

Introduction to Public Policy and Planning

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Key concepts, processes, and tools for understanding how governments address societal problems.

1. What Is Public Policy?

Aspect	Definition
Broad Meaning	A set of intentional actions (laws, regulations, programs, budgets, or statements) taken by government to achieve specific goals.
Scope	Can be national , state/provincial , local , or international .
Purpose	Solve collective problems, allocate resources, shape behavior, and reflect societal values. • Goal-oriented – targets a desired outcome.
Characteristics	• Coherent – internal consistency among measures. • Authoritative – backed by the state's power to enforce.

2. The Policy Cycle – A Working Framework

Stage	Core Activities	Typical Outputs
1. Agenda-Setting	- Problem identification - Media, interest-group pressure, political cues	Issue briefs, media coverage, legislative proposals
2. Policy Formulation	- Research & analysis - Stakeholder consultation - Drafting alternatives	Policy options, impact assessments, draft legislation
3. Decision-Making	- Legislative vote / executive decree - Negotiation among actors	Enacted law, executive order, budget allocation
4. Implementation	- Administrative structures set up - Service delivery mechanisms - Regulation enforcement	Programs, regulations, contracts, guidelines

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Stage	Core Activities	Typical Outputs
5. Evaluation	- Monitoring performance - Cost?benefit analysis - Feedback loops	Evaluation reports, performance metrics, audit findings
6. Revision/Termination	- Policy adjustment or repeal - Institutional learning	Amendments, sunset clauses, new legislation

Note: The cycle is **iterative**, not strictly linear; stages often overlap.

3. Major Actors in the Policy Process

Actor	Role	Influence Tools
Elected Officials (legislators, mayor, president)	Set agenda, pass laws, allocate budgets	Voting, public statements, coalition building
Bureaucracy / Public Administrators	Translate laws into programs, enforce regulations	Rulemaking, rule enforcement, administrative discretion
Interest Groups & NGOs	Advocate for specific outcomes, provide expertise	Lobbying, public campaigns, research reports
Media	Frame issues, shape public opinion	News coverage, editorial commentary, investigative reporting
Academics & Think?tanks	Generate evidence, propose alternatives	Policy briefs, conferences, data analysis
Citizens / Voters	Express preferences, hold officials accountable	Elections, petitions, public hearings, social media

4. Types of Public Policies

Category	Description	Example
Distributive	Allocate resources or services to specific groups or regions.	Infrastructure grants, agricultural subsidies
Regulatory	Set standards or restrictions to control behavior.	Environmental emission limits, workplace safety rules

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Category	Description	Example
Redistributive	Reallocate wealth or opportunities to reduce inequality.	Progressive taxation, welfare programs
Constituent	Establish or modify the structure of government itself.	Creation of a new agency, electoral reform
Symbolic	Convey values or political messages without major practical effect.	Declaring a “National Day of Service”

5. Analytical Tools for Policy Makers

Tool	What It Does Typical Use
Cost-Benefit Analysis (CBA)	