

What is Public Policy? What is Civil Society?

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What is Public Policy?

- The concept or idea that guides a course of action or procedure in dealing with public issues or problems.
- It includes the decisions, commitments and actions made by those who hold or affect government positions.
- Public policies are often embodied in laws, rules or regulations.

Why Learn About Public Policymaking?

- Ignorance about the public policymaking process leaves us without the tools to get things done.
- There is confusion about who does what in the policymaking arena.
- Knowledge, practical experience and citizenship skills empower citizens to influence public policy.

What is civil society?

- **Private sphere:** family and friends associate to pursue private interests free of unreasonable intrusion by the government
- **Civil society:** people associate to pursue interests they share and these associations monitor and influence government
- **Government:** formally elected or appointed representatives at local, state and national levels make decisions about public policy

Which sector of society is it? Private, civil society or government?

1. A local school board changes graduation requirements.
2. Susan becomes a member of the Girl Scouts.
3. Carmen and her friend go out to dinner and a movie.
4. Marco's family and friends have a picnic on July 4.
5. Sara and her sisters join the teachers' union.
6. The Sierra Club lobbies the New Jersey government to pass environmental protection laws.
7. The New Jersey state legislature passes a law limiting the use of cell phones while driving.
8. Citizens join a taxpayer's association in an effort to get government to lower property taxes in NJ.
9. The federal government awards a contract to a private company to repair sections of an interstate highway.
10. A city council passes a law establishing smoke free zones in public parks.

Public policies may be implemented by:

- ✓ Government alone
- ✓ Government acting cooperatively with civil society
- ✓ Government and civil society acting independently
- ✓ Civil society handling problems in accordance with government policy

Public Policies

The Problem: Poor families in the community need food and adequate clothing.

One solution: City officials fund a program for needy individuals to “buy” food and clothing from participating merchants using vouchers.

This is a public policy.

Another solution: A women’s civic organization conducts a drive to collect food and clothing and then distributes it to needy individuals.

This is NOT a public policy.

What are the advantages of a public policy solution?

- ✓ Civil society solutions depend on the voluntary efforts of individuals and may end
- ✓ Public policy solutions continue until changed