February 2018 Science Policy Engagement Survey Summary

**Graduate student members are engaged.**

- The largest group of respondents, 20%, were graduate students. In comparison, fewer than 5% of our Farm Bill respondents were graduate students (the number of post-docs for both surveys was the same). Professors made up 35% of Farm Bill Survey respondents but only 13% of this group.

- **Many responding members are already engaged in some way.** More than 50% of respondents have written to or called a local, state, or federal representative, and 30% have met with one in person. More than a fifth of respondents have participated in a march. A surprising 9% (19) have participated in an election campaign. Most of these engaged members are graduate students, professors, and consultants.

**Members engage on issues that are important to them.**

- Members who engaged said they did so because they felt the issues were important (96%) and because the SPO’s Phone2Action engagement tool made it easy (75%). Many also agreed that the email the Societies sent asking members to engage was compelling (39%).

- **Conservation is the #1 “other” issue members want to engage on.** Asked what “other” issues they would like to engage on, 29% of members included things like conservation, sustainability, climate change, carbon sequestration, and water quality in open-ended responses.

- Graduate students use the Phone2Action engagement platform, and their priorities are driving their engagement.
  a. The Science Policy Office’s budget-related campaigns (in May 2017, Jan 2018, and Feb 2018) engaged fewer members than the grad student taxation issue even though these same respondents ranked funding for AFRI and the Farm Bill’s mandatory programs as the #1 and #2 issues for the Societies.
  b. Respondents overwhelmingly engaged on the graduate student taxation issue, and that is consistent with education grants being ranked the third most important issue overall (#2 by graduate students). But the next most popular campaign was not budget, it was “Stand Up for Science,” promoted at the annual meeting.

**Members are open to more engagement – if asked.**

- Nearly 35% of respondents who did not engage said it was because they “Weren’t asked or didn’t know how.” This number is 60% for graduate students who didn’t engage.

- Just over 50% of respondents had not heard of the SPO’s engagement tool, Phone2Action, 38% had heard, and 12% were not sure. But of those who knew about the tool, the vast majority heard about it from emails sent by the SPO, and about half of those who knew about the tool had used it.

- 75% of members who used Phone2Action said that it was easy to use, and virtually no one said that the issues raised in the Phone2Action campaigns weren’t important. But 38% of those who’d seen this tool and felt that the issues were important didn’t “have the time” to engage. Those members are more likely to be professors and extension specialists from ASA who want to engage on conservation issues.
There is a misperception among Federal employees, such as ARS researchers, about how the Hatch Act allows them to engage with their government representatives. ARS employees are not prohibited from calling or otherwise engaging their representatives to talk about issues that are important to them, including agriculture research funding, except when they are at work. But many respondents believe that the Hatch Act prevents them from engaging at all. More information about what is allowed and not allowed for Federal employees can be found here: [https://www.ethics.usda.gov/rules/political/activities.htm](https://www.ethics.usda.gov/rules/political/activities.htm).

a. The second biggest reason that members chose not to engage (20%) was because as federal employees, they did not feel comfortable engaging in policy. None of these respondents said that these issues weren’t important.

b. Of those non-federal employees who were not comfortable engaging in policy/advocacy at all, most simply says that it is not part of their personality to engage. But a third felt that it is unacceptable at their institution and that there might even be retribution.

Other interesting tidbits.

- Graduate students say that their university provides some of their funding (70%), and about the same number say that some of their funding comes from the federal government. But none say that their funding comes from capacity funds. This is very unlikely, and it is possible that students don’t know the role that capacity funds play in funding universities.
- Consultants made up only 6% of total respondents, 16 in total, but they were disproportionately engaged – 75% of this group have engaged either through the Phone2Action tool or in other ways. In fact, more than a third of this group has met with a representative.
- Ranking of science policy issues for the Societies.
  1. **Funding for competitive research programs** (USDA-AFRI, Department of Energy, NSF). More than two thirds of respondents put this as one of the top three policy priority for the Societies.
  2. **Preservation of mandatory funding** for research programs in the Farm Bill (Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative, Specialty Crop Research Initiative). About half the respondents chose this issue as one of the top three.
  3. **Education grants for students** (ie: graduate student fellowships, Pell Grants, etc.). 40% of respondents put this in the top three.
  4. **Research infrastructure** (e.g. research equipment, buildings and facilities, computer systems and software). Interestingly, this was a favorite second choice for many respondents.
  5. **Farm Bill conservation programs** (e.g. Conservation Innovation Grants). Though only 38% of respondents had this issue in their top three, still 13% put this as their #1 priority.
  6. **Funding for USDA’s formula/capacity grants**. Only about 35% of respondents had this issue in their top three. But perhaps this is not surprising considering that only about 13% of respondents listed capacity funds as a source of their research funding in the last five years.
  7. **Funding for post-secondary curriculum development. Promoting access to visas for international students and scholars**. The overwhelming majority of respondents ranked these two issues in their bottom three.