Influencing policy:
Bunn's 10 commandments

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October 17, 2023

Influencing policy – a learned skill

❑ Need to think as hard about how to make recommendations happen as about developing the ideas in the first place

— In fact, the two are related…

❑ Everyone gets better with practice

❑ A few simple rules can steepen the learning curve

❑ "Insider" vs. "outsider" strategies

❑ In broad terms, key rules apply to influencing policies in other democracies as well – institutional and cultural specifics differ

❑ Indeed, similar rules apply to statecraft – states influencing other states to change their policies

I: Develop specific, actionable recommendations on important problems

❑ Need to be specific – <u>which</u> programs need <u>how much</u> more money, <u>which countries</u> should we make <u>what</u> proposals to
  — Wrap it up in a bow – the easier you can make it to say "yes," the more likely it is it will get done (relevant to all stages of the process)
  — *But,* remember the policymaker often knows more about how to get things done in his/her environment than you do

❑ Need to identify a problem and propose a solution
  — "Find a problem and fix it!"
  — Need a good argument in favor of your recommendation
    ▪ Why is your idea better than plausible alternatives?
  — Need to anticipate likely counterarguments, have answers

A good argument for a good idea is essential – but not enough

What's a good recommendation?

❑ Needs to be <u>specific</u>:

— At the end of your briefing, the policymaker should know who he or she should call and what he or she should tell them

❑ Needs to be <u>material</u>:

— Your recommendations should offer some prospect for solving a <u>substantial</u> part of the problem you're writing about

❑ Needs to be <u>implementable</u>:

— Organization is capable of doing it (technically, organizationally, with plausibly attainable resources)

— It's politically plausible

❑ <u>Don't</u> say "make things better" — say <u>how</u>

— Don't recommend that the agency "improve implementation" — suggest specific changes in approach

II: Identify <u>who</u> would have to decide to implement the recommendation

❑ Depends on the scale and specifics of the idea

— "Adopt a single-payer health care system" requires the President, both houses of Congress, etc.

— Hence would require a national grass-roots campaign, getting many interest groups in a coalition to support it, overcoming fierce opposition, etc.

— At other extreme, some ideas can be decided on by one appropriations staffer without anyone noticing

❑ Once you've identified the key decision-makers, develop a *plan* to influence them to adopt your policy

— Convincing: briefings, papers, letters, etc. presenting arguments

— Pressuring: getting constituents, other officials, influential individuals, the media, Congress, organizations, businesses, etc. to lean on them

— "Inside" vs. "outside" strategies

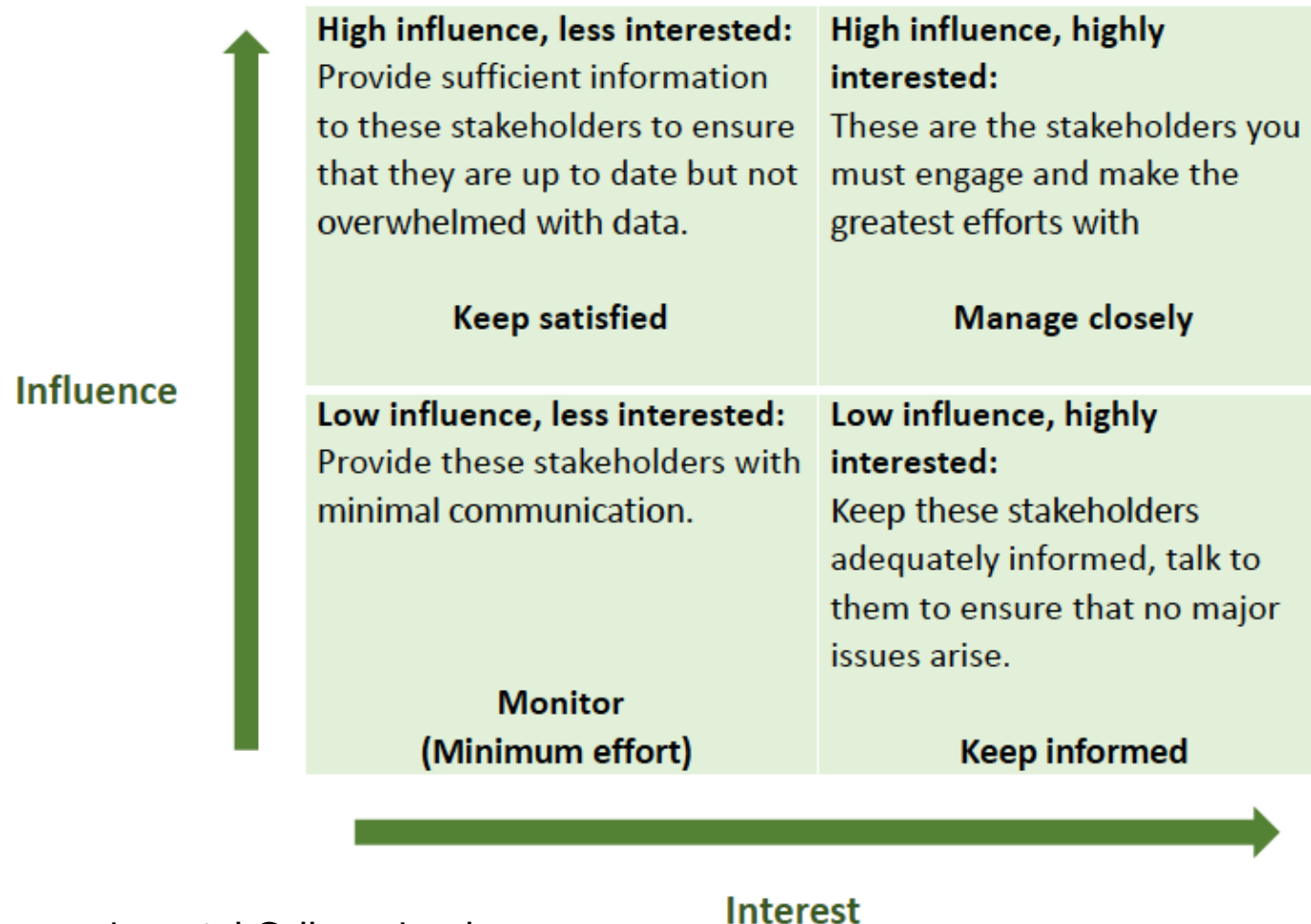# Identifying the decision-makers

❑ Find the locus of decision

— Executive branch? Which agency?

— Congress? Which committees? (esp. appropriators, authorizers)

— Courts? Which ones are likely to hear it?

— State or local? (Similar set of possibilities, questions, as above)

❑ Find individual people involved

— Often news stories will quote by name key officials involved in an issue

— Next step: identify their key staff people on the topic (usually NOT the ones quoted) – they are usually the first ones to talk to

— On Capitol Hill: Figure out which committees handle the issue, who the key committee staff people are (for both the Republicans and Democrats); also figure out staff for important members

Mapping the stakeholders

Influence

High influence, less interested: Provide sufficient information to these stakeholders to ensure that they are up to date but not overwhelmed with data.

Keep satisfied

High influence, highly interested: These are the stakeholders you must engage and make the greatest efforts with

Manage closely

Low influence, less interested: Provide these stakeholders with minimal communication.

Monitor (Minimum effort)

Low influence, highly interested: Keep these stakeholders adequately informed, talk to them to ensure that no major issues arise.

Keep informed

Interest

Source: Imperial College, London

Analyzing key stakeholder interests

NE ASIAN POWERS' NATIONAL INTERESTS IN MID-2000s

Source: Interviews with US, PRC, DPRK, ROK, Japanese & Russian government officials

Source: John Park, *Washington Quarterly*, 2005

III: Understand the world of the key decision-makers

❑ What do *they* see as the problems *they* are trying to solve?

— Can your recommendation help them solve a problem they already care about?

— If not, can you reframe/adapt it so it does?

— Otherwise, you need to convince them the problem *you're* trying to solve *should* be important to them (usually harder)

❑ What resources, constraints, and obstacles are they coping with?

— Limited time

— Limited analysis and idea-generation (very common)

— Limited budgets

— Limited authority

— Limited personnel

❑ What are *their* incentives and disincentives?

IV: Develop a focused "ask" – "yesable" propositions

❑ Develop a very focused version of what you want the decision-maker to do – and make the case for doing it

— Find a concise way to suggest what they should do – and to make the case for doing it – develop your "elevator speech" version, your briefing version, etc.

— Put yourself in the place of the busy policy-maker with 1000 things to attend to – how can you convince them quickly to take action?

— *Don't* spend 20 minutes providing background, reviewing the literature – get to the point (assume only 1-4 key points get through)

— Tell a story, don't filibuster

❑ Different "asks" for different people

— For a reporter – convincing them to run a story

— For a congressional staffer – convincing them to put language in a bill, or have their boss sign a letter endorsing your idea

V: Build credibility and relationships with key decision-makers over time

❑ Build credibility through:

— Getting your facts right consistently – doing good work

— Providing useful information and ideas in a <u>timely</u> way

— Getting your ideas endorsed by credible parties (e.g., getting them considered in independent reviews, such as from GAO, NAS…)

❑ Develop relationships through:

— Focused cultivation of key decision-makers on the subjects you work on – regular meetings, e-mail, phone calls, etc.

— Being friendly and trying to be helpful (can help staff with tasks)

— Work with both parties you agree with and parties you don't – look for whatever common ground you can find (easier to get ideas approved with bipartisan support, and today's majority may be tomorrow's minority – today's junior staffer is tomorrow's senior one)

❑ Can start with these tips, and can also work with people who have credibility and relationships established

VI: Work with key stakeholders and decisionmakers from the beginning

- ❑ People will listen to you more if they feel you've listened to them
  - — Strong evidence of greater support and influence for efforts that involved policymakers in discussions, debates early on
  - — Increases sense of ownership, buy-in – party "their idea"
- ❑ Also, relevant decision-makers know their decision environment better than you do
  - — Can get a much better idea of the political challenges and opportunities by discussions throughout project
- ❑ Also, early interactions help with long-term relationship-building
- ❑ BUT: hold off on offering ideas to policymakers until you know enough to hold your own in the discussion
  - — Difficult to recover from early impression you don't know your stuff

VII: Use every tool available to you

❑ Build coalitions

— Nobody wins battles alone; try to work with people, organizations, who are or may be influential with the key decision-makers

— Find common ground, points of agreement – be flexible

— Negotiation and discussion can also *improve* proposals – often does

❑ Use the media

— Key way to get your ideas in front of influentials

— Suggest stories, write op-eds, be prepared with pithy quotes…

— Use social media to get your ideas out as well

❑ Find key validators

— Ex military, national security officials, others can be strong messengers for a proposal

— Identify validators likely to be influential with each particular decision-maker

VII: Use every tool available to you (II)

❑ Make it normative

— Does the policy you're arguing against violate a key principle? Contradict past policy?

— Is the idea you're promoting something that others regularly do, and can be seen as "expected" behavior of "good" states?

— Can your idea be described as fulfilling terms, or general goals, of key agreements?

— Can your idea be described as a substantial contribution to an existing government goal or commitment? Examples:

   ◼ Mitigating climate change

   ◼ Providing good jobs

   ◼ Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals

   ◼ Making U.S. supply chains more resilient

   ◼ ….

VIII: Work with executive branch, Congress, regulatory agencies, and the courts

- ❑ All 3 branches of U.S. government have significant power
- ❑ Work with executive branch agencies to understand real implementation issues they are dealing with, suggest opportunities, modifications, budget shifts, etc.
- ❑ Work with Congress to get them to prohibit, direct, or suggest certain activities, increase/decrease budgets, hold hearings on certain issues, etc.
- ❑ Work with regulatory agencies to strengthen their approaches, help block efforts to weaken them
- ❑ Lawsuits (using the courts) can be highly effective in certain cases
  - — Limited to NGOs with the resources to pursue them
  - — Can be used to force agencies to take an action required by law, or stop/delay programs that arguably haven't followed the law

IX: Understand the budget and policy cycle – time your recommendations

- ❑ Understand and prepare to seize upcoming "decision moments"
  - — An upcoming vote
  - — An upcoming high-level meeting, negotiation
  - — The expiration of an agreement or program
- ❑ "Never let a crisis go to waste"
  - — Have ideas to respond ready if there's a major crisis in your area
- ❑ Need to pay attention to the rhythm and schedule of policy in the area where you're making recommendations
  - — An idea months *after* the issue is decided is not very helpful
- ❑ The budget process in particular has a regular rhythm offering several points for intervention with different participants

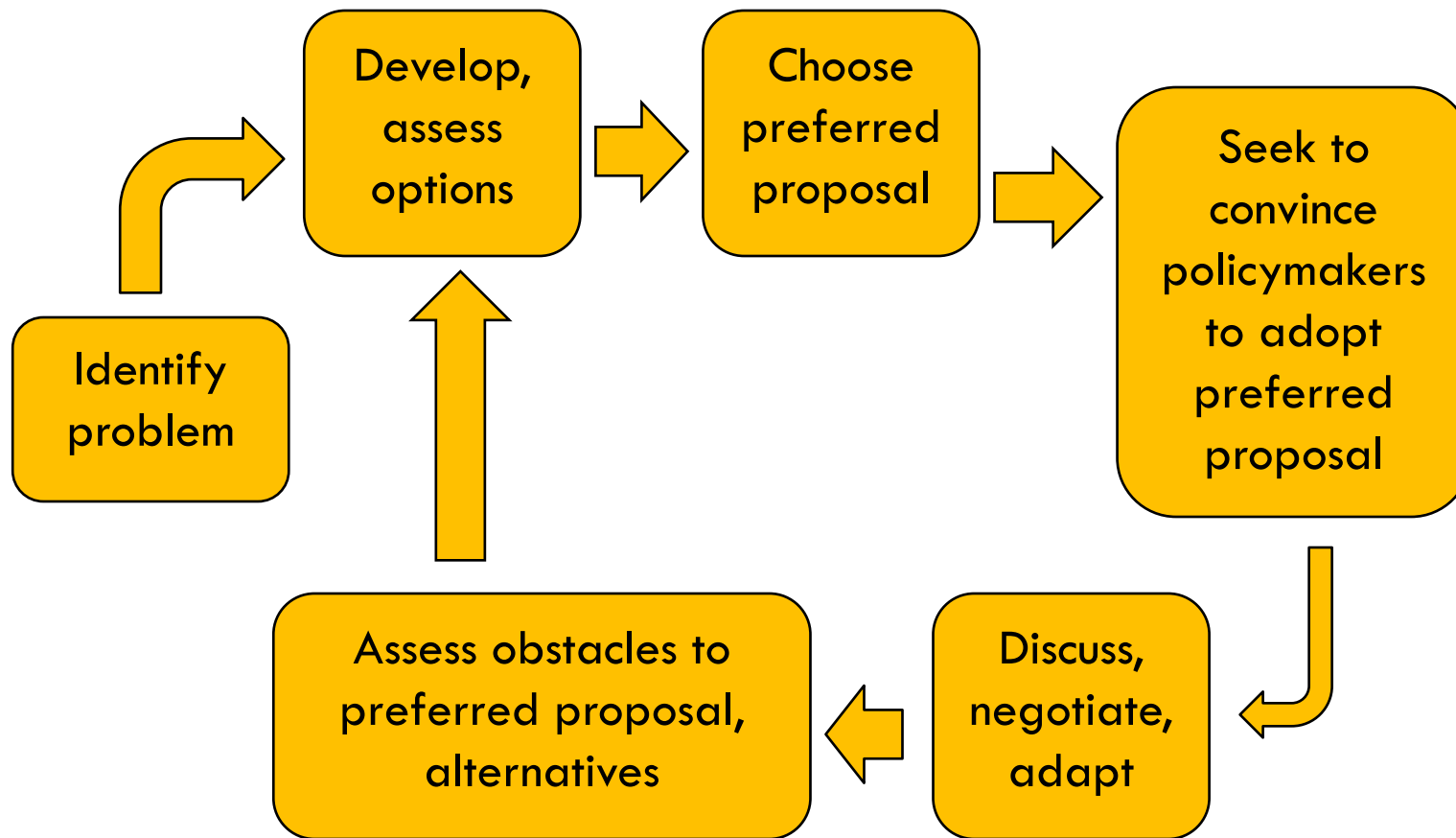*Budget is policy (but not the only policy)*

X: Relentlessly focus on getting a *small* number of ideas across the finish line

❑ Pushing many recommendations simultaneously disperses your forces, makes it harder to succeed on each one

— So, identify a few you really want to work on, focus on those

— Never try to push more than 1-2 ideas in any one meeting with a policymaker

❑ Don't be afraid to be repetitive

— Do a briefing version – give it many times

— Do an op-ed versions – see if you can think of a few different ways to argue the case for one particular idea

— Push your idea at every appropriate opportunity

— Repeat until you bore yourself

— Note: the best way to influence policy is NOT necessarily the same as the best way to establish a strong academic reputation and get tenure

An interactive, iterative process

Influencing multi-party talks

❑ Similar approaches

— Identify <u>who</u> could best carry forward a proposal or idea

— Try to frame the idea as meeting <u>their</u> objectives

— Try to build reputation, credibiity with parties over time

— Understand the rhythm of decisions – time recommendations

❑ The most powerful parties in the talks may not always be the best proponents of a new idea

— More powerful countries likely more set in their positions

— Others may reject proposals from the powerful players, especially if there is broader hostility – e.g., Russia and China may reject U.S. ideas

— But typically need a party with some influence to push the idea

— May be helpful to allow certain parties to take credit for the idea

The role of non-government dialogues

❑ Track 2 and Track 1.5 dialogues have played key roles in nuclear arms control, and in moderating some conflicts
- E.g., origin of strategic arms limitation, IAEA safeguards procedures…

❑ Non-government discussions offer greater flexibility:
- Can explore ideas more freely than official representatives
- Can build relationships, understanding of the other side's concerns
- <u>More</u> important when governments aren't talking to each other

❑ The influence of non-government dialogues is often indirect:
- May open up debates in expert communities of participating countries – influence governments over time
- Require patience – often difficult to judge how important or valuable the discussions will prove to be in the long term

Church's advice on influencing policy

❑ Barriers to research influencing policy
  — Policymakers are busy – no time to read latest research
  — Decisions happening faster than research can support them
  — Many drivers of decision are politics, not "facts"
  — Researchers may not focus on issues policymakers are thinking about; policymakers may not know where to get useful research, or judge which is credible

❑ Church's suggestions
  — Choose a strategy for influence appropriate for your goal
  — Design your research with influence in mind from the outset
  — Understand the policymakers' working context
  — Engage with potential users
  — Develop an actionable option analysis
  — Develop and present user-friendly results

From Cheyanne Church, "Mind the Gap," http://www.incore.ulst.ac.uk/policy/rip/RIP.pdf

Church's advice (II): *insider* vs. *outsider* strategies

❑ Insider strategies

— Working directly with policymakers (e.g., meeting with them, offering them memos on particular problems, helping on tasks)

— Requires:

■ Relationship with policymakers

■ Reputation for helpfulness, knowledge, ideas

■ Willingness to avoid attacks on policymakers that undermine trust

— Most appropriate for issues (a) already on the government agenda; (b) where the researchers and the policymakers are pushing in similar directions; (c) that will be decided by elites, not public

❑ Outsider strategies

— Generating ideas, pressure from outside the system

— Media, protests, lawsuits, more…

— Most appropriate for (a) getting issues on to the agenda; (b) seeking to stop or reverse existing policies; (c) issues where public views can play a major role in the outcome

What makes some studies have a bigger influence than others?

❑ Many factors – timing, expertise, politics…

❑ Simple, compelling message
  — Ask yourself: what is the headline? What are the key action items?

❑ Studies are more influential if audiences seem them as:
  — *Relevant* to addressing what they see as an important problem
  — *Legitimate* in handling both issues and stakeholders fairly (both in process and in outcome)
  — *Credible,* or likely to be generally on the right track

❑ Stakeholders are more likely to see a study as having these properties if they have been involved early on – builds their buy-in, acceptance of the process

See Mitchell, Clark, and Cash, "Information and Influence," 2006

An example – removing vulnerable nuclear bomb material

❑ Problem:

— Many sites around the world with HEU, plutonium, that could be stolen and used in a crude nuclear bomb, and poor security

— U.S. government had several small programs to cope with pieces of the issue – but gaps, overlaps, each too small to get over obstacles…

❑ Simple proposal:

— Create single program that would eliminate the gaps and overlaps, focus on removing material or beefing up its security, as rapidly as practicable

— Published in study, memos, etc.

❑ Crises add to the decision opportunity:

— 9/11 attacks, discovery of al Qaeda nuclear efforts, highlighted danger

— 2002: No program had needed authorities to cut a deal to get HEU out of Yugoslavia – private group (NTI) had to step in and provide money

An example – removing vulnerable nuclear bomb material (II)

❑ Built coalition of support:
— Both Harvard team and NTI influential on nuclear security
— Managed to get many Washington NGOs pushing the idea
— Related stories began to appear in the press

❑ Worked in a bipartisan way on Capitol Hill:
— Worked with Sen. Feinstein (D-CA), Sen. Domenici (R-NM), on their separate bills, helped convince them to merge them
— Legislation authorized creation of program

❑ A serendipitous opportunity pushes it over the top:
— IAEA Director-General visiting Washington to meet with President Bush
— Stops at NTI – which had given money to the IAEA for nuclear security – they suggest raising the idea with Bush
— Bush agrees, directs Secretary of Energy to launch the program

An example – removing vulnerable nuclear bomb material (III)

❑ Resulting program – the Global Threat Reduction Initiative – was highly successful

— Enough material for 100s of nuclear bombs removed from scores of sites around the world

— Many research reactors converted to use low-enriched uranium

— Particularly notable: HEU cleared from Libya, Ukraine before fighting started in each place

— >50% of all the countries that once had nuclear bomb material on their soil have gotten rid of itBoth Harvard team and NTI influential on nuclear security

— Even in Trump administration, >1,000 kg of material removed (scores of bombs' worth)

❑ Continued kibitzing, arguing for changes

— Covering more materials, facilities, policy approaches, types of incentives…
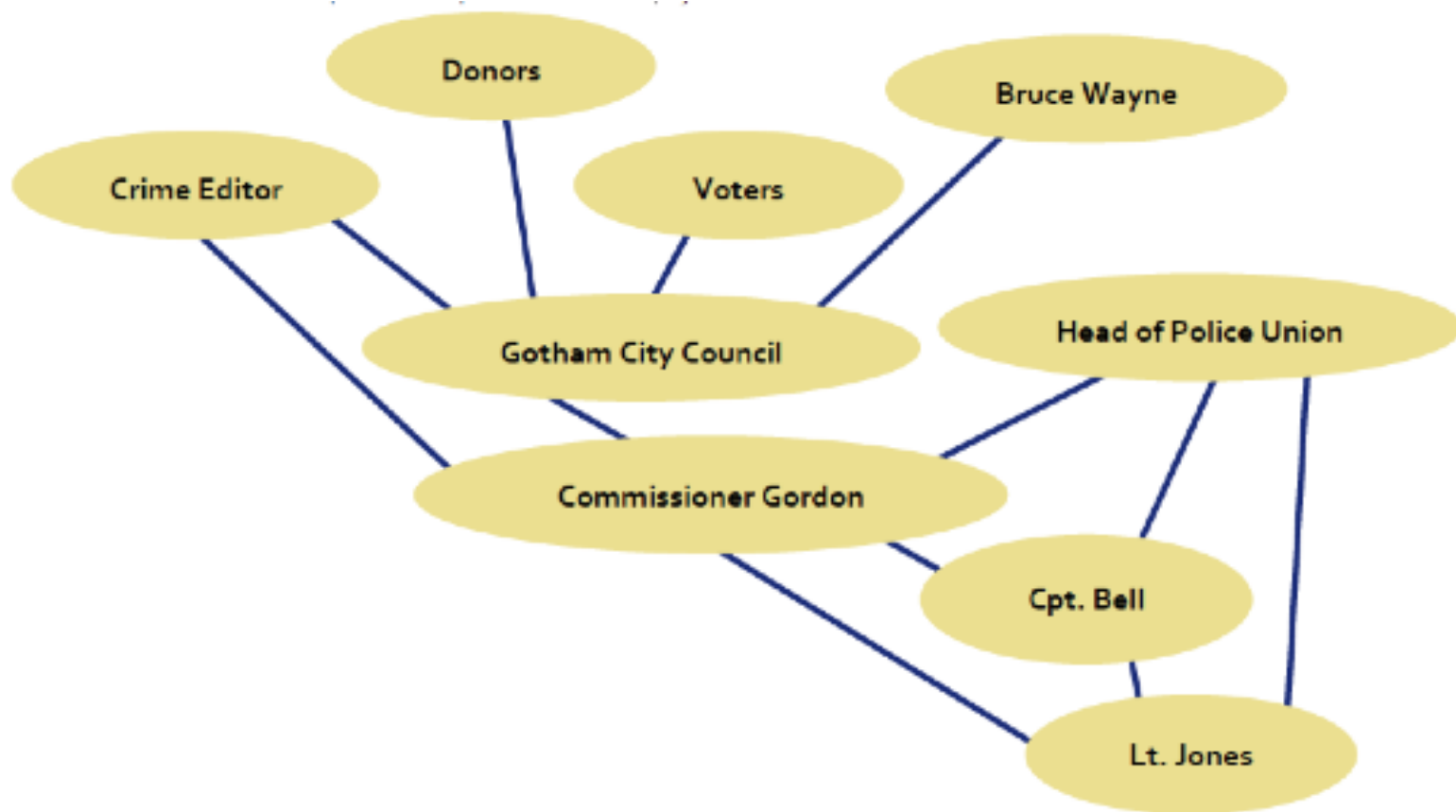
Backup slides if needed…

Stakeholder analysis

❑ You need to map out the stakeholders
  — Who would be affected by the policy options?
  — Who has power – to approve, support, oppose, disrupt?

❑ Then you need to understand their interests
  — What issues do they care about?
  — How <u>much</u> do they care? Enough to motivate action?

❑ Then you need an engagement plan
  — How can you build (and maintain) trust and confidence?
  — How can you persuade, or influence, those you need most?
    ▪ Identify the supporters, the opponents, and the persuadables

❑ Getting a policy adopted typically entails a long-term, focused plan to engage decision-makers
  — Need to track engagements, assess progress, identify new opportunities…

Power (and influence) mapping

Source: Center for Policing Equity + PolicyLink

IX: Understand the budget and policy cycle – time your recommendations (2)

U.S. Budget Process

❑ Programs develop budget proposals (summer of the year before)

❑ Departments review, modify program ideas, send budget requests to Office of Management and Budget (early fall)

❑ OMB reviews department requests, sends "passback" with proposed modifications (~Oct.)

❑ Departments may appeal OMB modifications – final budget requests agreed on (~Nov.-Dec.)

❑ President's budget goes to Congress, with detailed "budget justifications" (~ early Feb.)

❑ Congressional authorizing and appropriating committees hold hearings (~March-May)

IX: Understand the budget and policy cycle – time your recommendations (3)

U.S. Budget Process

❑ Authorizing committees and appropriations subcommittees draft bills (~May-July)

❑ Bills voted on in House and Senate (~June-July, can be delayed)

❑ "Conference committee" negotiates differences between House and Senate bills (~July-October, can be delayed)

❑ New fiscal year begins: October 1

❑ If no appropriation passed by October 1, Congress passes a "continuing resolution" – typically funds programs at last year's level temporarily

— Can be exceptions if House and Senate can agree particular programs need something different

❑ "Supplemental" appropriations can happen off-cycle

IX: Understand the budget and policy cycle – time your recommendations (4)

U.S. Budget Process – Some Key Terms

❑ *Authorization* – Permits the government to undertake a particular program; permits the appropriators to provide certain amounts of funds for that program

❑ *Appropriation* – Real power to write checks up to the appropriated amount

❑ *Obligation* – Occurs when the government signs contracts promising to pay certain amounts for certain goods and services – actual payment may not occur until much later

❑ *Outlay* – Actual payments by the government for goods and services, real writing of checks

❑ *Unobligated/Uncosted balances* – "Unobligated" is a balance not yet committed in contracts, "Uncosted" means not yet actually paid (but possibly already obligated)

Bunn's 10 commandments for influencing policy

1. Develop specific, actionable recommendations on important policy problems
2. Identify who would have to decide to implement your recommendations
3. Understand the world of the key decision-makers
4. Develop a focused "ask" – "yesable" ideas
5. Build credibility and relationships with key decision-makers over time
6. Work with key stakeholders and decisionmakers from the beginning – increases their buy-in

Bunn's 10 commandments for influencing policy (cont.)

7. Use all the tools available to you
   — Build coalitions, find common ground, get others pushing for your proposal
   — Use the media
   — Get high-powered "validators" for your idea

8. Work with the Executive Branch, Congress, regulatory agencies, and the courts

9. Understand the budget and policy cycle – time your recommendations
   — Prepare for and seize key "decision moments" – try to generate such moments if you can

10. Relentlessly focus on getting a *small* number of ideas across the finish line