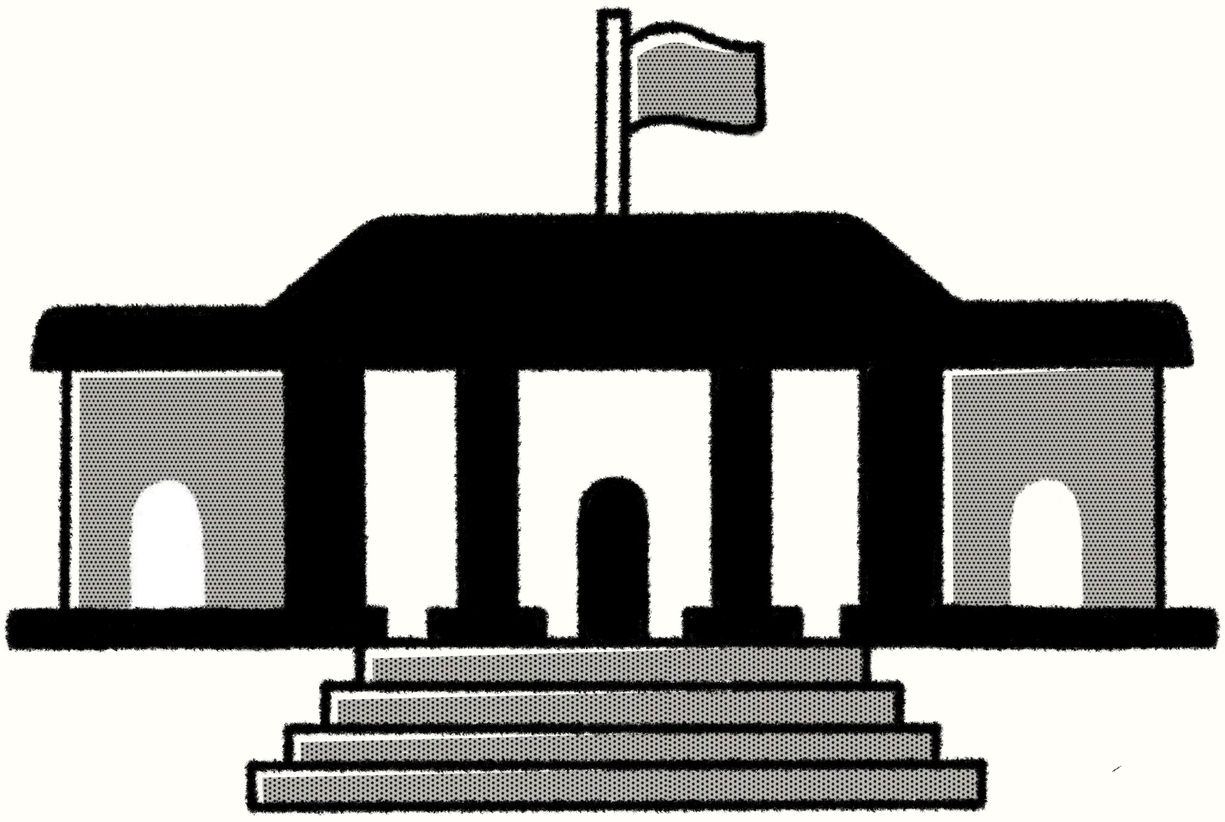
Local Engagement Playbook

Engineers & Scientists
Acting Locally

Learn more at: www.esal.us

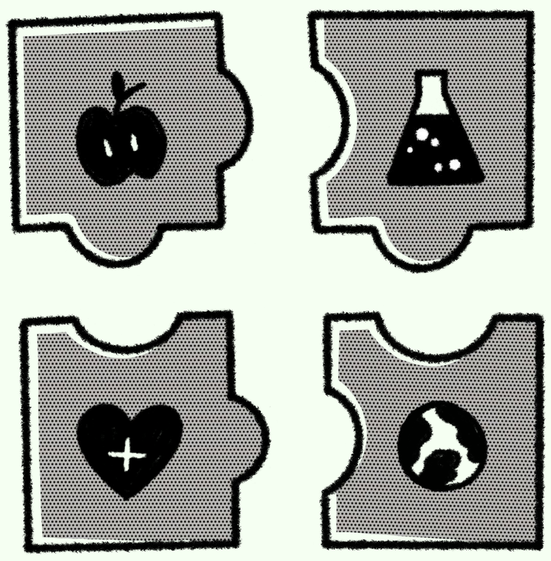
Build a career in **State & Local Government**

Use your STEM background to serve your community with purpose-driven work in the public sector.



01 Discover Your Path

State and local governments offer thousands of roles across various fields: education, infrastructure, environment, data science, healthcare, and more.



02 Consider Fellowships

Policy fellowships offer a pathway into government. Explore ESAL's Fellowship Guide, and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) listings.

03 Building Connections

Use ESAL's Local STEM Database and Local Engagement Map to find professionals and organizations in your region, city or state.

ACTION: VOLUNTEER & ATTEND LOCAL MEETINGS. ASK FOR INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS WITH CIVIC LEADERS.

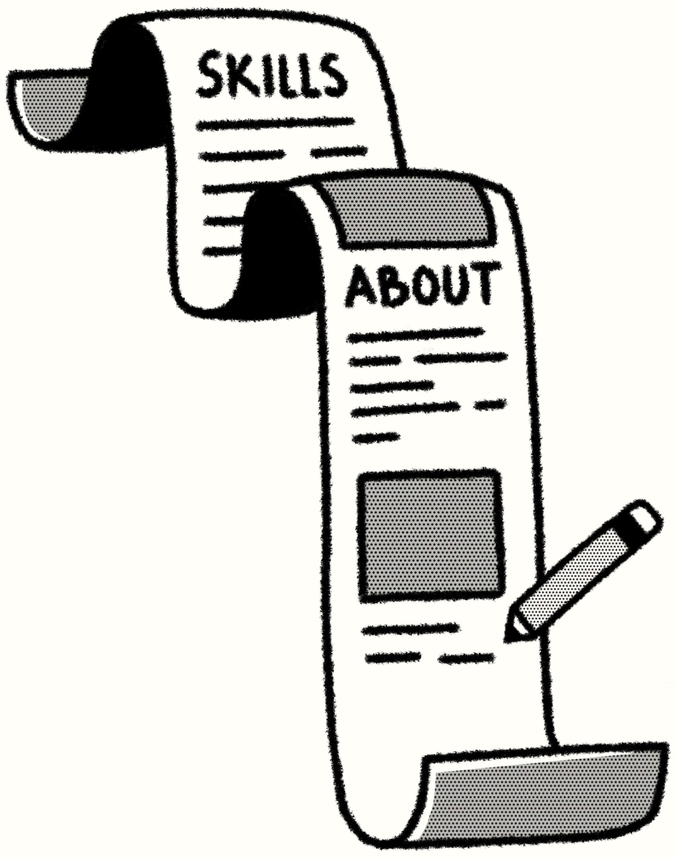
04 Prepare to Apply

Customize your resume/cover letter to reflect language in job descriptions. Link your STEM background to the agency's mission and take civil service exams.

TIP: USE CITY, COUNTY OR STATE CAREER SITE RESOURCES. ASK A CLOSE MENTOR TO REVIEW YOUR APPLICATION.

KEY TAKEWAYS

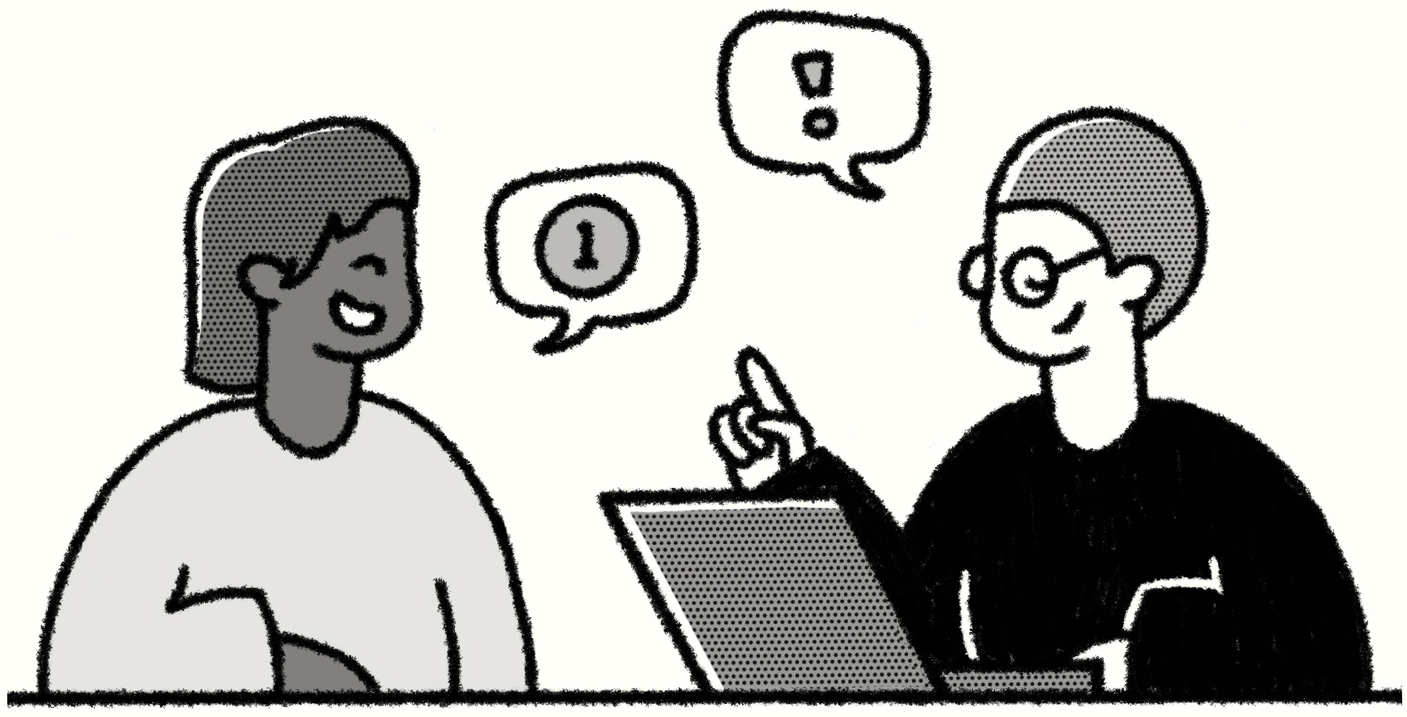
- → Local government needs technical expertise—your background is a strength.
- → Many roles don't require prior policy experience—just a willingness to learn.
- → Stay proactive. Various opportunities often come through consistent engagement.



Advocate for a policy with

Legislative Staff & State Legislators

Advocate for a new policy or demonstrate your support for an existing one by meeting with state legislators or their staff. This guide will help you prepare, execute, and follow up effectively to maximize your impact.



01 Schedule Your Visit

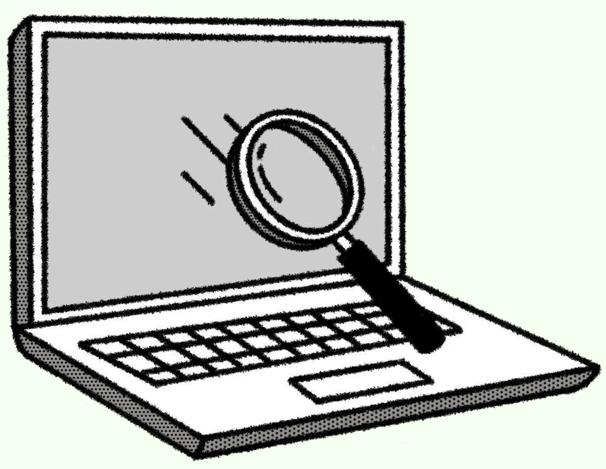
Understand Legislative Priorities: Know when to engage based on the legislative schedule and calendar.

Plan for Key Dates: Be aware of key dates like the start and end of the session, bill drafts, committee hearings, and elections.

02 Do Your Research

Know the Issues: Research the topics your legislator or staffer is working on, in order to build familiarity and knowledge.

Research the Person: Research the background of the person you'll meet with to build rapport.

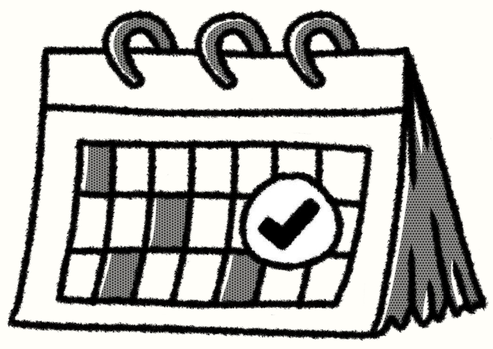


03 Plan Your Meeting

Schedule: Confirm your meeting time and leave time to adapt to last-minute scheduling changes.

Create a One-Pager: Summarize your key points & provide your contact info.

Prepare Your "Ask": Clearly define what action you want the legislator to take.



04 Hold the Meeting

Be Flexible: Expect changes. Learn to adapt accordingly in those situations.

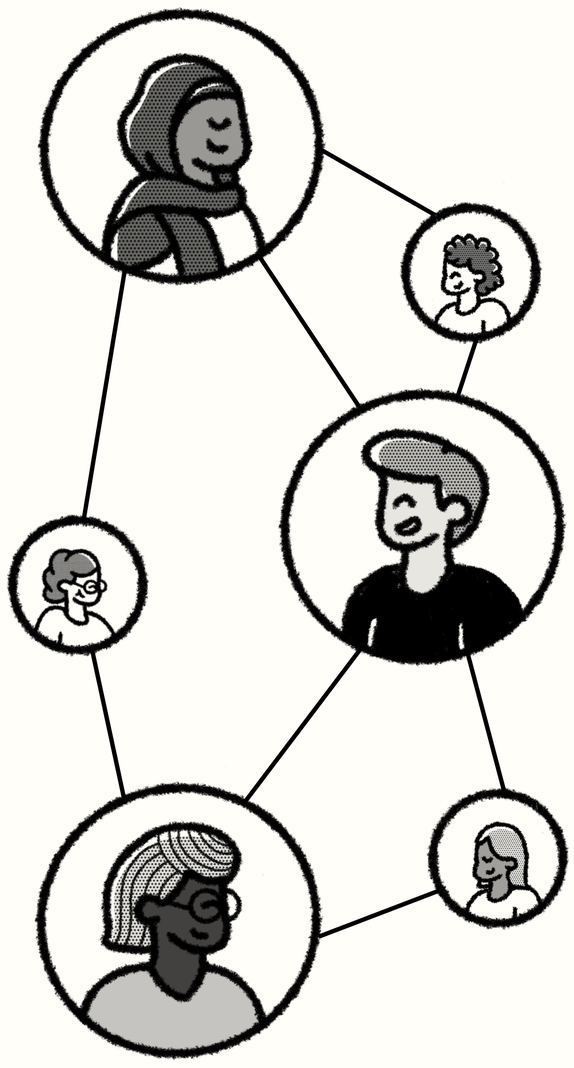
Leave Materials Behind: Provide your one-pager and business card for easy reference.

Ask for a Follow-Up: Get any contact information for future communication.

05 Connect & Follow Up

Send a Thank-You Email: Remind them of the key points and next steps.

Stay Engaged: Keep in touch to show your continued commitment to the issue.



TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- **Be Brief & Focused:** Your meeting time is valuable — keep your points clear and concise.
- **Be Professional:** Treat everyone with respect, from staff to legislators, to build long-term relationships.
- **Follow Up Consistently:** Don't let your efforts fizzle out — staying engaged can lead to more opportunities for influence.

RESOURCES

- HOW TO CREATE A ONE-PAGER
- CREATING AN EFFECTIVE ONE-PAGER
- RELATIONSHIPS WITH ELECTED OFFICIALS
- RELATIONSHIPS WITH LEGISLATORS

Public Commentary:

Prepping & Delivering

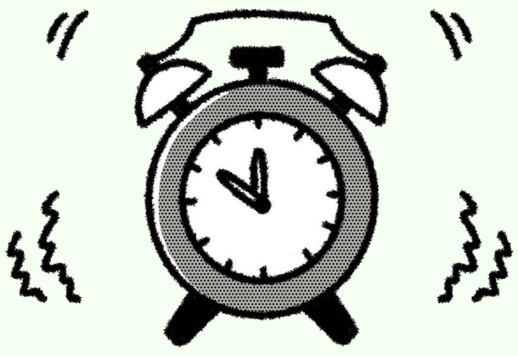
Delivering public comments is a powerful tool for informing policymakers and the public. This guide will help you prepare your remarks and engage effectively with decision-makers.

01 Find the Right Governing Body

Research Local Issues: Research local policies and rules by checking local news sources or meeting agendas.

Learn About Governing Bodies: Review governing body charters and meeting agendas to identify those relevant to you.

Reach Out: Email a local government staffer to verify before attending public hearings.



02 When to Deliver Comments

Check Agendas: Make sure your issue is on the agenda. Reach out to ask an official to propose the topics for an agenda.

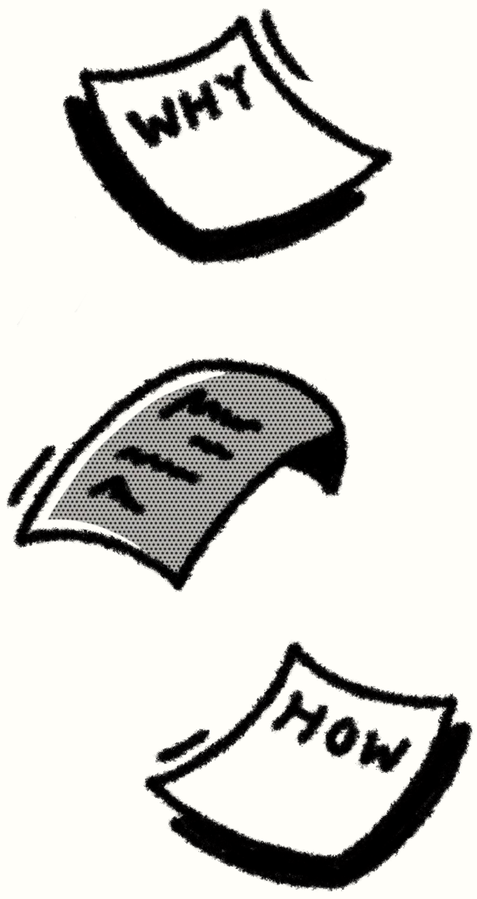
Public Comment Period: Check agendas for "public comment periods" to make sure there is an opportunity to speak.

03 Draft Your Remarks

Be Concise: Aim for 1-2 minutes and focus on all key points.

Prescribe Action: Ask for clear and specific actions to be taken.

Personalize: Explain why the issue matters to you and your broader community.



04 Bring Multiple Printed Copies

Leave Behind: Bring a printed copy of your remarks with your contact information.

05 Arrive Early & Plan to Stay

Sign In: Research the sign-up process and plan ahead. Arrive early to sign in if needed.

Stay for the Entire Meeting: Plan to stay for the entire duration, just in case public comment periods become extensive.

06 Be Respectful & Polite

Introduce Yourself: Begin with your name and thank the body for their time.

Stay Professional: Remain calm, always respectful, and focused on your message.

Pro Tip: Most people are nervous about public speaking. Your delivery does not have to be perfect. The more you step out to deliver public comments, the more comfortable this process will become.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- **Be Brief and Focused:** Don't overload your remarks with too much information, be direct and brief.
- **Stay Calm & Respectful:** Your tone is as important as your message.
- **Follow Up:** Provide your contact information for further engagement, communication and relationship building.

RESOURCES

- WRITING EFFECTIVE COMMENTS
- 10 TIPS FOR PUBLIC SPEAKING
- IMPROVE YOUR PUBLIC SPEAKING
- TOASTMASTERS PUBLIC SPEAKING TIPS

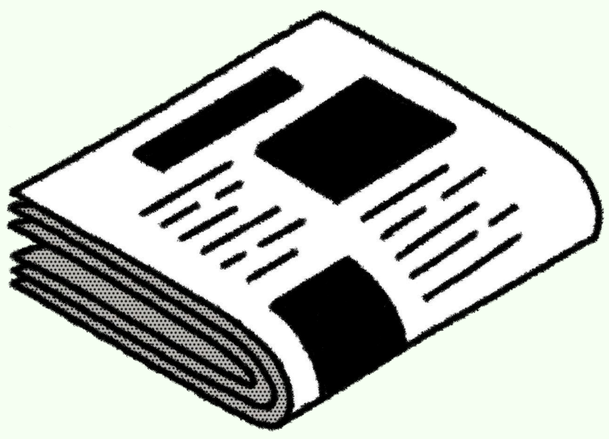
Researching **Policies & Initiatives**

Learn how to research policies that impact your community, engage and learn to make meaningful contributions.

01 Start with Local News

Your local newspaper is oftentimes an overlooked treasure trove of information about issues affecting your community. Focus on regional and/or neighborhood issues that impact your daily life.

PRO TIP: SCAN THE PAPER WEEKLY TO STAY UP-TO-DATE WITH ANY ISSUES OR EVENTS THAT MATTER TO YOU.



02 Government Websites

Local government websites offer a wealth of information including public programs, meeting minutes, news updates and any official documents. Navigate all of these resources to find important dates.

PRO TIP: BOOKMARK YOUR CITY/COUNTY'S GOVERNMENT WEBSITE FOR QUICK ACCESS TO IMPORTANT POLICY UPDATES.

03 Attend Public Meetings

Public meetings are key to understanding the discussions that shape communities. Attend local government meetings or any public hearings to experience first-hand how policies are formed.

ACTION: CHECK OUT GROUPS THAT HOST PUBLIC MEETINGS AT A LOCAL LEVEL.

PRO TIP: MEETING AGENDAS ARE POSTED IN ADVANCE, CHECK FOR POLICY DISCUSSIONS THAT INTEREST YOU.

04 Connect with Local Leaders

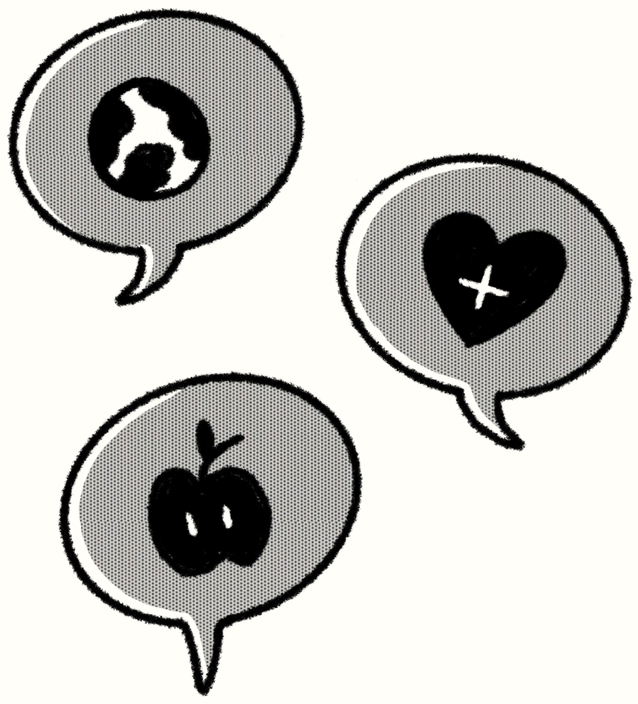
Local representatives are often accessible and want to hear from their constituents. Building relationships with them can give you valuable insights into policy creation and the political process

PRO TIP: REACH OUT FOR INFORMAL COFFEE MEETINGS TO DISCUSS TOPICS LIKE: CLIMATE HEALTHCARE & EDUCATION

05 Non-Profits & Organizations

Many nonprofits and advocacy groups are focused on local policy issues. These organizations can often provide valuable insights and may direct you to volunteer opportunities.

PRO TIP: SEARCH FOR ADVOCACY GROUPS & NON PROFITS FOCUSING ON EDUCATION, CLIMATE CHANGE, OR HEALTHCARE.



KEY TAKEWAYS

- → Start with accessible sources of information: newspapers and government sites.
- → Attend meetings! Connect with local leaders to stay engaged in the policy process.
- → Research is an ongoing process—keep revisiting these steps as policies evolve.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

- → **Stay Consistent:** Make it a habit to engage regularly with local news sources and government channels.
- → **Get Involved:** Don't just research — participate! Attend town halls or volunteer with organizations actively engage in the political process.

RESOURCES

- → INFOGRAPHICS
- → CIVICS 101
- → LOCAL GOVERNMENT WEBSITES

Local Policy Careers:

Applying to Fellowships

Policy fellowships offer a unique opportunity to engage directly with local policymakers. This guide will help you understand how to identity the right fellowship, craft a compelling application, and prepare for your fellow role.

01 Identify the Fellowship

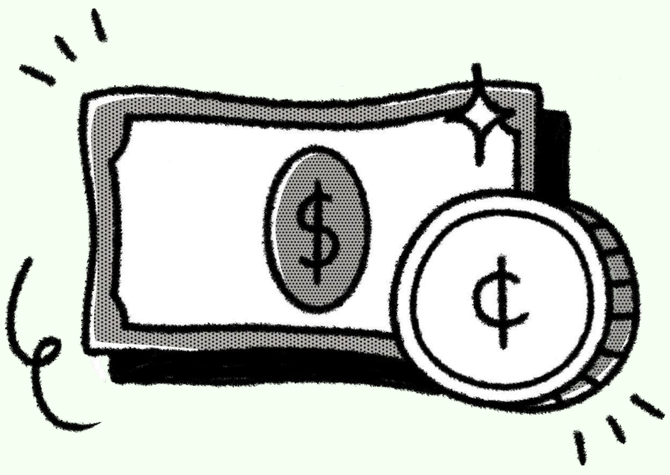
Research Fellowships: Look for programs that align with your expertise, interests and career goals.

Why This Fellowship? Assess how the fellowship fits into a long-term career plan.

02 Research How It Operates

Fellowship Components: Ensure the program has local champions, a nonprofit and/or university umbrella organization, relationships with legislators, and funding.

Understand the Funding: Make sure you know where the fellowship funding comes from and how it impacts your role.

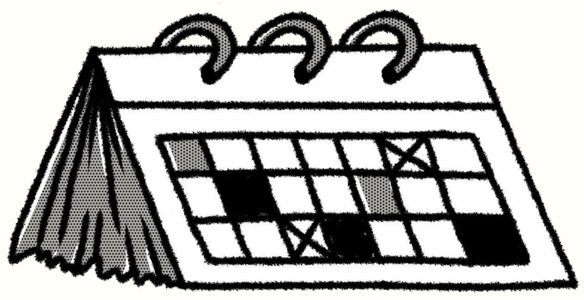


03 Apply to the Fellowship

Know Deadlines: Ensure you don't miss out, stay aware of application deadlines. They vary across state programs.

Strong Personal Statement: Write a compelling statement explaining your motivations, abilities to work with all parties and any qualifications.

Letters of Recommendation: Alert any mentors or colleagues early to give them time to submit strong references.



04 Prepare for the Interview

Talk to Former Fellows: Get advice from people and former fellows who have been through the fellowship process.

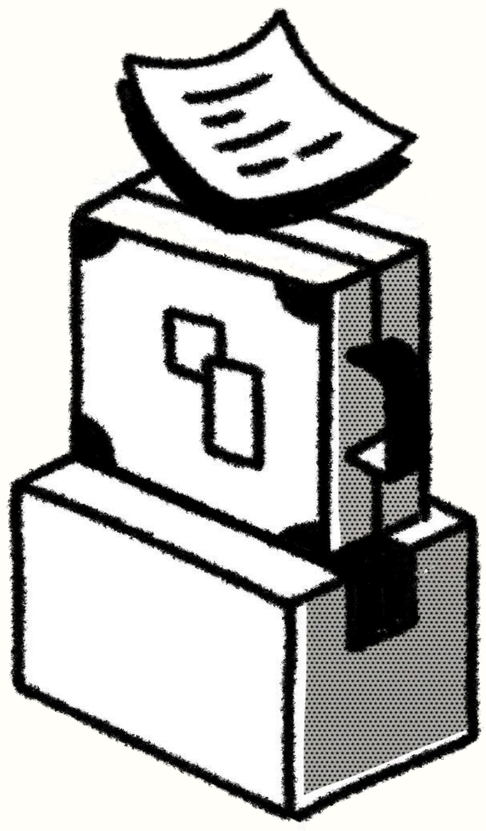
Explain Your Motivations: Be ready to articulate why you're interested in this fellowship and how you'll contribute professionally to all policy discussions.

05 Prepare for the Fellowship

Plan Your Move: If you need to relocate, make sure you've arranged housing and logistics well in advance.

Get Organized: Ensure all necessary program paperwork, local registrations, and housing agreements are prepared ahead of time.

Read Orientation Materials: Familiarize yourself with any preparatory materials provided by the fellowship.



TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- **Be Thorough in Your Research:** Understand the fellowship structure and funding before applying.
- **Focus on Your Long-Term Goals:** Choose a fellowship that aligns with your future career aspirations.
- **Engage from Day One:** Prepare to be fully immersed in your fellowship and ready to contribute meaningfully to policymaking.

RESOURCES

- EXECUTIVE FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM
- STATE GOVERNMENT INTERNSHIPS
- AAAS FELLOWSHIPS
- NATIONAL ACADEMIES FELLOWSHIPS

Applying for & Joining a

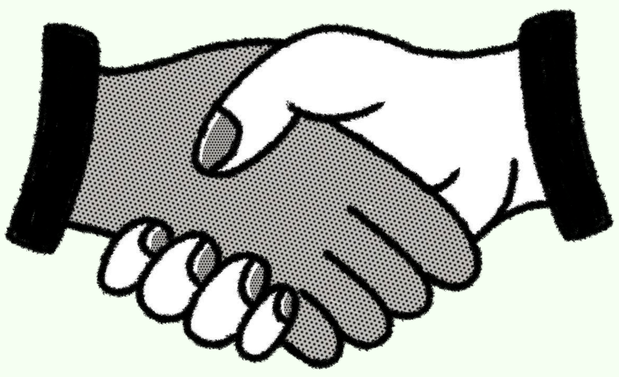
Local Board or Commission

Serve on a local board or commission to provide input and advice on policy decisions that affect your community. This guide will demonstrate how you can apply, prepare, and contribute meaningfully to local governance.

01 Identify the Advisory Board

Research Local Bodies: Check government websites for information about available boards and commissions.

Leverage Local Networks: Speak with any community groups, local organizations and elected officials for recommendations.



02 Research How It Operates

Review Past Meetings: Stream or review minutes from past meetings to learn how decisions are made.

Understand Priorities: Review any past agendas to see what issues are currently under discussion.

03 Apply for Nomination

Visit the Government Website: Find out how to apply or get nominated for your chosen body or board.

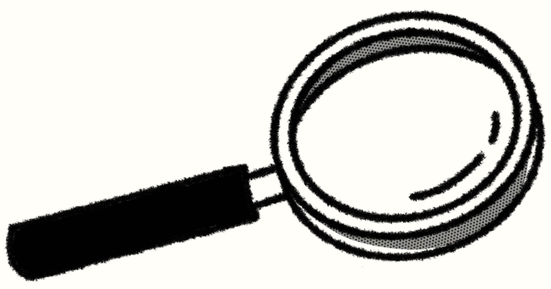
Ask Elected Officials to Nominate You: Politicians truly appreciate community members who want to engage in the decision-making process.

04 Prepare for the Interview

Clarify Your Motivation: Be ready to discuss why you want to serve and the issues you care about.

Review Recent Decisions: Think about the body's recent work and how you would have contributed.

Research Interviews: If possible, make efforts to meet with, or research, the interview panel beforehand.



05 Prepare to Serve

Learn Parliamentary Procedures: Most bodies use Robert's Rules of Order to guide meetings.

Decide How You Want to Contribute: Be consistent in your approach to building credibility and respect.

06 Make a Difference

Collaborate Respectfully: Work well with fellow members and respect diverse perspectives, opinions and decisions.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- **Engage Early:** Don't wait for an open spot — express interest early.
- **Stay Informed:** Regularly attend or review past meetings and stay up-to-date on issues being discussed.
- **Be a Resource:** Use your skills to contribute meaningfully and become a trusted voice.

RESOURCES

- ROBERT'S RULES OF ORDER
- PARLIAMENTARY PROCEDURE CHEAT SHEET
- GUIDE TO PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Campaign & Support

Local Ballot Measures

Advocate for a local ballot measure in your community. This guide will help you research, understand, and push for the issues that matter to you and your neighbors. Learn how to mobilize volunteers, raise awareness, and communicate effectively with voters.

01 Research the Measure

Conduct Online Research: Get familiar with current local ballot measures.

Get Connected: Talk to the people or groups endorsing the measure.

Attend Council Meetings: Learn what is being discussed, and stay engaged.

PRO TIP: SET UP A SEARCH ENGINE EMAIL ALERT FOR THE ISSUES YOU CARE ABOUT TO STAY INFORMED.

02 Build Your Team

Reach Out: Connect with local elected officials, community leaders, and other active residents.

Create Connections: Connect with all friends and family who are passionate about the issue at hand.

Find Volunteers: To help with fundraising, canvassing, and data collection.

PRO TIP: FIND VOLUNTEERS THAT CAN CONTRIBUTE SKILLS LIKE GRAPHIC DESIGN, OR DATA ANALYSIS TO CREATE EFFECTIVE VISUAL MATERIALS.

03 Tailor Your Campaign

Identity the Issues: Pinpoint the issues most important to your community and when relevant, connect the ballot measure to these issues.

Share: Connect with community leaders and local influencers to amplify information.

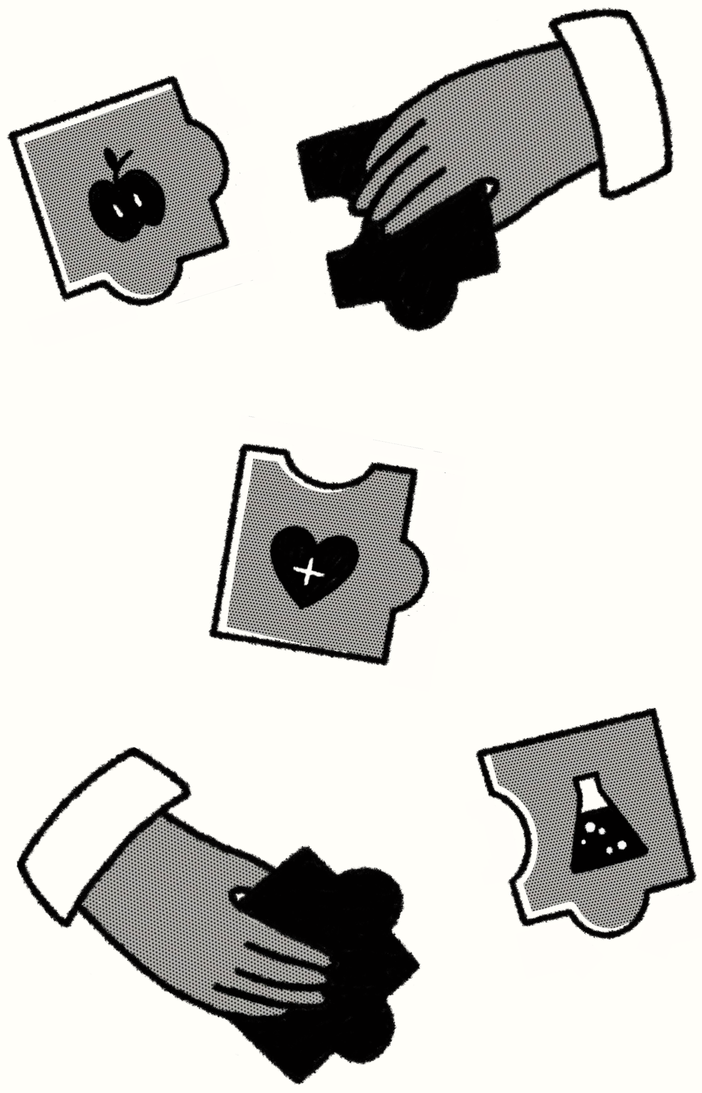
Visuals: Create easy-to-understand visuals that break down complex policies and share accurate election information.

04 Take Action

Fundraise: Fundraise for materials (flyers, lawn signs, etc.) and compensation for people campaigning.

Spread the Word: Go door-to-door, make calls, mail postcards, and bring your outreach to community events.

Leverage Local Media: In order to spread the word and get endorsements.



TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- **Personal Connections Matter:** People are more likely to engage with a familiar face and personality.
- **Use Data Wisely:** Break down complex policies with infographics.
- **Consistency is Key:** Keep the momentum going until election day.
- **Show Appreciation:** No matter the outcome, do not forget to take time to recognize and thank those who contributed to the campaign.

RESOURCES

- HOW TO MAKE AN INFOGRAPHIC UNDER 1 HOUR | EASY GUIDE (2025)
- INFOGRAPHICS TOOLKIT