

ESAL

Engineers & Scientists Acting Locally

Playbook Guide - Deliver Public Comments

Purpose

- Demonstrate support for or opposition to a policy already under consideration by government.
- Bring an unaddressed issue or new policy idea to government's attention.

Ideal Outcomes

- **Policies already under consideration:** your government incorporates your views into the policy process. You may be placed on an email list for updates, solicited for further comments in writing, or contacted for an in-person discussion.
- **New Ideas:** your government follows up with you. Your idea may become a future agenda item.

Step-by-Step Guide

1. **Find the appropriate body for your comments.** Examples: state legislature, county supervisory board, city council, planning commissions. **Policies already under consideration:** find out which body is currently deliberating it through local news sources or a government website.
 - **New ideas:** find the body most likely to act on the issue. How?
 - Review charters and past agendas of various bodies and guess. Even if it's not a perfect fit, officials will try to find a way to address good ideas
2. **Choose when to deliver your comments.**
 - **Policies already under consideration:** when the issue is on the agenda.
 - **New ideas:** choose the next meeting without a contentious issue already on the agenda.
3. **Draft talking points or full remarks beforehand.** Remarks should:
 - Be concise, stating your position for a broad audience in 1-2 minutes.
 - Be prescriptive about government action (e.g. "vote yes on this policy" or "investigate the environmental impacts of this chemical").
 - Provide information about why the issue matters to you personally.
 - Remarks should NOT:
 - Delve into policy details or use technical jargon.
 - Assume listeners are already familiar with your position or idea.

Tip: Working with an elected representative who shares your concerns is a great way to advance your idea

Tip: Use public comments to raise a concern or idea...not spell out the solution

4. **Bring a printed copy of your comment with your contact information to the meeting.**
5. **Arrive on time and try to stay for the duration.** The public comment period is often at the beginning, so arrive early. You may be asked to sign in and provide contact information.
 - Relevant public comments might be at the start of the discussion period for each agenda item, so plan to stay for the entire meeting.

Tip: If you can't stay for the whole meeting, ask to give your comments at the beginning.

6. **Be respectful and polite while delivering comments.**
 - Identify yourself before starting your remarks and thank the body for listening when you are done.

Last Updated: 10/4/22
Published: 01/5/22