

## GATHERING FACTS AND WORKING FOR CHANGE

The desire of GFWC clubwomen to improve our communities is our fundamental call to service. This requires that we impact the laws and regulations that apply at every level of government. “Embracing Legislative Involvement” is how it happens. The goal of legislative involvement is to achieve practical solutions to existing problems.

How does a GFWC club or GFWC clubwoman get started? Most of us are not politicians or lobbyists. It is not hard to “Embrace Legislative Involvement” but we have to be willing to make a little effort and go outside our normal comfort box.

Legislative Involvement is a multi-step process at each level of government. Each step naturally leads to the next step. Some are more time consuming. Some are more uncomfortable if you are reserved in character. However, every GFWC Clubwoman can “Embrace Legislative Involvement” even if we are not comfortable doing every step alone. Working as the great team members we are, each step gets done and we accomplish the goal – fixing a problem!

If you break down the process of “Embracing Legislative Involvement”, it does not look like the daunting task we assume it to be. Here are my seven (7) suggested steps:

**Step 1: Identify the issue that concerns you**

**Step 2: Identify the applicable GFWC Resolution**

**Step 3: Educate yourself about the issue(s)**

**Step 4: Determine who the decision-makers are for your issue**

**Step 5: Get to know the decision-makers**

**Step 6: Educate the decision-makers regarding your issue(s)**

**Step 7: Follow Up! Follow Up! Follow Up!**

**STEP 1** is perhaps the easiest. Areas of concern, also known as issues, seem to find GFWC clubwomen! Many issues are obvious when we look around our communities. Some issues are brought to our attention by others. It really does not matter how we become aware of the issue. What matters is that our members feel it needs to be addressed.

Issues grow in scope and often cross different levels or areas. A local area of concern often becomes a city’s concern, a region’s concern, a state’s concern and then a national concern! Some even become international concerns. If my community has an issue, chances are another community has a similar issue. They may not be identical but often have common characteristics.

Issues of importance to you are not always the same as another clubwoman’s are of concern. Our organization is vast and there is plenty of room for a multitude of issues to be addressed. Addressing an issue you are passionate about will be motivating and make the effort meaningful. It is hard to put in the necessary effort if it is not something you truly believe in.

**STEP 2** requires a Clubwoman to review the GFWC Resolutions. GFWC Standing Rules require that any advocacy done through GFWC must be related to a position taken in a resolution adopted by the members of GFWC. Currently GFWC has a large number of resolutions. The Resolutions Committee is working to reorganize and consolidate the existing resolutions to make it easier to use them. The resolutions are found at [www.GFWC.org](http://www.GFWC.org) under “resources”. The resolutions are also available via the MemberPortal.

As you decide whether the issue is important enough for you to take action, keep these rules in mind:

1. A clubwoman may not oppose the GFWC resolutions if she is representing GFWC.
2. GFWC is a nonpartisan, nondenominational organization. Clubwomen are allowed to advocate for policies or legislation. We are NOT allowed to endorse candidates or engage in partisan politics. GFWC members must separate personal political activities from official GFWC work.
3. Minority opinions may be expressed. A member organization (club or State Federation) holding a minority opinion and wishing to support its stand further may do so provided it states that its action represents the minority vote of GFWC.

Take time to become familiar with the GFWC Resolutions. You will see that our members are concerned about a lot of issues.

**STEP 3** requires a clubwoman to research and learn. We have to understand the situation fully to help improve it. In most situations, there are several factors contributing to the need. Each of those factors requires investigation and education. No problem can be solved, unless we truly understand the problem.

There are a multitude of ways to learn about an issue. Research sounds scary but it is primarily about reading various resources and listening to others. I love to start with the local community newspapers and newsletters. Church bulletins, community bulletin boards, and radio stations are great sources. Online resources are vast. In all research, do not assume the resource is factual. Every person writing about a topic brings their own personal bias to their writings. Cross check facts between resources. As you get more involved, you will learn which resources are the most trustworthy and which ones require a greater level of scrutiny. For example, when I need medical information, I don't start with Facebook. I start with the Mayo Clinic or Cleveland Clinic websites, or I might start by talking to family and friends who are in the medical community for suggested resources. Then move on to news sources and social media. Both have tons of information but you have to sort through the chaff.

**STEP 4** involves identifying the decision-makers who can address each cause. Often these are community leaders. To solve a problem through legislation, require clubwomen to identify what level of government controls the issue. The Legislative Action Center, which is available on the GFWC website, is a great source to identify decision-makers at the national level.

Your research in Step 3 may help identify the decision-makers. Every clubwoman should keep a local road map of governmental leaders. Start with your local municipality. Identify the active committees: who are the members, how are they appointed and when do they meet? What is the easiest way to contact each person: phone, snail mail, or e-mail?

Then move up a level to, perhaps, the county level and then a regional level. Taking the next step, identify your state-level officials and national-level representatives. In each case, look on their webpage for the names and contact information of the elected officials.

**STEP 5** requires a little advance planning and effort. A decision-maker is more likely to “listen” to someone they have already met. Someone who only reaches out when they want attention is easily ignored. Building relationships takes effort, but is not an insurmountable task. Send a note of congratulations on an election or committee appointment. Send a letter of thanks when you become aware of something positive they have done. Acknowledge a personal event such as an anniversary or birthday. A tin of cookies for the office is a great treat and keeps our name in front of everyone!

Inviting a decision-maker to a meeting or event is a great way to meet them informally. They don't have to be a speaker, but offer them the opportunity to present brief remarks. For example, my local community was represented at the state level by a woman who was a nurse. We invited her to a fall club dinner and asked her to share why she chose to run for office. Another time, we invited her to be part of the installation of new members. When we celebrated a milestone Club Anniversary, we invited her to be part of it. Each time we gave her a strict time limit. Guess what? She enjoyed meeting us so much that she reached out to us almost every year she was in office. Many times, it was to bring relevant pending legislation to our attention that impacted issues she learned we cared about by attending our meetings. On other occasions, she asked for help when she wanted to pass something. Our ongoing relationship made it easier to reach out when we wanted to bring something to her attention. By the time she retired from public service many years later, we felt she was part of our family. We did not always agree on a topic, but we knew that she respected our perspective, and we felt the same way.

Don't forget to get to know the staff in the decision-makers' offices. They often serve as gatekeepers so you definitely want to get on their good side.

**STEP 6** involves sharing what you have learned with the decision-makers. Decision-makers are busy! You have to get their attention quickly. Just like we develop elevator speeches to introduce GFWC to potential members, you only get a limited amount of time to sway the decision-maker.

Don't plan to share every iota you learned about the topic. Develop 5-7 talking points to use, whether it is an in-person meeting, a virtual meeting, telephone call or e-mail contact. Many offices will not permit the submission of flash drives or other electronic media because of the security risks. Offer to provide a more detailed analysis, called a working paper, and find out how they prefer to receive the information. Offer to share all of your research materials in case they want their staff to research. This avoids wasting staff time. Again, they control the process.

Sometimes you have to be creative. In one case, a local neighborhood group was concerned about a particular road and speeding. It turned out that the single largest group speeding was the local municipal employees going to and from work each day! In an effort to slow traffic a “Your Speed Is” sign had been erected but was not monitored by police. The neighbors took turns video-taping the vehicles passing the sign. They could not submit the videos or pictures but the township manager agreed to meet with them. Once he viewed what they found, he took pictures using his phone and took them back as proof. Problem solved.

**STEP 7**, the last step, is repetitive. Follow up periodically. Reach out every few weeks or months offering to update them on new information you have uncovered. Don't become a nuisance. It is okay to be a zealous advocate but don't become a stalker or make them afraid of you. You do not want to become *persona non grata*. While the "squeaky wheel gets the grease" it also sometimes just gets replaced! Each of us has to find the balance.

GFWC offers the Legislative Action Center to assist you. Look in *News & Notes*, the *GFWC Clubwoman Magazine*, and the GFWC Club Manual for more information to assist you on your journey to "Embracing Legislative Involvement". "Embracing Legislative Involvement" should be fun – you are changing the world in which you live for the better!

Any member of the Legislation/Public Policy Committee will be happy to assist you, if you need additional information about "Embracing Legislative Involvement". Remember that GFWC members are Gathering Facts and Working for Change every day!