

Ten Questions for Researching Policymakers

Before we can know how to reach and influence them, we need to *know* about them! That's what seasoned campaigners at the Union of Concerned Scientists say, and these are the questions we ask ourselves to determine the best points of leverage with policymakers we need on our side, along with some ways to begin to answer them:

1. **What's their track record on the issue so far?**
(Consider past statements or actions.)
2. **What other issues have they worked on or are they talking about now?**
3. **Who turned out big to vote for them?**
4. **Who worked with them in the past on political or policy achievements?**
5. **Who has direct influence over them** (personally and professionally)?
Consider:
 - Who they listen to or meet with
 - Who has a big financial influence (e.g., job creators)
 - Who campaigned for them
 - Any connections through their spouse, kids, place of worship, etc.
 - Business partners, allies, organizations, pastimes
 - Political leaders they have connected or collaborated with on past achievements or current priorities
6. **Do they boast about their college or any other institutions?**
7. **Which media outlets have covered them frequently, published their letters, interviewed them, etc.?**
(Consider whether the coverage has been positive or negative, and whether the outlet is based in an area where the problem is acute or has covered the issue before.)

These questions can help you determine the best points of leverage with the policymakers you need on your side.

8. **Who do they talk to when in their district?**
9. **Who is on their staff, and do we have any connections with them?**
10. **What are the communities most affected by the issue, and who represents their interests?** (Consider whether any have engaged with your targets in the past, or have expressed interest in using science in their campaign efforts.)

Research Tools

There are a number of ways you can find answers to these questions. Some of the most common research modes are:

- Online searches about the policymakers and the issue
- Policymakers' webpages (with a focus on their press releases)
- News aggregator sites (e.g., Google News, AP, Feedly)
- Policymakers' or their influencers' social media accounts (including Twitonomy.com)
- Conversations with related networks or advocates experienced on the issue
- Vote-tracking sites
- Legislative calendars
- Conversations with legislative staff