



**UNIT IV:
Community/
Public Policy
Leadership
Skills**

Module 4: Influencing Policy Decisions

Citizens with skills and interests in the policy making process will find themselves much needed in the coming years. Pressing social and economic conditions and conflicting ideas about what to do about many problems lead to growing demands for creative leadership. This makes it worthwhile to learn about ways to become involved in the policy making process. Public decisions are made on the basis of facts, myths and values.

Communities need people who can:

- Define public problems and issues in a precise way.
- Obtain unbiased facts about issues and their impacts on people of different backgrounds.
- Come to agreement in conflict situations.
- Think through solutions to public problems that are in the majority interest but also protect the rights of the minority.

Citizens have a responsibility to make choices about how to solve problems — government alone cannot solve them all. Citizens' views often differ from those of officeholders. Deliberation may reveal new possibilities for action that neither citizens nor officeholders saw before.

Advocacy, in contrast to education, means personally working for a particular solution to a public problem. An advocate proposes and/or supports one position, action, or group in a policy debate. A person's advocacy position is based on emotions or personal values as well as facts.

Public Deliberation

Democracy requires an ongoing deliberative dialogue about challenging public policy issues. Public deliberation occurs when people gather to talk about a community problem that is important to them. Participants deliberate with one another (eye-to-eye and face-to-face) to explore options, weigh others' views, and to consider the costs and consequences of public policy decisions. Public meetings or forums where people can both advance their own opinions and listen to those of others are a foundation for finding common ground.^{1,2}

Public deliberations enrich participants' thinking on public issues. The process helps people to see issues from different points of view. At their best, forums help participants move toward shared, stable, well-informed public judgments, based on what is valuable to them about important issues. Through deliberation, participants move from making individual choices to making choices as a public. Deliberation involves discussion and an exchange of ideas, whereas debate occurs after opinions have polarized.

Often citizens are seen as clients or customers of government. However, public forums operate on the premise that citizens must take responsibility for and act on their problems. Citizens cannot act together until they decide together. Public deliberation is a precondition for public action. Forums result in defining the area between agreement and disagreement, called common ground for action. This provides a general direction in which to move.