

# Choosing a Public Policy: Six Steps to Success

Larry N. Gerston  
San Jose State University  
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Too often, our students choose issues that are all but impossible to research or manage. But don't despair! There are myriad public policy issues in your own back yard – this guide will help you and your students find them.

## I. REMEMBER THE BASIC THEMES CONCERNED WITH PUBLIC POLICY

- A. Triggering Events: Scope, Intensity, Duration, Resources
- B. The element of Conflict
- C. Many possible outcomes
- D. Policy makers make the change
- E. However, your students can be **change agents**, or catalysts of change
- F. ***It's about process***

## II. START WITH A COMMUNITY PROBLEM

- A. "Community" can mean
  - 1. your county/city/town
  - 2. your school district/school
  - 3. your classroom
  - 4. state issues are tough, but doable
- B. Students may have a "knowledge head start" if they are familiar with the issue
  - 1. they'll know people who have "suffered" from a problem
  - 2. they'll know some of the actors, e.g. a local business polluting a local creek

## III. STAY LOCAL/MAKE IT "HANDS ON"

- A. Trying to end global warming is great, but...
- B. Bear in mind the financial cost factors – it's an economic AND political reality
- C. Remember Tip O'Neill – "all politics is local" – so it should be with your public policy portfolios. Some issues and possible public policies

ISSUE	POLICY
1. fast traffic in front of a school.....	stop sign, speed bumps
2. need for students to communicate .....	newspaper
3. no student representation.....	student board member
4. jeopardized health from cafeteria food .....	nutrition policy
5. no place for students to congregate .....	skateboard park
6. cracked sidewalks .....	safe sidewalks
7. gang colors.....	school dress code
8. weapons on students.....	metal monitors
9. student cheating .....	student review board
10. strangers on campus .....	closed campus

#### IV. LET STUDENTS DIRECT THE SEARCH

- A. ***It's about ownership***
  - 1. if they pick it, they keep it; if you choose it, you lose it.
  - 2. people buy into what they own
- B. Focus on public policy
  - 1. not service learning
  - 2. not community service
- C. Your job is to
  - 1. guide
  - 2. help with direction, resources
  - 3. stay on task

#### V. THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS FAILURE

- A. It's about ***processes*** and ***values*** more than outcome
- B. It's that your students have connected an issue with those who can act on it
- C. It's about understanding the realities, limits and importance of power
- D. Any outcome is a bonus because you've brought them into the public policy process as players, participants

#### VI. REFLECTION IS THE KEY

- A. When it is over, students need to understand the value of their journey
  - 1. what did they seek to do?
  - 2. what was the outcome?
  - 3. what would they do differently next time?
  - 4. what were the high and low points?
- B. Show how their recent experience is a window to the future
  - 1. the same public policy process works in Washington, D.C. or the state capital
  - 2. as with their local recent experience, their participation can make the difference