

# Public Problems and Policy Alternatives

# Outline

- Problem analysis
- Finding information
- Constructing alternatives
- Thinking creatively about policy

# Problem Analysis

- Must start with a description of the problem
- Sometimes these are obvious; sometimes not
- Nature of the problem
- Definitions and measures of problems
  - clear definitions allow people to communicate with one another
  - measures are important for clarification (e.g., how many people are living in poverty)
  - often have different ways to measure problems

# Problem Analysis (cont'd)

- Politics of problem definition
  - based on perspectives
- What will change in the future?
  - projections and forecasting
- Think about causes
  - must ask why the problem came about
  - answers may help determine how to resolve problem
  - often problems have multiple causes; conflict over which one to address
- Set goals and objectives
- Determine what can be done

# Find Information

- Variety of sources available
- Internet
  - search tools
- Government sites
- Popular newspapers and magazines (overview)
- Online sources
  - LexisNexis, American Statistical Abstract
- Indexing and abstracting services
- Important to interpret the information cautiously

# Constructing Alternatives

- Courses of action
- What can government do?
  - regulate
    - » license, inspect, enforce standards
  - subsidize
    - » loans, direct payments, price supports
  - tax and spend
  - tax an activity to encourage or discourage
  - educate
    - » provide information through formal programs

# Constructing Alternatives (cont'd)

- What can government do? (cont'd)
  - ration
    - » limit access to scarce resources
  - contract out
    - » contract government services to private sector
  - market incentives
    - » special category of tax or fees that creates incentives to change
  - privatize
    - » transfer services to private sector

# Constructing Alternatives (cont'd)

- What can government can do? (cont'd)
  - charge fees for select services
  - create public trusts
    - » hold public property in trust for citizen use
  - conduct research
  - modify existing policies



# Constructing Alternatives (cont'd)

- Need to consider policy design
  - role of government agents and the target population
- Policy tools
  - how to get individuals to do something they would not ordinarily do or modify behavior

# Constructing Alternatives (cont'd)

- Different types of tools
  - authority tools
    - » people behave because an authority asks them to
  - inducements/sanctions
    - » people behave because inducement benefits them
  - capacity building tools
    - » provide training or education to empower people
  - hortatory tools
    - » invoke images to get people to behave a certain way
  - learning tools
    - » people are encouraged to participate and learn

# Thinking Creatively and Generating Ideas

- No action
  - begin w/status quo as a baseline
  - keeping present policies may be viable option
- Quick surveys
  - talking w/people within policy network to see what ideas they have
- Literature review
  - examination of material to see what has been proposed

# Thinking Creatively and Generating Ideas (cont'd)

- Real world situations
  - examine what has worked in similar situations
  - state governments provide opportunities
- Parallel situations/analogies
  - look at other policy areas to see if ideas can be adapted
- Brainstorming
- Comparison to ideal
  - envisioning “ideal” to generate ideas