



Planning Guide

ELECTED OFFICIALS

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INTRODUCTION

Thank you for committing to be an agriculture advocate! This is an important and essential role needed in agriculture. This planning guide will assist you in conducting a complete advocacy activity.

The Agricultural Literacy and Advocacy model consists of four steps: plan, develop, do and reflect. This model can be used to complete advocacy experiences with different audiences. This experience guide is designed for an Agriculture Literacy and Advocacy Elected Officials activity. The guide will walk you step-by-step through planning and conducting a complete activity/event.

Interactions with local leaders, as well as chapter and community needs, are unique and might be different than what is included in this guide. It is important to take those into consideration and revise the advocacy plan to fit your local needs and situation. A blank experience guide (for a quick start to planning!) can be downloaded from the online module if you want to personalize this plan and/or create a new one!

WHAT WE KNOW:

FFA members and students in agricultural education may have the opportunity to interact with elected officials. These are the same leaders who are implementing change and creating legislation in our communities, state and nation!

Think about how legislation has played a role in the development of the National FFA Organization. In 1917, the Smith-Hughes Vocational Education Act passed, which provided federal aid to promote vocational education. Since then, agricultural education has continued to depend on the support of our local school districts, education systems and national policy makers. This planning guide will provide direction for sharing key messages when interacting with elected officials.

WHAT WE WILL DO:

The Planning Guide outlines the process (plan, develop, do, reflect) to create and facilitate an educational visit to elected officials to share the importance of agricultural education and FFA. The activity can be completed by an individual (you!) or by a small group of FFA members. The Planning Guide provides the layout for some specific processes and events – you can use this in conjunction with an existing chapter, school or community event, or you can create a stand-alone experience. Whichever you choose, let's get ready to advocate!



PLAN

The first step in the advocacy model is PLAN. The overall question to investigate in this step is:

“What are elected officials’ perceptions about agriculture and FFA?”

There are three areas to explore. Each one has a guiding question to answer.

Brainstorm by answering the questions below. Examples are included – challenge yourself to think about other answers that are specific to your situation.

DEFINE ISSUE:

Guiding question: “What is the challenge we are facing?”

Examples:

- Elected officials at the local, state and federal level make decisions every day that impact the agriculture industry yet often do not have a general understanding of agriculture.
- Elected officials may not understand the role that agricultural education plays in preparing students for future careers.
- There is a lack of understanding about the variety of opportunities available in FFA.

Use the space below to capture the details of your challenge.

The challenge we are facing is:

ANALYZE:

Guiding question: “What is the vital information we need to know, and where can I find it?”

Examples:

- Key statistics about agriculture in your area, your state and the United States
- Key messages about how agricultural education prepares students for career success
- Local, state or federal issues relating to agricultural education (depending on your audience)

We need to know:

UNDERSTAND AUDIENCE:

Guiding question: “Who are we trying to influence?”

Examples:

- Elected officials at the local, state and federal level
- Local: city council, mayor, school board, school district superintendent
- State: governor, state board of education, legislators
- Federal: members of Congress, senators

Before beginning the next step, it is crucial to determine your target audience. When questions arise throughout the process, you can refer back to your target audience. Consider any questions or feelings they may have. An example of a target audience is the school board president.

Our target audience is:



DEVELOP

Now that you have analyzed the situation and identified the target audience, it is time to begin to DEVELOP materials, messages and resources!

There are three areas to explore. Each one has a guiding question to answer.

WRITE OBJECTIVES:

Guiding question: “What do we want to accomplish?”

Example:

- Ask an elected official for support of agricultural education and FFA

Our objectives are:

IDENTIFY SMART GOALS:

Guiding question: “How are we going to accomplish this?”

Once you have solid objectives, it is essential to think about how you will bring them to life. That happens by setting goals for each one.

Anytime you see a reference to a Resource Handout in this guide, click on it and it will take you directly to that document!

Take time to write your specific objectives and goals for each one using *Resource Handout 1*.

Example: The objective is to “ask an elected official for support of agricultural education and FFA.”

The next step is to write a goal to support that objective. Goals should always be SMART: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant and Timely.

So our goal to meet the objective might be, “We will set up a meeting with John Smith, school board president, to provide information about our agricultural education program and FFA chapter. We will provide educational materials, engage in conversation and ask for his verbal and/or written support of our program. This will be accomplished in one month.”

DETERMINE KEY MESSAGES:

Guiding question: “What are our important talking points for our defined audience?”

Talking points are a set of clear, easily remembered phrases that outline a project or idea. They help keep the audience focused on the important concepts.

Examples for key messages/talking points:

1. The National FFA Organization is a national youth organization comprised of student members from all 50 states, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
2. The FFA mission is to make a positive difference in the lives of students by developing their potential for premier leadership, personal growth and career success through agricultural education.
3. American agriculture and the National FFA Organization prepare young people to be the next generation of industry leaders. Agriculture needs a strong and skilled workforce, and we are the future farmers, biologists, chemists, veterinarians, engineers and entrepreneurs who will fill that need.
4. Our local FFA chapter is located in (town/school) and has (number) members. We are learning about (share highlights of classes offered and some FFA events).

Having talking points is important, but be prepared for elected officials to ask questions and seek additional information. A great resource to help you prepare is in the online module, “Let’s Advocate!” You can listen to the start of a conversation and decide what your key message response could be.

Use Resource Handout 2 to map out your key messages.

DEVELOP PLAN:

Guiding question: “What are the steps that we need to take to achieve our objectives?”

There are multiple steps to complete in order to meet objectives. The first one begins with you and your knowledge base!

Step 1:

Decide which elected official you will meet with. Complete part one of the Friend-O-Meter evaluation. Is this individual a friend of the FFA yet? Work with your advisor to schedule the meeting.

Resource Handout 3 helps you with the Friend-O-Meter evaluation.

Step 2:

Research issues appropriate to that elected official’s sphere of influence relating to agriculture education and prepare your specific ask. Examples:

- If you are meeting with the mayor, it would be appropriate to ask her to declare “National FFA Week” an official town event.
- If you are meeting with the school board president, share with him the local successes of your program and ask for continued support and funding.
- If you are meeting with your state or federal representative, research policy priorities on your state and/or National FFA website, be prepared to share how agricultural education has influenced your life and ask for their continued support.

Step 3:

Research background information about the elected officials you are meeting with.

- Learn about their backgrounds and their scope of influence (what they are responsible for at their job).
- Prepare a “leave behind sheet” with relevant information about agricultural education and FFA.

Step 4:

Practice your key message points with your advisor before the meeting.

- Draft an “Elevator Speech” (a quick pitch that is about 30 seconds long that includes key points) to share your message.

Resource Handout 4 helps you formulate an Elevator Speech.

If visiting your federal elected officials isn’t feasible, think about contacting their offices by phone.

Step 4:

This final step is about developing a timeline and assigning tasks to individuals to bring your visit to life.

It is important to include the following:

- Tasks to be completed
- Start date
- Due date
- Who is responsible

This will help you stay organized and create accountability for the project among the people helping to bring the event to life.

An example task sheet can be found in the online module “Let’s Advocate!”

Resource Handout 5 is an example timeline for your project. A blank timeline is also included so you can map out your project!



DO

You have successfully planned and developed your resources. Now it is time to take action! What are the next steps? Collaborate, execute and raise awareness! Each area has a specific guided question to help you.

COLLABORATE:

Guiding question: “How can we partner with others to strengthen our advocacy efforts?”

Brainstorm (individually or as a group) a list of local or state businesses/organizations/individuals who could be:

- Resources for information when talking to elected officials.
- Potential partners when asking for an elected official’s support.

Complete a SWOT analysis on the business/organization/individuals on your list to determine who will be resources and partners for collaboration.

A completed SWOT analysis is provided as an example on Resource Handout 6. Use the questions below to guide discussion.

A SWOT analysis is an evaluation of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Strengths include positive attributes. Weaknesses are negative factors that can take away from strengths. Opportunities are potential areas that can be utilized to improve and find success. Threats are mostly negative and out of your control. Consider these questions to determine potential collaborations, and complete the worksheet on [Resource Handout 6](#).

Strengths

- What are some of the strengths of your target audience in your community?
- What are the events that these people do well?
- What are the positive feelings associated with these people/groups?

Weaknesses

- What are the weaknesses of pursuing a collaboration with this group?
- Are there any negative aspects?
- Is there anything that would be considered a barrier?

Opportunities

- What opportunities are there for creating a new event or partnership?
- What benefits could result from this?

Threats

- Are there any threats that may be a challenge?
- What other groups may be competition?

Next, it is essential to engage the people/groups identified. Finalize your plans to gather information from them and how they can be a collaborative partner.

EXECUTE:

Guiding question: “How are we using what we know?”

Use the following guidelines for your meeting:

During the meeting: (from FFA Legislative Advocacy Handbook)

- Introduce yourself to the elected official or staff member you are meeting.
- Take the initiative and be confident.
- Make a local connection and follow “asks” with a story or example.
- Ask direct and focused questions to stay on topic.
- Thank the elected official or staffer.

Following the meeting:

- Write down your impressions and notes.
- Promptly follow up with any requested information.
- Send a written thank you note.

Tips:

- Silence your cell phone.
- Bring business cards and/or a leave-behind document.
- Be prompt to all appointments.
- Allow for time to go through security (at state and federal level).
- If you don't know the answer to a question, let the person know you will find out and get back to them.
- Be familiar with your elected official and their background prior to meeting.
- Follow the elected official on social media.
- Do not engage in partisan critiques.

RAISE AWARENESS:

Guiding question: “How do we promote our advocacy efforts and gain support?”

Follow your elected leader on social media and tag them in a photo. Follow up with your elected official with your specific ask in a written thank you note.

Be diligent and focus on sharing the key messages to meet the objectives in each interaction. Consider posting on your chapter’s social media pages or website to share the progress of your visit. Don’t be afraid to reach out to your local newspaper to highlight your chapter’s exciting advocacy activities.

Think about the message you want to share and use the Social Media Tips (Resource Handout 7).

An example press release and guide to writing a press release is provided in Resource Handout 8.



REFLECT

Taking time to reflect on what happened and what could be changed or improved is one of the most important parts of completing an event (and one that is sometimes overlooked)!

This final step is critical to determine what was done well and what can be adjusted for future advocacy events. Use the guiding questions below to reflect on all that you just accomplished!

MONITOR:

Guiding question: “What information can we collect that will demonstrate impact?”

Follow up with elected officials after you have made your specific ask.

- Provide any additional information requested at the meeting.
- Follow elected official’s social media posts and news articles (written or online) that document their support.
- Send a written thank you note.

REVIEW:

Guiding question: “How well did I achieve my objectives?”

- Review the meeting and evaluate the level of engagement from the elected officials.
- Use the Friend-O-Meter evaluation to identify your perception of their level of support.
- Identify any additional steps or strategies to move them higher on the Friend-O-Meter and make a plan for implementation.

ADAPT:

Guiding question: “What changes can I make to improve?”

Determine what changes should be made in the future. Keep accurate records and notes from the meeting to use for future meetings with that individual or elected officials. This will help future FFA members identify what could be improved.

Complete the program evaluation (Resource Handout 9).

CONGRATULATIONS!

You have completed the steps to be a true agriculture advocate to elected officials! Celebrate your success and get ready to plan your next advocacy effort!

SMART GOALS

OBJECTIVE 1

S:

M:

A:

R:

T:

OBJECTIVE 2

S:

M:

A:

R:

T:

ADVOCACY PLAN:

HOW TO GET STARTED

DIRECTIONS: Begin the process of developing an advocacy plan by completing the first four steps outlined below.

Step 1: Identify an advocacy challenge or opportunity.

Where can you advocate for agriculture? (e.g., school, community, youth group, etc.) Think outside the box!	In the locations you identified, what opportunities to advocate are available?	Which opportunity appeals to you the most or has the highest priority?

Step 2: Determine key audiences.

Who are the key people you want to reach with your message? Are they in the primary or secondary audience?

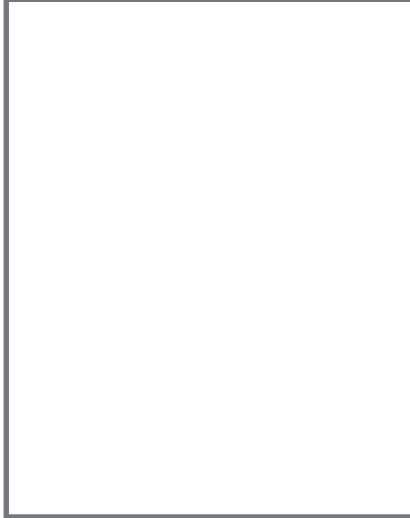
Who can help you influence your audience? What influence do these people have? Will they champion your efforts?

Step 3: Determine what they know.

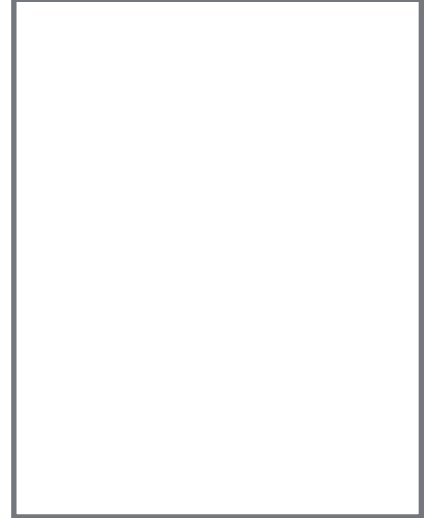
What do you need to know to effectively share your message?



What does your audience need to know to understand and accept your message?



How will you find out what your audience already knows or believes about the topic?

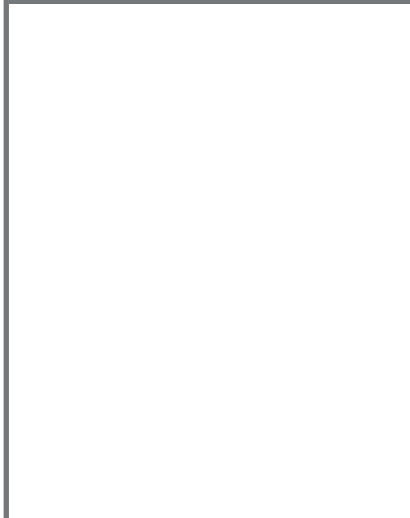


Step 4: Determine how they receive their information.

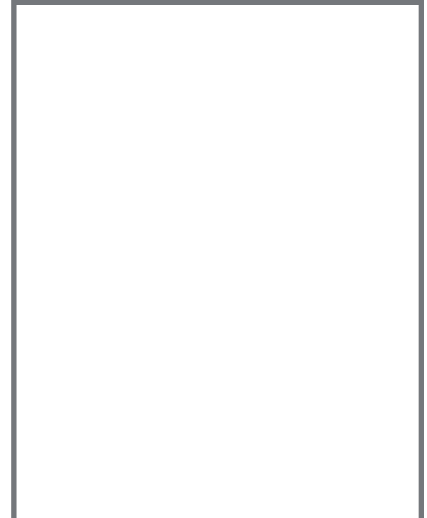
What are common ways people get information?



How can you provide information using these common ways?



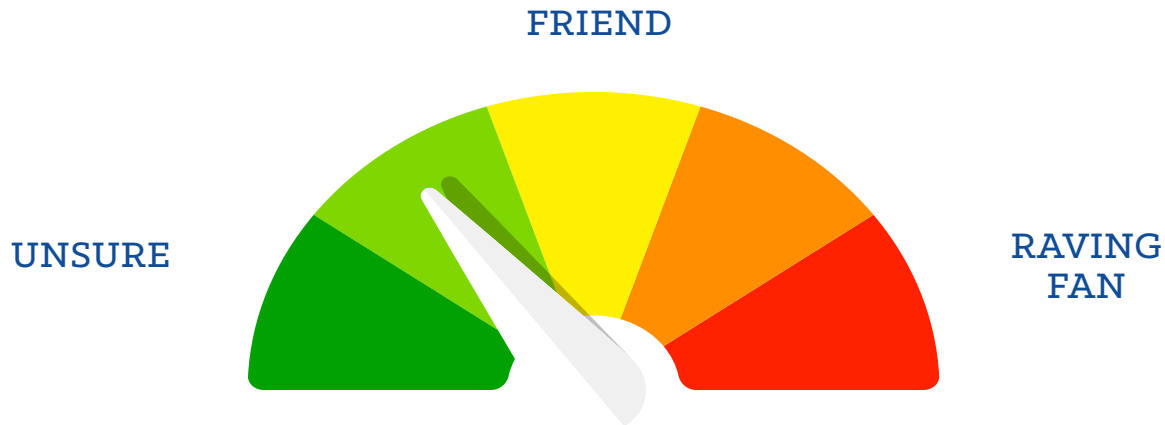
How will you find out how your audience receives information?



Aligned to the following standards:
CS.01; CS.09; AGC02.01; AGC10.03; CCSS.SL.9-10.1.C;
CCSS.SL.9-10.1.D, CCSS.SL.9-10.4; WHST.9.10.4;
WHST.9.10.5; MP3; MP6; AG1; AG2

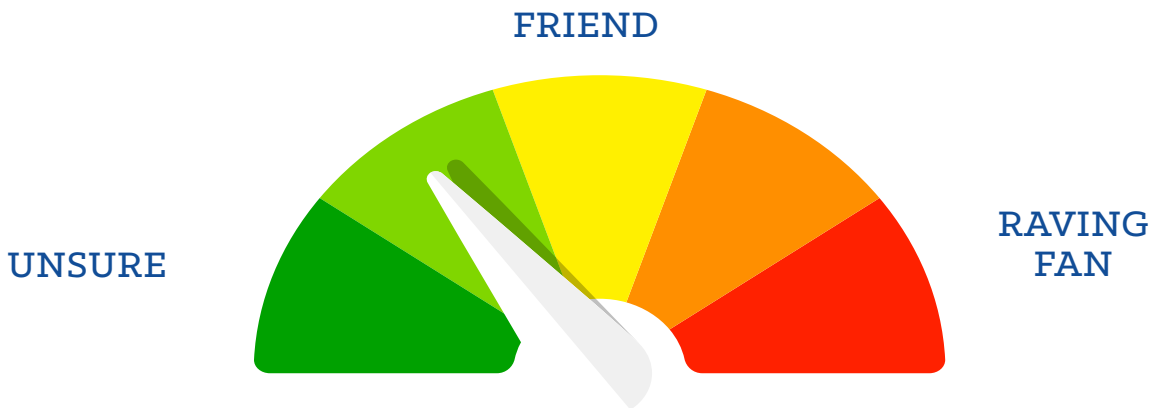
FRIEND-O-METER

Consider how the elected official feels about FFA and agricultural education. Maybe they were an FFA member in high school and are a raving fan. Or, maybe they have never had a personal interaction and don't understand the value of the program. Either way, there are countless opportunities to continue advocating, regardless of where this person is at on the "FFA Friend-O-Meter!"



BEFORE THE EXPERIENCE

1. Is this elected official unsure, a friend or a raving fan of the FFA? It's important to gauge how this person feels when advocating for FFA!
2. What opportunities do you have to advocate? What strategies can you use to reach your goals?



AFTER THE EXPERIENCE

Evaluate if the elected official has shown more interest in agricultural education and FFA and whether or not they have moved up or down on the Friend-O-Meter.

1. What are your next steps to continue building this relationship?

ELEVATOR SPEECHES

EXAMPLE

Have you ever been asked, “What is agricultural education and FFA?” How do you explain the program concisely and accurately? Creating and knowing responses to common questions about FFA is a great strategy for advocacy. An “elevator speech” is a 30-second summary of key messages that explain the “who and what” of the organization, tells what you do, and gives a personal story or example of impact. Before meeting with elected officials, have an elevator speech written and practiced. It can be used all at once or use “nuggets” of it at appropriate times during the meeting. The following are prompts to help you get started:

Part 1: What is agricultural education and FFA, and who is involved?

“FFA and agricultural education prepare students for successful careers in agriculture, food, fiber and natural resources. FFA members are middle school and high school students enrolled in agricultural education courses. There are over (number) members across the U.S. and (number) in our state and (number) in our local chapter.”

Part 2: Explain what agricultural education and FFA do.

“Agricultural education and FFA prepare young people for leadership and careers in science, business and technology in agriculture. This happens through classroom instruction, Supervised Agricultural Experience programs and FFA (leadership).”

Part 3: Make it personal! Share a story of how FFA has personally impacted your life.

“Agricultural education and FFA have helped me develop skills in landscaping and I started my own business. I plan to continue my education, and expand my enterprise after college.”

ELEVATOR SPEECHES

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Part 1: What is agricultural education and FFA, and who is involved?

Part 2: Explain what agricultural education and FFA do.

Part 3: Make it personal! Share a story of how FFA has personally impacted your life.

TIMELINE

EXAMPLE

MARCH

- Call and set up visit
- Follow up with a phone call to confirm
- Brainstorm elevator speeches or specific asks

FEBRUARY

- Identify elected officials to visit with
- Determine potential dates for a visit
- Determine students who will attend visit

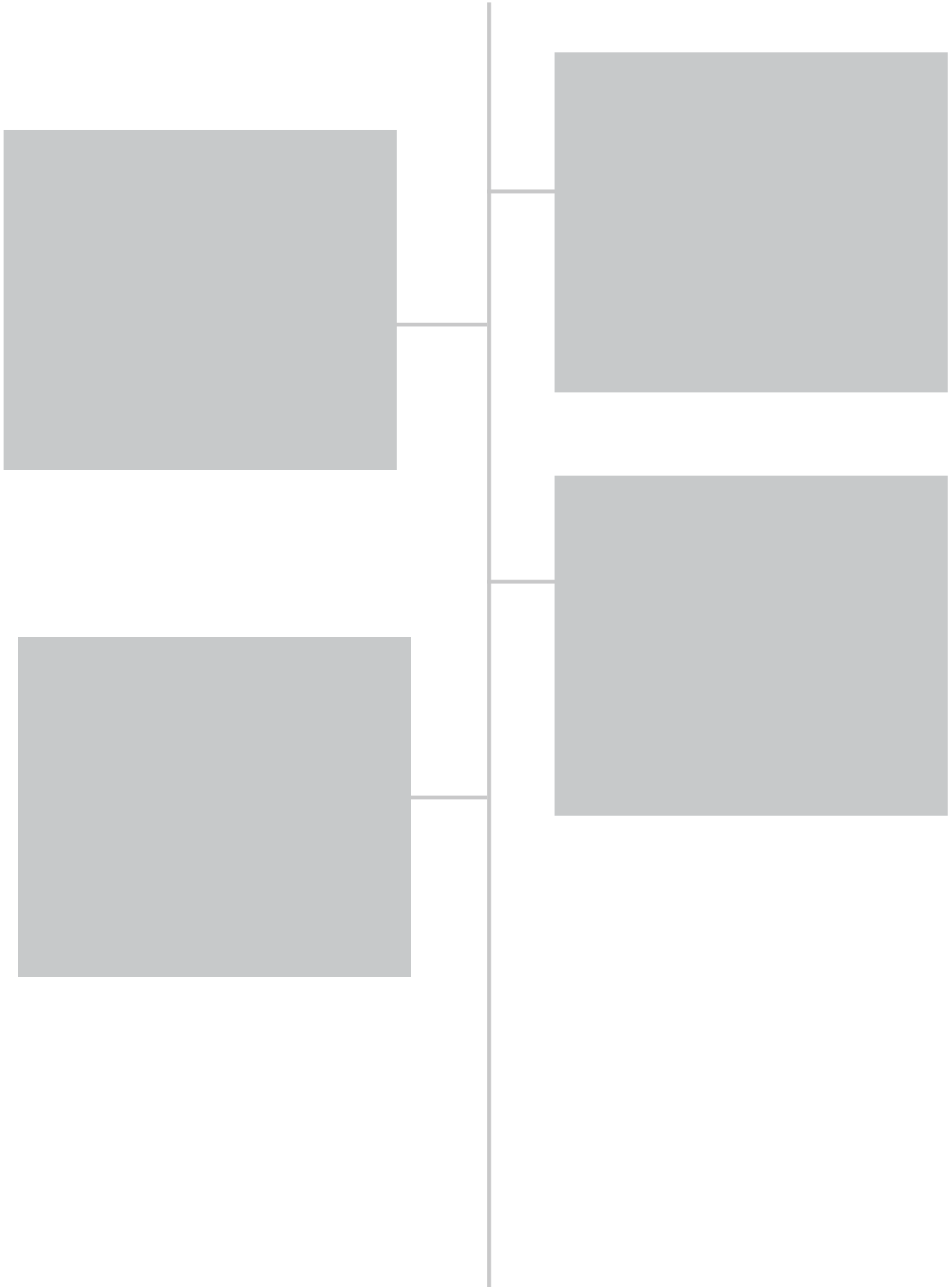
APRIL

- Practice key messages with advisor
- Prepare leave-behind materials

MAY

- Conduct visit
- Follow up with a thank you note
- Create social media posts about visit

TIMELINE



S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS

Opportunities for collaboration with community groups, agricultural businesses and people in the community.

STRENGTHS

WEAKNESSES

OPPORTUNITIES

THREATS

S.W.O.T. ANALYSIS

EXAMPLE

Opportunities for collaboration with community groups, agricultural businesses and people in the community.

STRENGTHS

This elected official was a former member of the FFA. She will be excited to hear from us.

WEAKNESSES

We have not yet built a relationship with this elected official.

OPPORTUNITIES

National FFA Week is approaching, and we can ask for her support! We can also ask her to speak at our awards banquet.

THREATS

She has a very busy schedule. With several other obligations and other organizations to support, she may not be able to attend.

SOCIAL MEDIA TIPS

1. *Be sure to tag the elected official!*
2. *Include high quality photos from your visit!*
3. *Don't forget to hashtag [#SpeakAg](#)*

Example Status Update:

Blue and Gold FFA members met with the school board president, John Smith, to share their experiences in FFA and the importance of agricultural education for their future careers. We are thankful Mr. Smith took the time to meet with us. [#SpeakAg](#)

PRESS RELEASE



Contact:

First Name Last Name

Telephone

E-mail address

News Release

Agricultural Literacy: Local FFA Members Educate Elected Officials about the Importance of FFA

LOCAL TOWN, Month Day, 20XX – Members of the **City/School FFA** Chapter engaged with elementary students to share information about agricultural education and the importance of local, state and federal support of the program.

The project was inspired by the National FFA Agriculture Literacy and Advocacy Model, which encourages FFA members to complete four steps to successfully advocate: plan, develop, do, and reflect.

Details about the event

Quote from a student who attended, committee chair or agriculture teacher

Future plans to continue advocating or upcoming events

For more information about agricultural advocacy or about the FFA organization, please contact (**contact information**).

PRESS RELEASE

EXAMPLE



Contact:
Jane Doe
0123-456-789
jane.doe@email.com

Agricultural Literacy: Local FFA Members Educate Elected Official about the Importance of FFA

Indianapolis, Indiana, July 1, 2019 – Members of the Blue and Gold FFA Chapter met with John Smith, school board president, to share information about agricultural education and the importance of local, state and federal support of the program.

The project was inspired by the National FFA Agricultural Literacy and Advocacy Model, which encourages FFA members to complete four steps to successfully advocate: plan, develop, do and reflect.

Chapter FFA members Jill Brown, Zach Johnson and Jane Doe met with Mr. Smith and shared specific information about agricultural education and FFA.

“We discussed what students experience in our agricultural education classes and highlighted activities that our FFA members can participate in on the local, state and national level,” Jane Doe, local Blue and Gold FFA president said.

Mr. Smith invited the FFA chapter to share an informational presentation at next month’s school board meeting.

Mr. Agriculture Teacher said, “We are thankful for support of our agricultural education program and FFA chapter. It is important to continue to share what we are doing with other elected officials.”

For more information about agricultural advocacy or about the FFA organization, please email blueandgoldffa@email.com or call 555-555-5555.

REVIEW AND ADAPT

REVIEW: DID I MEET MY OBJECTIVES?

ADAPT: HOW CAN I IMPROVE?

WHAT WAS THE OBJECTIVE OF THE EXPERIENCE?	EXPECTED COMPLETION DATE	DID I MEET EXPECTATIONS? WHAT AREAS CAN BE IMPROVED?