The Rachel Carson Council Policy Toolkit

This toolkit is a practical, student-friendly guide to turning concern into concrete civic action on campus, in your community, and with public agencies.

LIST OF RESOURCES:

1. College Campus Resolution How-To
2. Emailing & Calling Your Public Official: Script Guide
3. What To Include in a Policy Infographic
4. Civic Participation Education
5. How to Prepare an Effective Public Comment
6. Public Comment Template
7. How to Attend a Public Hearing
8. Public Hearing Script
9. Understanding the Permitting Process
10. How to Read an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
11. Hill Decorum 101
12. How to Deliver a 5-Sentence Pitch
13. One-Pager 101
14. Sample One-Pager

1. College Campus Resolution How-To

What Is a Resolution?
A resolution is a formal statement passed by the student government to express student priorities, request institutional action, and establish a public record of student concerns.

Before You Write

- Identify the issue and who it impacts.
- Gather evidence (student testimonies, data, reports).
- Identify which administrators or offices have authority.
- Clarify the change you want to see.

Resolution Structure

- Title: Clear and concise (e.g., "A Resolution to Expand Campus Counseling Services").
- Authors & Sponsors: Students/orgs backing the bill.
- WHEREAS Clauses: Evidence-based context. Each clause states a fact, problem, or justification.
- BE IT RESOLVED Clauses: Direct action items; what you are asking the university or SGA to do.

How to Draft in 5 Steps

- Outline the problem and gather your evidence.
- Write 3–6 strong WHEREAS clauses (facts only).
- Write 1–3 BE IT RESOLVED clauses (actions only).
- Share draft with administrators or experts for feedback.
- Secure co-sponsors before submitting.

Sample Template

Title: A Resolution to **TOPIC**

Authors: **Student Senator**
Sponsors: **Campus Office of [TITLE]**

WHEREAS, **[ISSUE YOU ARE ADDRESSING];**
WHEREAS, **[CONTINUE FORMAT UNTIL DONE EXPLAING THE ISSUE];**

BE IT RESOLVED THAT [**SOLUTION];**
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT **[CONTINUE FORMAT UNTIL DONE]**

2. Emailing & Calling Your Public Official: Script Guide (One Pager)

Why Contacting Officials Matters
Reaching out to elected officials is one of the most effective ways to influence policy. Whether by email or phone, your message helps shape priorities, elevate community concerns, and hold leaders accountable.

Before You Reach Out

- Identify your official (local, state, federal).
- Know the issue and your position.
- Gather 1–2 key facts or personal stories.
- Be concise, respectful, and clear about your request.

Email Script Template

Subject: Request for Action on [Issue]

Dear [Title] [Last Name],

My name is [Your Name], and I am a constituent living in [City/County]. I am writing to express my concern about [issue].

This issue matters because [1–2 sentences: data, lived experience, or community impact].

I respectfully urge you to [specific action: support/oppose a bill, allocate funding, issue a statement, meet with constituents].

Thank you for your leadership and attention to this matter. I would appreciate a response regarding your position.

Sincerely,
[Your Name]
[Your Contact Information]

Calling Script Template

Hello, my name is [Your Name], and I am a constituent from [City/County]. I'm calling about [issue].

This issue concerns me because [brief reason—1–2 sentences].

I am asking the Senator/Representative to [specific action].

Thank you for your time. Could you please record my message and share it with the official?

Have a great day.

Tips for Effective Outreach

- Keep it under one minute when calling.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Be polite. Staff remember respectful callers and those who aren't.
- Share personal impact (this increases effectiveness).
- Always include a clear ask.

Follow-Up

- Save responses for future reference.
- If you don't hear back in 7–10 days, send a short follow-up email.
- Encourage peers or community members to reach out too.

3. What To Include in a Policy Infographic

Purpose of a Policy Infographic

A policy infographic visually communicates complex information in a simple, compelling, and accessible way. It helps audiences, from students, lawmakers, or community members, to quickly understand a policy issue and why it matters.

Essential Components

- **Clear Title:** A short, attention-grabbing headline (e.g., "Campus Air Quality: What Students Need to Know").
- **Problem Statement:** 1–2 sentences explaining the issue.
- **Key Data Points:** Use 3–5 strong statistics or facts, ideally with percentages or clear visual comparisons.
- **Visual Elements:** Icons, charts, timelines, or illustrations that enhance understanding.
- **Affected Communities:** Who is impacted and how.
- **Policy Context:** Laws, regulations, or institutional decisions that shape the issue.
- **Proposed Solutions:** Specific actions or policy recommendations.
- **Call to Action:** What you want people to do, contact officials, attend meetings, or support a resolution.
- **Sources:** Credible references to strengthen legitimacy (placed at the bottom).

Design Tips

- Use no more than 2–3 colors for clarity.
- Use icons to replace long text blocks.
- Highlight key numbers using bold or larger fonts.
- Keep all text concise and scannable.

Common Infographic Formats

- Timeline: Showing events or impacts over time.
- Comparison: Before/after or policy A vs. policy B.
- Flowchart: Visualizing a process or decision pathway.
- Map: Showing regional or demographic impacts.
- Data Snapshot: Quick stats with icons.

Checklist Before Publishing

- Clear and accurate data.
- Accessible fonts and color contrasts.
- No unnecessary jargon.
- Clear call to action.
- Credible sources included.

4. Civic Participation Education

A foundational guide for students, faculty, and community members learning how to engage with public agencies in educational ways.

What Is a Public Comment?
A public comment is an opportunity for individuals to provide information, observations, research, or personal experiences to a government agency during a rulemaking, permit review, or decision-making process.

Agencies collect public comments to gain insight into:

- Community concerns and lived experiences.
- Local knowledge about environmental or health conditions.
- Scientific data or research findings.
- Information they may not access through internal channels.

Public comments do not need to be technical or written by experts. Anyone can participate. Students, residents, Tribal members, educators, scientists, or anyone with relevant observations.

A strong public comment provides useful information, not political advocacy. Its role is to help agencies understand what people are seeing, experiencing, or learning on the ground.

5. How to Prepare an Effective Public Comment

1. Read the Agency's Request

Every agency posts a "Notice" that explains:

- What topic they are reviewing?
- What type of information they are seeking?
- Whether comments should focus on environmental, scientific, cultural, or community considerations.
- Understanding the prompt ensures your comment is relevant and helpful.

2. Identify Your Expertise

Expertise can include:

- Lived experience (e.g., living near forests, waterways, or facilities).
- Academic knowledge from coursework or research.
- Community experience (e.g., observations about neighborhood changes).
- Professional insight (e.g., ecology, public health, forestry, engineering).
- Agencies value many forms of knowledge, not only scientific data.

3. Stay Factual and Informational

Share what you know, have witnessed, or have studied:

- Local environmental conditions.
- Personal or community observations.
- Neighborhood changes over time.
- Research you have encountered.
- Questions or considerations you believe the agency may want to explore.
- The goal is to provide information, not to persuade decision-makers to take a specific legislative action.

4. Keep It Clear and Organized

Most public comments are 1–2 pages, structured and easy to follow. Concision ensures your core message is understood.

Suggested Structure for a Public Comment

1. Introduction

Who you are, your background, and why you are interested in the topic.

2. Information You Want to Share

This can include:

- Observations
- Data or research findings
- Community experiences
- Environmental or cultural knowledge
- Local context or historical background

3. Questions or Considerations

You can highlight:

- Potential effects or interactions
- Uncertainties worth examining
- Factors you believe merit attention

4. Closing Statement

Thank the agency and reiterate your main informational points.

Tips for Writing a Strong Public Comment

- Use your own perspective. Agencies value diverse viewpoints.
- Stick to information, observations, and experiences.
- Avoid urging specific votes or legislative outcomes.
- Be respectful and constructive.
- Support statements with examples or context when possible.

6. Public Comment Template

[Your Name]
[City, State]
[Affiliation (student, faculty, resident, researcher, community member, etc.)]
[Date]
Subject: Public Comment on [Name of Agency Process / Permit / Rulemaking / Topic]

To Whom It May Concern:
My name is [Name], and I am a [student/faculty member/resident] in [City/County/State]. I appreciate the opportunity to provide information related to [topic]. Public comments allow community members and stakeholders to share observations, data, or lived experiences that may assist the agency in understanding local conditions, environmental context, or community perspectives.

1. Background & Personal Connection
You may briefly describe:

- How familiar are you with the area or issue?
- Any relevant academic, professional, or community experience?
- Why is the topic of interest to you?

Example:
"I have lived in [community] for [x] years and have observed changes in air quality and forest conditions during that time."
OR
"As an environmental science student, I have studied local ecosystems and their responses to land-use changes."

2. Information, Observations, or Data You Want to Share
Use this section to offer factual or experiential information that may be helpful to the agency. This can include:

- Environmental observations (e.g., forest changes, wildlife patterns, water conditions).
- Community experiences related to environmental quality.
- Academic or scientific information you have learned.
- Cultural or historical context related to the land or resources.
- Questions or considerations the agency may want to evaluate.

Example topics (not prescriptive):

- Changes in air or water quality.
- Impacts on local species or habitats.
- Community health observations.
- Land use patterns.

- Cultural or Tribal connections to the landscape.
- Weather, flooding, or environmental trends.

3. Questions or Considerations for the Agency
Students and community members may pose questions for the agency to explore, such as:

- How the project may interact with existing environmental conditions.
- Whether cumulative environmental factors have been evaluated.
- How environmental justice considerations are assessed.
- How monitoring will occur.
- Clarity of data, methods, or assumptions in the agency's materials.

This section is about raising considerations, not urging outcomes.

4. Closing Statement
Close by thanking the agency for the opportunity to provide input.
Example:
"Thank you for considering this information as part of your review. I appreciate the opportunity to contribute community observations and academic perspective to this process."
Sincerely,
[Name]
[Email or Phone (optional)]

7. How to Attend a Public Hearing

Public hearings are opportunities for agencies to gather community input orally. Participation is educational and helps agencies understand local experiences.

Before You Go

- Confirm logistics: Date, time, location, and whether the hearing is virtual or in-person.
- Review the topic: Agencies often provide background materials.
- Prepare a brief informational statement: 1–3 minutes is standard.

What to Expect at the Hearing

- A moderator from the agency will guide the process.
- Speakers typically sign up and are called in order.
- Time limits help ensure everyone can participate.
- The goal is to share information, not advocate for specific legislation.

Tips for Speaking

- Start with your name and affiliation (student, resident, etc.).
- Clearly describe your experience or knowledge.
- Speak slowly and stay within the allowed time.
- Thank the agency for holding the hearing.

8. Public Hearing Script

Public Hearing Script Template

1. Greeting & Introduction (10–15 seconds)
"Good [morning/afternoon/evening]. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.
My name is [Name], and I am a [student/faculty member/resident/community member] from [City/County/State]."
(Optional additions):

- "I attend [university] where I study [field]."
- "I have lived in this community for [x] years."

2. Context & Personal Connection (20–30 seconds)
Briefly explain *why* you're familiar with the topic.
Examples:

- "I live near [area] and have observed environmental changes over time."
- "My coursework/research focuses on [topic], giving me familiarity with local ecosystems."
- "My family has cultural, historical, or livelihood connections to this land or region."

3. Key Information, Observations, or Data (45–60 seconds)
Share informational content that may support the agency's understanding of local conditions.
Examples:

- Environmental observations (air, water, forest, noise, wildlife).
- Community experiences or lived realities.
- Academic or scientific insights.
- Cultural or historical context.
- Noticing patterns over time.

You can begin with phrases like:

- "In my experience…"
- "In my community, we have observed…"
- "Research indicates…"
- "One aspect the agency may want to examine is…"
- "Something I have learned through study is…"

Avoid urging a specific action. Focus on information.

4. Questions or Considerations (20–30 seconds)
Offer questions or points the agency may wish to explore.
Examples:

- "How might this project interact with existing environmental conditions?"
- "Has the agency considered potential cumulative impacts in this area?"
- "Are there long-term monitoring plans the community should be aware of?"
- "What baseline data are being used to assess environmental change?"

This keeps the tone educational and constructive.

5. Closing Statement (10–15 seconds)
End with appreciation.
"Thank you for the opportunity to provide this information. I appreciate the agency's commitment to gathering public input and understanding community perspectives."

9. Understanding the Permitting Process

Many environmental decisions go through permitting, the official review of proposed projects like industrial sites, logging operations, energy facilities, or infrastructure.

Here's how the process typically works:

1. Application Submitted: A company or applicant submits a detailed proposal, including site plans, engineering descriptions, and environmental data.

2. Agency Review: Experts review the proposal for compliance with environmental, health, safety, and technical standards.

3. Public Notice Issued: The agency posts an official notice online or in local publications. This informs the community that a permit is under review.

4. Public Comment Period: Agencies open a window (usually 30–90 days) for individuals to submit comments with information or observations.

5. Hearing (if required or requested): Some projects require a public hearing; others allow one if community members request it.

6. Decision Issued: The agency may…

- Approve the permit.
- Approve it with conditions.
- Request additional information.
- Deny it.

7. Monitoring & Compliance: If approved, the agency monitors whether the company follows the permit's conditions.

Understanding this process empowers students and communities to contribute useful information at each stage.

10. How to Read an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

EIS documents describe the anticipated impacts of major federal actions on the environment. They can be long, but students can learn to extract essential information.

Sections to Focus On:

- **Executive Summary**: Provides a high-level overview of the project and the key environmental findings.
- **Purpose & Need**: Explains why the agency or applicant believes the project is needed.
- **Affected Environment**: Describes current conditions from air, water, forests, species, and communities.
- **Environmental Consequences**: Outlines how the project might alter environmental or social conditions.
- **Alternatives**: Lists other options the agency considered, including taking no action.

What to Look For in an EIS

- **Cumulative impacts:** How multiple stressors may interact.
- **Public health considerations:** Air, water, noise, or safety effects.
- **Environmental justice assessments:** Impacts on marginalized communities.
- **Forest/wildlife impacts:** Habitat changes, species at risk.
- **Mitigation plans:** Steps proposed to reduce harm.

11. Hill Decorum 101

Understanding etiquette on Capitol Hill ensures students and advocates communicate professionally and effectively with congressional offices.

Before the Meeting

- **Know the office:** Research the member's committees, district/state priorities, and past votes related to your issue.
- **Be punctual:** Arrive 10–15 minutes early. Hill schedules move quickly, and lateness reflects poorly.
- **Dress professionally:** Business formal.
- **Bring only what you need:** A printed one-pager, a notebook, and water.

During the Meeting

- **Introduce yourself clearly:** Name, school/organization, city, and why you care about the issue.
- **Be concise:** Staffers often have 5–10 minutes. Stick to your core message and one clear ask.
- **Be respectful and nonpartisan:** Stick to factual talking points and not political rhetoric.
- **Listen first:** Staff often share insights or constraints. Tailor your message based on what they say.
- **Stay calm and positive:** Even if the office disagrees, you are building a long-term relationship.

After the Meeting

- **Leave a one-pager** summarizing your issue and ask.
- **Send a thank-you email** within 24 hours.
- **Record notes** on who you met, what they said, and recommended next steps.

Good decorum builds credibility. Offices remember students who show professionalism and preparation.

12. How to Deliver a 5-Sentence Pitch

A five-sentence pitch (also known as your "policy pitch") is a fast, clear way to communicate your issue and ask to busy staff or lawmakers. It is typically used during coalition meetings, conferences, or any setting where you have limited time.

Structure of the 5-Sentence Pitch

1. **Who You Are:** Your name, affiliation, and district/state connection.
   "My name is ___, and I am a student at ___ living in ___."
2. **What the Issue Is:** A one-sentence problem statement.
   "I'm concerned about ___ because ___."
3. **Why It Matters:** One specific data point or personal story (~1 sentence).
   "In my community, we've seen ___."
4. **What You Want:** Your clear, specific ask.
   "I'm asking ___."
5. **Thank You & Invitation:** End with appreciation and an offer to follow up.
   "Thank you for your time. I'd be glad to send additional information."

Tips

- Keep it conversational, not scripted.
- Practice until you can deliver it in 20–30 seconds.
- Stick to one ask.
- Use plain language.

13. One-Pager 101

A one-pager is a concise, visually clean document (usually one side of one page) that summarizes a policy issue, its impacts, and what you want decision-makers to do. It is typically left behind after meetings with policymakers, administrators, or campus leaders.

Purpose of a One-Pager

- Provide a snapshot of the issue.
- Highlight why it matters to your community.
- Present your solution or "ask."
- Serve as a reference document after your meeting ends.

Essential Elements

1. **Title:** Clear and short (e.g., "Improving Campus Air Quality").
2. **Summary Statement:** one paragraph explaining the issue.
3. **Key Facts or Data:** Bullet points with statistics, visuals, or short explanations.
4. **What Is The Ask/Recommendation:** The action(s) you want the reader to take.
    - This can include one paragraph, followed by specific actions in a short, bulleted list
5. **Results:** The takeaways of benefits from the ask.

A clear one-pager strengthens meetings, reinforces your pitch, and increases the probability of follow-up from officials.

14. Sample One-Pager

TITLE

Clear, specific, and action-forward (who/what + where + why it matters).

Executive Summary:

A 3–4 sentence snapshot of the issue and why it matters now.

- **What's happening:** couple of sentences
- **Why it matters:** couple of sentences (impacts: health, costs, equity, jobs, environment, etc.)

Key Facts

- **Fact 1:** one strong stat or finding that supports urgency
- **Fact 2:** one stat or example that supports feasibility/solution
- **Fact 3:** one stat or example that supports equity/real-world impact

What Is the Ask / Recommendation?

A short paragraph stating exactly what you want the decision-maker to do, and the outcome you expect.

- Name the action (pass, fund, oppose, direct an agency, convene, request a briefing, etc.)
- Include timeframe if relevant ("this session," "in FY26," "before reauthorization," etc.)

Specific actions a policymaker can take:

- **Action 1:** the most direct action (bill language, vote, sign-on, amendment)
- **Action 2:** an oversight or agency action (letter, hearing, data request, rulemaking support)
- **Action 3:** a constituent-facing or coalition action (district visit, roundtable, press statement)

Expected Results / Impact

A short paragraph describing what changes if your ask is adopted.

- What improves (people/places/systems)
- What risks/costs are avoided
- How success can be measured (1–2 simple metrics)
- Summary Paragraph

Additional Note: Add footnotes at the very bottom for sources. These can bleed into page 2 if needed.