

PRINCIPLES AND TECHNIQUES LEARNED FROM THE IOWA PUBLIC POLICY EDUCATION PROJECT

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The Iowa Public Policy Education Project (PPEP) began in 1988 as a partial solution to the problems faced by a single institution planning and delivering public policy education programs in the current environment of special interest policy making and increasingly limited public funding.

The coalition concept was seen as a way to: 1) prioritize the concerns of the state, 2) focus on one issue at a time, 3) pool the state's limited policy education resources, and 4) increase citizen understanding and involvement in the resolution of state and community concerns.

PPEP initially surveyed legislators, lobbyists and selected populations of local leaders to determine priority policy issues. This agenda survey process is being repeated every two years following the election cycle.

In addition, PPEP annually selects two issues and organizes: 1) statewide town meetings via satellite to 100 downlink sites, 2) in-depth focus group studies for emerging leaders representing diverse interests from across the state, and 3) policy preference polls of participants and randomly selected households to provide state and local leaders with citizen input on future directions.

Previous topics featured the 1990 farm bill; drug, alcohol and substance abuse; waste management; and health care policy. Topics for 1991–1992 are education policy and state budget policy.

Do Coalitions Make a Difference?

The intuitive conclusion from PPEP is that the development of broad-based coalitions supportive of issue-oriented, nonpartisan public policy education is a necessary, but not a sufficient, condition for enhancing the impact of public policy education programs. PPEP has demonstrated that coalition building can enhance the quality

and effectiveness of policy education programs, but the bottom line impacts depend on a multitude of factors, some of which are related to the coalitions and others which are not.

Whether, in fact, a coalition contributes to or detracts from the impact of the program depends in part on: 1) the process used to form the coalition(s), 2) the personal capabilities of coalition members, 3) access of coalition members to organizational, intellectual and financial resources, and 4) the expected roles and controls placed on coalition(s) regarding topic selection, program planning, production, delivery and follow-up activities.

The success and effect also depends on the degree to which coalition members identify with the mission of the project and cooperate with project staff and other coalition members representing different views and perspectives.

PPEP's Use of Coalitions

Central to PPEP was its focus on coalition building to develop a broad base of diverse interests supportive of nonpartisan, issue-oriented public policy education. A key strategy was focusing on the Iowa Agenda rather than a rural agenda or an urban agenda. State and local policy problems require compromise and support from urban, rural and other relevant interests that surface issue by issue. By focusing on a state agenda, PPEP was able to overcome special interest status and achieve a higher level of public interest that enhanced its objectivity, educational integrity and ability to attract diverse nontraditional participants.

Several representative coalitions were organized for specialized roles in the project. Their participation strengthened the relationships necessary for consistent implementation of PPEP's statewide policy education programs:

- An eighteen-member PPEP Council of legislators and prominent Iowans advises the project, reviews agenda surveys and selects timing of PPEP topics to assure the PPEP educational agenda is consistent with agendas of state and local policy makers.
- Representatives from approximately thirty special interest groups meet with PPEP twice a year to 1) provide program input into planning statewide town meetings, 2) nominate focus group members, 3) assist in promoting statewide programs and audience recruiting, and 4) distribute PPEP policy preference surveys. Several groups have been represented at all meetings while others participate depending on topic.
- The PPEP Implementation Team brings approximately twenty county, area and university extension leaders together quarterly to discuss ways to improve PPEP program delivery.

- Thirty emerging leaders from diverse interests are organized into Focus Groups to study each topic in more depth. PPEP provides travel and lodging while members commit to devote six one-day meetings over a period of six months to intensive study.

Effect of Coalitions

Each coalition has played a distinct role in evaluation and creating a drive for excellence, practicality and relevance. As a result, more variations in marketing, content, format, delivery and follow-up were tested to increase the odds for overall project success (Table 1).

Internal and external coalition involvement also provides access to a greater number of communication networks. As a result, there was greater involvement and interest from extension staff, and participation by greater numbers of local leaders/citizens with membership in statewide organizations because their state organizations were involved in program planning and study process.

Finally, the coalition processes provided greater legitimization with broader circles of state and local leadership and diverse interests that may eventually assist in sustaining the project and public policy education programs in general.

PPEP Performance

During the two years of PPEP, 12,000 people (3,000 per satellite program) have participated in statewide town meetings. One hundred twenty people (thirty per focus group) have participated in statewide focus group studies; and six press conferences have been organized in the state capitol to release results of citizen policy preference surveys.

Evaluations and informal feedback indicate PPEP has developed a strong, positive statewide reputation. Consistently, 90 percent of satellite town meeting and focus group participants rate PPEP program quality and content as “good” or “excellent.” Anecdotal evidence is continually received and indicates numerous citations in state and local policy discussions and even some changes in policy decisions resulting from information and discussions attributable to PPEP programs. The Iowa Press Association clipped 170 local newspaper articles regarding PPEP programs during the most recent statewide program.

Although county extension offices voluntarily decide whether to host a downlink site, 95 percent of the county offices have consistently chosen to participate in PPEP programs. No other satellite program has consistently reached this standard. According to 60 percent of downlink site hosts, PPEP programs should be given top or

Table 1. Typical Timeline for a PPEP Statewide Town Meeting.

- 28 weeks - Implementation Team reviews topic/content proposals.
 - 26 weeks - Council reviews content proposals and selects topic.
 - 22 weeks - Faculty/Extension task force identifies list of 50 to 100 representatives of diverse interest groups and develops initial interview suggestion list.
 - 18 weeks - Interest group information meeting invitations sent.
 - 16 weeks - Informational meeting for selected interest groups.
 - Focus group nomination forms to interest groups.
 - Interest groups review program and suggest content.
 - Interests identify additional experts to interview.
 - Interest groups order brochures for distribution.
 - Downlink participation requests sent to county staff.
 - Focus group nomination forms to county staff.
 - 12 weeks - Downlink site participation and brochure order deadline.
 - Promotional brochures to printer.
 - Focus group nomination deadline.
 - Marketing/recruiting packet sent to downlink hosts.
 - Conduct 20 video interviews of diverse leaders/experts.
 - Transcribe interviews.
 - Implementation team reviews program/and next topics.
 - Council meeting reviews program/selects next topic.
 - 8 weeks - Brochures sent to interest groups and county staff.
 - Focus group orientation meeting.
 - Focus group suggest dates for six meetings.
 - Focus group suggests speakers and topics of interest.
 - Review interview text and write program.
 - Begin editing pre-taped production.
 - Select statewide panel from interview material.
 - 6 weeks - Design policy preference survey and evaluation.
 - Send participant resource materials to printer.
 - Send speaker marketing/hosting packet to counties.
 - Satellite inservice for downlink hosts on role/content.
 - Continue editing pre-taped production.
 - 4 weeks - Send town meeting and press reception invitations.
 - Final post-production editing.
 - Focus group meeting.
 - 2 weeks - Prepare press release on town meeting content.
 - Participant packets sent to downlink sites.
 - 0 weeks - Satellite town meeting format.
 - Local host introduction and pre-taped documentary.
 - Live state panel discussion with focus group members answering phones and asking questions on air.
 - Local panel discussion.
 - Participant preference surveys and evaluation.
 - 2 weeks - Policy preference survey deadline data entry begins.
 - 4 weeks - Policy preference survey/program evaluation analysis.
 - Focus group meeting.
 - Implementation Team reviews program and evaluations.
 - Council reviews program and evaluations.
 - 8 weeks - Policy preference survey report press conference.
 - Final focus group meeting and report.
 - 38 weeks - Focus group post-evaluation.
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high priority for continuation after seed funding expires. An additional 30 percent indicate moderate priority for continuance.

Factors Contributing to Performance

In reality, a multitude of factors contribute to the success of a large, multifaceted program like the Iowa Public Policy Education Project (Table 2). Some of these factors relate to the leadership and performance of the coalition members. The other factors relate to leadership and performance of extension and capabilities of the delivery system.

For example, a broadcast quality documentary is not produced by simply bringing together a coalition of legislators and interest group representatives or a coalition of professors and field staff. Successful downlink site meetings do not happen by staff simply turning on the TV monitors and coffee pot. A talented project staff and a highly-structured coordination system are also required.

One to two years is needed to build peak performance capacity. Staff training helps each of the 150 staff learn his or her role, but peak performance is achieved only after each discovers how to improve his or her own performance through repetition and providing feedback to others. As a result, PPEP has demonstrated that quality, content and participation rates can be enhanced by building and integrating appropriate roles for coalitions in the planning and implementation process.

Table 2. Performance Factors of Public Policy Education Programs and Involvement of Coalitions in Program Planning and Delivery.

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1. Perceived integrity of the agenda setting process.
 2. Level of participatory planning in content, format and follow-up
 - by university experts and field staff
 - by coalition interest group representatives
 3. Success of marketing strategies in generating the target audience
 - by university staff
 - by coalition interest group representatives
 4. Inherent capabilities of the delivery mechanism
 - technology used and potential audience generated
 - active leaders versus passive constituencies
 - internal and external staff support generated
 - institutional reputation with respect to the issue
 5. Degree of audience participation and interactivity
 6. Degree which new and valuable information is provided
 7. Degree of objectivity, completeness and credibility of content
 8. Degree of technical production and visual quality of program
 9. Complementarity of project activities and products
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Transferability to Other States

All of the agenda-setting procedures, coalition-integration concepts and management-coordination principles used by PPEP are easily transferable to other states. Transferability of the statewide town meeting concept, depends on the existence of a satellite system. Several states have requested materials. At least one of these states has implemented a policy education program on a smaller satellite network, and we are aware of another privately-funded project that conducted a series of 100 meetings statewide.

Finally, it would have been very difficult to launch a large project of this nature without going through an awareness/legitimization process. A Founders' Iowa Agenda Conference was organized and generated a great deal of awareness and enthusiasm. However, access to statewide staff support and seed funding from a reputable outside foundation opened several doors and played an important role in legitimizing the project.

Sustainability

The Kettering Foundation recently concluded that, while citizen interest in public issues and desire for political participation is high, citizen access to public hearings, political events and educational seminars is severely constrained by organized interests, limited program locations and personal considerations of time and out-of-pocket costs. Participant evaluations indicate that PPEP has increased access, understanding, citizen involvement and policy-maker knowledge regarding citizen attitudes.

But, in spite of PPEP's success, additional public funds for sustaining the project will not be forthcoming in the near future because of a \$330 million state budget crisis (10 percent of total expenditures) that has been revealed since the last election.

In addition, the PPEP Council continues to debate whether the project should be satisfied by statewide media events that attract 3,000 active leader constituents. Some Council members asked, "Why not 30,000 or 300,000?"

As a result, PPEP is piloting the formation of a five-station commercial network called the Iowa Public Issues Network (IPIN). Advertising revenues will assist in sustaining the project and viewership may potentially be expanded fifty- to one hundred-fold. The focus group concept will be localized to foster community/citizen participation and to achieve a higher degree of interactivity than would otherwise be possible in a commercial broadcast.

Therefore, the issue of sustainability and the coalition's role in that process is still open.

Iowa Leader Issue Rankings Sorted by Legislators' Preferences

	Legis- lators		Interest Groups		Mayors		County Supervisor		Ext Council	
	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Rank	Chairs	Rank	Rank	Rank
State budget deficit, taxation, and spending policy	1.47	1	1.58	1	1.72	1	1.57	1	2.32	14
Developing value added agricultural products	1.61	2	2.60	18	2.49	14	2.16	3	2.21	10
Access to adequate health insurance	1.81	3	2.18	5	2.00	4	2.17	4	2.36	16
Elementary and secondary schools and education policy	1.95	4	2.18	6	2.08	6	2.21	6	2.20	9
Policies for reducing drug/alcohol abuse	1.97	5	2.14	3	1.93	3	2.29	8	2.03	2
Pre-school education programs for children at risk	2.03	6	2.42	13	2.71	33	2.67	26	2.55	27
Access to and adequacy of Iowa health care services	2.05	7	2.41	12	2.37	12	2.63	21	2.52	24
Programs to improve family parenting skills	2.05	8	2.61	21	2.53	17	2.39	12	2.20	8
Organization and structure of health care delivery	2.05	9	2.36	10	2.56	21	2.65	24	2.77	40
International trade policy impacts for Iowa	2.10	10	2.67	23	2.47	13	2.49	15	2.41	18
National budget deficit and economic policy	2.17	11	2.84	32	2.32	10	2.23	7	2.61	31
International market development in Eastern Europe, etc . . .	2.19	12	2.76	28	2.63	26	2.69	27	2.68	34
County care for the mentally ill, disabled, or indigent	2.20	13	2.68	24	2.79	40	2.20	5	2.91	44
Water quality standards and policy	2.22	14	2.03	2	2.10	7	2.35	10	2.08	4
Alternative recycling techniques	2.24	15	2.31	8	1.88	2	2.15	2	2.03	3
Policy options for assisting youth at risk	2.25	16	2.33	9	2.53	16	2.76	32	2.43	19
Policies for reducing domestic violence	2.25	17	2.46	15	2.54	19	2.80	34	2.48	22
Crime, corrections, courts, and capital punishment	2.27	18	2.48	16	2.32	11	2.37	11	2.65	33
Teen pregnancy and/or abortion policy alternatives	2.27	19	2.61	20	2.84	43	2.61	20	2.52	25
Access and adequacy of child care	2.27	20	2.46	14	2.74	37	2.74	28	2.45	20
Conservation programs and sustainable agriculture	2.28	21	2.53	17	2.56	20	2.61	19	2.25	11
Waste management and policy	2.31	22	2.16	4	2.04	5	2.42	13	2.17	7
Jobs training and assistance programs for unemployed	2.31	23	2.39	11	2.51	15	2.67	25	2.46	21
Iowa economic development policy	2.32	24	2.73	27	2.59	23	2.87	40	2.62	32
Small town community development and leadership	2.37	25	2.88	34	2.21	9	2.65	23	2.38	17
Pesticide use and environmental protection	2.40	26	2.24	7	2.19	8	2.49	16	2.14	5
Entrepreneurship and business development programs	2.42	27	2.96	37	2.73	37	3.00	46	2.68	35
Developing alternative agricultural enterprises	2.44	28	2.70	25	2.65	27	2.59	17	2.26	12
Maintaining livestock competitiveness	2.45	29	3.25	52	2.85	44	2.45	14	2.16	6
Access to adequate housing and homelessness	2.48	30	2.67	22	2.76	38	2.94	43	2.91	43
Increasing farm profitability	2.50	31	2.97	38	2.62	25	2.30	9	1.85	1
U.S. rural development programs and policy	2.51	32	2.99	39	2.73	35	2.86	39	2.55	28

Policy incentives for multi-community cooperation	2.57	33	2.78	30	2.61	24	2.61	18	2.80	41
Strengthening youth decision-making skills	2.59	34	2.71	26	2.68	32	2.75	30	2.29	13
Iowa oil and energy dependence and policy options	2.63	35	3.11	46	2.91	46	2.91	41	2.75	38
Programs to strengthen family management skills	2.65	36	2.87	33	2.58	22	2.64	22	2.34	15
State technology development and transfer programs	2.66	37	3.02	40	3.22	52	3.02	47	3.14	52
Local government development and structure	2.69	38	2.78	31	2.97	49	2.96	44	3.30	55
Post-secondary vocational and higher education policy	2.71	39	2.77	29	2.87	45	3.06	49	2.88	42
Implications of national agricultural policy	2.72	40	3.06	41	2.95	48	2.76	31	2.56	29
Services and support for aging populations	2.86	41	2.61	19	2.66	28	2.74	29	2.49	23
Changing structure of agriculture	2.87	42	2.92	35	2.84	42	2.82	37	2.52	26
Banking system viability and regulatory policy	2.90	43	3.08	43	2.74	36	2.98	45	2.98	47
Citizen responsibility and volunteerism	2.90	44	3.18	48	2.77	39	2.81	36	3.00	48
Family financial management and safety net programs	2.91	45	3.08	44	2.79	41	2.81	35	2.57	30
Policy on training and recruiting health professionals	2.96	46	3.20	49	2.68	31	3.22	52	2.95	46
Telecommunications technology and state networks	2.98	47	3.24	50	3.23	53	3.25	53	3.13	51
Providing life-long education programs for all ages	2.98	48	3.08	42	3.05	50	3.11	51	2.73	37
Iowa street, road, and highway finance	3.05	49	3.24	51	2.54	18	2.77	33	3.05	50
Policy on training and recruiting teachers	3.09	50	3.12	47	2.94	47	3.10	50	3.05	49
Corporate farming, contracting, integration	3.22	51	3.46	54	3.52	54	3.50	54	3.16	53
Provision of police, fire, and public safety services	3.27	52	3.10	45	2.68	29	3.06	48	2.94	45
Family coping skills for surviving a recession	3.27	53	3.33	53	3.16	51	2.85	38	2.77	39
Food safety standards and policy	3.29	54	2.93	36	2.68	30	2.94	42	2.69	36
Animal welfare policy	4.00	55	3.92	55	3.79	55	3.83	55	3.27	54
Average Age	52.9		46.4		54.9		55.9		40.2	
Female	14.8%		25.0%		12.5%		28.9%		42.6%	
Male	85.2%		75.0%		87.5%		71.1%		57.4%	
Are you familiar with the Iowa Public Policy Education Project?	Yes	86.4%	70.7%		55.7%		70.2%		53.5%	
Number of Respondents	No	13.6%	29.3%		44.3%		29.8%		46.5%	
		62	180		199		53		496	

Score Interpretation

- 1 = Highest priority, must do a program on this topic
- 2 = High priority, would like to see program in the future
- 3 = Moderate priority, some resources needed here
- 4 = Some priority, but is not a major issue at present
- 5 = Lowest priority, policy education program not needed

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