

The Eightfold Path for Policy Analysis

League of Women Voters of California
2015 Convention

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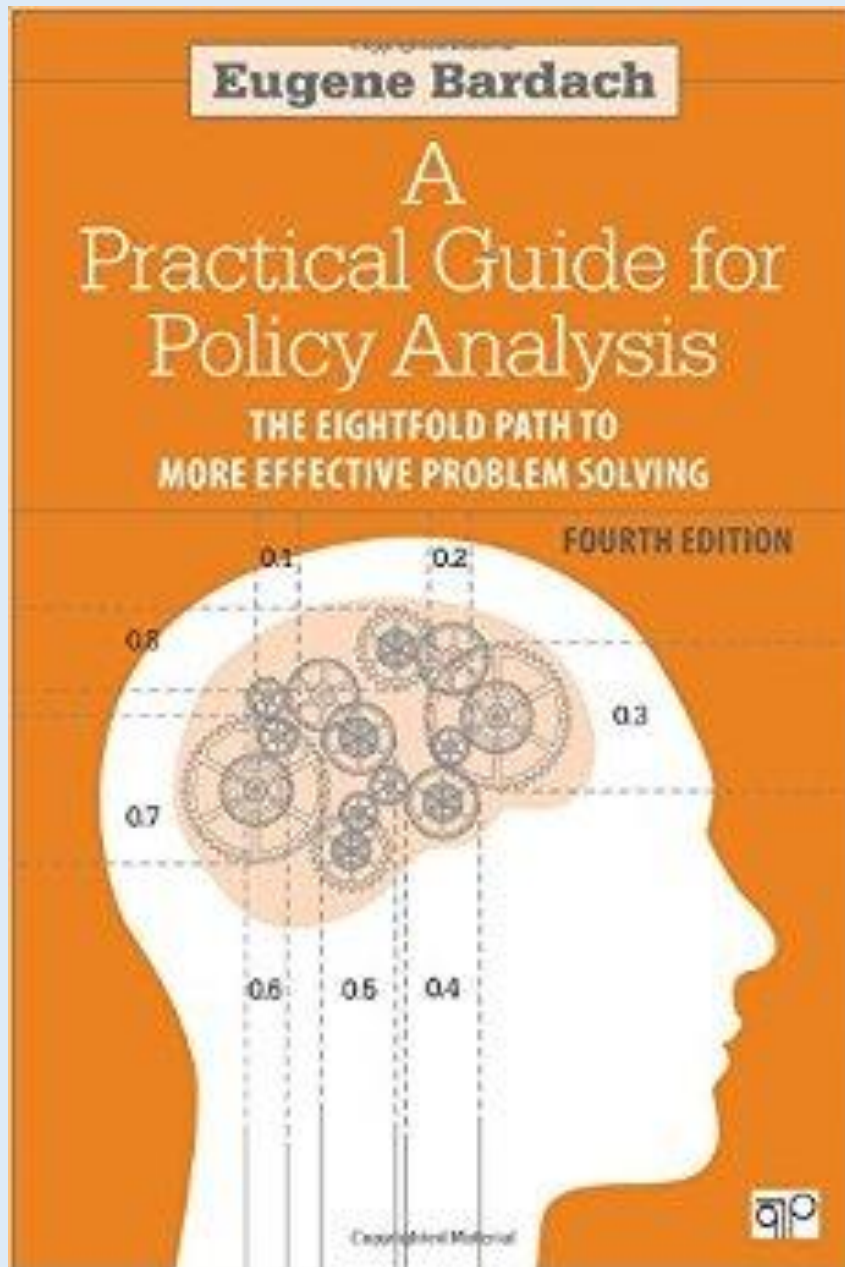
Basis for Taking Action in the League

In deciding whether to take action, a League Board considers:

- League position, including previous League action
- What does the League's voice add to the debate?
- Is there a plan for effective action? Funding? Timing?

Where Do I Find League Positions?

- LWVS Impact on Issues
- LWVC Action Policies and Positions
- Your local League's positions



A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis
The Eightfold Path to More Effective
Problem Solving
Eugene Bardach

The Eightfold Path

- Define the Problem
- Assemble Some Evidence
- Construct the Alternatives
- Select the Criteria
- Project the Outcomes
- Confront the Trade-offs
- Decide
- Tell Your Story

Step One:

Define the Problem

TIPS

- Think of Deficit and Excess
 - Too big, too small, too slowly, too fast
- Quantify if possible
 - Use a range (between 100,000 -200,000) if you need to
- Risky conditions can be problems
 - Eg. Odds of an accident are too high

TIPS

- Latent opportunities
 - A problem could be a missed opportunity
- Avoid “issue rhetoric”
 - Stay away from partisan buzzwords
- Consider whether it’s a trouble that warrants definition as public problem requiring public resources
 - Is there a market failure?
 - Is it a purely private trouble?

TIPS

- Avoid defining the solution into the problem
 - “There is too little shelter for homeless families”
- Be careful with causal claims in your definition
 - “Prop 47 has caused an increase in crime”
- Your problem definition may evolve as you learn more
 - Continue to come back to this step as you learn more

Step Two:

Assemble Some Evidence

Three Principal Purposes of Collecting Evidence

- Assess the nature and extent of the problem you are trying to define
- Assess the particular features of the policy situation you are engaged in studying
- Assess policies that have been thought to have worked effectively in similar situations

Before you start

Ask yourself:

- What do I already know?
- What do I need and don't need to know? Why?

The Value of Evidence Depends On:

- What is the likelihood that it will cause you to substitute a better decision for whatever decision you would have made without it?
- The likelihood that the substituted decision will, directly or indirectly, produce a better policy outcome than would have been produced by the original decision?
- The magnitude of the difference in value between the likely-to-be-improved outcome and the original outcome?

Where Do I Find the Evidence I Need?

- Have other Leagues looked at this issue?
- Review available literature
 - Be careful with literature from advocacy organizations
- People are relevant sources

Survey Best Practices

- The chances are good that the problem you are studying is not unique
- The practices you find may be more like “good practices”
 - What are the vulnerabilities?
 - Will it work in my context?
 - Is this evidence or anecdote?

TIPS

- Start early!
- Get other points of view
- Try using analogies

Step Three:

Construct the Alternatives

TIPS

- Options are not necessarily mutually exclusive
- Initially, err on the side of comprehensiveness
- Letting present trends continue is an option
 - Consider what changes will affect the problem: political, economy, budgets, demographic changes, etc.

TIPS

- Learning more can be an option
 - Consider pilot studies
 - Continue to look for good practices elsewhere
- Wait for future to be less murky
 - There can be a cost to premature decision making
 - There can be a cost to waiting

Step Four:

Select the Criteria

Look for Evaluative Criteria

- Efficiency: Maximizing the public interest.
 - Most important criteria in cost effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis
- Limits to efficiency as a criteria:
 - If utility is judged by willingness to pay for a benefit, people with less money have less clout
 - Values with few human defenders may be underestimated

Other Criteria

- Equality
- Diversity
- Fairness
- Justice
- Freedom
- Community
- Privacy
- Safety

Practical Criteria

- Legality of alternatives
- Political acceptability
- Robustness
- Improvability

TIPS

- May be helpful to identify a primary criterion. This is your principal objective to be maximized or minimized.
 - Use weighting for the other criteria
- Don't confuse alternatives and criteria
 - Alternative are courses of action. Criteria are standards for evaluating the action.
 - "Rapid response election day hotline"

Step Five:

Project the Outcomes

TIPS

- Magnitude estimates
 - Use ranges if you need to (100,000 to 150,000)
- Break-even estimates
 - What is the level of results necessary to justify the known costs and risks?
- Sensitivity analysis
 - How big of a mistake in my assumptions before my analysis is in trouble?
- Guard against excessive optimism

Construct an Outcomes Matrix

Policy Alternative	Criteria 1	Criteria 2	Criteria 3	Score
A	Low	Low	High	
B	High	High	Low	
C	Medium	Low	Medium	

Step Six:

Confront the Tradeoffs

TIPS

- Tradeoffs are about the outcomes, not the alternatives
- Can you establish commensurability
 - If outcomes are measurable in dollars, that's an easy way (efficiency? Cost-benefit?)
 - Break-even?
- How does it compare to present trends?

Step Seven:
Decide!

TIPS

- If it's such a good idea, how come nobody has done it yet?
 - Bureaucracy resistance?
 - Stakeholder resistance?
 - Political resistance?

Step Eight: Tell Your Story

TIPS

- Identify and assess the likely audience
 - Level of sophistication and familiarity with the topic
- Consider the political environment
 - Who will use the analysis?
 - Are you comfortable with it being public?
 - Is there language that could alienate certain audiences?

TIPS

- You don't need the eightfold path in your narrative
 - It's a tool to help you think through the policy problem
- Don't include every fact you ever learned
- If you know it's contentious, consider including rebuttals to objections

TIPS

- Start with your conclusion
 - You aren't writing a mystery
- Break up large bodies of text
 - Use headings and subheadings
 - Use bullets
- Unless the report is short, include an executive summary
- Include references and sources