

# The role of scientists in public policy decisions: The case of drought planning

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*Oklahoma Climatological Survey*

## Key Findings

- (1) There is no substantial Cultural Gap.
  - Those involved in state drought policies had little difficulty utilizing scientific information and advice
- (2) Policy-Makers have little difficulty accessing, understanding, and utilizing scientific and technical information.
  - First drafts created by individuals at lower levels of state organizations
  - Scientific or technical background not necessary
- (3) Intermediaries are more likely to be engaged in federal initiatives, and earlier in the process, than research scientists.
  - Federal organizations, national centers
  - Working groups
  - Active collaboration with policy-makers
  - Framework for broader participation
- (4) Research scientists are as likely to engage decision-makers as are intermediaries, but in more local arenas.
  - Close collaboration with local decision-makers
  - Not necessarily policy-making context
  - Oriented toward operational concerns
- (5) Both research scientists and intermediaries tend to be passive.
  - Most often initiated by a request
  - Time constraints
- (6) The organizational structure posed more of a barrier to communication than did the technical nature of the material.
  - Restrictions on communications limited direct contact
  - Academic rewards systems emphasize scientific communication over service and outreach activities
  - Inconsistent funding for extension and outreach programs
- (7) Internet communication is a key feature of a drought knowledge community.
  - Both within and external to the community
  - E-mail discussion list (weekly Drought Monitor) excellent forum
  - Develops some degree of consensus / shared knowledge
  - Summarizes information for external audiences
  - Regular publications draw attention
- (8) Implementation issues are more important than communication issues.
  - Partitioning problems focuses on scientific or technical components
  - Resulting policies fail to address competing values or stakeholder issues
  - Lack of political support for controversial or expensive elements



## Final Thoughts

1. It's the process, not the content
2. Established Connections provides conduit for transfer of information
3. Plenty of interaction among experts and stakeholders, but lacks coordination
4. Need an effective means of communication and something to bring people to the community