

Workshop 02

Evidence, Alternatives, Criteria

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Rony Rodrigo Maximiliano Rodriguez-Ramirez

rrodriguezramirez@g.harvard.edu

<https://calendly.com/rrmaximiliano/30min>

Harvard University

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Introduction

Welcome to the Policy Analysis Workshop!

Today, we will focus on **Steps 2, 3, and 4** from Bardach and Patashnik's *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis* (2020):

2. Assemble Some Evidence
3. Construct the Alternatives
4. Select the Criteria

Agenda

Step 2: Assemble Some Evidence

- Importance of Evidence
- Purposes of Assembling Evidence
- Efficient Data Collection
- Building Credibility and Consensus

Agenda

Step 3: Construct the Alternatives

- Defining Alternatives
- Generating and Refining Alternatives
- Creative Techniques

Agenda

Step 4: Select the Criteria

- Understanding Criteria
- Types of Criteria
- Selecting and Defining Criteria
- Weighting Criteria

Step 2: Assemble Some Evidence

Importance of Evidence

- **Core Activities in Policy Analysis:**
 - **Thinking:** Conceptualizing and strategizing.
 - **Hustling Data:** Gathering meaningful information.
- **Time Constraints:** Real-world policy analysis often faces tight deadlines.

“Evidence is information that affects the existing beliefs of important people... about significant features of the problem.”

— Bardach & Patashnik, 2020, p. 36

Purposes of Assembling Evidence

1. Assess the Problem:

- Understand the nature and extent of the education issue.

2. Understand the Policy Context:

- Insights into factors like funding, teacher qualifications, demographic changes.

3. Evaluate Existing Policies:

- Examine what has worked in other education systems or regions.

Example: Improving Student Performance

- **Problem:** Declining standardized test scores in public schools.
- **Evidence Needed:**
 - Current performance metrics.
 - Teacher-student ratios.
 - Funding levels.
 - Socioeconomic factors affecting students.

Efficient Data Collection

Strategies

- **Focus on Relevance:** Continuously evaluate the necessity of the data.
- **Avoid Irrelevant Data:** Prevent collecting information that doesn't inform policy decisions.
- **Value vs. Cost:** Balance the effort and resources against the potential impact of the evidence.

Tips for Data Collection

- **Start Early:** Initiate data collection promptly to accommodate stakeholders' schedules.
- **Review Available Literature:** Utilize online databases and academic journals.
- **Use Analogies and Best Practices:** Learn from successful education policies in other regions.

Group Exercise 1: 10 minutes

Topic: Assembling Evidence for Education Policy

Task:

- **Scenario:** Addressing X or Y problem (in your groups).
- **In Groups:**
 1. Identify key pieces of evidence needed (rank the evidence).
 2. Discuss sources for this evidence.
 3. Outline strategies to collect this data efficiently.

Share Your Findings: Assign a group speaker. Each group will present a 1 min summary.

Step 3: Construct the Alternatives

Defining Alternatives

- **Alternatives:** Different policy options or strategies to solve the education issue.

“Policy alternatives can range from single actions to combinations of strategies.”

— Bardach & Patashnik, 2020, p. 42

Comprehensive vs. Focused Alternatives

- **Start Comprehensive:**
 - Generate a wide range of potential solutions.
- **Narrow Down:**
 - Eliminate less viable options to focus on the most promising ones.

Example: Reducing Achievement Gaps

Possible Alternatives:

1. Increase Funding for Underperforming Schools:

- Allocate more resources to schools with low performance metrics.

2. Implement Targeted Teacher Training Programs:

- Enhance teacher skills in diverse and underserved classrooms.

3. Introduce After-School Tutoring Programs:

- Provide additional academic support for struggling students.

Sources for Generating Alternatives

1. Proposals from Political Actors:

- Review existing policy suggestions from education boards and policymakers.

2. Generic Strategies:

- Refer to “Things Governments Do” checklist for innovative ideas.

3. Unconventional Solutions:

- Encourage out-of-the-box thinking, such as technology integration or community partnerships.

Creative Techniques

- **“If Cost Were No Object”:**
 - Imagine ideal solutions without budget constraints.
- **Analogous Contexts:**
 - Apply successful strategies from other sectors or countries.
- **Challenge Assumptions:**
 - Regularly ask “why not” to explore new possibilities.

Group Exercise 2: 15 minutes

Topic: Constructing Alternatives for Education Policy

Task:

- **Scenario:** Groups of 5s, split into 2, and then merge with the other group. Groups of 3s will be merged and create one group. Total 3 groups.
- **In Groups:**
 1. Brainstorm at least two alternative policies (2-5 minutes).
 2. Ensure each alternative is distinct and actionable.
 3. Present your alternatives briefly and discuss feasibility (5 minutes).

Share Your Findings: In your new groups, assign a group speaker. Share with the session how you weight the alternatives and whether you think you currently have enough evidence for it.

Step 4: Select the Criteria

Understanding Criteria

- **Criteria:** Standards used to evaluate the potential outcomes of each alternative.
- **Purpose:** Bridge analytic facts and evaluative judgments.

“Criteria are evaluative standards used to judge the goodness of the projected policy outcomes.”

— Bardach & Patashnik, 2020, p. 53

Types of Criteria

1. Evaluative Criteria:

- Standards to assess desirability (e.g., efficiency, equity).

2. Practical Criteria:

- Considerations related to implementation (e.g., legality, political acceptability).

Common Evaluative Criteria

- **Efficiency:** Maximizing resources to achieve goals.
- **Effectiveness:** Degree to which objectives are met.
- **Equity:** Fairness in distribution of benefits and burdens.
- **Political Acceptability:** Support from stakeholders and policymakers.

Example: Criteria for Reducing Achievement Gaps

1. Primary Criterion:

- **Effectiveness:** Significant reduction in achievement gaps.

2. Secondary Criteria:

- **Cost-Effectiveness:** Optimal use of budget resources.
- **Equity:** Fair distribution of resources among all student demographics.
- **Political Feasibility:** Support from key stakeholders.

Selecting and Defining Criteria

Steps to Define Criteria

- 1. **Primary Criterion:** Directly addresses the core problem.
- 2. **Secondary Criteria:** Additional factors influencing desirability.

Define Metrics

Criterion	Metric
Efficiency	Cost per student improvement
Effectiveness	Percentage decrease in achievement gaps
Equity	Distribution of resources across demographics
Political Acceptability	Level of stakeholder support

Avoiding Common Mistakes

- **Do Not Confuse Alternatives with Criteria:**

→ Alternatives are actions; criteria are standards for evaluation.

“Alternatives are courses of action, whereas criteria are mental standards for evaluating the results of action.”

— Bardach & Patashnik, 2020, p. 69

Weighting Criteria

- **Relative Importance:** Assign weights based on policy goals.
- **Balancing Values:** Prioritize criteria based on overarching values.

Approaches to Weighting

1. **Political Process:**

- Let existing frameworks determine weights.

2. **Analyst Imposition:**

- Adjust weights to reflect fairness and underrepresented interests.

Practical Application

- **Group Separately:**
 - Positive (benefit) criteria vs. Negative (cost) criteria.
- **Specify Metrics:**
 - Ensure clarity and measurability.
- **Focus on Relevance:**
 - Criteria should align with policy objectives.

Group Exercise 3: 15 minutes

Topic: Selecting Evaluation Criteria

Task: - Scenario: Evaluating alternatives to improve digital literacy in schools. -

In Groups: 1. Identify and list potential criteria. 2. Define clear metrics for each criterion. 3. Assign relative weights to each criterion.

Share Your Findings: Each group presents their criteria and metrics.

Conclusion

- **Assembling Evidence:**
 - Critical for understanding and framing the problem.
- **Constructing Alternatives:**
 - Generates viable policy options.
- **Selecting Criteria:**
 - Ensures objective and value-driven evaluations.