

The Policy Role of Council

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What is Public Policy?

- “At its core, policy is a course of action intended to accomplish some end. The term policy needs to be able to embrace what is intended and what occurs as a result of the intention.” (Heclo)
- “Policy is whatever government chooses to do or not to do.” (Dye)
- “Policies are statements of what is valued. Policies provide direction and guidance for society and those charged with administering government. The ultimate policy statement is the budget. We spend our money on what we value.” (Pierce)

Public policy often addresses three questions:

- What good will we do?
- For which people?
- At what cost?

The answer to these questions often reflects our values

Public Policy and Politics

The making of County policy ultimately is a political process.

- Politics involves the mediation of differences vs. constant conflict
- Politics is the art of the possible
- Politics often revolves around the allocation of scarce resources
- At the most basic level ----- “whose ox is gored”

The Policy Environment

The environment in which policy is made has a major impact on policy.

Environments:

- Institutional (Representative Democracy; Federal System, Intergovernmental Relations)
- Political
- Societal/Demographic
- Fiscal
- Regulatory/Legal
- Technological

Types of Public Policy

- Substantive
- Procedural
- Distributive
- Regulatory
- Self-Regulatory
- Redistributive
- Material
- Symbolic

Collective Goods _____ Private Goods

Anderson, Public Policymaking

County Policy

What are the major areas in which counties are involved in making policy?

- Role of County Government?
- Services
- Regulations/Restrictions
- Financial
- Human Resources
- Structure/Organization

Participants in the Policy Process

- Official Policymakers
 - primary (Policy Body)
 - Supplementary (Executive personnel)

- Unofficial Participants
 - interest groups/organized groups
 - political parties
 - research organizations
 - Media (broadly defined)
 - individual citizens

Role of Council

The essential and unique role of council is to envision the future and to provide direction toward that future.

Ed Thomas and Jon Pierce, Institute for Public Service & Policy Research, USC

Councils Roles and Responsibilities

While one could develop an extensive listing of the roles and responsibilities of a council, the role can be reduced to three contributions that are uniquely the council's. These contributions comprise a job description of council:

- provide linkage to the ownership
- articulate organizational policies
- assure CAO performance

Adapted from John Carver, [Board That Make A Difference](#)

Role of Individual Council Members

Individual council members bring their own perspective to how they make policy decisions and what role they should play.

- Trustee
- Delegate
- Politico

Council and Executive Leadership Policy Dynamics

- What is the CAO's and staff's role in policymaking?
- The “technical” vs. the “political” – We Stand Where We Sit
- Council and elected department heads/executives

Organizational Policies

- The organization's "ends" or outcomes
 - What good is the organization going to do? For what people or needs? At what cost?
- The most important "ends" policy statement is the organizational mission statement. Budget should reflect this mission.
- Governing values
- Limitations on CAO authority
- Council-staff relationships (note form of government)
- How the council will govern; conduct its business

Mission Statements

If used, a meaningful and well thought out, consensus mission statement can:

- provide significant direction for the council, county government and its employees
- serve as a means for communicating direction and focus to citizens and customers
- be an excellent mechanism for measuring the performance of the county and its employees, as well as council.

The Policy Framework

(Jones, An Introduction to the Study of Public Policy)

- public problems exist as a result of perceived needs
- some people have problems in common
- some of these organize and make demands or demands are made by those who seek to represent people
- demands are perceived and judged by those with authority
- decisions are made and enforced
- public problems are affected by these decisions
- some people have common reactions
- demands are made **And So Forth**

The Policy Process

Caveat: Although presented in a linear fashion, the reality is clearly much more complex.

- problem identification
- agenda building
- policy formulation
- policy adoption
- budgeting
- implementation
- evaluation
- policy succession

(Rushefsky, Public Policy in the United States)

How Does An Idea's Time Come?

- “policy primeval soup”
- political, problem and policy streams
- policy window
- policy entrepreneurs
- coupling - hooking policy onto “problem of the moment”
- spillover - opportunity for somewhat related policy

(Kingdon, Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies)

Types of Policy Agendas

- Systemic
- Institutional/governmental
- Decision

Criteria for Survival on the Agenda

- Technical feasibility
- Financial feasibility
- Value acceptability
 - policy is value laden
 - values impact policy
 - policy may impact values
 - as society's values change; policy may change
- Political feasibility

Determining Policy Impact/Outcome

- How do you know whether a particular policy has had the intended impact or achieved the desired outcome?
- What is required to be able to answer this question?

Performance Measurement

- Performance measurement is a process by which an entity objectively measures whether it is achieving the intended outcomes of a program, service, or policy.
- Performance measurement can:
 - ensure a connection between actual performance and intended outcomes
 - provide an early warning system
 - assist in future planning and provide decision-making information
 - improve communication with customers and stakeholders

Types of Performance Measures

- Inputs
- Outputs
- Outcomes
- Efficiency/productivity
- Quality

Techniques for More Effective Policymaking

- Strategic planning to establish a collective vision, mission, values and goals
- Use work sessions and retreats
- Encourage and allow each member to actively participate
- Get to know each other
- Respect individual differences and backgrounds
- Focus on the issue not personality or past history
- Communicate openly and honestly
- Don't let the PERFECT be the enemy of the GOOD
- Recognize that COMPROMISE is not a bad word