Writing effective policy papers

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Method

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Relevance For Public Health

This resource was developed by the Local Government Public Service Reform Initiative, Open Society Institute for policy advisors in Central and Eastern Europe. It was designed to support think tanks and policy-makers in this region. This guide is useful for public health practitioners looking to develop their skills in writing policy papers. For instance, this resource would be useful for developing a policy argument for implementing legislation for reducing exposure to second hand smoke.

Description

This practical resource aims to support practitioners, policy analysts and researchers in writing policy papers. With concrete steps for writing policy papers and checklists for planning, writing and disseminating policy projects, this is a very valuable guide that will affect decision making at the policy level.

This guide aims to help the user:

- examine the role of the policy paper as a decision-making tool in the policy process; and
- learn knowledge and skills for writing policy papers.

Public policy has been defined in several ways. Brooks (1989, p. 16; cited in Smith, 2003) defines public policy as "the broad framework of ideas and values within which decisions are taken and action, or inaction, is pursued by governments in relation to some issue or problem." Across diverse definitions, some core elements emerge. Public policy is characterized as:

- an authoritative government action;
- a reaction to real world needs or problems;
- goal-oriented;
- delineating a course of action; and
- a decision to take action or to not take action.

Key factors and considerations in the process of policy development include (Smith, 2003):

- Public interest: how does the policy address what is in the best interests of society as a whole?
- Effectiveness: how does a policy achieves its stated goals?
- Efficiency: how well are resources used to achieve goals and implement policy?
- Consistency: what degree of alignment is there with broader goals and strategies of governmental bodies?
- Fairness and equity: to what degree does the policy increase the equity of all members and sectors of society?
- Reflective: to what extent does the policy reflect other values of society, such as freedom, security, privacy, etc.?

The purpose of the policy paper (Young & Quinn, 2002, p. 18) is "to provide a comprehensive and persuasive argument justifying the policy recommendations presented in the paper and therefore, to act as a decision-making tool and a call to action for the target audience."

This resource consists of the following sections:

- Introduction
- The Public Policy Community
- The Policy-making Process
- The Policy Paper: An Overview
- The Policy Paper: Structural and Textual Elements
- Publishing Your Policy Paper
- Concluding Remarks
- Appendices

Implementing the Tool

Who is Involved?

Various individuals could use this resource for preparing policy papers, including management, policy analysts, project specialists, health promotion officers, researchers, decision makers, and policy makers.

Steps for Using Tool

This resource includes the following sections:

1. Introduction

2. The Public Policy Community

1. Defining public policy

The core elements of Public Policy include the following:

- authoritative government action
- a reaction to real world needs or problems
- goal-oriented
- a course of action
- a decision to do something or a decision to do nothing
- carried out by a single actor or a set of actors
- a justification for action
- a decision made

2. Members of the public policy community
3. From political science to policy science

- **Policy science** aims to provide insight and reflection on what governments actually do. Policy science has two distinct fields: policy study and policy analysis. **Policy study** seeks to understand and inform the policy-making process through primary research into specific policy issues. **Policy analysis** affects action and influences policy outcomes by designing policies that are implemented by governmental agencies.

4. Policy science as an applied discipline

- There are two defining characteristics of policy science: policy science creates solutions for real-world problems, and it presents value-driven arguments through the effective presentation of data analysis.

3. The Policy-making Process

The policy cycle (or the policy-making process) consists of these steps:

- Step 1: Problem definition/agenda setting
- Step 2: Constructing the policy alternatives/policy formulation
- Step 3: Choice of solution/selection of preferred policy option
- Step 4: Policy design
- Step 5: Policy implementation and monitoring
- Step 6: Evaluation

1. Role of the policy paper in the policy-making process
2. Disseminating your policy ideas

4. The Policy Paper: An Overview

- As a decision-making tool, the policy paper:

1. defines an urgent policy issue within the current policy framework;
2. outlines the different ways in which the issue can be addressed;
3. provides an analysis of possible outcomes of these options; and
4. makes a policy recommendation and provides a strong argument for why this policy option is the best course of action.

- Different types of policy papers:

1. The table on p. 20 outlines the differences between policy papers written for policy study and those written for policy analysis.
2. A checklist for writing your policy paper is given on p. 21.

5. The Policy Paper: Structural and Textual Elements

- Useful tips, strategies, checklists and examples are provided for each section of the policy paper:

1. Title
2. Table of contents
3. Abstract or executive summary
4. Introduction
5. Problem description
6. Policy options
7. Conclusion and recommendations
8. Endnotes
9. Bibliography
10. Appendices

6. Publishing Your Policy Paper

7. Concluding Remarks

8. Appendices
• Includes a sample of a policy paper, APA citation guidelines and a checklist for editing.

Evaluation and Measurement Characteristics

Evaluation

Has not been evaluated

Validity

Not applicable

Reliability

Not applicable

Methodological Rating

N/A   Not applicable

Tool Development

Developers

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Method of Development

This resource was developed by the Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative to provide support for writing policy papers. *Writing Effective Public Policy Papers: A Guide for Policy Advisers in Central and Eastern Europe* can be used as a self-study guide or to support training courses on writing policy papers.

Release Date

2002

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Resources

Title of Primary Resource	Writing Effective Public Policy Papers: A Guide for Policy Advisers in Central and Eastern Europe
File Attachment	None
Web-link	http://www.icpolicyadvocacy.org/sites/icpa/files/downloads/writing_effective_public_policy_papers_young_quinn.pdf
Reference	Young, E. & Quinn, L. (2002). *Writing Effective Public Policy Papers: A Guide to Policy Advisers in Central and Eastern Europe.* Local Government and Public Reform Initiative; Budapest, Hungary. Retrieved from: http://www.icpolicyadvocacy.org/sites/icpa/files/downloads/writing_effective_public_policy_papers_young_quinn.pdf
Type of Material	Handbook
Format	On-line Access
Cost to Access	None.
Language	English, Russian, Croatian, Serbian, Bulgarian, Mongolian, Ukranian
Conditions for Use	Copyright © 2002 Open Society Institute

Title of Supplementary Resource	Public Policy and Public Participation: Engaging Citizens and Community in the Development of Public Policy
File Attachment	None
Web-link	http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20061214051535/http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/canada/regions/atlantic/publications/public_policy/public_2003_e.pdf
Reference	Smith, B. L. (2003). *Public Policy and Public Participation: Engaging Citizens and Community in the Development of Public Policy.* BLSmith Groupwork Inc. Prepared for Population and Public Health Branch, Atlantic Regional Office, Health Canada. Retrieved from: http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20061214051535/http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/canada/regions/atlantic/publications/public_policy/public_2003_e.pdf
Type of Material	Workbook
Format	On-line Access
Cost to Access	None.
Language	English, French
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