

# IMPLEMENTATION BARRIERS

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*The Capacity Development Resource Guides highlight the key technical areas of expertise needed to effectively influence health policy design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation. Each guide identifies the specific skills, knowledge, and capacities that individuals and organizations should possess in the area. The standardized indicators listed for each competency and capability map to the accompanying Capacity Indicators Catalog, which helps to generate a tailored tool for assessing and scoring an organization's capacity level. Each guide also includes a list of useful resources for designing and delivering capacity development assistance.*

## ADDRESSING BARRIERS TO POLICY IMPLEMENTATION

### ■ DEFINITION

Developing a policy is just the first step; for policies to contribute to the successful delivery of health services, they must be effectively implemented. Challenges to implementation are referred to as “implementation barriers.” They can be rooted in a variety of causes, including opposition from key stakeholders, inadequate human or financial resources, lack of clarity on operational guidelines or roles and responsibilities for implementation, conflicts with other existing policies, lack of coordination and collaboration between parties responsible for implementation, or lack of motivation or political will.

### ■ RELEVANCE TO POLICY

Policy implementation refers to the mechanisms, resources, and relationships that link health policies to program action. It includes both technical and relational aspects—not only specifying the institutions responsible for implementation but also ensuring that the institutions have the capacity for implementation and that the relations among institutions are conducive for collaboration (Hardee et al., 2012). Understanding the nature of policy implementation is important because international experience shows that policies, once adopted, are not always implemented as envisioned and do not necessarily achieve intended results (Bhuyan et al., 2010).

To address implementation barriers, stakeholders must assess the root cause of the challenge and develop targeted strategies to address each barrier in collaboration with other interested and empowered parties. Throughout the policy development, implementation, and monitoring processes, barriers should

be continually assessed and addressed. Implementation is an ongoing process of decision making by key actors who work in complex policy and institutional contexts and face pressures from interested as well as opposing parties. As such, the motivation, flow of information, and balance of power and resources among stakeholders influences policy implementation processes. Ultimately, overcoming policy implementation barriers will require commitment and perseverance by a range of stakeholders, possibly over a prolonged period (Bhuyan et al., 2010).

## ■ KEY CAPABILITIES

The ability to address policy implementation barriers is a key capability for government, policymakers, and civil society. Addressing policy barriers requires individual and institutional skills and competencies to understand the policy environment governing the health system, the configuration of the health system in the context of the government structure, and the needs of beneficiaries/clients and implementers. It requires the ability to critically assess the true root of policy implementation barriers—whether it is sociological, political, structural, institutional, or cultural—and to craft targeted solutions to address them. Finally, it requires engendering stakeholder buy-in and commitment to take action, determining resources required for the proposed solution, implementing a solution to remove the barrier, and enacting accountability mechanisms to ensure that barriers have been addressed (Bhuyan et al., 2010; Cross et al., 2001).

## ■ PERFORMANCE IDEAL

**High capacity for addressing policy implementation barriers includes being able to**

- Gather and synthesize different types of information from various sources
- Elicit feedback from implementers, partners, and beneficiaries to identify barriers to successful policy implementation and explore root causes
- Identify solutions to challenges and advocate for corrective action
- Maintain systems to facilitate regular reviews of implementation experiences, share best practices across groups, and integrate lessons learned into subsequent policies and action plans

At the highest level of performance, individuals and organizations consider—throughout the policy process—the potential roadblocks and steps to overcome them. Attention to barriers starts with policy design and strategic action planning and continues during policy implementation—and thus policy monitoring—to track outcomes, identify challenges, and be alert to unintended consequences or inequities. In a high-functioning system, the gap between policy and practice narrows and barriers to realizing results are identified and removed.

**In the ideal, the following would exist:**

- Policies translated into effective operational rules and guidelines
- Efficient allocation and coordination of human and financial resources to achieve policy goals
- Regular systems to review policy and program decisions (e.g., mid- and end-term reviews, multisectoral forums), with broad-based participation

## INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCIES

### KNOWLEDGE OF

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Local and national policy environment, laws, and the configuration of the health system within government structures	IB 1
Specific aspects of the policy to be implemented, including policy goals, strategies and action plans, roles of different institutions and stakeholders, and available resources	IB2

### SKILLS TO BE ABLE TO

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Collect, analyze, and present quantitative and qualitative data to identify barriers and develop evidence-based solutions	IB3
Engage diverse stakeholders in constructive policy dialogue to identify and address barriers at the appropriate level (national, district, facility, etc.)	IB4
Understand the socio/political/structural/institutional/cultural root of policy implementation barriers and craft targeted solutions to address them	IB7
Conduct cost analysis that aligns budget allocations with the actual resources required to implement policies	IB6
Draft operational policy guidance and rules to implement change	IB8
Communicate evidence-based recommendations and influence decisionmakers to take corrective action	IB5
Monitor and document the policy implementation process and impact of adopted solutions	IB9

### ATTITUDES/VALUES/ATTRIBUTES

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Elicits stakeholder buy-in and commitment to ongoing engagement	IB10
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## ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITIES

### TECHNICAL ABILITY TO

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Develop implementation plans that include clearly defined policy goals, strategies, action plans, monitoring mechanisms, and operational guidelines	IB11
Integrate best practices and successful approaches to overcoming barriers into organizational and decision-making processes	IB12

**RELATIONAL ABILITY TO**


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Leverage multisectoral partnerships and resources to collectively address complex barriers at the appropriate level and facilitate implementation (national, district, facility, etc.)	IB13
Provide training, technical assistance, and mentoring to other organizations on addressing implementation barriers	IB21

**ORGANIZATIONAL OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT TO SUPPORT**


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A knowledge management system to share best practices in policy implementation and lessons learned internally and externally	IB15
Regular interactions among staff responsible for program implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and management	IB16
Allocation of sufficient resources (time, money, staff) for policy implementation and regular reviews and monitoring of the implementation process	IB17
Allocation of resources required to take corrective action to alleviate identified barriers and/or communicate recommended action for other organizations	IB18
Mechanisms to ensure compliance with policy directives and understand incentives for compliance as well as sanctions for non-compliance	IB19
Systems to routinely collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data from various sources (e.g., periodic assessments, activity appraisals, client satisfaction surveys) and stakeholders (beneficiaries, implementers, and policymakers)	IB20
Roll out of new policy directives throughout the organization along with adequate training, supervision, resources, and support for their implementation	IB14

## ■ ILLUSTRATIVE CAPACITY- STRENGTHENING ACTIVITIES

- Multi-directional feedback loops involving beneficiaries, implementers, and policymakers
- Mechanisms to ensure follow-up and compliance with policy directives (e.g., national monitoring board, national policy unit, incentives for compliance, sanctions for non-compliance)
- Systemic monitoring and evaluation of the impacts of policy formulation and implementation
- Provide technical assistance on systems and process analysis for anticipating and mitigating against potential roadblocks during the policy formulation and action planning processes
- Support costing exercises that encourage aligning budget allocations with the actual resources required to implement policies and programs
- Train local decisionmakers (e.g., district health officials) on operational policy issues and tools and techniques to analyze barriers
- Provide technical assistance to develop monitoring and evaluation plans that track both outcome and process indicators, including qualitative and contextual information
- Assist a multisectoral team of stakeholders to adapt and apply a proven policy monitoring tool or checklist
- Assist with the establishment of feedback mechanisms to gather information from as well as report back to implementers and beneficiaries
- Incorporate systems to document and share programmatic lessons learned into organizational capacity development plans
- Assist government and other stakeholders to carry out annual or mid-term reviews and integrate findings into subsequent action plans

## ■ RESOURCES

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This resource guide is part of an Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) suite of tools. The USAID-funded Health Policy Project developed the suite to help organizations assess and strengthen their capacity to contribute to improved health systems and health outcomes. The tools include an overview of the OCA approach, a facilitator guide, a series of capacity development resource guides, and a Capacity Indicators Catalog. The suite is available at [www.healthpolicyproject.com](http://www.healthpolicyproject.com).

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