



## Organization of Biological Field Stations

*Supporting environmental research, education, and public understanding*

### **Toolkit for Biological Field Stations Engaging with Policymakers**

#### **Summary**

The following documents are intended to serve as a resource for OBFS members to more easily access tools and materials to engage with policymakers on local, state, and federal levels. This toolkit has a mix of resources personalized to biological field stations and generalized to science and policy. The materials have been collected from various organizations, each of which you can get more involved in to further your skills and training opportunities. For example, OBFS collaborates with the American Institute of Biological Sciences (AIBS) annually to send a few OBFS members to the AIBS Congressional Visit Days, an in-person training and engagement opportunity in Washington D.C. Individual persons within OBFS who have engaged with policymakers in the past are also excellent resources to connect with, learn from, and share experiences with.

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## 1. Why Engage in Advocacy and Policy?

This is a fundamental question to ask yourself and ponder before reading the following resources. Also ask yourself what are you hope to achieve? Who do you need to engage with to help achieve this? What evidence do you need to provide, and how should you provide it?

Engaging with policymakers can be a stressful but proactive process, and one that requires a unique skill set. Unlike communicating with the public, engaging with policy makers can be a more transactional process that requires different terminology and an understanding of their incentive structure. When talking to an elected leader or their staff, topics around education, tax expenditures, and jobs in their district, help capture their attention. This engagement is critical to ensure evidence-based policy and bolster support for STEM and biological field stations in the United States and across the globe. Science and field stations have never been more important for informing sound policy and ensuring progress for all.

## 2. Biological Field Stations and Policy

Advocating for biological field stations to policymakers is a unique challenge made easier by three key attributes of biological field stations that are of interest to policymakers: (1) biological field stations provide essential infrastructure and resources to facilitate globally competitive and important STEM research and education, (2) biological field stations facilitate the effective and efficient use of tax dollars distributed for STEM research and education and (3) biological field stations diversify local economies with high skill jobs. Each of these three attributes has many potential points of discussion that should be strategically selected and crafted to maximize appeal to the policymaker you'll be engaging with. A few things to consider are level of government the policymaker is at, their past voting history and comments around STEM topics, and their political beliefs. Communicating to a policymaker in the Democratic Party versus communicating to a policymaker in the Republican Party will require different approaches. This also applies when communicating to federal versus local policymakers.

For example, when speaking to a federal-level policymaker, focusing on how biological field stations facilitate U.S. global STEM leadership and competitiveness, enable efficient use of federal tax dollars, and bolster STEM education and access across the country will help the policymaker connect with your message and the value of biological field stations. When speaking to a local- or state-level policymaker, focus on how biological field stations foster community and local education and diversify the local economies with high skill jobs and federal investment. It is especially important when communicating with local and state leaders to customize your message to your specific biological field station/s and extend an invitation to visit your facility.

**The most essential part of advocacy is trust.** Policymakers are inundated with advocacy efforts for dozens of important topics. Communicate honestly and efficiently. Maintain regular contact with your policymakers. As many biological field stations are

owned/operated through academic institutions, work with your university's Government Affairs Office. Often, these Government Affairs Offices have already built trust with local leaders and can help you get in contact with the right people in the policymaker's offices.

### **3. Introductory Information**

This section is intended to help you learn how to navigate the basics of the policy sphere. Below are resources on how to identify your representatives and learn their backgrounds, track legislation, share your research with policymakers, and build your science communication skills. However, the documents in this OBFS toolkit only skim the surface and are intended to help you identify further resources and opportunities to learn and engage. For example, and in addition to opportunities through the AIBS-OBFS partnership, the [Research-to-Policy Collaboration](#) (R2P) is an excellent organization to get further engaged with to access more in-depth tools and resources. Sign up for R2P's free [Rapid Response Network](#) to access their expert tools and opportunities!

#### ***Who represents me?***

Not sure who represents you in Congress, your state legislature, and other state/local positions? You can enter your address into [My Reps](#) to find your representatives across all three levels of government. It's important to know who your leaders are and to mention if you are a constituent when meeting with them. Legislators prioritize their constituents' needs, concerns, and wishes over those of non-constituents – they depend on constituent votes to get re-elected. If you are not meeting with one of your legislators but have a relevant connection to that state, mention that connection when you introduce yourself (e.g., growing up or previously living in that state, previously working for an organization in that state, having extended family that lives in that state).

#### ***Tracking Voting Records, Positions, and Bills***

Keeping track of legislator's activity can be difficult but is made easier with tools like [GovTrack](#) which concentrates information such as yearly "report cards" and biographical information, bill and resolution status, summaries, and text, voting records, and committees. [Vote Smart](#) is another tool for tracking legislators' biographical and contact information, committee and caucus assignments, issue positions, and voting records.

The Congressional Research Service (CRS) is a non-partisan government agency dedicated to compiling research for Congress. The CRS creates reports, ranging from a few paragraphs to hundreds of pages, that may become the basis of new legislation. [EveryCRSReport.com](#) compiles these reports into a searchable database dating back to 1972. You can search this site to see what other research has been compiled on topics of interest and to see what research Congress sees.

#### ***Engaging in Advocacy***

There are numerous approaches and platforms to bolster support for biological field stations; not every approach involves policymakers directly. The public, journalists, and

social media can also play important roles. Once you are ready to engage in advocacy, identifying what platform you want to use is important. Each reaches a different audience in a different way. [COMPASS](#), an organization preparing scientists to become agents of change, has a number of [great resources](#) to learn to engage with a variety of stakeholders through a variety of platforms. A summary of some of COMPASS' resources regarding advocacy platforms are:

- **The Message Box** (<https://www.compassscicomm.org/leadership-development/the-message-box/>) helps you to improve your science communication techniques. This tool provides guidance on how to target your audience and to effectively tailor the information you need to share.
- Tips for **Writing Op-Eds** (<https://www.compassscicomm.org/op-ed-writing-its-ok-to-argue-for-something/>). Op-eds are one way to bring research into public dialogue. To help make your science relevant and connect with policymakers, explore the idea of writing an op-ed and tips to construct a strong argument.
- **Connecting with Journalists** at Conferences (<https://www.compassscicomm.org/sarah-sunu-getting-out-there-connecting-with-journalists-at-scientific-conferences/>). Gain insight into how to prepare for conversations with journalists at science conferences, which can promote your work and be a powerful connection.
- **Writing Blog Posts** (<https://www.compassscicomm.org/how-to-write-a-blog-post-about-your-research-with-priya-shukla/>). Science communication can be tricky Who are you communicating to and how will you get your research across in a suitable manner? This tool offers a firsthand look at writing blog posts in the SciComm world.
- Tips for **Radio Interviews** (<https://www.compassscicomm.org/what-makes-a-great-radio-interview/>). Use this resource to optimize and enhance your communication techniques on a radio interview. Hint: telling a story aids in your audience's understanding and interest in your research!
- **Personal Media Kit** (<https://www.compassscicomm.org/how-to-make-your-science-media-kit/>). Documenting your research can improve your science communication skills and the future promotion of your work. Learn how to capture your work and build a relationship between research and media.
- Tips for **Creating One-Pagers** (<https://www.compassscicomm.org/how-to-craft-a-great-one-pager/>). In policymaking, one-pagers are critical to communicating research in an effective manner. This post provides researchers with tips to certify their one-pager will be articulate and successful.

#### 4. Documents in OBFS Toolkit

The following documents will aid your advocacy efforts, education, and identification of further opportunities. Documents found in this [google folder](#).

##### *From AIBS*

- 1 - Science Policy 101
- 2 - Communicating Science 101

- 3 - Media 101
- 4 - Contacting Your Members of Congress
- 5 - How Bill Becomes a Law
- 6 - Legislative terms
- 7 - R&D Budget Presentation
- 8 - Communications Triangle
- 9 - Additional Resources

### ***Infographics***

- 10 – Biological Field Stations Infographic
- 11 – Individual Biological Field Station Example Infographic v1
- 12 – Individual Biological Field Station Example Infographic v2
- 13 – Los Angeles Biodiversity Infographic

### ***Reports***

- 14 – FSML of the Future: A Strategic Vision

### ***Papers***

- 15 – Biological Field Stations Promote Science Literacy through Outreach
- 16 – Optimizing the Reach of Racial Equity Research
- 17 – A Scientist’s Guide for Engaging in Policy in the United States

## **5. How to Further Engage**

While there are many excellent ways to engage in advocacy efforts, here are four great ways to start:

1. OBFS Outreach and Communications Committee
  - a. This committee houses OBFS’ primary advocacy efforts and engaged members. Contact the committee, or any OBFS Board Member, to find out how to get more involved or to get advice on you and your station’s advocacy efforts!
2. [AIBS](#)
  - a. A fellow 501(c)(3) helping biologists advocate for public policy informed by science, AIBS is a strong partner of OBFS. Annually, OBFS sends a few members to the AIBS Congressional Visit Days, an in-person training and engagement opportunity in Washington D.C. AIBS also has outstanding [online resources](#) accessible year-round and a topical and detailed bi-weekly science policy newsletter you can [sign up for here!](#)
3. Research-to-Policy Collaboration’s [Rapid Response Network](#)
  - a. With tools and opportunities created just for scientists, sign up (free) to access these excellent resources to take your engagement to the next level.
4. Talk with your policymakers!

- a. No better way to engage in policy and help advocate for biological field stations than to jump right in and talk with your elected leaders and their staff.

## **6. Advocacy for International Biological Field Stations**

Advocacy in United States is unique, compared to other countries, due to the access U.S. citizens have to their elected policymakers. While many democratic countries have mechanisms for citizens to engage with their government, no two countries are alike. Many of the tools and educational opportunities here may apply when meeting with policymakers across the globe. However, arranging meeting with policymakers or their staff may take a very different form.

Despite the differences between the US and elsewhere, a few basic tenets of advocacy are nearly universal. Policymakers are busy everywhere, so developing a clear, concise message within the cultural framework of one's own country is important. Also, any documentation or literature, at least in the introductory phase, should be short and focused. Advice on one-pagers and honing one's message should be helpful wherever you are located.

International OBFS members should contact fellow stations locally or contact the OBFS International Committee to seek peers and resources in their country. International OBFS members should also feel encouraged to contact the OBFS Outreach and Communications Committee to further discuss and strategize advocacy efforts.