

Trends and Issues in Public Policy Decision-Making

To begin fostering the WVU Extension Service efforts in the area of Public Issues Education, this newsletter presents the following lists related to issues and their creation.

The first two lists delineate the issues facing both West Virginia and the nation. The last three lists detail how issues develop and how one can evaluate them. Subsequent issues of *PIE Update* will discuss these topics in greater detail.

Current Issues Facing the Mountain State and the Entire Country

Major “Visible” Issues

- Government Finances
- Homeland Security
- Insurance Coverage
- Trust Funds Solvency
- Financial Markets’ Status
- Political Campaigning and Change

Major “Hidden” Issues

- Environmental Quality
- Revenue Source Transformation
- Educational System Changes
- Privacy Rights and Rules
- Infrastructure Needs
- Private Sector Rearrangement



Process of Issue Creation

How Do Issues Become Issues?

- Public Opinion
- Media Scrutiny
- Special Interests
- Political Pressure

How Do You Filter Information?

- Use Multiple Sources
- Use Different Sources
- Use Unusual Sources
- Remember Source Bias
- Get Details; Dig Beneath the Surface
- Use Own Reality to “Test” Assertions



How Do You Stay Atop Issues?

- Newspapers
- Television
- Radio
- Internet
- Personal Contact
- Other Sources



Some Questions to Think About

- What are Public Issues?
- What is Public Issues Education?
- What is the purpose of this *Public Issues Education Update*?

Public Issues are important matters that are (or at least should be) debated, discussed, and deliberated on before decisions are made. These can be of any subject – ranging from land use to health care, national security, food safety, economic development, and education. Furthermore, Public Issues are defined as pressing and emerging matters that involve multiple, often-conflicting interests. They also can have widespread consequences.

Public Issues Education involves providing education about these public policy issues as they arise. Commonly known as PIE, this education can be offered to everyone from decision-makers and community leaders to affected individuals and all citizens. Providing this education is a role traditionally filled by land-grant universities through their respective Extension Services.

The publication *Public Issues Education: Increasing Competence, Enabling Communities* has been developed by the National Public Policy Education Committee – Public Issues Education Competencies Task Force to help Extension educators deal with public issues.

The PIE task force listed eight competencies in this area:

- Creating partnerships
- Collecting and interpreting data about issues, audiences, and educational settings
- Designing public issues education programs
- Communicating effectively
- Facilitating group discussion and decision-making
- Managing and transforming conflict
- Working with scientific and technical information
- Creating an environment of professionalism

Detailed information on PIE – including the publication mentioned above – is available at the Public Issues Education Web site (www.publicissueseducation.net).

Public Issues Education Update is the current effort by the WVU Extension Service to provide Extension agents and specialists with additional resources about important issues.

This newsletter will be published quarterly. Initially, issues will be available both on hard copy (paper) and virtually (on the Internet). Eventually, the newsletter will be a Web-only tool, supplemented with Web site postings.

Of course, working in PIE is nothing new. The WVU Extension Service has always been very active in this area. Providing education is and always will be the primary purpose of Extension. And because of the subjects taught by WVU Extension, virtually every educational session presented by specialists and agents contains a Public Issues Education component.



There have also been previous publications. Many of these were ad hoc in nature, distributed via e-mail or the Web. In addition, the *Public Issues Education* newsletter was published in 1996-97. Three issues are available online (www.wvu.edu/~exten/infores/newslet.htm#pie).

How do you want your PIE?

What type of PIE do you want? How large of a piece of PIE do you want?

OK. We admit that Public Issues Education is not that type of PIE. But you do have some “choices” to make with respect to *Public Issues Education Update*.

Each edition of this newsletter will examine the major prominent issues of the moment. For example, the Summer issue of *PIE Update* will look at the actions of the West Virginia Legislature. The Fall issue will revisit the state’s fiscal situation. And the Winter issue will examine the 2004 election results and what they might mean.

Still, there are other issues that people in the Mountain State may want to know about – or even more important – need to know about. If you have a topic that you would like to see discussed, please contact me at 304-293-6131, ext. 4215; or Michael.Dougherty@mail.wvu.edu.

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