

Policy Field Audit

Policy field analysis can help make sense of the complexity in an implementation system. The policy field audit is the first step in this process.

Public policy and program implementation is often complex because it can involve so many diverse institutions and nuanced relationships that are difficult to assess without specialized knowledge. Sometimes, the relationships between these institutions are formalized with government tools like grants and contracts. Other times, the relationships are informal based on affiliation or history. We use policy fields analysis to untangle this complexity.

Policy fields are bounded networks among organizations carrying out a substantive policy and program area in a particular place. Therefore, a policy field audit begins by identifying a substantive policy or program area of interest. For many professionals, their organization's mission or role helps define this substantive topic area. It might fall neatly within one policy domain, such as public education or renewable energy or it might cross a number of policy areas; for example, economic development can involve transportation, housing, and small business development.

What is needed? Pen, printed copies of this worksheet for all

Who is needed? Yourself, staff of your organization

How long will this take? 1 hour

Activity

Step 1

Program or policy to be focused on in this exercise:

Identify the specific federal, state and local institutions (public, nonprofit, and private) that could be involved in implementing this program. Quickly brainstorm and list as many as you can think of.

Step 2

Look at your brainstormed list, do some research by internet reviews or informal conversations, and identify the following:

Which organizations have a real interest in this policy/program?

Add a □ next to the organizations in your brainstormed list with real interests in this issue.

Interests can come from staff expertise or organizational reputation, as well as their assessment of the economic, political, or ideology significance of engaging in the work of implementing this particular program.

Which organizations have power to make change related to it?

Add a ψ next to the organizations with potential power to "get things done" in the system surrounding this issue.

Power can come from many sources, including funding, program expertise, research know-how, or communications infrastructure.

Where does administrative authority lie?

Add a Ω next to the organizations that are given administrative authority in the oversight of the program.

In policy systems, all organizations possess some political authority; yet, some organizations are given authority to mandate compulsion to change because of the power of law, public investment of funding, or both.

This process of identification helps narrow the list of potential institutions.

List the policy field institutions below. You can organize them by sector or interest area.

This list will be helpful to inform the other parts of the policy field analysis.

Step 3

In this step, we will catalogue the laws, public funding streams (and their forms), and other important implementation resources in use in the field.

What are the important national, state or local laws establishing the policy or authorizing public funding?

What policy tools are in use?

Policy tools have been defined as things through which collective action is structured to address a policy problem. These policy tools typically leverage the authority and/or resources of government, and are structured as grants, contracts, vouchers, regulations, tax expenditures, etc. Consider how the policy tools-in-use might impact conditions or create implementation constraints within the field.

What are other significant implementation resources to support implementation activities?

Implementation resources have been defined as "individuals or organizations that can help implementing units learn about policy, best practices for doing policy, or professional reforms meant to change the character of services delivered to clients."

Step 4 (Optional)

Taking what you have listed here, it can be helpful to arrange the policy tools and implementation resources in a table format, categorizing them by types and/or level of influence.

Another option is to follow up with an exercise to shape the policy field visual diagram.

Additional References:

- Chapter 4 from the book provides the theoretical foundations for Step 3. For examples of common policy tools, refer to table 4.4 from the book. In table 4.3, there is an array of non-monetary implementation resources that might be important shaping what is happening in the field.
- For an overview, see Policy Field Analysis video at www.hubertproject.org. The scholarly grounding is found in Jodi R Sandfort and Melissa Middleton Stone, "Analyzing Policy Fields: Helping Students Understand Complex Policy Environments," *Journal of Public Affairs Education* 14 no.2 (2008); Melissa Stone and Jodi R Sandfort, "Building a Policy Fields Framework to Inform Research in Nonprofit Organizations," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 38, no. 6 (2009): 1054–1075.
- Lester Salamon, *The Tools Of Government: A Guide to the New Governance*, ed. Lester Salamon (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- Heather C Hill, "Understanding Implementation: Street-Level Bureaucrats' Resources for Reform," *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 13, no. 3 (July 2003): 269.