

I. INFLUENCING LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Since a large part of a neighborhood association's time may be spent advocating for change at the local level, it is important to know how to work with local government. This section gives ideas for how groups like neighborhood associations can effectively work with local government to influence decision making. This section deals with general principles, such as how to choose the best channel to go through, how to give public testimony, and how to be politically effective as a group. You can supplement this with specific information related to the City of Salem by looking at section E, "City of Salem Overview", and section J, "Common Neighborhood Association Committees and Issues".



The following list of principles is designed to be used by an individual or a group. References are made to neighborhood associations, but they could be any group.

1. Set Your Goals

What is most important for your neighborhood association to accomplish in order to maintain livability? If it is unclear, set aside some time for your Board to set its direction. Prepare needs statements for the City budget process and prioritize issues for Board involvement.

2. Know Your Issues

Do your homework. Find out who is affected, to what degree, and the consequences of no action. On a long-range issue, document your process, dates of events, who was involved, and correspondence. Determine which issues will need to be addressed by a local government agency and which will need to be addressed by the neighborhood itself. Only neighbors working together and along with government can solve short- and long-term neighborhood problems.

3. Know the Structure and Purpose of City Government

See section E, "City of Salem Overview", for information on the structure of the City of Salem, and section K, "Other Community Resources", for information on other local governments and agencies.

4. Become Acquainted with Procedure

Visit a few meetings of your public officials (e.g., City Council, boards, commissions, etc.). Understand how they operate, discover the guidelines they have to follow, and realize the pressures they are under. Have someone explain to you the procedure if it isn't otherwise clear.

5. Work Personally

Allow your officials to get to know you. The best form of contact is on the personal level: (1) personal appearance, (2) phone call, (3) letter, (4) e-mail. See Section E, "City of Salem Overview," for ways to contact City officials.

6. Keep Your Public Officials Informed

Do not surprise your officials with unexpected actions. Bring written copies of your concern when meeting with them, and follow up your concern and action with letters. (Keep copies of everything you do!) Make reference to things you have sent. Keep up an ongoing relationship. Show your appreciation as well as dissatisfaction. Send carbon copies to other individuals or agencies involved (citizens, City staff, others).

7. Work on All Levels

Try the chain of command first by going to the person most directly responsible for your concern. Then work on all levels by going to your appointed and elected officials. If you don't know whom to talk to, do not hesitate to go to the top. Be sure to keep your City Councilor informed. If necessary, address the Council as a whole to be sure you are heard.

8. Make it Clear If You Represent a Group

Identify the name of your group and its purpose. Use appointed contact persons to establish continuity and identity. Document attendance at general meetings and votes taken. Ensure that you have the group's approval/authorization before acting.

9. Get Solid Answers

Don't be satisfied with vague answers. Talk to informed people and solicit answers you can rely on. Ask for and remind your officials of specific information—dates, places, times, etc.

10. Be Open To Suggestions

Take the suggestions of your officials seriously and follow up on them. Progress occurs when everyone pushes in the same direction.

11. Follow Up

Follow up on a discussion with a memo summarizing the discussion and its outcome. Check back to see if whatever has been agreed to is being done or to see if decisions are being made. After the decision has been made, check back with the appropriate staff or government official to be certain it is carried out.

12. Keep the Neighborhood Informed

Use your neighborhood association's meetings and annual newsletter to keep the neighborhood informed. Talk with neighbors and businesses about what is happening. Contact the neighbors and friends about what is happening. Contact the newspapers to let them know your concerns. You may wish to issue a press release (see sections H4 and H5, for more on writing press releases). Make your written information interesting.

CHOICES FOR POLITICAL ACTION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

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STAFF

Administrative support to executive branches of government, (i.e., agency personnel, committee staff, etc.) is a source of information, advice, and opinion. They can make small decisions within the scope of their procedures. As a rule, they have no authority for policy changes.

ELECTED OFFICIALS

Elected officials are a source of information, advocates for policy changes, intermediaries for citizen groups or citizens. In smaller jurisdictions their accountability, responsiveness, and accessibility are enhanced.

COMMITTEE

Standing, ad hoc, citizens, or subcommittees are typically advisors of government. Recommendations are prepared for higher levels of government. This is where the work leading up to decisions is conducted. They are characterized by greater informality, more candid and detailed staff reviews, airing of positions of all interested parties, and possibly brokering and negotiating of trade-offs between interest groups.

COUNCILS/BOARDS/COMMISSIONS

These are the final action, decision-making levels for cities, counties, districts, and other planning bodies. They are characterized by more formal procedures and presentations. In many cases, decisions ratify committee recommendations. However, the policy body may weigh a recommendation against other priorities and override the recommendation or request additional information before making a decision. Likelihood of action without prior committee recommendation or referral is remote. This is the most visible arena of the policy making process. Therefore, conflict resolution is difficult and the PR value of confrontation is highest at this stage. Compromises are better worked out ahead of time.

VOTERS

Voters have direct access to legislative power through the initiative/referendum process. This applies to legislative action only (contrast: administrative or quasi-judicial) in state, home rule county, or city with appropriate charter provisions. It can either propose grass roots legislation or challenge a decision by policy makers in referring their action to popular vote.

MEDIA

Mass media is relevant to any discussion of the political process, although in itself not a bona fide category of political action. Letters to the editor, feature stories, radio talk shows on current events, and editorial board support are desirable, no-cost strategies for influencing public officials and contributing to the public debate. (See section H, "Mass Media," for more information.)

If comments are being made on behalf of a neighborhood association, a Board action should have been taken to authorize those comments. Individual citizens can also make comments. It is important to be clear about whether you are speaking as an individual or on behalf of a neighborhood association or other group.

Comments on a public hearing can be given orally at the City Council meeting and/or in writing.

- < *To testify orally* at a public hearing, you need to arrive before 7:30 p.m., when the public hearings begin and put your name on the sign-in sheet for the public hearing you want to speak about. **The sign-in sheets are found on the counter at the east entrance to the City Council Chambers.**
- < *Written comments* should be addressed to the Mayor and City Council, and sent or delivered to the City Recorder's Office, 555 Liberty Street SE, Room 205, Salem, OR 97301, or call the City Recorder's office at 503-588-6097 for an e-mail address.
 - < If written comments arrive prior to 5:00 p.m. the Wednesday before the meeting, they will be included in the agenda packet that the Mayor and City Council receive on the Friday before the meeting.
 - If written comments arrive before 12:00 noon the day of the meeting, they will be included in the Additions Packet that the Mayor and City Council receive when they arrive for the meeting.
 - If you choose to bring a written copy of your oral testimony to the meeting, you may ask that it be included in the record, and give the copy to the city recorder following your oral testimony.
 - If you need to bring written comments to the meeting but are unable to give oral comments, you will need to give the copies to the City Recorder so they can be officially entered into the record.
 - Please do not personally distribute written comments to the Mayor and City Council before the meeting because they do not get entered as an official part of the record. Only comments that are a part of the official record can be considered when the Mayor and City Council deliberate (discuss and decide) the issue.

For more information about oral or written comments, contact your Neighborhood Services Counselor at 503-588-6261.

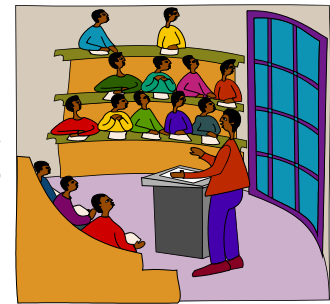
See Section E2 "City Council" for more information on how City Council meetings are structured.

Giving public testimony before the City Council, boards, or commissions can be frightening if you have never done it before. There are several things you can do to make your thoughts and presentation clear and successful. You may not always have the time to follow the outline listed below. However, whenever you can, it is beneficial to spend as much time as possible preparing your testimony. Carefully prepared testimony may influence action. Also, testimony becomes part of the public record and may be referred to later on.

HOW TO PREPARE PUBLIC TESTIMONY

1. **Know your time frame**

Find out when, where, and before whom (City Council, Planning Commission, Parks and Recreation Advisory Board, etc.) the issue will appear. This will let you know how much time you have to prepare—there is a big difference between having one day and one month to prepare.



2. **Know your issue**

Support opinions with as many facts as possible. Do your homework—information is power. Read newspapers, magazines, etc., to find out about the issue. Talk to local government officials, when possible, and other citizens. Be knowledgeable of the opposition's arguments and be prepared to counter those arguments. Also, draw on your own knowledge and experience.

3. **Start writing down main points**

Construct a rough outline from scattered thoughts, research, plus any additional brainstorming. Begin thinking about any extra visual aids that might be important (posters, charts, fact sheets, flyers, cartoons, brochures, etc.).

4. **Know how much time is allowed for the testimony**

Generally, testimony in front of City Council is allowed three minutes, followed by a time for response to Councilors' questions.

5. **Write a draft statement**

- a. Address the governmental body (example: "Mr./Ms. Mayor, Members of the Council").
- b. State your name and address for the record.
- c. Say if you are testifying for yourself or a group, and give a brief description of why you or your group is testifying on the issue.
- d. Explain how support for your testimony was solicited from your group (by petitions, vote at meeting, surveys, letters, etc.). Bring with you documentation of that support (copies of petitions, surveys, minutes of meetings, etc.) whenever possible. Be specific about how many people were involved in making the decision. State whether this is a majority or minority opinion.
- e. Keep the statement as short as possible (two pages is about right). State the problem, the reasons why you or your group support or oppose, and then summarize.
- f. Get others to read and make comments on the draft. If you need the approval of a group,

use the rough draft so people will feel comfortable making corrections or suggestions on the copy.

- g. Let the statement sit for a day or so, if you have the time, and then go back and read it again and revise if necessary.

6. **Write up final copy**

- a. Type and double space final copy, if possible (easier to read, looks neater, etc.); or print if necessary. Be careful to check spelling.
- b. Start anticipating questions from the Council, board, etc.
- c. Practice giving testimony before friends and get hints on improving the presentation.

HOW TO GIVE THE TESTIMONY

1. **Be Familiar with the Group's Process**

Attend one or more meetings of the group before you testify to get an idea of the room layout and the procedures used.

2. **Know Your Audience**

Try to stress what you have in common with and that you respect the differences of the people you are talking to. The more you can find out about their biases and sympathies, the more chance you have to relate to them.

3. **Presenting Yourself**

Be aware of how you present yourself when you make a statement to the decision-making body. Think about what image you want to project. Most of what we communicate is nonverbal. Be aware of your body language and where you stand in the room. If possible, stand closest to the person you want to impact—possibly the swing vote.

4. **Check Your Feelings**

Try to keep your feelings in check while you are testifying. It is all right to have strong feelings on the subject, but you do not want them to overshadow the content and reason of your message.

5. **Maintain Eye Contact**

Use notes rather than written manuscript so you can develop good eye contact.

6. **Define What You Want**

Make it perfectly clear what action you want the group to take.

7. **Sum up Important Points**

Summarize your written message to emphasize the important points.

8. **Copies of Testimony**

Provide copies of your written testimony for each member of the body, appropriate staff, and the media.

If you are testifying for a group:

- Have people sit in different parts of the room. Mingle in with people on the opposite side of the

issue.

- Don't use a moderator. Appear as a group of citizens who are overwhelmed with this issue and just happen to be well organized.
- Make sure different people cover different topics so the testimony is not repetitious.
- Have different people address the problem, possible solutions, and the group's best solution.

ACTION CHECK LIST

- ' 1. Learn the decision-making process.
 - See sections E2, “City Council”; E3. “Urban Renewal Agency”, and J1, “Guide to Salem Land Use Procedures.”
 - Talk to you Neighborhood Services Counselor for more information on what the process is for your item of interest.
- ' 2. Meet your elected officials as early as possible.
- ' 3. Concentrate and coordinate your efforts.
- ' 4. Inform yourself—research the issue.
 - See information and knowledge checklists in section J for general information.
 - View previous staff reports online at cityofsalem.net (select Council Agenda, and Staff Reports, and use the ‘search option’) or by talking to the staff person dealing directly with your issue or your Neighborhood Services Counselor.
- ' 5. Inform the members and the public of the issues.
- ' 6. Attend meetings.
 - View the City “Meetings of Interest” schedule online at www.cityofsalem.net.
- ' 7. Assist your elected officials.
- ' 8. Know and support your allies.
- ' 9. Always provide completely accurate information to elected officials; never deliberately provide misleading or false information.
- ' 10. Focus on the preliminary stages of policy making.
 - Most issues go to City Boards/Commissions, and/or neighborhood associations before they get to the City Council level. Get involved as soon as you hear about it.
- ' 11. Never threaten elected officials.
- ' 12. Form coalitions.
- ' 13. Identify "swing votes".
- ' 14. Be discreet.
- ' 15. Be realistic.
- ' 16. Thank elected officials for their help.
- ' 17. Inform your members about which officials helped and supported your cause.
- ' 18. Evaluate your efforts.
- ' 19. Monitor the implementation of decisions.
- ' 20. Involve as many members as possible in different roles.

To make change happen, an organization must deal with a variety of power structures within the community. Knowing how to deal with power effectively is a key ingredient for reaching the goals of the organization.

KINDS OF POWERS

1. **Executive Power** - The power to give orders and have them carried out. Elected officials, business executives, agency directors, and other "bosses" have executive power. Identify who can give the order you want to have carried out and find out how to reach that person. Be aware that any individual's power is limited; know how much you can reasonably expect.
2. **Financial Power** - Money—getting, giving, or withholding it—confers financial power. Government gets money by collecting taxes and gives money or services. Lobbyists and special interest groups try to influence the way government uses money.

In the private sector, banks, businesses, foundations, and funding agencies may collect money through income, investments, or donations and give it out in profits, grants, or services.

Consumers and citizens exercise financial power when they buy—and when they choose not to buy—products or services.

3. **Influence** - Influence is exercised by the media (radio, television, newspapers, magazines), by organized groups (lobbyists, special interest groups, citizen organizations), by individuals (acknowledged experts, former office holders, community leaders), and by the grapevine (word-of-mouth).
4. **Laws and Regulations** - Laws can limit or enable individual or organizational power. They are made by legislators at the state and federal level and by ordinances and resolutions at the local level. Citizen pressure can change, eliminate, or help create new laws.

Regulations are made by government agencies to carry out laws. They set standards for how things may or may not be done. Consider your influence with decision-makers (elected officials if it is a law; and administrators if it is a regulation) when deciding if you want to change a law or a regulation. Sometimes the only way to change a regulation is to make or change a law.

When establishing new community service programs, find out which laws and regulations apply. Compliance with regulations may raise the cost of providing a service.

5. **Tradition** - "We always do it this way." Examine the traditional framework in your community. Does your project fit comfortably? Does it make minor changes? Or is it radically different? A project that differs a great deal from the way "we always do it" will require more explanation to the community before it will be accepted.

POWER CLUSTERS

Organizations and individuals who are all interested in the same thing form power clusters. For example, the Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and the state Fish and Game Commission might all focus on wildlife issues. When these groups join efforts, they form a power cluster, sometimes called a coalition.

Coordination with other agencies and groups interested in similar issues can strengthen your organization. A search for such groups may also reveal groups who oppose your goals. Knowing the opposition's arguments will increase your ability to deal with them effectively.

Power clusters communicate with each other and form power networks. For example, the oil and gas companies, the mining companies, and the lumber companies may form a network to focus on issues involving public lands. Individual members may also form networks. Find and join networks appropriate to your organization; they are often sources of advice and expertise for moving your program forward. Examples of networks that may relate to neighborhood associations include (your Neighborhood Services Counselor can provide you with up-to-date contact information for these organizations):

- ' Salem Neighborhoods Inc. (See section A3)
- ' Teen Activity Network
- ' Mid-Valley Volunteer Managers Association
- ' Land Use Network
- ' Police-Neighborhood Liaison Committee
- ' Community Progress Teams
- ' Salem-Keizer Together Community Drug Prevention Network
- ' Watershed Councils

Identify the gatekeepers or information brokers within and among networks. These may be the administrative aides, the county clerk, the volunteer who serves on several committees, or anyone who gives and receives information for organizations.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL POWER STRUCTURES

Formal power structures include people who hold offices, titles, or executive power in government, private sectors or citizen organizations.

Informal power structures are composed of (a) people who work for the formal power structure, and (b) people who can influence the decisions made by the formal power structures. These include administrative assistants, secretaries, consultants, etc. Identify them and keep them informed about your programs and projects.

HOW TO FIND OUT ABOUT THE POWER STRUCTURE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Talk to lots of people: members of the formal and informal power structure. Find locations where important decisions are made informally—restaurants, for example. Attend meetings of the City Council, the County Commissioners, various boards, the Chamber of Commerce. Take care to confirm information with more than one person. There may be conflicts between individuals and organizations of which you should be aware.

POINTS TO REMEMBER WHEN DEALING WITH POWER STRUCTURES

1. **Power isn't given away.** It's up to you to acquire the power to do the job. No one will give it to you and some may want it for themselves or their organizations.
2. **It's your responsibility.** Be prepared to take responsibility for management and for doing the real work. Identify how much work needs to be done and who is available to help. Organize people and tasks with attention to their skills and interests. Weed out individuals who want attention but don't want to work.
3. **Get organized.** Get people together who are committed and willing to work. Get community support from those who may not be able to work on the project, but who will stand up and speak for it.
4. **Do your homework.** Get the facts and figures to back up your position. Check out other communities' activities related to your program. Know which laws and regulations apply to your program. Make sure your presentation is well—written and well thought out. Have visual aids prepared in advance. Rehearse. Think of questions you might be asked and have answers ready for them.
5. **Don't surprise public officials at public meetings.** Lobby officials and members of the informal power structure ahead of time. Give them time to think over new ideas and evaluate them in relation to other issues they must consider.
6. **Compromise, but set a bottom line.** Do not accept a compromise that will cause your project to fail. It will damage your reputation for future projects.

Adapted from Family Community Leadership

Following are a collection of ideas to make your citizen's group more effective. Pick and choose, selecting those that are most appropriate for your situation.

MEMBERSHIP

1. Get more members. Involve families in your projects.
2. Get more diversity in the membership.
3. Get members more involved: put everyone in charge of something.
4. Build a solid consensus of support for activities.
5. Provide ways for inactive members to show support (associate memberships or financial contributions).

ANALYSIS

1. Develop an independent understanding of the causes of social problems.
2. Discuss social problems and their political and economic roots.
3. Understand national trends (especially those which concern many people) and show your program's relationship to them.
4. Identify and challenge decision-makers' assumptions about problems.
5. Identify who else is concerned with the issue. Talk with them, form an alliance, share information, work together.
6. Understand concerns, viewpoints, and priorities of your enemies and allies.

VISION

Define your ideas, your vision of a society where problems which concern you have been resolved.

STRUCTURE

1. **Decision-makers**
 - a. Go directly to decision-makers; work with those who will work with you; by-pass anyone who seems to act only as a buffer between agency and citizens.
 - b. Go to the top if you need to. Also, don't overlook the possibility that the direct service worker may be more accessible and more willing to change than "the boss" is.
 - c. Take a mayor to lunch.
 - d. Assign one citizen group member to each relevant decision-maker to lobby, to research (voting record, interest, etc.)
 - e. Develop new ways of solving a problem which by-passes uncooperative decision-makers.
2. **Power**
 - a. Acquire direct control over some decisions (through legislative lobbying or agency delegation of power).
 - b. Acquire shared control over some decisions.
 - c. Especially acquire some degree of control over budget—not just a "sign-off" (veto power), but a say in what does and does not go in.
 - d. Become more independent, especially in funding, from any agency you wish to influence.

- e. Search for other structural alternatives which would give your group more power; decide which ones to implement and then do it.

IMAGE

1. Internal

- a. Adopt the attitude that the public needs to know about your neighborhood association, its thinking, and its positions on issues.
- b. Develop a forceful image, a clear impression that you'll stick with it until you get what you are after.
- c. Elect new leaders willing to adopt a forceful image.

2. External

- a. Get listed or featured in other groups' newsletters.
- b. Start or improve your own newsletter and send it to as many influential people as possible.
- c. Become better known (a "household word").
- d. Launch a public education campaign.
- e. Get radio and TV stations to help you develop your own public service announcements. (See H3 "Televising Your Message" and H6 "Broadcasting Through Radio.")
- f. Use local cable television. (See H2 "Promoting Your Organization on Capital Community Television".)
- g. Raise the consciousness of the general public on what it means to be an active, effective citizen.

STRATEGIES AND FORMS OF INVOLVEMENT

1. Neighborhood

- a. Choose "win-able" issues.
- b. Set up a demonstration project which shows how a problem should be dealt with; form partnerships; get funding if needed.
- c. Canvass neighborhoods to gather opinions and build support.
- d. Support community issues and concerns.
- e. Celebrate community events (holidays, local history, successes).
- f. Hold block parties.

2. Community Action

- a. Decide whether your group would be more effective by using a different strategy. If so, figure out how to change and do so.
- b. Schedule when, where, and to whom you want to speak, not just when invited.
- c. Get to know local officials.

3. Legal Action

- a. Hire a lawyer and an ad agency.
- b. Threaten to take legal action.
- c. Take legal action on your issue.

CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT AS AN ISSUE

1. Clarify your goals for improving your citizen participation mechanism—your access to power, to information, etc.
2. Assume you have the power you would like; start acting as if you have it.
3. Build coalitions with other citizen groups.

RESOURCES AND ASSISTANCE

1. Assess organizational history and strengths; they are among your most important resources.
2. Make a budget for your citizen involvement activities and get funding without strings.
3. Use community resources such as school buildings for space.
4. Draw on technical experts for advice and testimony.
5. Enlist the support of people with clout.
6. Use process consultants and facilitators when appropriate.
7. Seek in-kind services (free printing, auditing, legal assistance, etc.).

ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Set long-range goals and allocate time in accordance with them.
2. Initiate plans and policies rather than reacting to those of some government agency or other organization.
3. Manage time carefully and realistically (within a single meeting and during implementation of plans).
4. Develop leadership and membership skills. Make training an on-going part of your activities.
5. Evaluate your progress regularly.

Adapted from Family Community Leadership