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Tools of the Trade

Be It Resolved: Writing Resolutions to Influence Health Policy

Phyllis M. Wallace, DrPH, CHES
Daphne C. Watkins, PhD
Eleanor Dixon-Terry, MPH, CHES

Keywords: *resolutions; health policy; policy development; advocacy*

In the United States, health policy development is usually driven by a combination of unmet health care needs, disease, risk behaviors, public opinion, media attention, and the political climate. Well-written, evidence-informed policies support and validate effective measures for addressing public health crises. A thoughtfully planned resolution and its process can effectively promote strategies to prevent or mitigate a health problem. The resolution's process requires careful thought, critical review of the literature, and cautious consideration of how the public health topic of interest will have an impact on the quality of health and well-being—at the individual, group, and community level. Professional association members, community organizers, health educators, health sciences students, and others will find the resolution to be an effective health communication tool for highlighting a cause and call for action.

For an organization to set its own policy on an issue, a series of formal steps must be followed. This tool is an eight-step policy development guide based on the Society for Public Health Education (SOPHE) Resolutions Committee process. Our purpose in writing this tool is to empower and educate health professionals to initiate and follow through on the policy development process within any authoritative body.

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As cochairs of the SOPHE Resolutions Committee, we refer throughout this Tool to the SOPHE Resolutions Policies and Procedures Manual. For a more in-depth description of how to develop resolutions and for additional examples of well-crafted resolutions, go to http://www.sophe.org/content/resolutions_list.asp.

Questions related to resolution writing within SOPHE or in general can be sent to Phyllis M. Wallace at pmwallace03@yahoo.com or Daphne C. Watkins at daphnew@umich.edu.

► DEFINITIONS:

Policy (Merriam-Webster, 2009)

Definite course or method of action

Selected from alternatives, in light of given conditions

To guide, determine present and future decisions

Associate Editors, Tools of the Trade Department

Karen Denard Goldman, PhD, CHES, is co-director of the Associate's degree program in Community Health at Kingsborough Community College (City University of New York) in Brooklyn, New York and Director of KDG Consulting, a health education consulting enterprise.



Kathleen Jahn Schmalz, EdD, RN, CHES, is President of NJMedicalRecordsReview, LLC, a legal nurse consulting firm in Paramus, New Jersey.

Evidence-Informed Policy (Kohatsu, Robinson, & Torner, 2004, p. 418)

“Integration of science-based interventions
With community preferences
To improve the public’s health”

Resolution (Roberts, Evans, Honemann, & Balch, 2000)

Proposal written by member (e.g., SOPHE)
Put forward as motion
For consideration by governing body (e.g., SOPHE Board of Trustees)
To inform, educate, create awareness, motivate, initiate dialogue on issues

► EIGHT-STEP RESOLUTION PROCESS

Step 1: Select One Issue

Of compelling interest
Relevant to organization’s mission
Advances organization’s vision
Appropriate level of significance for group: local, national, international
Timely—of current interest
Evokes passion
Fills unmet health concern requiring advocacy or action

Step 2: Research the Issue

Science-based data essential before requesting support
Questions to consider

- Does organization already have issue policy? If so, is science current?
- What does the literature indicate about the topic?
- When were these studies published?
- What is the gap in services?
- What facilitates or impedes policy development?
- What statistical and surveillance data are available from credible sources?
- What effect or change is desired once resolution is written, approved?

Incorporate organization’s policy development requirements

Create concept map (Burke et al., 2005)

- Tool for organizing, representing knowledge
- Includes concept words enclosed in boxes
- Defines relationships among boxes by linking words with lines

Step 3: Collect Information

Research or develop rationale or justification
Build on existing organizational policy or related resolution
Write concise descriptive or summary statement: ≤150 words
Reference primary sources, top-tier journals
Let statistics enhance, justify clauses
Use powerful quotations to emphasize points
Describe gap/need resulting from issue not being met
Describe populations facing greatest impact: where, when, how many?

Step 4: Write the Resolution

Develop clear concise policy title, centered on page, capitalized

- **Example:** CALL FOR CLEAN WATER IN MOGADISHU PROVINCE

Craft one-line summary statement

- Place 1 space from title, italicized, centered on page

Compose two segments:

- Preamble/“Whereas” clauses
- Operative/“Resolved” clauses

1. Writing Preamble/“Whereas” Clause(s)

For each “Whereas” clause (issue) write “Resolved” clause (solution to issue)

Identify problem, need for action

Address its urgency, its effect on general public

Offer explanation/rationale for resolution

Concise, factual

Begin sentence with action verb

Indicate action to be taken

- Amend
- Declare
- Educate
- Establish
- Promote
- Reaffirm
- Stress
- Urge

Capitalize first word after “Whereas,”

Provide reference for each “Whereas” clause

End each clause with semicolon (;), also add “and”; use no period (.)

Last “Whereas” clause

- Close with semicolon
- Add connecting expression “THEREFORE, be it”
- Capitalize word “THEREFORE”
- Place “THEREFORE, be it” on separate line two spaces below preceding clause
- Leave two spaces above first RESOLVED clause

Preamble example:

- WHEREAS, The . . . (text of the first preamble clause)^{1, 2}; and*
- WHEREAS, The . . . (text of the next to the last preamble clause)^{3, 4, 5}; and
- WHEREAS, The . . . (text of the last preamble clause)⁶;

THEREFORE, be it

RESOLVED

2. Writing Operative/“Resolved” clause(s) (Roberts et al., 2000; SOPHE, 2008)

List specific recommendations for Board action

- Broad recommendation:
Example: Call for removal of asbestos in all middle schools
- Specific recommendation:
Example: Call for development of particular health promotion program

Base recommendations on resources required, available
Describe, given preamble, direct action to be taken

- Letter writing
- Names of agencies/organizations to get copies of resolution
- Specific policy or health education intervention

Use declarative words

- Acknowledges
- Calls upon
- Declares
- Instructs
- Recommends
- Requests
- Suggests
- Supports

Write as separate paragraphs

Begin each clause with “RESOLVED, That”

End each clause with semicolon and “and be it further”

End last resolving clause with period (.)

Resolution example:

- RESOLVED, That . . . (action to be taken, in response to WHEREAS statement); and be it further

- RESOLVED, That . . . (stating further action to be taken); and be it further
- RESOLVED, That . . . (stating further action to be taken).

Step 5: Review, Using Criteria Checklist

Scholarly presentation

Correct spelling, grammar, punctuation

Appropriate manuscript style (SOPHE, 2008)

- Microsoft Word
- 1-inch margins, all sides
- Times New Roman
- 12-point font
- Paginated consecutively
- Reference list on separate page
- Consistent with current American Psychological Association (APA) style
- Preamble references in superscript sequential numbers (e.g., ^{1, 2, 3})
*(Only rule not specifically APA)
- Running head: ≤25 characters placed in upper right hand corner
- Opening statement: ≤150 words
- No footnotes and hyperlinked text
- Text: ≤1,000 words not including references
- References: ≤two pages double-spaced

Step 6: Submit Proposed Resolution (SOPHE, 2008)

- Allow ample time for Committee/Board review
- Provide author information
 - Author(s) name
 - Association member number
 - Name of author(s)/chair/Community of Practice (COP)
 - Title, affiliation
 - Address: city/state/zip
 - Phone number
 - Email address
 - Submission date

Step 7: Await Executive/Trustee/Board Review

- Action initiated by Resolution Committee
- Goal: timely turnaround time
- Authors invited to discuss or answer questions
- Authors informed of Board’s final decision, amendment needs
- Potential responses (SOPHE, 2008)
 1. Approved as submitted

- Related action plan must be approved by Association leaders
- 2. Returned for revisions and additional information
- 3. Disapproved for action
- Identify alternative ideas if resolution not approved

Step 8: Publicize Approved Resolution

- Disseminate widely
 - Individual association members
 - Association chapters
 - Policy makers
 - Partner organizations
 - Funders
 - Media
 - Other stakeholders
 - Organization's Web site
 - Flagship newsletter and bulletins
 - Organization's e-mail distribution listings
 - Twitter
 - Facebook and LinkedIn
- Collaborate with Advocacy/Communications committees to implement

Bottom Line/Summary (SOPHE, 2008)

- Convince resolution readers of issue's importance, need to act
- Resolution key attributes
 - Concise
 - Readable
 - Accurate
- Key steps
 - Consider, "Is policy needed?"
 - Identify and clarify policy issue
 - Identify group most affected
 - Research best primary sources for background/context
 - Search online for similar policies as foundation for resolution
 - Identify alternatives if policy not adopted
 - Consult content experts
 - Create strong first preamble clause to anchor arguments
 - Get feedback from colleagues
 - Review, rewrite, review
 - Prepare draft for review, recommendations, approval
 - Update annually as needed

The Authors

Phyllis M. Wallace, DrPH, CHES, is a Senior Research Coordinator with the National Cancer Institute's Cancer Information Service–New England at Yale University's Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Daphne C. Watkins, PhD, is an Assistant Professor at the University of Michigan School of Social Work and a Faculty Affiliate for the Program for Research on Black Americans at the Institute for Social Research.

Eleanor Dixon-Terry, MPH, CHES, is the former Senior Project Director for the Society for Public Health Education, now with the Bureau of Primary Health Care, Health Resources and Services Administration.

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