

1 April 2022

Policy cycle

A 'GOOD PROCESS' TEST FOR MAKING PUBLIC POLICY

What is the 'policy cycle'?

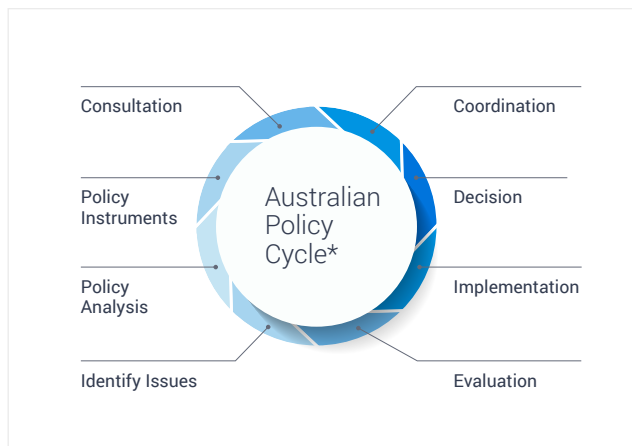
Good public policy solves problems. There are many problem solving models that

- break the process into logical steps, and
- turn it into a cycle because issues often need repeated attention.

The policy cycle does the same thing for the policy process.

There is, in fact, an *Australian Policy Cycle* (APC). Developed in the 1990s and used ever since, the APC is outlined in *The Australian Policy Handbook*

- it can be especially helpful for those new to policy.



*Althaus, Bridgman and Davis, *The Australian Policy Handbook*, 2020.

The APC outlines how policy *should* be made

- through a logical and systematic process
- it does not claim to describe how policy is made.

The APC has 8 stages. These are not necessarily followed sequentially – some may even be skipped or repeated

- if a stage is not done in sequence, then it is important to identify that and to understand *why*.

What's a practical example of the policy cycle in action?

The whole Budget process is in effect a policy cycle, with overlapping processes as each 'line' department has its own cycle to contribute new policy proposals and savings measures. Because of the tight timeframes, stages may be conducted together (eg issue identification and policy analysis) or truncated – full consultation is often not possible before the Budget's release due to cabinet-in-confidence requirements.

How can the policy cycle be employed by public servants?

- By structuring policy projects so that they are more organised and logical
- By communicating with stakeholders and decision-makers what processes are being used and why
- By ensuring that time and space is created for information, analysis and evaluation to be used to better inform decisions
- By using the cycle in conjunction with other models and frameworks that highlight (for example) the role of policy opportunity (the 'policy window' [<link>](#)) and/or incremental change [<link>](#)
- As a framework for assessing past policy projects – where they worked and where they didn't.

References

Althaus, Bridgman and Davis. 2020. *The Australian Policy Handbook: A practical guide to the policy making process*. 6th edn. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.

Ayres, 2021, 'Using the policy cycle: Practice into theory and back again'. Ch 8 in Mercer, et al. (eds.), *Learning Policy, Doing Policy: Interactions Between Public Policy Theory, Practice and Teaching*. Canberra: ANU Press.

CONTENT PROVIDED AND CREATED BY AUTHORS:

Dr Trish Mercer, Visiting Fellow, Australia and New Zealand School of Government, Canberra Office.

Dr Russell Ayres, Adjunct Associate Professor, University of Canberra.

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