

Family Relations

**From Education to Advocacy and Activism: Alternative Approaches for Translating Family Science to Policy**

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Running Head: From Education to Advocacy and Activism

From Education to Advocacy and Activism: Alternative Approaches for Translating Family

Science to Policy

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### Abstract

Historically, translational family science frameworks focused on policy have delimited the roles family scientists can play and the approaches they can implement within the scientific realm. In this article, we call for an expanded translational research-to-policy framework that is inclusive of such roles as policy educator, scholar-advocate, and scholar-activist. We argue that, depending on the policy topic or context of one's research, different approaches and roles are needed to move family research to policy, especially when working with marginalized and disenfranchised families. We then present three approaches to family policy engagement, particularly at the local and state levels: family impact seminars, deliberative policy processes, and community-based participatory research. Each approach positions the family scientist to perform different roles—from policy educator to scholar-advocate to scholar-activist—in their translational work. We offer our reflections across roles and approaches and provide recommendations for future translational family science in the policy arena.

*Key Words:* Family policy research, policy education, scholar-activism, scholar-advocacy

## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 Family scientists can play myriad roles and utilize different approaches as they work to translate  
4 family research within the policy arena. Discussions of the roles of family policy researchers  
5 were brought to the fore in the late 1970s following calls for an explicit family policy agenda in  
6 the United States (Feldman, 1979). Indeed, family policy was the focus of the 1978 National  
7 Council on Family Relations annual meeting, which culminated in the publication of a special  
8 issue on family policy published in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* (McDonald & Nye,  
9 1979). In many ways, these earlier discussions mirror discussions we continue to have today,  
10 particularly regarding the proper roles of family scientists in the policy arena.  
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22 In their seminal work, Nye and McDonald (1979) provided a translational framework for  
23 family policy research that includes three distinct approaches: family evaluation research, family  
24 impact analysis, and an approach they coined *research for family policy*. This latter approach  
25 goes beyond analyzing the effects that policies have on families (evaluation) and educating  
26 policymakers about family impacts (family impact analysis) to analyzing what families need  
27 from public policies to function well. In this way, Nye and McDonald recognized the bi-  
28 directionality of translational science as a process in which family scientists can use various  
29 approaches and perform various roles as they work to inform legislators, agency heads, relevant  
30 professionals, and the public-at-large not only about discovery and applied research findings but  
31 also about the impact and limitations of policy decisions deriving from family research.  
32 Imperative in this process is that family scientists recognize and engage in a system of translation  
33 activities as has been illustrated in the articles provided in this special issue. As family scientists  
34 discover family needs across diverse family systems and the impact of extant policies on family  
35 functioning and well-being, they can disseminate their research findings within the scientific and  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 policymaking arenas and inform the development of new theoretical or conceptual frameworks,  
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5 new research questions, new interventions, and new family policies.  
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8           In their translational framework, however, Nye and McDonald (1979) distinguished clear  
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10 boundaries between family policy research approaches and family policy advocacy. Whereas  
11  
12 family policy researchers must work to maintain a rigorous, unbiased, scientific objectivity  
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14 throughout their research endeavors and take a neutral stance with respect to family structures  
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16 and family outcomes, Nye and McDonald contended that family policy advocates work to  
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18 persuade policymakers and actively campaign for the improvement of family conditions and the  
19  
20 enhancement of family well-being. Because Nye and McDonald delimited their definition of  
21  
22 advocacy as a political tool and not a part of the scientific process, they argued that it should fall  
23  
24 outside of the realm of translational family science. Indeed, as we discuss here, this distinction  
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26 between the role of the researcher and the role of the advocate continues to be espoused in the  
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28 family science field today (Bogenschneider, 2014; Emery et al., 2016).  
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34           Yet, in this article, we call for a more expansive (and perhaps messier) framework with  
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36 regard to translational family science approaches and the roles family scientists might play  
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38 within the policy arena. We argue that, depending on the research topic or the context of one's  
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40 research, a family scientist may use any number of family policy research approaches and  
41  
42 engage in diverse translational roles inclusive of policy education, scholar-advocacy, and  
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44 scholar-activism to move family research into the policy arena. We diverge from Nye and  
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46 McDonald's (1979) and Bogenschneider's (2014) conceptualization of family policy advocacy,  
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48 arguing that some forms of advocacy (and activism) can be based on and steeped in family  
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50 science and thus fall within the realm of translational science. Moreover, advocacy and activism  
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52 can be effective tools for advancing the voices of marginalized and disenfranchised communities  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 who have been excluded from or harmed by science and policy historically and can facilitate  
4 efforts to be more inclusive, diverse, and just. We acknowledge the inherent tensions and pitfalls  
5 of scholar-advocacy and scholar-activism (e.g., bias) but also recognize that bias can seep into  
6 the scientific method as well, requiring scholarly reflexivity and awareness of one's positionality  
7 across all roles (Emery et al., 2016; Nye & McDonald, 1979).  
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11 To make our case, we first call for an expanded translational framework that  
12 reconceptualizes the roles family scientists can play in the research-to-policy arena to include  
13 policy educator, scholar-advocate, and scholar-activist. Next, we discuss three approaches—  
14 family impact seminars, deliberative policy processes, and community-based participatory  
15 research (CBPR)—that can be useful as family scientists position themselves to engage in  
16 various roles to translate discovery and applied family research to policy. Across approaches  
17 presented, there is a reliance on family research, commitment to democratic participation in  
18 policymaking, and focused effort to translate and disseminate research in ways that are timely,  
19 accessible, and useful to policymakers and the public-at-large. However, each approach positions  
20 the family scientist differently in the research-to-policy translation process or calls for different  
21 types of roles (e.g., educator, scholar-advocate, scholar-activist). We posit that although each  
22 approach and the roles performed by family scientists may be different, each is necessary as  
23 scholars collectively work to translate family science to policy across complex, and sometimes  
24 controversial, family topics and within diverse contexts.  
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## A CALL FOR AN EXPANDED RESEARCH-TO-POLICY TRANSLATIONAL FRAMEWORK

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49 Since the emergence of family policy as an explicit field of study (Zimmerman, 1979), many  
50 family scholars have weighed in on defining what is meant by family policy and the ways family  
51 scientists can play roles in translating science into policy decision-making that affects families  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 (e.g., Bogenschneider, 2000; Letiecq, Anderson, & Joseph, 2013; Ooms, 1990; Trzcinski, 1995;  
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5 Zimmerman, 2001). Drawing on Nye and McDonald's (1979) delineation of family policy  
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7 research and advocacy, Bogenschneider (1995) further operationalized the roles that family  
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9 professionals can play in the policy arena as that of educator or advocate. On one hand,  
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11 Bogenschneider defined a family policy advocate as someone who "campaign[s] for an  
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13 underrepresented group or a particular policy alternative that may potentially enhance family  
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15 well-being" (p. 361). On the other hand, a family policy educator "does not lobby for a single  
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17 policy option, but attempts to inform policy discourse by clarifying the potential consequences of  
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19 several policy alternatives" (p. 365). However, an emergent challenge with such definitions is  
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21 that they are narrow in scope, equating policy advocacy with lobbying and other political actions,  
22  
23 such as campaigning. Yet lobbying and campaigning are very specific forms of advocacy, and  
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25 definitions inclusive of lobbying and campaigning obfuscate and may unintentionally  
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27 delegitimize as nonscientific alternative forms of family policy engagement, such as scholar-  
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29 advocacy and scholar-activism.  
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37 Herein, we argue for a more expansive translational framework that reconceptualizes the  
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39 definition of family policy advocacy as broader than lobbying and other forms of partisan  
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41 political activities. Such clarifications are needed as we work to explicate the many roles family  
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43 scientists can play in translational research-to-policy efforts. Too often, academics and other  
44  
45 family scholars working for nonprofit organizations are confused about the differences between  
46  
47 advocacy and lobbying and avoid, for example, advocating for research-based family policies  
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49 because they think such actions equate to lobbying, are not a part of the scientific process, and  
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51 put at risk their organizations' nonprofit status (Alliance for Justice, 2011; Mehta, 2009; Raffa,  
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53 2000; Vernick, 1999). However, according to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS; 2017), there  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 are specific parameters defining lobbying to include direct lobbying (e.g., any communication  
4 with a legislator that expresses a view about specific legislation) and grassroots lobbying (e.g.,  
5 any communication with the general public that expresses a view about specific legislation and  
6 includes a call to action; Raffa, 2000). Nonprofit 501(c)3 organizations can engage legally in  
7 policy advocacy as well as limited lobbying activities as long as they meet IRS expenditure tests  
8 (Alliance for Justice, 2011).  
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18 Thus, our definition of family policy advocacy is much broader than lobbying or  
19 campaigning for specific legislation and involves working within systems to advance family  
20 science and family policy for the well-being of all families. Family scholar-advocacy can be  
21 defined as activities that bridge family science and policy advocacy and involve advocating for  
22 the use of family research findings in formulating policies and practices that affect historically  
23 marginalized and disenfranchised families (Emery et al., 2016). Scholar-advocacy can also be  
24 useful in the policy arena when pointing out the limitations of family scholarship and the  
25 unintended consequences of implementing policies and practices that will continue to harm and  
26 marginalize vulnerable families or family members. Whereas policy educators are trained to take  
27 a neutral stance with respect to family structures and family outcomes, scholar-advocates are  
28 focused on advancing family research and research-based policies and practices to actualize  
29 justice for vulnerable families. Scholar-advocacy efforts are often community-based, centered on  
30 marginalized communities, and provide opportunities to bring together academic researchers,  
31 their students, and the public at large to work for social and policy change. Such community-  
32 university engagement might include organizing marginalized communities for participation in  
33 research endeavors that will lead to policy change and the training of individuals from  
34 marginalized communities on how to engage in and conduct family policy research. With the  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 exception of lobbying and partisan political activities, all of these forms of advocacy are  
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5 unrestricted and unlimited for 501(c)3 organizations (Mehta, 2009). Thus, rather than restricting  
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7 advocacy definitions as solely connected to lobbying or campaigning (Bogenschneider, 2014;  
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9 Nye & McDonald, 1979), we must expand our understanding of scholar-advocacy activities as  
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11 critical elements of family science translation in the policy arena.  
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15 A second rationale for an expanded research-to-policy translational framework and the  
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17 reconceptualization of family scientist roles in the policy arena relates to family research topics  
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19 that are controversial, partisan, confront social injustices, or challenge the norms of science  
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21 (Kuhn, 2012). Although many topics lend themselves to policy education, where researchers  
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23 assert neutrality while engaging in dispassionate inquiry about policy impacts, other topics (e.g.,  
24  
25 abortion, sexual orientation or gender identity, the illegality of immigration, mass incarceration)  
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27 or theoretical frames (e.g., feminist, critical race) or methodologies (e.g., indigenous) can be  
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29 sociopolitically loaded, and, simply by engaging in these topics, theories, or methods,  
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31 researchers may be questioned about their personal motives or their commitment to scientific  
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33 neutrality or objectivity (Few, 2007; Lloyd, Few, & Allen, 2009; Smith, 2012). Whereas most  
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35 family scientists can choose their own scholarly identities, some identities are placed on the  
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37 scientist by society because of the research topics or context of one's work. In such cases, a  
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39 dispassionate or neutral stance may not be afforded to family scientists against their own  
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41 personal and professional wishes, and they must grapple with such scientific and political  
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43 realities within their translational work.  
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50 Moreover, as we argue here and elsewhere (Anderson & Letiecq, 2015), there are times  
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52 when the advancement of human rights calls for confronting unease and blurring the lines  
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54 between family policy education, advocacy, and activism. As Sanford and Angel-Anjani (2006)  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 described, an engaged scholar working with marginalized and disenfranchised families who, as a  
4 result of unjust policies, are suffering may be called to take direct action against (or from  
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6 outside) hegemonic systems. In other words, a family scientist may become a scholar-activist to  
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8 fight for policy change because remaining neutral, as Sanford and Angel-Anjani contended,  
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10 would be unethical. To further elucidate our call for an expansion of the roles family scientists  
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12 might play in the policy arena—from policy educator to scholar-advocate to scholar-activist—we  
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14 present three approaches to family research-to-policy translation, including family impact  
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16 seminars (FISs; highlighting the role of the policy educator), deliberative policy processes  
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18 (highlighting the role of the scholar-advocate), and CBPR (highlighting the role of scholar-  
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20 advocate and scholar-activist). As noted, each approach positions family scientists differently  
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22 depending on research topics and the context of one’s research, creating different pathways for  
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24 policy engagement.  
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## ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES AND ROLES FOR TRANSLATING FAMILY SCIENCE TO POLICY

*Family Impact Seminars*

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32 Perhaps one of the best known translational family science approaches in the policy arena stems  
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34 from the work of Theodora Ooms (Ooms, 1990; Ooms & Preister, 1988), who, from 1988 to  
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36 1998, conducted more than 40 FISs, delivered as 2-hour briefings on family matters on Capitol  
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38 Hill for congressional staffers, federal agency officials, and other organizations. In 1999, the  
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40 FISs were moved to the University of Madison–Wisconsin as the Policy Institute for Family  
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42 Impact Seminars (PINFIS), and under the leadership of Karen Bogenschneider, the federal  
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44 seminars were ended and a statewide network of FIS sites were instituted. As Bogenschneider  
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46 (2014) described, FISs offer policymakers and agency officials an ongoing series of  
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48 presentations, discussion sessions, and briefing reports for translating high-quality, objective  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 research evidence to policymakers. Bogenschneider (2014) asserted that a key ingredient of FISs  
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5 is that family scientists engage in research-based policy education where one works to clarify the  
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7 potential consequences of several policy alternatives for legislators and other policy decision-  
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9 makers. To attempt to maintain an objective, neutral, nonpartisan forum for the translation of  
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11 discovery family science and applied family science, FISs do not include lobbyists, the media, or  
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13 promote certain policies over others.  
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18 Currently, there are 22 sites nationally conducting variations of FISs with one  
19  
20 overarching goal: to increase policymakers' capacity to make research-informed family policy  
21  
22 decisions. The intent is to bring families to the forefront of policy and program decisions by  
23  
24 connecting researchers with policymakers and policymakers with research. According to  
25  
26 Bogenschneider (2014), it is critical that policymakers know how to use or translate family  
27  
28 research to make the best informed decisions that could have an impact on family health and  
29  
30 well-being. Since 1993, more than 175 seminars have been held, covering such topics as family  
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32 poverty and economic security (41), family health (37), families and schools (25), juvenile and  
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34 adult crime (16), strengthening families and parenting (13), early childhood education and care  
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36 (11), family violence (10), and teen pregnancy (9). FIS processes and practices are well-  
37  
38 documented, and the renamed Family Impact Institute, now housed at Purdue University,  
39  
40 provides many examples of FISs conducted across the United States (see Family Impact  
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42 Institute, n.d.). To exemplify the policy educator role of the family scientist when using FIS as a  
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44 translational research-to-policy approach, we describe an FIS conducted in Montana on the topic  
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46 of kinship care.  
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53 *Family Impact Seminars: Family Scientist as Policy Educator*  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 The decision to hold a FIS in the State of Montana on kinship care was informed by the  
4 availability of ongoing research both nationally and at the state level, as well as the timeliness  
5 and relevance of the topic for policymakers within the state. At the national level, the Indian  
6 Child Welfare Act of 1978 (ICWA) and the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980  
7 paved the way for state child welfare agencies to give preference to kin as a first placement  
8 choice when foster care is needed (Geen, 2003). Consequently, the use of kin as foster parents  
9 grew rapidly. However, beginning in the early 2000s, family scientists at Montana State  
10 University began documenting a sharp increase in the number of grandparents rearing  
11 grandchildren (GRGs) in their state, primarily due to an emergent methamphetamine drug  
12 epidemic and unmet parental mental health needs. The family scientists launched a series of  
13 studies—what Nye and McDonald (1979) called *research for family policy*—on the needs of  
14 Native and European American GRGs vis-à-vis public policies and human services delivery  
15 systems (Leticq, Bailey, & Kurtz, 2008; Leticq, Bailey, & Porterfield, 2008). With a goal of  
16 translating research findings within the policy arena, the family scientists worked to disseminate  
17 and share their research with state agency officials, state legislators, and the public at large.  
18 Helpful to research dissemination in this case were the long-standing, trusted relationships  
19 between the family scientists and state officials who were in positions of influence within the  
20 government. In 2006, testimony was invited on the topic of kinship care to the Children,  
21 Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee of the Montana Legislature. Many  
22 lawmakers expressed keen interest in the topic, with several noting that they had relatives who  
23 were parenting a second time around, and thus the decision was made to host a FIS on kinship  
24 care.  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 To develop and implement the FIS, family scientists sought guidance from PINFIS and  
4 financial support from their home institution. Important in the funding of translational family  
5 science to policy is that many academic administrators (e.g., presidents, deans) often work with  
6 members of state legislatures. In the current instance, the FIS provided the university with a  
7 mechanism to leverage resources, build on strong statewide ties, and serve the state in a  
8 meaningful way. For the FIS, invited national experts informed state legislators, agency officials,  
9 and the public about a diverse array of topics bridging kinship care and policymaking and drew  
10 on applied family science, family law and social policy, and family-based program evaluation.

11  
12 During the seminar, panelists reviewed the GRG literature, discussed the kinship care  
13 landscape in Montana, and reviewed policy approaches across multiple states, including policies  
14 allowing kin caregivers to make medical and educational decisions on behalf of their custodial  
15 grandchildren. Because Montana is home to seven Native American reservations, panelists also  
16 discussed the ICWA and kinship care in Indian Country. The seminar provided a vehicle in  
17 which family scientists could position themselves as policy educators, working with lawmakers  
18 to share their expertise leading to the development of three bills extending rights to custodial  
19 grandparents, including educational decision-making, medical decision-making, and de facto  
20 custodial rights (Letiecq, Bailey, & Porterfield, 2008). The bills, authored by Republicans,  
21 received broad bipartisan support in the legislature and in 2007 became law with the governor's  
22 signature.

23  
24 FISs may or may not result in the passage or enactment of new family policies, but the  
25 role of family scientists throughout the translational process is to maintain a neutral stance while  
26 educating policymakers and agency officials, offering unbiased, objective interpretations of  
27 discovery and applied family research, and raising policy alternatives germane to the research  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 that may support the health and well-being of the families they serve. Perhaps because one of the  
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5 goals of the FIS approach is to remain impartial while educating the legislative body regardless  
6  
7 of political affiliation, FISs may be limited in the topics covered. Topics that are particularly  
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9 polarizing (e.g., immigration bans; reproductive rights; same-sex marriage; child-rearing in  
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11 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer families) may not be well suited for a FIS. Indeed, to  
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13 our knowledge, these topics have yet to be covered by FISs, likely because they will not be  
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15 received as bipartisan in the current political context.  
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*Deliberative Policy Processes*

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22 Deliberative policy processes as a translational approach expands the role of family scientists  
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24 beyond policy educators to that of scholar-advocates. This approach can provide an alternative  
25  
26 pathway to translational family science, particularly when working with marginalized and  
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28 disenfranchised families. Developed by the Kettering Foundation (2016), deliberative policy  
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30 processes offer a translational approach that positions the family scientist as scholar-advocate.  
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33 The premise is that American democracy operates at its full potential when citizens (e.g.,  
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35 individuals, organized groups, members of specific professions) feel a sense of control over  
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37 policy decision-making and are engaged in the policy process. The Kettering Foundation  
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39 suggested that for democracy and the policy process to work, three elements are required:  
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41 responsible and informed citizens who can make sound decisions regarding the issues that will  
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43 affect their lives; communities that collectively engage all citizens to work together toward  
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45 exploring, understanding, and addressing their common problems; and institutions that integrate  
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47 agency work with citizens and communities to construct policy drawn from research (Kettering  
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49 Foundation, 2016). In the context of translational family science in the policy arena, this  
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51 approach rests heavily on the capacity of family scientists and institutions to find ways to  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 connect with and engage citizens, request their insights, learn about their challenges and  
4 strengths, and garner suggestions that might shape future policy decisions. This approach is  
5 consistent with an emphasis on the translation of basic discovery and applied research to inform  
6 policy while also giving voice to community stakeholders regarding the impact of policy,  
7 particularly on vulnerable families, and what families need for improved outcomes.  
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15 According to the Kettering Foundation (2016), citizens who are engaged with decisions  
16 in their community are more likely to address issues of importance to the community, consider  
17 action that can be implemented, reach consensus on the decisions, and then organize and act on  
18 the problem together for sustained change. In this case, family scientists must integrate their role  
19 as educators about relevant family research with their role as advocates on behalf of the  
20 community to help identify existing and new resources and champion responsive policies and  
21 practices to have an impact on the identified problem. Together, citizens and family scientists  
22 can engage in new research that can inform their problem-solving and policy or practice change  
23 agency. With this engagement, citizens contribute to decisions in their community that are  
24 important and meaningful to them, and family scientists support community organizing and  
25 action to address the needs of the community vis-à-vis sustained policy and social change.  
26  
27 Kettering drew on six democratic practices to guide these deliberative policy processes: (1)  
28 naming the problem, (2) offering options that can frame how to address the problem, (3)  
29 deliberating over the consequences of each option to make good decisions, (4) engaging in a  
30 collective identification of resources to enact the decision, (5) joining forces followed by action,  
31 and (6) evaluating and reassessing the actions and impacts. The following example elucidates the  
32 role of the scholar-advocate when implementing these six practices.  
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56 *Deliberative Policy Processes: Family Scientist as Scholar-Advocate*  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 The Unheard Voices project grew out of a research study, Rural Families Speak, designed to  
4 present data to policymakers about the lived experience of low-income rural families who tend to  
5 experience marginalization in the policy arena. The Unheard Voices project was created to  
6 investigate the likelihood that these rural residents would participate in deliberative policy  
7 processes (DPP; Braun & Anderson, 2005, 2006), despite geographic and cultural barriers to  
8 civic engagement. First, to better understand barriers to policy engagement and mechanisms to  
9 overcome such barriers, the Unheard Voices team of family scientists conducted interviews with  
10 low-income female participants from a rural western area of the state of Maryland. The team  
11 employed community-based qualitative research methods and held focus groups in several  
12 counties with limited-resource citizens as well as a group of social services workers. The  
13 ultimate goal of this research-to-policy translational approach was to conduct family research to  
14 empower a historically disenfranchised group of citizens to participate in the family policy arena.  
15 As scholar-advocates, the family scientists hoped to help citizens share their experiences related  
16 to family needs and policy impacts, to name their problem, to identify policy solutions, and to  
17 organize citizens and encourage them to participate in civic engagement for policy change. To  
18 reach economically and geographically marginalized community members and maximize their  
19 participation, the family scientists held meetings at convenient times and locations for  
20 participants, identified transportation, and provided child care and food.

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46 After the family scientists facilitated a deliberative forum that included Unheard Voices  
47 mothers and the local mayor, mothers identified enhanced recreation opportunities for their  
48 children as an immediate need as the summer months approached. Subsequently, the mayor  
49 included the mothers in a town meeting where a donated local facility for recreation was  
50 identified and strategies were discussed to take action and move the new recreation plan forward.  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 Mothers indicated an interest in continuing to work on the initiative to bring it to fruition and  
4  
5 were inspired to work on future initiatives. A lesson learned for the local policymakers and  
6  
7 family scientists alike was that under the right facilitation and organizing approach, low-income  
8  
9 rural mothers who often felt and were disengaged from policy processes can and will participate  
10  
11 in local community policymaking to enhance the well-being of their families.  
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14  
15 Engaging in the DPP approach resulted in additional outcomes. For example, after  
16  
17 witnessing the translational utility of DPP, the area Cooperative Extension expressed interest in  
18  
19 adopting this approach of informing policy via scholar-advocacy. Staff at the Extension office  
20  
21 were enthused by the community engagement in local policy matters facilitated by the DPP  
22  
23 approach and began exploring other ways to empower local citizens to raise their voices in the  
24  
25 policy arena. In conjunction with the Unheard Voices mothers, Extension staff identified a  
26  
27 variety of policy solutions to issues affecting these families and used those potential solution sets  
28  
29 to drive citizen involvement in policy advocacy activities, including teaching people whom to  
30  
31 contact regarding local governance matters, finding and using relevant information, helping  
32  
33 organize citizen groups, providing help and support to local leaders, and helping citizens learn  
34  
35 how to engage in the policy arena and work with others to advance family and community well-  
36  
37 being. To engender success using the DPP approach, family scientists must take time to build  
38  
39 relationships with families they wish to serve and work collectively with an engaged citizenry to  
40  
41 identify family issues that need to be addressed by family research and scholar-advocacy within  
42  
43 the policy arena.  
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51 *Community-Based Participatory Research Approach*  
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53 A CBPR approach can also be useful as family scientists partner with marginalized and  
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55 disenfranchised communities and engage in scholar-advocacy and scholar-activism to translate  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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2  
3 family research to policy. Unlike DPP, a CBPR approach shifts the balance of power from the  
4  
5 researchers to the participants of research, creating a partnership that is dialogical, egalitarian,  
6  
7 democratic, action-oriented, and centered on social justice (Israel, Eng, Schulz, & Parker, 2012;  
8  
9 Minkler & Wallerstein, 2008). CBPR engenders a participatory, collaborative, and iterative  
10  
11 process of engagement, inquiry, and action that is community-driven (Israel et al., 2012). CBPR  
12  
13 begins with the goal of addressing a community-identified and defined social problem, and,  
14  
15 although it is not specifically geared to policy engagement, it is well suited as an approach for  
16  
17 family science translation to policy via scholar-advocacy and scholar-activism (Reason &  
18  
19 Bradbury, 2008).

20  
21 In employing a CBPR approach, family scientists are committed to leveraging their  
22  
23 academic power and resources to facilitate and empower historically marginalized groups to  
24  
25 determine discovery research questions and to direct and control research about their lives.  
26  
27 Family scientists work in concert with their community partners to build trusted relationships  
28  
29 and actively move research into the policy arena by working within the system (scholar-  
30  
31 advocacy) and pushing for change from the outside (scholar-activism). A CBPR approach  
32  
33 typically entails using multiple steps: (a) forming a research team and community advisory board  
34  
35 (CAB), (b) establishing partnerships with governmental agencies and nongovernmental  
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37 organizations, (c) engaging in CAB-directed community-based research, and (d) taking joint  
38  
39 action to advance social and policy change (Letiecq & Schmalzbauer, 2012).

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49 *CBPR: Family Scientist as Scholar-Advocate and Scholar-Activist*

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51 In the early 2000s, Montana, like many rural, nontraditional new settlements, experienced a rapid  
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53 growth of undocumented immigrants. Immigrant family well-being was affected by anti-  
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55 immigrant policymaking in the state legislature and local municipalities, language barriers,  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 limited services, racial profiling by highway patrol, and the constant threat of deportation and  
4 family separation (Letiecq & Schmalzbauer, 2012). Working with family scientists, community  
5 members sought to document their struggles to actualize family health and to advance immigrant  
6 justice. First, they established a CAB made up of members of the Mexican immigrant  
7 community, bilingual community organizers, and family scientists. The CAB and research team  
8 then conducted qualitative (in-depth interviews, focus groups) and quantitative (interview-  
9 assisted surveys) research to capture and give voice to the lived experiences of immigrant  
10 families in Montana. Consonant with CBPR principles, the CAB formed partnerships with  
11 community agencies and nonprofit organizations and engaged in research-informed action steps  
12 (e.g., implementation of a community legal and health clinic) to promote immigrant family well-  
13 being (Letiecq, Grzywacz, Gray, & Eudave, 2014; Letiecq & Schmalzbauer, 2012; Minkler &  
14 Wallerstein, 2008).

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32 Initially, working within established systems, the CAB and family scientists worked to  
33 disseminate family research, offering community presentations to local health providers, social  
34 workers, educators, school and health care administrators, and statewide agency officials and  
35 policymakers. The goal of this scholar-advocacy was to educate decision-makers and service  
36 providers about immigrant family needs and advocate for more culturally and contextually  
37 responsive policies and practices to alleviate suffering and ameliorate poor outcomes among  
38 undocumented immigrant families. However, in 2012, the Montana legislature placed on the  
39 November ballot a voter referendum (LR-121) seeking to deny certain state services to “illegal  
40 aliens,” which the immigrant community and its partners feared would bring further harm to  
41 their families. This referendum called for scholar-activism or direct action against systems to  
42 prevent social injustice. Thus, family scientists, CAB members, and community partners  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 engaged in both direct and grassroots lobbying efforts statewide to defeat LR-121, including  
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5 writing evidence-based op-ed letters to newspapers, engaging in a letter-writing campaign to  
6  
7 legislators, and hosting protest rallies where research-based fact sheets were distributed. Despite  
8  
9 such efforts, the referendum passed by a landslide. However, before the legislation was  
10  
11 implemented, the Montana Immigrant Justice Alliance, a statewide immigrant justice  
12  
13 organization affiliated with the CAB challenged LR-121 in court and successfully blocked it  
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15 from taking effect.  
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20 Using a CBPR approach positioned the family scientists to establish a research program  
21  
22 in partnership with a marginalized and disenfranchised community and engage in scholar-  
23  
24 advocacy and scholar-activism to translate family research in the policy arena. The action steps  
25  
26 called for by a CBPR approach helped to build trusted relationships and solidarity among the  
27  
28 CAB, family scientists, and other community partners, which are often necessary for gaining  
29  
30 entrée into communities and carrying out valid family research. Using a CBPR approach also  
31  
32 promotes sustained efforts over time and the continuous sharing of knowledge, skills, and  
33  
34 abilities that engenders translational co-learning across partners. In this way, family scientists  
35  
36 can generate rigorous research; educate agency officials, other relevant professionals, and the  
37  
38 public at large about the needs and strengths of marginalized and disenfranchised families; and  
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40 advocate (and lobby) for policies that foster family well-being. Further, as we and others have  
41  
42 discussed (Anderson & Letiecq, 2015; Sanford & Angel-Anjani, 2006), there are times when  
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44 human rights violations, discriminatory practices, or unethical policies summon family scientists  
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46 to engage in scholar-activism to uphold scientific and ethical obligations to do no harm.  
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## DISCUSSION

## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 Translating family science to policy is complex and multifaceted, requiring different approaches  
4 and different roles depending on the policy topics being considered or the context of one's  
5  
6 discovery or applied family research. Historically, the discourse on family policy engagement  
7  
8 has been bifurcated conceptually, focusing on the roles of the researcher or educator within the  
9  
10 scientific realm and the role of the advocate falling outside the scientific realm (Bogenschneider,  
11  
12 1995; Nye & McDonald, 1979). In this article, we first called for an expanded research-to-policy  
13  
14 translational framework that reconceptualizes the roles of family scientists in the policy arena to  
15  
16 include policy educator, scholar-advocate, and scholar-activist. We then document three  
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18 approaches to translational family science in the policy arena that position the role of the family  
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20 scientist differently depending on the goals of research-to-policy engagement, the topics under  
21  
22 study, or the context of one's research. Specifically, we highlight FISs and the role of policy  
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24 educators, deliberative policy processes and the role of scholar-advocates, and CBPR and the  
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26 role of scholar-advocates and scholar-activists.  
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34 Our rationale for an expanded translational framework includes recognition of the need to  
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36 clarify differences between advocacy and lobbying or other political practices, such as  
37  
38 campaigning. As we described, advocacy is a much broader term that can include scholarly  
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40 activities within the realm of science that are critical for bridging family science and policy  
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42 advocacy, particularly when working with marginalized and disenfranchised families. The  
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44 confusion about where advocacy stops and lobbying starts has seemingly stymied family  
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46 scientists from engaging in translational work in the policy arena, particularly when public policy  
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48 controversies have erupted (e.g., same-sex marriage, immigration bans). In this article, we sought  
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50 to clarify how lobbying is defined by the IRS and demarcate family policy advocacy activities  
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52 inclusive of scholar-advocacy.  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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Our second rationale for a more expansive research-to-policy translational framework confronts the fallacy that all research can be value-neutral. We argue that some topics, theories, or methods of family research are partisan or sociopolitically controversial. Some researchers may be labeled as having a political agenda or bias simply by questioning the norms of science or, for example, asking research questions that expose discriminatory policies or social injustices. For these researchers, their work and their family policy role may be placed in the family policy advocacy or scholar-activist camp, not by choice of the researcher but by the very norms of science their work seeks to confront (Kuhn, 2012). Moreover, researchers who do expose human indignities, human rights violations, and human suffering because of unjust or ill-conceived policies may be ethically called to work for change from within through scholar-advocacy or to take direct action through scholar-activism to push against hegemonic systems (Sanford & Angel-Ajani, 2006). The complexity of family and community needs and diverse ecological contexts of family science work calls for a broader, more inclusive, and perhaps muddier conceptualization of translational family science to policy across family topics and contexts that range from less to more controversial.

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The depiction of FIS, deliberative policy processes, and CBPR approaches illustrate steps for translation. We recognize that many other approaches are available for family science translation and policy engagement, but we offer these approaches to illustrate the varied roles family scientists can perform (a) to conduct family policy *research*, (b) to *educate* lawmakers and the public at large about family matters and the intended and unintended consequences of alternative policies for families, (c) to *advocate* along with community members for research-based family policy changes needed to improve family health and well-being, and (d) to *engage*

## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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2  
3 *in scholar-activism* to drive change using direct action, particularly when policies do harm to  
4  
5 vulnerable families.  
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7  
8 As we reflect on the various translational approaches, we note that each relies on family  
9  
10 science, democratic principles, and an engaged citizenry. Across approaches, it is also evident  
11  
12 that policymaking is relational at its base, and whether a family scientist is conducting FISs or  
13  
14 engaging in deliberative policy processes or CBPR, each approach relies on building trusted  
15  
16 relationships and partnerships across policymakers, families, communities, and institutions.  
17  
18 Finally, we assert that translational family policy work requires a deep belief that family policy  
19  
20 solutions to family challenges exist and that, when given the facts (or confronted with injustices),  
21  
22 policymakers and an informed citizenry will make sound decisions to promote family health,  
23  
24 well-being, and justice. However, this optimistic view of policy processes requires a functional  
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26 democracy, where policymakers, an engaged citizenry (including family scientists), and social  
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28 institutions (including higher education) are working together to explore, understand, address,  
29  
30 and redress their shared problems (Kettering Foundation, 2016).  
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36 *Recommendations for Future Family Policy Engagement*

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38 We have numerous recommendations for the future of family research-to-policy translational  
39  
40 work. To have the greatest impact, family scientists need to understand policy-making processes  
41  
42 and how legislation is developed to frame their research questions and present the ensuing results  
43  
44 to reflect policy actions. In other words, policy-engaged scholars must not only study their topics  
45  
46 of inquiry but also study policy processes. Importantly, family scientists should understand and  
47  
48 clarify their roles in policy processes and understand the parameters of those roles (e.g., when  
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50 does policy education become advocacy and when does advocacy become lobbying). Family  
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52 scientists also must consider the implications and limitations of those roles for themselves and  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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3 for their professional identities and pursuits. Policy educators may feel stymied by the limitations  
4 of their engagement in family policy matters, whereas family scholar-advocates and scholar-  
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activists may be questioned regarding their commitment to scientific neutrality and objectivity (Bogenschneider, 2014; Emery et al., 2016). Yet we contend that all scholarship and scholarly engagement is limited in some fashion and vulnerable to bias, requiring scholarly reflexivity and a willingness to engage in constant critique of our scholarship as we seek the truth. Regardless of one's chosen approach or role, translational efforts take a substantial amount of time and effort, which may ultimately be broadly impactful in the policy arena and in the lives of families, but perhaps not as valued in the academy (which, in general, rewards publications and external funding over policy education, advocacy, or activism). This reality begs for policy and practice change within the academy if translation of family science to policy is truly a goal and we hope to have a family policy impact.

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Beyond the academy, for family scientists, citizens, and policymakers alike to make sound decisions on behalf of families in the policy arena, they must be knowledgeable regarding the facts, the meaning and implication of this information, and how research findings can be used to inform policies that are better aligned with and culturally and contextually responsive to diverse family needs and strengths. Family scientists must work to translate research methodologies and scientific findings into language that is accessible to and understood by an engaged citizenry and body politic. Further, family scientists need to develop relationships with the citizenry, to talk with those who might be most impacted by research, and to document their views so sound decisions are made to value and promote the well-being of all families.

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Using scientific methodologies and strategies that facilitate voices being heard in the policy arena that have in the past been absent, systematically excluded, or ignored is important to

## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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2  
3 shine light on diverse family realities and to strive for a more just society. Strategies for  
4  
5 facilitating voice in our translational family science work are particularly salient when working  
6  
7 with families on the margins whose lives are highly affected by the social structures and policies  
8  
9 that regulate their lives. Such engagement—where family scientists work to connect diverse  
10  
11 families, practitioners, and policymakers in the policy arena—can build new bridges and new  
12  
13 opportunities for effective dissemination of family science, democratic participation, community  
14  
15 empowerment, shared responsibility, civil political discourse, and social justice ends.  
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20           Although all research-to-policy translational approaches elucidated herein rely on  
21  
22 academic expertise and findings from scientific research, we note that the emergence of  
23  
24 deliberative and community-based participatory research approaches promote a reframing or  
25  
26 expansion of “expert” to include nonacademic community partners—the individuals and families  
27  
28 who are directly experiencing challenges and threats to their well-being. As Sanford and Angel-  
29  
30 Anjani (2006) so cogently described, it is not uncommon in the academy “for lived experiences  
31  
32 to be dismissed as unscientific or not relevant to real, objective scholarship” (p. 14). The authors  
33  
34 went on to assert that this thinking is problematic because “it is the academy that needs to be  
35  
36 relevant to the reality of lived experiences” (p.14). We agree that advocacy and activism should  
37  
38 not be viewed as diminishing the validity of one’s scholarship, but rather that engaged scholar-  
39  
40 advocates and scholar-activists remind us that all research is inherently political (Sanford &  
41  
42 Angel-Anjani). Family scientists must be aware that they personally may become the subject of  
43  
44 study. Therefore, training and sustained mentoring on understanding how best to position our  
45  
46 family scholarship, our family policy engagement, and ourselves are critical as we work to  
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48 translate family science to policy. If the goal is to be relevant as family scientists, our expanded  
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50 vision of incorporating additional approaches and roles into the translation of discovery and  
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3 applied family science in the policy arena is essential, and most salient if scientists hope to  
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5 expand the use of data in the development of sound family policy that is inclusive of diverse  
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7 populations and actualizes justice.  
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## FROM POLICY EDUCATION TO ADVOCACY AND ACTIVISM

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