

Phases of the Public Policy Life Cycle From NCG (Northern California Grantmakers) Public Policy Toolkit



Problem definition: Policy development starts with problem definition. During this stage, a problem is identified and examined, and possible solutions are explored through research and analysis.

Agenda setting: The next step is agenda-setting. During this stage, efforts are used to raise the profile of the problem and possible solutions among the public and decision-makers. Typical strategies include:

- community organizing
- public education
- media and communications
- convening stakeholders
- building coalitions

Policy adoption: Next, policymakers discuss options and possible solutions and adopt new or amend existing policy.

Common strategies used to impact policy adoption include:

- issue advocacy
- regulatory advocacy
- community organizing
- public/private partnership creation

In the case of ballot measures and referenda, the voters are policymakers and the election determines policy adoption.

Implementation: This phase is often ignored because it is not as visible to the general public. Implementation is an essential phase during which critical decisions are made which ultimately determine the policy's effectiveness.

Approaches used include:

- issue advocacy
- regulatory advocacy
- litigation
- public/private partnership creation

Evaluation: After a policy is implemented, it is important to evaluate its effectiveness. Policy research and analysis are strategies to evaluate whether the policy meets its original intents and if there are any unintended outcomes. If the policy is not successful on any level, evaluation findings can be used during a new phase of problem definition. The policy life cycle begins again and continues until an effective policy is created and successfully implemented.

Public policy changes do not occur overnight; rather, they are the result of activities in each stage of the policy life cycle. Each phase can take weeks or years, depending on the depth of the issue, the people involved, and the intricacy of the policy itself. This life cycle is only a framework—not all policy is formed according to this linear model. However, all policy creation is incremental and builds upon prior developments and activities. A number of different strategies are often required to create one policy change.

Issue:

Description/Definition of the Public Policy Initiative:

Current "Location" in the Public Policy Process:

Problem Definition

Agenda Setting

Policy Adoption

Implementation

Evaluation

Steps Required to Advance the Issue:

Key Stakeholders:

Suggested Timeframe for Action:

