

# County Legislative Platform Process Template



Establishing a legislative platform is a critical step in representing the county's interests to the State and Federal levels. A platform is a document that expresses a host of legislative stances, from policy priorities to other, more general positions. It stakes out where the county plans to argue for change and what principles it plans to defend.

While most counties in Kansas do not employ or contract directly with lobbyists, they can still represent their interests via their department heads, county commissioners, and other elected officials.

There are a variety of ways a county can go about adopting a platform. This outlined process was crafted to serve as a guide. It prioritizes getting as many county voices involved as possible so that the county's experts have a chance to weigh in on what they deem important. It also is designed to equip your county's own experts to represent the county when legislative matters arise. By adopting this process (or one similar), you put your county in its best position to have its interests heard and advocated.

The following are the outlined steps to construct a county legislative platform:

- 1) County commission announces their work on a policy platform for the upcoming year.
- 2) Platform should be carved into a Federal and State section (or Federal and State be handed via entirely separate documents)
- 3) Platform should list both Priority areas (those areas of highest import to the county and to receive priority attention during the legislative session) and other policy positions (which may be lower tier and more "nice to haves" rather than a particular focus).
  - a. The county should have no more than 8-10 priority items. More than that threatens to spread resources too thin.
  - b. Among the "priority items" the county should identify no more than two to three items that it will emphasize to its legislative delegation in meetings, phone calls, and legislative presentations.
  - c. Policy statements should be fairly broad (e.g., we support local officials' freedom to meet community needs by determining the most effective methods) rather than overly specific (e.g., local officials should have the ability to determine the trash pickup schedule for their locality).
- 4) County commission should provide an opportunity for input from other county leaders, specifically:
  - a. Their various department heads (e.g., public health, public works, noxious weeds, etc.).
  - b. Other elected county officials (e.g., sheriffs, clerks, treasurers, etc.).



- c. County Commission should make every effort to insure that no county position conflicts with other positions. If conflict exists, it may be better to simply not take a position on that topic.
- 5) These other county leaders should present policy concepts they would like to see in the legislative platform.
  - a. Topics should be organized as to whether they are a Federal or State issue.
  - b. Topics should be organized as to whether they are a priority or another policy position.
  - c. To avoid “creep” in priority areas, the county commission may want to mandate a limit on the number of priority areas any given department head/elected official can present. No department should have more than one or two priority areas in a given year to avoid spreading resources too thin.
- 6) The county commission should review all policy suggestions from the other county leaders, asking questions and soliciting additional information as needed. Agreed upon topics should be added to the policy platform. The county commission should have at least one, but no more than three public meetings to discuss policy suggestions.
- 7) The county commission should incorporate their own policy suggestions into the policy platform.
- 8) For every adopted topic, the county should designate individual(s) who can testify on behalf of the county (be it written or in-person) on a given topic.
  - a. County leaders who suggested topics are the obvious experts to turn to on those policies.
  - b. Commission-proposed topics can either be led by a county commissioner or another knowledgeable designee.
  - c. The goal is to always have at least one person ready to act on a policy should it appear before the relevant legislative body.
  - d. It is encouraged that counties and county officials coordinate with other counties and their statewide organizations on potential policy positions to allow for greater influence and effectiveness.
- 9) The finalized platform should be adopted.

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