOOSE 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

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.

TYPES OF PUBLIC POLICIES

Public policies take many shapes and sizes – and can affect the whole country, or only a few stakeholders. Our national, state, and local governments all establish public policies. Most often, public policies are government efforts to encourage or discourage a particular behavior, activity, or outcome. Examples of public policies might include:

REGULATORY MEASURES

Rules or codes created to set product specifications or performance. For instance, the Food and Drug Administration manages regulations concerning the proper handling of food. The state employment office regulates fair employment practices.

LAWS

Established rules imposed by governments on a local, state, or federal level. A broad term, “laws” can apply to everything from criminal activity to international trade to how old you have to be to get married.

PROGRAMS

Government-funded initiatives that support certain types of activities, such as parks and recreation departments, youth sports leagues, or after-school programs.

INCENTIVES

Efforts to encourage citizens, corporations, non-profits or others to take a certain type of action. For example, companies often get special tax breaks if they perform certain types of research.

JUDICIAL DECISIONS

Rules determined by a court of law. For example, the Brown v. Board of Education (1954) Supreme Court Case determined that the “separate but equal” standard was against the law making segregation illegal in public schools.

Step 3: Dig into national or state public policy

Choose a national or state public 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?

CHOOSE 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.

Careers to Explore

Elected official

Talk-show host

Case worker

Documentary filmmaker

Policy analyst or researcher

Public-relations agent

Journalist

Community organizer

International development worker

Lobbyist

Lawyer

Nonprofit organization director

Visual artist

Editorial cartoonist

Political blogger

Mediator social worker

Environmental scientist

Policy analyst

Foreign-service officer

City planner

Charity administrator

Activist/advocate

Ethics officer

Ombudsperson

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

CHOOSE 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?

More to EXPLORE

Find out what it takes to be a lobbyist and what rules govern the industry. Do lobbyists need to be certified? What type of college degree and experience works best for a lobbyist? What internships are available for a career as a lobbyist.

Understand 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.

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
- 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.

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.

CHOOSE ONE:

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? From where is it? 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.

“Any woman who understands the problems of running a home will be nearer to understanding the problems of running a country.”

-Margaret Thatcher,
former U.K. prime minister

“I want history to remember me not just as the first black woman to be elected to Congress not as the first black woman to have made a bid for the presidency of the United States, but as a black woman who lived in the 20th century and dared to be herself.”

-Shirley Chisholm,
American politician, educator, and author

WOMEN in PUBLIC POLICY

Throughout this badge, take note of the roles women play in public policy. Where are they influencing your community, state, the country, and internationally? If you interview or visit a female policy-maker, ask if she encounters challenges in the workplace due to gender? If so, what kinds? How does she handle them?

Add the Badge to Your Journey

All of your Leadership Journeys encourage you to try to make a lasting difference. Working to change public policy is one way to do that! Look back at the issues you heard about in this badge, while investigating issues and policies. An issue you uncovered might interest you so much that you're inspired to go on and tackle it as a Take Action project. Now that's leadership in action!

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

- **Making my voice heard for my *Your Voice, Your World* Leadership Journey**
- **Using my policy influence knowledge to earn my Gold Award**
- **Advising others on the most effective ways to advocate for change in my community**