

# Community Choices

Public Policy Education Program

## Module One

Public Policy Education Model

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# Module One Instructor's Guide

## The Public Policy Education Model


### Objectives

After completing this module, participants will be able to do the following:

- ◆ Determine the meaning of public policy education;
- ◆ Know the criteria for assessing which issues can be characterized as public policy issues; and
- ◆ Understand and use the public policy education model for addressing issues of local importance.

### Procedures And Timeline

- ◆ This brief discussion provides an ideal setting for informing your audience of what is meant by public policy education. In general, such education reflects an effort to address problems/issues that are controversial and that require some kind of public policy intervention to resolve. Discuss how values and conflicts are a natural part of public policy decisions. You might want to ask participants to share examples of how people's values affect how they look at a public policy issue, for example, economic development, environmental preservation and educational funding.
- ◆ Briefly present the eight steps involved in the public policy education framework. The key aspects of this model are threefold
  - \* the identification of important issues in the community,
  - \* an exploration of the policy alternatives that might be developed to address these issues, and
  - \* the careful consideration of the consequences that could result if specific alternatives were put in motion.
- ◆ For the rest of the program, split your participants into small groups (depending on the number of participants). Normally, groups of five to eight people are sufficient. Give them the activity sheet



titled *Exploring Public Policy Issues*, which is designed to give each group an opportunity to apply the Public Policy Education Model to an issue of their choice. Select a member of each group to summarize the group's work and present it to all participants at the last phase of the workshop. Allow about 45 to 60 minutes to complete this entire activity. After the small group presentations are finished, begin an open discussion with participants as a means of generating additional thoughts about the group presentations or the entire session.

## Materials

- ◆ Microsoft PowerPoint
- ◆ Copies of *The Public Policy Module: A Framework for Addressing Local Issues* and the *Exploring Public Policy Issues* activity sheets to distribute to each participant; and
- ◆ Newsprint pads or overhead transparencies and markers for the small group presentations.

## Going Further— Things For Participants To Do

- ◆ Have each participant interview three to five local people who are knowledgeable about issues in the community. The participants should have them identify some of the important policy issues in the community. Have participants report and discuss with other participants the importance of their findings at the next meeting.
- ◆ Ask participants to read the local newspaper for one week and have them identify public policy issues discussed in the newspaper. If possible, have them identify the positions presented for dealing with these issues. Have participants share their reports with the other participants at the next meeting.

# The Public Policy Education Model: A Framework for Addressing Local Issue

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## Introduction

A community is often defined as the interaction of people or groups of people who live within some geographic area that provides for most of their daily needs and who share certain values and meanings about their common life situation. Further, these individuals work together to address local problems, concerns, and opportunities.

Most communities, regardless of size, find themselves confronted with a host of issues that require tough choices. How can communities begin to understand the connection between human capital resources and local economic development? Should priority attention be given to the community residents' education and job training? Should priority be given to the community's ability to attract new industries and promote economic development? Or do both need to be examined simultaneously? Indeed, as difficult as this question may seem, even more complicated is the process of securing public agreement on these priorities? Why? Because in nearly all communities, the needs of local residents are diverse. These multiple needs make arriving at community consensus on local priorities a difficult task at best. Let's face it—people and groups have different interests, interests that make competition and conflict an ever-present part of decision-making activities at the local level.

Our intent in this brief document is to outline a framework that offers local people a way to take stock of the important policy issues that can affect the relationship between human capital investment and economic development in their community. Furthermore, it presents a mechanism for outlining a set of agreed upon strategies to address these issues. An important aspect of this process is to ensure that these decisions are guided by facts that allow community residents to arrive at more informed decisions on policy choices. County and state Extension faculty who are part of the *Community Choices* public policy education program in their community serve as key resources for securing such facts.

“Public policy helps citizens participate in the democratic process for those policy matters about which they care deeply.”



The foundation for the Community Choices public policy education model is threefold:

- ◆ Give citizens an increased understanding of important policy issues facing their community;
- ◆ Stimulate citizens' interest and involvement in helping shape local policy decisions; and
- ◆ Bring about an enhanced capacity for the community to arrive at key policy decisions through an active involvement of people who represent the variety of interests in the community.

“Values affect how people think of problems and the policy strategies they feel would best solve these concerns.”

### Key Terms

To make sure that we have a common understanding of public policy education, here are a few definitions to help clarify what some of the key words mean:

- ◆ **Policy**—An agreed upon course of action, guiding principle, or procedure considered to be expedient, prudent, or advantageous.
- ◆ **Public Policy**—A designated course of action adopted by a governmental entity and followed by the public to resolve an issue of public concern [3,9].
- ◆ **Education**—The process of imparting information and technical assistance to individuals, groups, and communities to enhance their capacity to address and resolve problems of local importance.
- ◆ **Public Policy Education**—An educational program provided by many state land-grant institutions (especially the Cooperative Extension

As Flinchbaugh [5] notes, public policy issues can be characterized as follows:

- ◆ They involve problems that require a group decision;
- ◆ Solutions to the problems are based on value judgements;
- ◆ The issues are of broad interest and concern;
- ◆ They deal with controversial matters; and
- ◆ The issues tend to be recognized by decision-makers as a problem.

Service system). This program applies the university's knowledge to public issues—knowledge that enables citizens to make more informed policy choices.

A key word that must be highlighted is the “public” dimension of public policy education. Our concern is not with decisions that are private or personal in nature, but rather with those that necessitate some kind of public intervention [9].

An issue that meets these criteria is generally considered to be a matter worthy of public attention and debate.

## Values and Conflicts

Of the five characteristics of public policy issues listed above, two deserve additional comment—values and conflicts. Both are part and parcel of any public policy issue, so it's critical for people to be prepared to effectively deal with them. According to Barrows [1], public policy involves questions and decisions over which there are conflicts and disagreements. In fact, if controversy does not exist, there is no public policy issue.

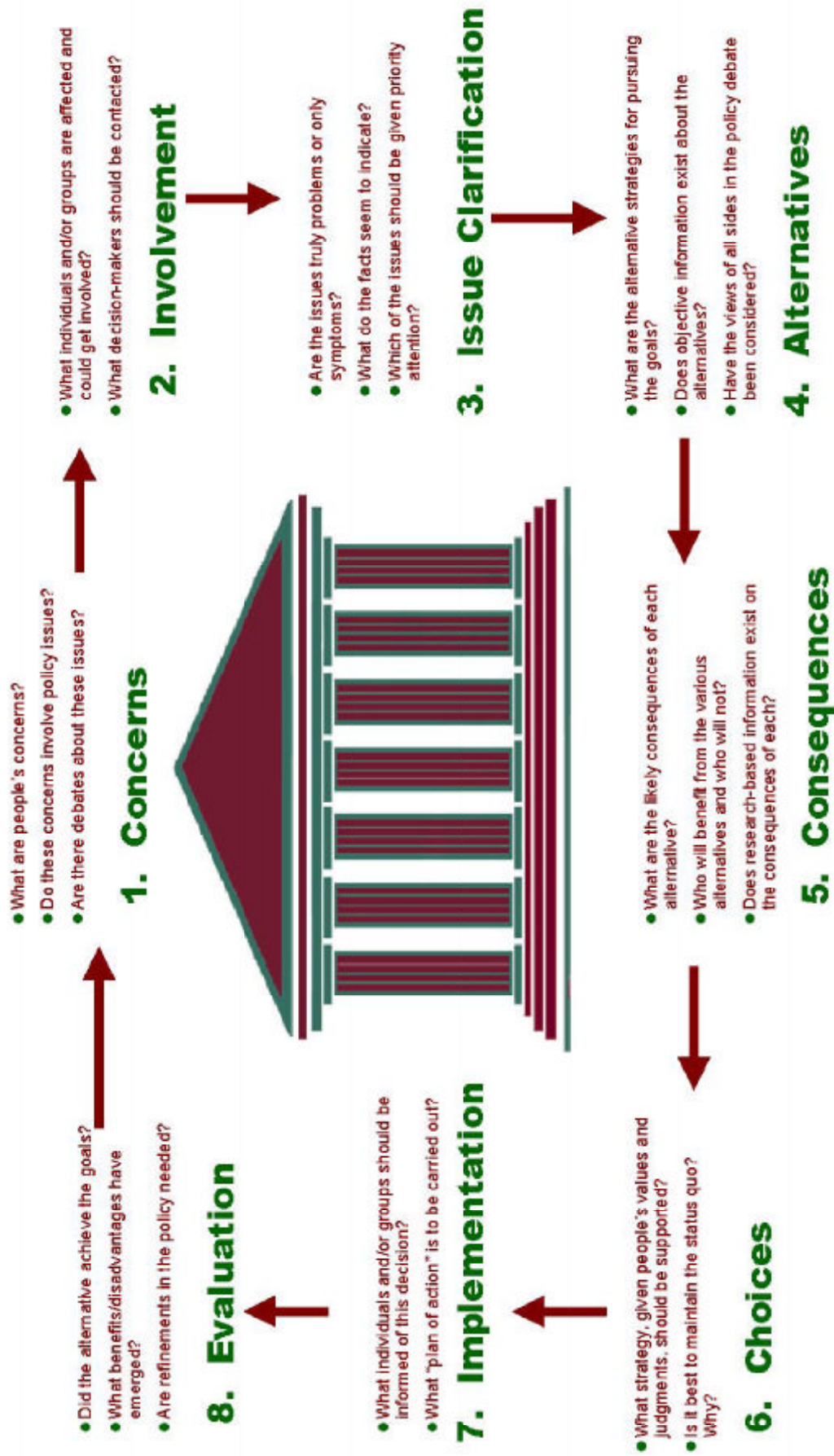
Underlying many policy debates are values. Values are people's views of what should be or what the desirable situation ought to be. They are a person's perception of what is “good” and “bad” [4]. Values affect how people think of problems and the policy strategies they feel would best solve these concerns. Because people discuss public policy issues with different sets of values, conflicts naturally arise. The goal is to compromise, to reach policy decisions that all interested parties can endorse [8].

A personal experience from a few years ago serves as a vivid reminder of how we operate with different value systems. I was asked to present a program about population changes that took place in the county over the last 10 years to a group of local leaders in a small, rural county. While studying the county population data, I was struck by the limited growth in the county's population during the decade—a stark contrast to the trends uncovered in most other counties in the state. Without much thought, I stated during my presentation that the county underwent *only* a small proportional growth in its population over the 10-year period. Soon after I made this point, an elder gentleman in the audience raised his voice in protest. He pointed out that, to many people in the county, no growth was just fine because it meant very few outsiders would be moving into their area. That episode helped remind me that not all people see issues in quite the same light. Indeed, people's values do differ, which is something that must be recognized when dealing with public policy issues.

As you can see, although informed decisions should be guided by facts, values also come into play in all policy decisions.

“The Public Policy Education Model is designed to walk you through a series of logical steps to arrive at solutions that hold promise in helping solve the policy issues under discussion.”

**Figure 1. The Public Policy Education Model**



Source: House [11] and Hahn [6].

Program participants should remember and be continuously aware of the tension between “facts” and “values” in their community and realize the importance of compromise in generating workable solutions to existing problems.

## The Public Policy Education Model

As you study local human capital and economic development concerns, and seek to find ways to solve these problems, it is helpful to have a framework to guide your activities. The *Public Policy Education Model* presented in Figure 1 is designed to walk you through a series of logical steps to arrive at solutions that hold promise in helping solve the policy issues under discussion. As the model shows, the initial phase of the public policy education program involves exploring *concerns*. The intent is to discover what problems and issues are on people’s minds. But remember, these issues must have policy dimensions to them—differences and conflicts about how to deal with these problems.

After you generate a list of issues, begin to think about the group of people and organizations in the community who also see these issues as problems. You should identify people and groups who may be willing to assist in getting these issues resolved (see Module Two). This is the *involvement* phase of public policy education. It might be useful to touch base, at least informally, with decision-makers who could help get the problem addressed.

Next, *clarify the issues* that have been identified so as to get to the causes of the problems outlined. Is the issue truly a problem, or only a symptom of a more deeply-rooted problem? Getting sound, research-based information/facts on these issues can be beneficial. After careful study of the information, a decision has to be made about which issues should be given priority. When that process has been completed, you begin the difficult task of exploring *alternatives* for solving the problem. This involves specifying what goal is being sought; that is, what should the situation be with respect to this issue? What goal are we hoping to attain? With a goal in mind, you are in a better position to explore alternative strategies that are better aligned with the goals being pursued. Also, determine whether the views of all sides in the policy debate have been considered. Remember, determining alternatives will involve value judgments, so be prepared for disagreements.

Assessing the *consequences* of each alternative under discussion is critical. Taking the time to understand the potential consequences of each strategy can help you make sound choices from the alternatives. Know that in any policy decision, some people benefit and some do not. It is important to try to think as much as possible about these impacts before deciding on a strategy. One useful source may be research reports that have investigated outcomes from some of the policy options being considered.

“Finding answers to the tough issues facing communities requires careful thought, study, and debate among all affected parties.”





“Policy decisions represent compromises reached among individuals and groups who hold different views on the issues being addressed.”

Armed with a list of alternatives and a view of the likely consequences of these strategies, you must make a *choice* from the alternatives. Once again, value judgments enter into the picture and influence the choice. Remember that no solution is likely to be perfect. Why not? Simply because policy decisions represent compromises reached among individuals and groups who hold different views on the issue being addressed [8]. Keep in mind that doing nothing about the issue—that is, preserving the “status quo”—is a choice that some may want to embrace.

The *implementation* step of the *Public Policy Education Model* involves putting the selected policy solution into action. This involves touching base with individuals and groups who are likely to be affected by the policy decisions. Furthermore, a timetable for implementing the policy choices (and the resources needed to do so) should be outlined and put into effect at this stage.

An important step in the model is *evaluation*. This step is designed to assess how well the policy solution achieved its intended goals. Did those people for whom a policy was intended accrue any measurable benefit? Did any unanticipated problems emerge? Are refinements needed to make the policy more effective? These are some of the questions that deserve serious treatment. Evaluation can also be used to assess what went right or wrong during each step of the public policy education process.

## Concluding Remarks

Today’s communities are confronted with a host of problems. While solutions to some of these problems may be clear-cut, most are not. Finding answers to the tough issues facing communities requires careful thought, study, and debate among all affected parties. The *Public Policy Education Model* presented in this document offers a useful framework for identifying local issues that require policy solutions—solutions that are arrived at through consensus among parties with different interests. The benefit of this model is that it works to ensure that alternatives for addressing the policy issues are explored fully and that the potential consequences of these strategies are considered. In the final analysis, the *Public Policy Education Model* serves as an important tool to help communities reach public policy decisions that enjoy the support of local residents—support that is realized as a result of the democratic process employed in arriving at workable solutions.

## References

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“Know that in any policy decision, some people benefit and some do not.”

# Module One Instructor's Guide

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## Small Group Activities



## Activity #1


### Exploring Public Policy Issues

This activity lets you apply the *Public Policy Education Model* to a real-life issue in a community. While many issues will be proposed, it is recommended that your group select one issue to study in greater detail.

1. Begin by listing the issues that you, as an individual, feel are important public policy concerns facing your community. Remember, these must be issues over which there are conflicts and disagreements.
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. \_\_\_\_\_
  - h. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Each member of the group should share his/her list with the group. It would be a good idea to have someone from the group write all the proposed issues on a newsprint pad or blackboard. When everyone has shared his/her list, open the floor for discussion, elaboration, and debate. Your group should identify one issue to investigate further during the remainder of this activity. Write this issue on the top of the worksheet that is attached to this activity.
3. Try to determine what groups or individuals would think your issue is important. List them on the worksheet.
4. Work as a group to clarify the issue; consider whether the issue you have identified is really the problem or only a symptom of a deeper concern. If you find it is only a symptom, use the new information you have uncovered to restate your issue. What is the root problem as you see it? Write this on the worksheet.
5. With your issue clearly identified, the next critical step is to agree on your goal(s). What does your group hope to achieve? For example, if the issue you are dealing with is the lack of summer employment opportunities for local teenagers, a goal you might aspire toward is creating 100 summer jobs for teens in that community. Having a goal identified is it gives you something concrete to work toward.

As a group, come to some consensus on what your goal(s) will be for the issue you are dealing with. Write it (them) on the worksheet.

6. Individually, list some possible alternatives for dealing with your group's issue in the space provided below. Remember, these alternatives should be designed to help you achieve the goal(s) you outlined in No. 5 above.
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_
  - c. \_\_\_\_\_
  - d. \_\_\_\_\_
  - e. \_\_\_\_\_
  - f. \_\_\_\_\_
  - g. \_\_\_\_\_
  - h. \_\_\_\_\_



Each person should share his/her list of alternatives with the group. Have someone write these items on a newsprint pad or blackboard. Have group members clarify any alternatives they might have suggested or ask others to discuss in more detail alternatives they may have proposed to the group.

7. As a group, choose three to five alternatives that you think are likely to be effective and achievable. Write these alternatives on the accompanying worksheet.
8. For each alternative listed, assess what its potential consequences might be. What is likely to happen if this alternative is carried out? Will certain people benefit? Will some people be affected negatively as a result of this alternative? As a group, list these possible consequences on the worksheet.
9. If time permits, be prepared to provide a brief report of your activities to the entire group of people involved in this session.

## Activity #1 Worksheet

### 1. Issue

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### 2. Potential Groups or Individuals to Be Involved/Interested

- |          |          |
|----------|----------|
| a. _____ | e. _____ |
| b. _____ | f. _____ |
| c. _____ | g. _____ |
| d. _____ | h. _____ |

### 3. Restate Issue (If Needed)

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### 4. Your Group's Goal (s)

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### 5. Alternatives Selected

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_



## 6. Consequences of Each Alternative

### **ALTERNATIVE 1**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_

### **ALTERNATIVE 2**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_

### **ALTERNATIVE 3**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_

### **ALTERNATIVE 4**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_

### **ALTERNATIVE 5**

- a. \_\_\_\_\_
- b. \_\_\_\_\_
- c. \_\_\_\_\_
- d. \_\_\_\_\_