

POLICY DIALOGUE

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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.

ENGAGING IN POLICY DIALOGUE TO REACH CONSENSUS AND CREATE MORE RESPONSIVE POLICIES

■ DEFINITION

“Policy dialogue involves discussions among stakeholders to raise issues, share perspectives, find common ground, and reach agreement or consensus, if possible, on policy solutions. Policy dialogue takes place among policymakers, advocates, other nongovernmental stakeholders, other politicians, and beneficiaries (see VSI, 2002, for a code of good practice on policy dialogue between the government and civil society)” (Hardee et al., 2004, p. 15).

■ RELEVANCE TO POLICY

When done well, policy dialogue can help stakeholders see problems from each other's perspectives, improving understanding of the impact that policies and programs can have on various groups. It encourages participation in the policy process and can increase ownership and result in more responsive policies. Policy dialogue engages various sectors and diverse stakeholders and gives people a voice in the decisions that affect their lives and health. Ongoing policy dialogue keeps attention on health issues throughout the process—from policy formulation to implementation and monitoring—and encourages consensus for policy action.

■ KEY CAPABILITIES

Roles and responsibilities for policy dialogue vary, particularly among government officials and civil society. Meaningful policy dialogue requires governments and policymakers to recognize and understand its importance and

provide the space for the dialogue between them and other stakeholders to occur. Policy decisionmakers must be able to facilitate participatory processes and engage and form partnerships with diverse stakeholders. Dialogue requires the participation of civil society actors who represent relevant constituencies and are capable of engaging in effective advocacy, able to present evidence-informed arguments, and are knowledgeable of the policy process. Effective policy dialogue requires all involved parties to have strong communication, negotiation, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills (McCullough et al., 2011).

■ ■ PERFORMANCE IDEAL

High capacity in policy dialogue includes being able to

- Hold or participate in an open, inclusive, and informed dialogue toward the best possible policies
- Obtain consensus on the objectives, purpose, and process of participation prior to the dialogue
- Provide easy access to information relevant to the dialogue to participants
- Identify a range of groups or individuals who may be affected by a policy or who can make a significant contribution to the discussion
- Time dialogue activities appropriately so that feedback can make a difference in decision making

During dialogue, participants should be able to freely contribute their knowledge, expertise, and ideas. Their views should be listened to and considered. Dialogue may be more effective when it draws on relevant data or evidence from analyses, case studies, or pilot or demonstration projects. Accountability is enhanced by stakeholders reporting back to their constituencies and for both planners and participants to monitor and assess the results of policy dialogue.

At the highest performance level, policy dialogue provides an avenue for improving mutual understanding, identifying priorities, enhancing ownership and participation, finding common ground, building constituencies and resolve for change, and influencing policy. Effective dialogue requires putting into practice principles such as mutual respect, inclusiveness, accessibility, clarity, transparency, and accountability.

In the ideal, the following would exist:

- Opportunities and mechanisms for sharing information, knowledge, views, expertise, and experiences
- Relevant evidence, including from data and research findings, assessments, and the evaluation of previous relevant policies
- Sufficient time and resources to facilitate open, inclusive, and informed discussion among key stakeholders
- A policy process and policies shaped and influenced by stakeholder inputs
- Stakeholder monitoring and assessment of dialogue activities for learning and improvement

Note: The individual competencies and organizational capabilities needed will differ based on the individual or organization's role in the dialogue (e.g., convening versus participating).

INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCIES

KNOWLEDGE OF

The policy process and key actors relevant to dialogue	PD5
Relevant local/national policy environment, laws, and health sector issues	PD4
Credible evidence or information related to the issue	PD10
Strategic planning, advocacy, and communication strategies	PD6
Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approaches appropriate for tracking advocacy efforts	PD7
The needs, interests, and level of technical understanding of policy dialogue participants	PD12

SKILLS TO BE ABLE TO

Facilitate dialogue in such a way that draws out marginalized voices and concerns related to cross-cutting issues such as gender and health equity	PD11
Influence others and establish trust, consensus, and common ground with diverse stakeholders	PD13
Explain technical terms and findings in simple, policy-relevant ways to other stakeholders	PD2
Negotiate effectively and problem solve; raise difficult issues with a view to a positive resolution	PD1
Facilitate processes for stakeholders to report back to their constituencies	PD14
Apply qualitative and quantitative skills to assess and evaluate data on relevant policies	PD8, PD9

ATTITUDES/VALUES/ATTRIBUTES

Values collaboration and respects different perspectives	PD15
Is politically astute and diplomatic; can accurately assess power dynamics	PD3

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPABILITIES

TECHNICAL ABILITY TO

Promote, plan, and implement policy dialogue activities that are open, inclusive, and evidence-informed	PD25
Inform, consult, and influence partners and stakeholders using a range of communication mechanisms	PD16
Contribute to discussions around policy at all stages including development, dissemination, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation	PD17
Develop and implement a strategy for dialogue and a plan for monitoring and evaluation	PD19
Conduct outreach with constituents to heighten awareness of policy issues, keep them informed about policy dialogue activities, and elicit their inputs	PD29
Conduct research to understand the implications of policy issues on constituents	PD23
Build capacity among community groups and others to enable them to successfully engage in policy dialogue	PD30
Communicate perspectives with clear and compelling material and presentations, using credible evidence and data	PD18

RELATIONAL ABILITY TO

Establish trust and credibility with diverse constituents, partners, stakeholders, and donors	PD28
Establish collaborative relationships with external groups and organizations representing diverse constituencies and sectors (health, labor, economic, youth and sport, human rights, gender, women, military, education)	PD26
Engage in dialogue activities with stakeholders of different types and at different levels (e.g., grassroots, community, regional, national)	PD27
Foster and maintain strong networks, alliances, coalitions, and working groups based on shared interests to take joint action	PD24

ORGANIZATIONAL OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT TO SUPPORT

Allocation of adequate resources (staff, time, money) to conduct policy dialogue activities	PD21
Active contribution to or support of policy dialogue efforts by senior management	PD20
Development and implementation of standard operating procedures and systems that ensure high-quality processes for policy dialogue	PD22

■ ILLUSTRATIVE CAPACITY- STRENGTHENING ACTIVITIES

- Conduct training on participating in the policy process for civil society organizations
- Provide technical assistance to government in planning and implementing policy dialogue activities
- Engage civil society organizations in policy monitoring and then reporting the findings and recommendations through policy dialogue
- Conduct workshops with civil society organizations on communicating with policymakers
- Award small grants to support the implementation of policy dialogue activities
- Facilitate multisectoral dialogue with ministries of health, finance, and planning; women leaders; parliamentarians; and the private sector
- Foster south-south collaboration and regional forums in support of policy goals

■ RESOURCES

Hardee, K., I. Feranil, J. Boezwinkle, and B. Clark. 2004. "The Policy Circle: A Framework for Analyzing the Components of Family Planning, Reproductive Health, Maternal Health, and HIV/AIDS Policies." *POLICY Working Paper Series No. 11*. Washington, DC: Futures Group. Available at: <http://www.policyproject.com/pubs/workingpapers/wps-11.pdf>.

Joint Accord Table of the Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI). 2002. "A Code of Good Practice on Policy Dialogue: Building on an Accord between the Government of Canada and the Voluntary Sector." Ottawa, Ontario: Voluntary Sector Initiative. Available at: http://www.vsi-isbc.org/eng/policy/policy_code.cfm.

Lavis, J. N., J. A. Boyko, A. Oxman, S. Lewin, A. Fretheim. 2009. "Support tools for evidence-informed health policymaking (STP) 14: Organising and using policy dialogues to support evidence-informed policymaking." *Health Res Policy Syst* 7(1): S14. Available at: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20018104>.

McCullough, A., J. Tsui, et al. 2011. *Review of Literature and International Practice in Policy Dialogue: Evaluation*. Canberra, ACT: AusAID. Available at <http://www.theidgroup.com/documents/AusAid2011ReviewofLiteratureandInternationalPracticeinPolicyDialogueFINAL.pdf>.



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