

# Policy position step by step

## Introduction

This briefing paper is aimed at practitioners to provide a step by step checklist to assist in the process of preparing a policy position. It should be read in conjunction with other factsheets on public policy and research. Further reading material is also suggested at the end of this paper.

## 1. Describe the problem

The first step is to describe the problem that needs to be addressed. Do not confuse cause and effect. Ensure that you really are describing the cause. You should be able to articulate the problem in a single sentence, though you may then require a few additional sentences to explain why the problem is a problem, covering for example the depth and breadth of the impact and the consequences of the impact for both the businesses and for the country.

This should take no more than 30 minutes and should be based on questions asked of the BMO or the BMO's key activists.

## 2. Prior legislation

It is possible that there is already legislation or regulation in place and it is possible that is what has given rise to the problem to be addressed. If there is legislation in place, then describe the problem that the legislation was designed to overcome. It is possible that the legislation was specifically designed to change businesses' behaviour (such as the abolition of plastic bags) in which case there is little point in campaigning to reform the law. However, it is also quite possible that the problem to be addressed is an unforeseen consequence of legislation that was intended to deliver something else.

If there is no legislation or regulation, then it may be worth just asking whether you really want to encourage more regulation. Sometimes it may make sense, but not always.

This should take no more than 1-2 days. The problem may be written down in the preamble to legislation or may be covered in a policy document. If it is not, then there may be a need to call someone in an agency or ministry.

## 3. Understand the issue in brief

The third step is to gather secondary research – do an internet search; talk to key people in the BMO; talk to key people in the ministry or agency – to understand the problem in more detail and to understand the context. It is rare that there is no information on an issue but at this stage you are not aiming for a comprehensive review of what exists; rather you want to get an idea of what does exist and what it is telling you. You may find information, for example, that explores the problem in more detail; you may find information that stresses the importance to the economy of the sector; you may find information that describes the extent of the problem and the consequences; you may find information on what is being done already to address the problem (a private member's Bill in the legislative process or a proposed policy, for example).

This step should take no more than 1-2 days. As you read the material, jot down facts that you think may provide evidence for the case that you will be building together with the source so that you can go back for more if necessary.

#### **4. Consider options**

The BMO may already have a clear idea of their desired policy (abolish cess, for example). However, the research may suggest alternative options or even better options. So think about the options – which might include new legislation, reform of existing legislation, administrative reform and revising the interpretation of legislation.

This will help with the next step of framing but will also help with deciding the key target audiences for your advocacy.

This step should not require more than a couple of hours. If it does, then in all likelihood, the research has not thrown up the evidence that you need.

#### **5. Frame the issue**

Now frame the issue as simply as you can. Often the framing can imply a solution so do this as well.

As with the consideration of option, this step should not require more than a couple of hours. If it does, then in all likelihood, the research has not thrown up the evidence that you need.

#### **6. Outline the case**

It is very easy at this point to jump into preparing a policy position, but that may mean missing something vital. It is sensible to outline the case – including the problem, the solution and the argument for the solution. The problem and the argument are likely both to include evidence, so set out the whole case and if necessary note the gaps in the logic and in the evidence.

This step will probably not take more than a couple of hours as it is only setting out in a logical format the information and argument that you already have. If there are gaps, they can be addressed in the next step.

#### **7. Research**

You may have enough evidence already, but you may have identified some gaps in which case you need to undertake, or commission, research to fill those gaps.

It is impossible to estimate how long this will take.

#### **8. The policy position**

Once you have all the research evidence, you are then in a position to complete the policy position. It is quite possible that steps 7 and 8 may require a degree of iteration.

Policy positions are best prepared by a group of interested individuals, so allow one full day for this step.



## Further reading and further information

There are several factsheets that might be helpful:

- ♦ Assessing quality of research
- ♦ Commissioning research
- ♦ Framing
- ♦ Policy analysis
- ♦ Policy position preparation
- ♦ Understanding research



In addition, the following may be helpful:

Anderson, J.E., (1984) *Public Policy Making: An Introduction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Boston: Houghton. (an extract is available at <http://baf.fyi/anderson>)

Dunn N.W., (2012). *Public Policy Analysis*, 4th Ed, Pearson USA. (text may be accessed at <http://baf.fyi/dunn>)

Knill C. & Tosun J., (2012) *Public Policy, A New Introduction*, UK: Palgrave Macmillan



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