USING RESEARCH TO BUILD BETTER
PUBLIC POLICY FOR FAMILIES

In order to write legislation that is effective and appropriate, legislators need current research and evidence. Information about family issues currently provided by lobbyists, interest groups and other special constituencies to legislators can be fragmented and sometimes biased.

But it doesn’t have to be that way.

Policy decisions are more effective when they are based on strong evidence. Policy decisions can be more efficient if they leverage the contributions families make to society by viewing issues through the lens of family impacts. Policymaking can be less polarized if opportunities are provided for neutral, off-the-record dialogue that can build the relationships needed to overcome partisan gridlock.

The Family Impact Institute (FII) works with states around the nation to communicate with policymakers and help them see families as public priorities for policy and program decisions rather than as private problems of individual families. FII’s state-based efforts connect researchers with policymakers, and policymakers with knowledge.

www.familyimpactinstitute.org
FAMILIES: THE CORE OF AN EVOLVING SOCIETY

Families, in their many forms and configurations, are the basic building block of society. No culture has been able to provide anything better than the family for producing strong individuals for a sound economy. Strong families can be harmed by stressful conditions — the inability to find a job, afford health insurance, secure quality childcare or send their kids to good schools. What might the future look like if we are unable to use research to build better public policy for families? It is up to us to strengthen our society for future generations and families.

IMPACT MEETS ACCESS

Since 1999, the Family Impact Institute (FII) has been the national headquarters for state-focused Family Impact Seminars. It has built capacity for research-based policy decisions on family issues, by recruiting affiliates for the state seminar sites and providing training on how to build relationships with policymakers and effectively communicate research evidence to them. FII facilitates the exchange of ideas and peer mentoring on how to make the seminars more effective and efficient. To ensure seminar quality, the FII provides training, consultation on best practices for building the advisory infrastructure, writing policy briefs, fundraising, and viewing issues through the lens of family impact and racial equity.

FII also is working to create new and dynamic experiences for students and academics across the nation. At Purdue University, FII is working with the Center for Families, Purdue Extension, the Department of Human Development and Family Studies, the Brian Lamb School of Communication, the Department of Political Science, and the Honors College to develop engagement opportunities with policymakers across the nation. Together they are working with state-of-the-art scientific research to impact legislation affecting families. The possibilities are endless.

A PROVEN MODEL OF IMPACT: FAMILY IMPACT SEMINARS

Family Impact Seminars are an award-winning, cost effective, rapidly expandable, and proven model for turning research evidence into better public policies for families. Seminars are a series of presentations, discussion sessions and briefings reports communicating research to state policymakers on timely topics that they identify.

This model of communicating high-quality, objective research to state policymakers improves respect for and use of research in policy decisions. Policymakers report that the objective information and opportunities for dialogue provided by the seminars help them rise above politics and develop the relationships needed to build common ground. Seminar information increases policymakers’ understanding of complex issues and is useful in shaping policy decisions. This also helps them see the value of research and the family impact lens.

Since 1993, Seminars across the country have been conducted on issues such as family poverty, jobs and economic security; family health; families and schools; juvenile and adult crime/corrections; early childhood care and education; family-focused foster care, and strengthening families/parenting.

HOW DO YOU BREAK DOWN THEIDEOLOGICAL AND THE PARTISAN BARRIERS? I THINK THAT INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORKS SUCH AS THE FAMILY IMPACT SEMINARS ARE EXTRAORDINARILY BENEFICIAL IN CREATING THAT INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK BY WHICH WE CAN HAVE A DISCUSSION ACROSS THE PARTISAN AND IDEOLOGICAL DIVIDE.

—WISCONSIN STATE SENATOR

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IF YOU ARE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE OR BECOMING INVOLVED, CONTACT FII AT FII@PURDUE.EDU OR 765-494-0979.