

# WHAT IS PUBLIC POLICY?

Introduction to Climate Adaptation for Professionals

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**Module 1: Foundations of Climate Change Policy**

# OUTLINE

1. What is policy?
2. What is public policy?
3. How does public policy happen?
4. Challenges of environmental policy design, production and/or implementation

# WHAT IS POLICY?

“a definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions”

(Merriam-Webster, 2020)

## WHAT IS PUBLIC POLICY? (1/2)

- **Public policy** is: a course of action or inaction chosen by public authorities to address a given problem or interrelated set of problems" (Pal, 2010, p. 2)
- In other words, public policy is how a government's vision for action on a problem (or problems) gets expressed. Governments are implementing agencies, so they are generally responsible for implementing solutions to public policy problems; although more co-management, and collaborative approaches also now happen.

For example, the Canadian Federal Government's *Pan-Canadian Framework on Climate Change and Clean Energy (2016)* is a high level public policy framework, implemented to address the public policy problem of climate change.

## WHAT IS POLICY (PUBLIC POLICY?) 2/2

- Public policy tools and instruments are the **HOW**, in terms of implementing public policy. These can include anything from legislation, to regulation to taxation, to other more creative ideas, like for example supporting new technology, or setting up data collection systems, etc.
- **Policies are generally broken out into two types:**
  - substantive (tools that cause change directly, eg: licensing), and
  - procedural (tools that ensure support and are more indirect, eg: policies about consultation)
- Policies can be enforceable (eg: legislation), or voluntary (eg: official community plans - OCP's)

# HOW DOES PUBLIC POLICY HAPPEN?

- Development of both new policy and/or new policy tools can begin through many means, for example:
  - a new problem is identified and needs a policy solution
  - a policy gap in the current system is identified and needs to be filled
  - a substantive policy needs to be supported with a new (maybe better) procedural policy
  - a newly elected government has a new policy vision/agenda it wants to shape

## CHALLENGES OF POLICY DESIGN, DEVELOPMENT, OR IMPLEMENTATION

There are many challenges with policy choice, design and implementation. Whether created policy by government or by others, there are a number of things to be addressed, iteratively at all stages, for example:

- **collective action problems:** is this a problem where there may be differences in in between individual and group goals?
- **wicked problems:** is this a problem that lacks clarity in both outcomes and actions?
- **public interest:** Is this policy solution in the public interest?
- **effectiveness:** will this be the right policy to deal with this problem?
- **coherence:** how will this policy integrate across with other policies?
- **compliance:** will people respond to this policy?

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