

What is public policy exactly and how does it come about?¹

Public policy refers to decisions taken concerning the selection of goals for society and the means of achieving them. It consists of the approaches agreed upon by governments, as the custodians of the collective resources and rules, to address particular problems or circumstances. Sometimes these are explicit (i.e., they involve a commitment of resources, the introduction of legislation, the setting of limits on harmful materials, etc.). At other times they are implicit (i.e., a refusal to act that ensures a continuation of the status quo that many have been arguing against, or a series of separate decisions that add up to a policy approach even though it is never articulated as such).

Issues to be addressed by public policy are identified in different ways. Sometimes the issues they touch upon are seen as the core business of governments, and policies on how to deal with these issues are always there in some form but shift over time in response to changing circumstances, the need to reduce costs, the need to respond to pressure/criticism, fresh information, or for some other reason. Other public policy issues are put on the public agenda (“get on the agenda”) after months, years, or even, decades of research, mobilization, and/or public awareness campaigns by non-profit or labour organizations, business, or major institutions of our societies such as universities, colleges, and healthcare providers.

Program Objectives

- To provide non-profit organization participants with training to help strengthen their organization’s capacity to advance public policy positions of strategic interest to them.
- To enhance the non-profit sector’s understanding of how governments make policy decisions.
- To ready non-profit organizations to carry out a public policy project by working through:
 - *Understanding what Public Policy is*
 - *The Role of Research*
 - *Developing and Analyzing Policy Options*
 - *Informing and Engaging Decision Makers, and*
 - *Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation*

¹Carter, S. Public Policy and the Non-profit Sector, Excerpt from *The Philanthropist*, Vol 23, No 4 (2011)