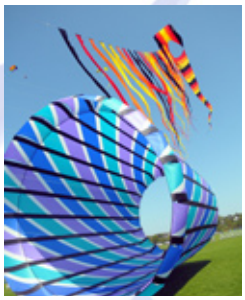
GUIDE TO PLANNING AN ACTION STRATEGY FOR HEALTHIER LOCAL PUBLIC POLICY



HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

An Approach to Action on Health Determinants in Canada

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People. Place. Potential.

OHCC · CCSO
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FOREWARD

This guide was made possible thanks to technical and financial support from the Public Health Agency of Canada as part of "Healthy Communities: An Approach to Action on Health Determinants in Canada." It is intended for a wide range of community stakeholders—community and interest groups, social workers, coalitions, organizations, municipal employees and officials, residents—anyone looking for more effective action strategies for getting involved in drafting and implementing healthy public policy at the local (i.e., municipal) level. The guide is particularly addressed those seeking to make their community a healthy place to live in accordance with the values and action principles of the "Healthy Cities and Towns" (HCT) approach.

The concepts, strategies, and actions below are based on our literature review, ***Le rôle des communautés locales dans l'influence des politiques publiques favorables à la santé*** (Martineau, Sasseville, and St-Pierre, 2010). This guide has also been reviewed by a number of stakeholders involved in advocating for healthy public policy.

The strategies put forward in this guide, as in the literature review, focus on actions designed to help draft and amend public policy to promote health *at the local level.* Remember that because not all policies are a matter of local jurisdiction, community stakeholders might also need to act at the provincial and national levels. Our experience at the community/municipal level suggests that the strategies in this guide could also be fruitfully used to promote public policy at the provincial and national levels.

Note that this guide is not designed to be a comprehensive inventory of possible actions or "best practices." Every community stakeholder is unique, with widely divergent situations and needs. This difference means that we must always take the specific local situation into account when deciding on strategies to use. Choosing appropriate strategies helps ensure that actions are successful. Everyone has a seat at the table when the time comes to draft and develop public policy!

INTRODUCTION

Whether or not they have experience, community stakeholder groups or coalitions all possess the qualities and skills needed to take part of the process of drafting and developing public policy, and thus improving public health in their community. The Healthy Cities and Towns (HCT) strategy, which has been adopted by several thousand communities worldwide, is an appealing approach because it aims to strengthen cooperation between partners and the community and foster citizen participation. HCT gives residents and communities the support they need to get involved in issues that matter to them by building on their strengths.

Leading organizations including the World Health Organization (WHO) acknowledge that successful healthy policy addresses health issues from multiple perspectives (education, urban planning, zoning, and more). At the local level, communities hold a number of policy levers: policy on family, social inclusion, sports and recreation, and more. Local communities can address residents' needs and aspirations by working together with various local stakeholders to use resources as efficiently as possible—and make a real difference in quality of life!

In this guide we define public policy as "the actions of legitimate political or administrative bodies to address an issue of public concern" (Mény & Thoenig, 1989). Public policy can take the shape of a program of actions or more specific measures such as laws, regulations, or resource allocation. We will consider public policy to be "healthy" when it expressly addresses a health or social justice issue in its objectives (see WHO, 1999).

This guide has three parts. Part 1 will help us understand the urgency of taking action on public policy if we wish to make a difference in health. Part 2 presents the public policy development cycle, an important aspect because understanding where you are in the cycle lets you tailor your strategy accordingly. Part 3 takes a closer look at four processes to consider prior to taking action: 1. defining the situation or problem, 2) understanding the local context, 3) identifying the stakeholders, and 4) selecting the appropriate strategies. The objective is to prompt stakeholders to choose the most appropriate strategies for their particular situations, thus increasing their likelihood of success. Part 4 is a collection of supplemental resources.

Throughout this guide you will find both examples and references to other tools to foster participation. The symbols in the legend below will help you find them in the text.

LEGEND:

Example

Reference or other tool to foster participation

GLOSSARY

Decision-maker

Senior public servants or municipal, provincial, or federal politicians who have the authority and power to make decisions. (YMCA Canada, 2002).

Health

Health is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Well-being is more subjective than health: only an individual is in a position to assess their state of well-being in any given situation (WHO, 1999)

Healthy public policy

Healthy public policy (HPP) is characterized by an **explicit concern for health and equity in all areas of policy** (diet, transportation, housing, etc.). Its main aim is to create a supportive environment to enable people to lead healthy lives. HPP has the effect (though not necessarily the chief aim) of making physical and social environments health-enhancing (WHO, 1999).

Public policy

The actions of legitimate political or administrative bodies to address an issue of public concern. It can take the shape of a program of actions or more specific measures such as laws, regulations, or resource allocation (Mény & Thoenig, 1989).

Strategy

A strategy comprises a set of actions, plans, or operations designed and coordinated to achieve a single objective (Boudreau and Perron, 2006). A strategy makes it possible to plan the actions necessary to foster the development of healthy public policy.

1 FOSTERING HEALTHY PUBLIC POLICY

This first section shows why it is critical to take action on public policy to promote healthier public policy in line with the values and strategies of the Healthy Cities and Towns (HCT) approach.

One of the best ways to make a real and lasting difference in health is to introduce policy that translates into action on determinants of health. Healthy policy can lead local governments to take action on air and water quality, public transportation, literacy, education, etc. Each of these determinants and a host of others will have a definite impact on the health of local populations. In such a context, promoting health is everyone's business, in every community sphere. When residents, community groups, public institutions, and elected officials work actively together to draft healthy policy, the result is concrete change.

Examples of local healthy public policy

Victoriaville's Universal Accessibility Policy (1999):

Victoriaville's universal accessibility policy is designed to ensure that every resident with physical, sensory, or intellectual disabilities can be fully integrated into social and community life and be socially, economically, culturally, and politically active.

More concretely, several policy thrusts directly touch on health:

- Architectural/planning accessibility: e.g., incentives for mixed use of cycle paths (with measures like pedestrian traffic lights, signage, adapted shoulders for scooters, etc.)
- Activity programming: e.g., making various municipal sports and recreation facilities accessible to people with mobility impairments and physical disabilities

Rivière-du-Loup, Ville-Amie des Aînés, Plan d'action 2009-2013
(A Senior-Friendly City, 2009–2013 Action Plan)

The action plan, based on consultation and partnership-building, is designed to improve the physical and social environments of seniors and help them lead active social lives, become more empowered, and enjoy better access to healthcare services, as well promoting active aging and healthy lifestyle choices. Some policy thrusts are directly tied to health, notably:

- Recreation: Developing recreation programming for seniors
- Housing: developing a stock of physically and financially accessible adapted housing
- Social inclusion: raising awareness in the communities about the problem of isolation among seniors

Healthy public policy makes it easier for residents to adopt healthy lifestyle choices by making changes to the social and physical environments, which are determinants of health. The goal is that ***all public policy*** in all spheres—food, education, housing, employment, and others—have a positive impact on health, from dietary policy in the school system to building bike paths to family policy.

Toolkit to Healthier Communities - Influencing Healthy Public Policies (2011) from the Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance offers a list of ideas and examples of healthy public policies that can be addressed at the community level.

Available free of charge: http://www.ocdpa.on.ca/rpt_HCHandbook.gk

Communities are particularly well positioned to promote local public policy for three reasons:

1. They tend to have a good understanding of specific local health needs and aspirations.
2. Local decision-makers are often closer, more accessible, and more available than those at other levels of government (provincial and federal).
3. The process for developing public policy is often less complex at the local level: it is easier to understand and get involved.

Warning!

Despite the best intentions of local stakeholders, in some cases the legal, technical, and financial resources to address certain problems are simply not available locally. When local communities lack the resources to intervene, the strategies in this guide may be used to promote and take part in drafting and amending not only local but also provincial and federal policy.

WHY IS STRATEGY SO CRITICAL?

Developing public policy is a lengthy, complex process that can involve years of work, dozens of stakeholders, and a host of often unforeseen events.

For these reasons, it is critical to think strategically. This means **1)** identifying your allies and opponents, **2)** selecting the best actions to achieve your goals, and **3)** acting at the right time and with the right people. Choosing an appropriate strategy helps you work more effectively and increases your odds of success.

HOW TO ADOPT THE HEALTHY CITIES AND TOWNS STRATEGY

The Healthy Cities and Towns (HCT) strategy[1] was introduced by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1986 to improve the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. In the HCT approach, actions are buttressed by local government commitments to prioritize residents' health and well-being (WHO, 2002) by:

1) encouraging residents to play an active role in their communities

2) fostering collaboration and partnership between different community sectors to achieve the shared goal of a healthier community

3) promoting the involvement of municipal government

4) developing healthy public policy and measures for healthy environments

5) building capacity and sharing resources

Healthy public policy is one of the five strategies in the HCT approach to health. Healthy policy must be developed through a collaborative process involving municipal government, local stakeholders, and residents, boosting the community's capacity to take action on health.

The five strategies in the HCT approach are based on common values: fairness, diversity, solidarity, and empowerment. Taken together, these values guide actions to give residents and communities greater power over their health.

[1] "Healthy Cities and Towns" (*Villes et Villages en santé* in French, commonly abbreviated as VVS), is a term in use in Quebec. In the rest of Canada, "Healthy Communities" is more widely used.

WHO CAN HELP MAKE PUBLIC POLICY?

Every community member has a role to play in drafting, approving, and implementing public policies. This includes residents, municipal employees, community and interest groups, coalitions, organizations, and municipal officials.

Communities that have adopted the **Healthy Cities and Towns** approach are especially well positioned to promote healthy public policy because they have already started working together with residents, groups, and decision-makers.

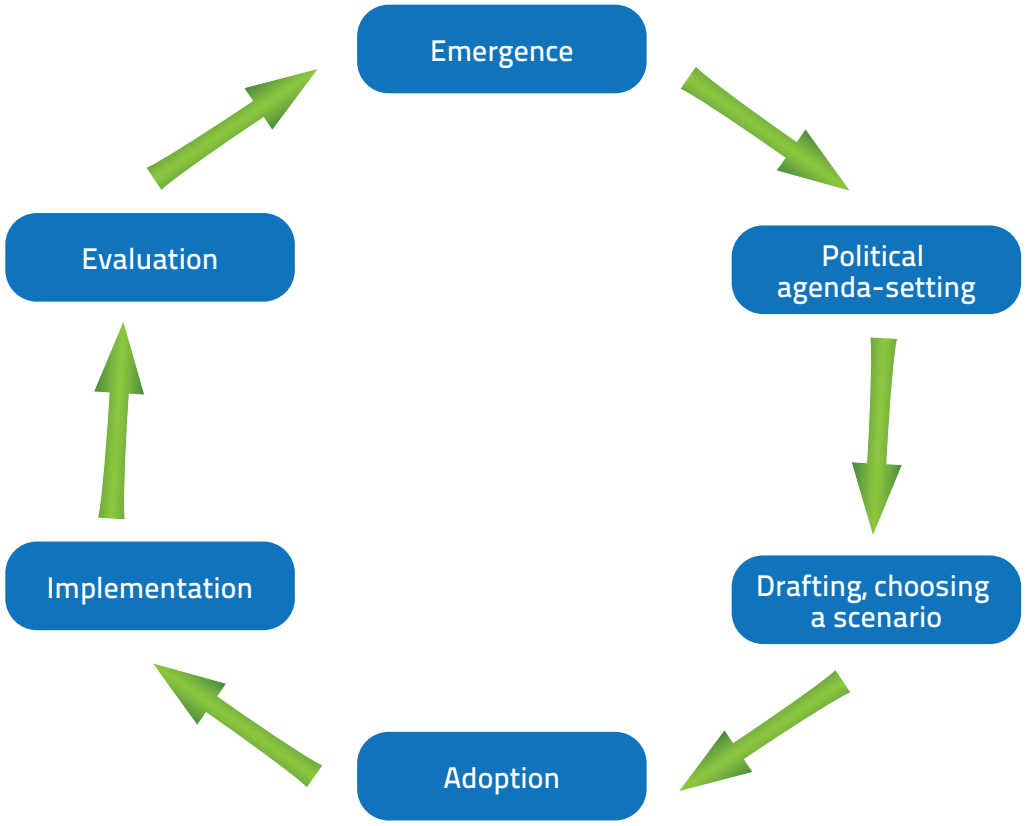
There are, however, a few prerequisites to ensure that actions intended to influence policy hit the mark. Drafting healthy public policy depends largely on ***active, well-connected, determined, and persistent*** groups and individuals. The term "policy entrepreneur" has been coined to describe individuals or groups who dedicate their time and energy to advocating on behalf of a specific policy. Policy entrepreneurs display a number of skills and qualities that boost the impact of their actions on public policy (Jansson, Dempsey, McCroskey, and Schneider, 2005)

1. **Leadership** is needed to rally the various stakeholders involved and mobilize resources in the community.
2. **Knowledge of the political process** is required to successfully draft, approve, and implement public policy (understanding of regulations, contacts, etc.).
3. **Research and analysis capabilities** make it possible to thoroughly understand the problems faced and properly document realistic solutions.
4. **Communications experience** enables stakeholders to lead working groups, liaise with the media, and easily forge ties with other key actors
5. **Negotiation skills** are needed to achieve compromise.
6. **An understanding of empowerment** and an ability to make it happen on the ground (supporting other groups, delegating leadership tasks, working with underprivileged populations).

2 THE PUBLIC POLICY DEVELOPMENT CYCLE

It is important to understand the public policy development process. The process can generally be broken down into six phases, as illustrated in the diagram below (Figure 1). You can participate in many different phases of the cycle, but it is critical to ask where your action fits before getting started. Do you want to convince decision-makers to take on a particular social problem? Advocate for a new public policy? Amend an existing policy? Taking the time to ask such question helps you choose the most effective actions based on the phase of the cycle targeted, the nature of the situation, the local context, and the stakeholders involved (as we will see in Part 3).

Figure 1: The public policy development cycle



I. **Emergence of the policy** refers to the period when the issue rises to prominence in the public arena and the need for a solution appears.

II. **Political agenda-setting** is the period when the issue becomes pressing enough that decision-makers take an interest and decide to act.

III. **Drafting and choosing a scenario** is when a range of solutions is put forward, debated, and analyzed.

IV. **Adoption** occurs when a final decision is formalized as policy.

V. **Implementation** is when regulations and programs stemming from the policy are put in place.

VI. **Evaluation** assesses whether regulations and programs stemming from the policy have yielded improvements in the problem situation that the policy addressed.

Note: The six steps do not necessarily occur in chronological order and frequently overlap.

While stakeholders tend to play a more active role during the first three steps of the cycle leading up to the adoption of the public policy, there is still room for stakeholder involvement in the later steps (implementation and evaluation).

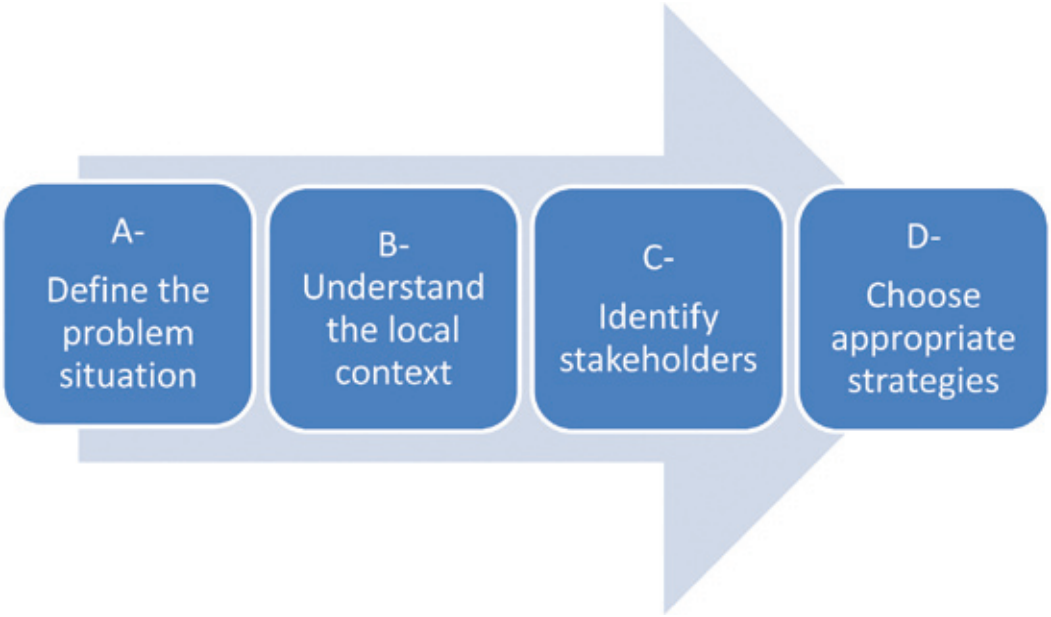
Once public policy has been adopted, decision-makers may not immediately allocate the resources needed to implement it. In such cases, stakeholders can advocate on behalf of programs and other concrete measures. Stakeholders also have a role to play in assessing public policy, to measure its true impact on the health of the target population and inform subsequent improvement initiatives.

3 BEFORE GETTING STARTED: FOUR STEPS TO GUIDE YOUR PUBLIC POLICY ACTIONS

Once you have determined which phase of public policy development to act on, the next you will need to properly prepare yourself before taking action. The four steps below can help guide your actions to target key stakeholders, time your intervention, and boost all-around effectiveness. In a nutshell, you will need to have an overview of the situation you want to get involved in. For these reasons we recommend taking the time, alone or in a group, to reflect on certain aspects of your environment.

Note: You don't need to be an expert or carry out detailed, costly research to get a good grasp on the situation and be well prepared. You will find that a few simple operations using the knowledge base and resources at your disposal (e.g., Internet, media, public opinion surveys, studies, community partners, civil servants) can go a long way.

Figure 2: Being well prepared before you get involved - 4 steps



A - DEFINE THE PROBLEM SITUATION

Taking the time to study the situation you want to address will help you understand the underlying issues involved. Who stands to benefit from changes? Who might stand to lose? How? Answering such issues also helps us assess the feasibility and acceptability of our actions. It is worth taking the time to paint a relatively complete picture of the situation and identify factors liable to impact our involvement. These factors fall into three categories—see the worksheet in Appendix 1.

1) **Is your problem situation clearly defined? Consider the following:**
   a. Scope
   b. People or groups affected
   c. Stakeholders' positions
   d. Causes and consequences

2) **Are there realistic solutions? Consider the following:**
   a. Financial viability
   b. Ease of implementation
   c. Examples of successful implementation in other communities

3) **Are there socially acceptable solutions?** In other words, does your solution enter into conflict with dominant values and ideologies?

The example below shows how the way different stakeholders define a problem situation can influence the kind of solutions generated. A lack of consensus, for example, can stifle stakeholders' ability to come up with a mutually acceptable policy solution. In such situations it may become necessary to focus efforts on working toward a shared vision of the problem situation and the most suitable solutions to address it.

The importance of values and ideologies on the situation/problem and its solutions

During a reflection session on drafting a public policy, different partners can't agree on socially acceptable solutions to prevent youth drug addiction.

Drug addiction can be defined as:

- A personal lifestyle choice problem caused by organized crime. In this view, police enforcement would be a conceivable solution.
- A public health issue and a complex social problem influenced by physical and social environments. In such a view solutions would include prevention, building awareness, and rehabilitation.

B - UNDERSTAND THE LOCAL CONTEXT

Before getting involved in drafting, adopting, and implementing public policy, it is critical to get a good handle on the local context in which the problem situation has developed. You can analyze five distinct dimensions of this context: historical, political, economic, institutional, and social (see Figure 3). An accurate reading of the context will enable you to identify both opportunities for successful action and limitations. This process helps us:

- Estimate the human and other resources, energy, and time needed to participate in promoting public policy
- Choose the best strategies and most effective, appropriate actions
- Determine whether the timing is right for the action proposed

Appendix 2 provides questions to guide your reflection on these different dimensions of the local context.

Figure 3: The five dimensions of the local context to better understand the problem situation

Warning! You do not necessarily have to analyze each of the five dimensions in depth. You are not drawing up an exhaustive portrait of your community. Rather, use these dimensions of the local context as indicators to guide your reflection and discussion on actions to be taken.

Dimension 1: The political context

Examining the political context of a problem situation means paying close attention to 1) the main stakeholders involved in developing and amending public policy, and 2) the range of political positions on the problem situation.

Stakeholders include both municipal government officials (elected officials, school boards, etc.) who will ultimately decide whether to adopt the policy, and civil servants (executives, management, employees, etc.). Some individuals and groups, though not officially part of the political structure, still wield a great deal of influence (public institutions, public figures, etc.). All these stakeholders may have diverging interests and positions on any given issue. Section C deals specifically with this matter, to help you better figure out where these stakeholders stand, what they think, and what resources they may be able to bring to your cause.

The second aspect of the political dimension considers stakeholders' political positions on a specific problem situation and their openness to healthy public policies. If your action is out of step with the current positions of decision-makers, you will have to take this fact into account when choosing strategies and arguments to use.

Don't forget that decision-makers care about public opinion. Generally speaking, the closer you are to an election period, the more sensitive public opinion becomes. Consequently, advocacy aiming to amend existing or adopt new public policy could be weighed as political capital that can influence candidates' or parties' odds of achieving re-election.

Toolkit to Healthier Communities - Influencing Healthy Public Policies (2011) from the Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance, and *Have an Influence on Public Policy*, from YMCA Canada (2002), contain useful tools to help organize your arguments to better convince a target audience: communication plans, creating key messages, targeting the right stakeholders, dealing with the media, and more.

Policy Windows **-** Advocating for public policy is a question of timing. It is essential to choose the right time to get involved. A problem situation that has passed under the radar can swiftly find its way onto the political agenda thanks to current events. Closely monitoring the news and discussing with partners are good ways to identify propitious times to take action on public policy. These "policy windows" can be predictable or unexpected; what they have in common is that they do not remain open long. You have to be ready to seize the moment.

(Kingdon, 1995)

Dimension 2: The economic context

Implementation cost is a key aspect to consider when getting involved in developing public policy—and a particular concern of policy decision-makers. Cost analysis will help you put forward acceptable, financially viable solutions and find compelling arguments to help make decisions. Gradual, step-by-step implementation is an example of a solution that may help bring stakeholders on board when public policy implementation costs are prohibitive.

Another potentially effective strategy is documenting the costs of inaction.

Costs of inaction

Obesity prevention has positive impacts on individual health and can save our healthcare system money. Conversely, inaction on obesity prevention can impact the incidence of obesity-related illnesses (e.g., cardiovascular disease, Type II diabetes), entailing additional healthcare costs.

Dimension 3: The organizational culture context

Every institution, like municipal governments and school boards, develops its own institutional cultures. The extent to which institutions are open to stakeholder participation depends on both formal rules, such as regulations and policies, and informal conventions and customs. It is worth finding out about how institutions work so you can take advantage of the opportunities they offer to get involved. For example, a municipality might hold public meetings or encourage residents and local groups to join committees responsible for drafting public policy. In such cases it would clearly pay to use these avenues to promote your views. Getting to know all the available opportunities to play an active role in institutions' consultation mechanisms is simply good strategy.

By the same token, institutions' varying degrees of openness to participation may influence which actions you choose to focus on. A political environment hostile to advocacy on behalf of healthy public policy may lead to confrontation, whereas a more amenable environment may engender more constructive dialogue.

Dimension 4: The social context

You should also assess the extent of community involvement and the degree to which stakeholders work together. In a community where local stakeholders (elected officials, public institutions, residents, etc.) already work together on a range of projects, promoting healthy public policy will be an easier task. But a community where stakeholders don't work together much and some groups of residents are marginalized is another story: promoting healthy public policy will require strategies to boost involvement, forge ties between different sectors of the community, and bolster social participation.

Dimension 5: The historical context

We have much to learn from the past. Before getting involved in drafting and implementing public policy, it is important to learn from past experiences in this area. Have healthy public policies already been adopted? Has the city/town council supported healthy policy in recent years, or has such policy been adopted only after long struggles? In a community with a record of successful stakeholder participation in public policy, it may well be easier to get involved. On the other hand, if recent attempts to introduce healthy public policies have ended in failure, you may face substantial challenges when advocating on their behalf. Give the matter careful consideration and opt for strategies that respect the pace of change in the community.

C - IDENTIFY STAKEHOLDERS

Developing and amending public policy involves a number of stakeholders—social welfare institutions, residents, elected officials, unions, public institutions, businesses, and more. Stakeholders may be involved closely or at a distance, in just one phase or throughout the development cycle. Section C will help you identify the key stakeholders, their positions, and the level of involvement and human and other resources they bring to the table.

I – Types of stakeholders

More complex or controversial problems or situations involve a greater number of stakeholders. A close look at any situation will usually reveal that the number of people with a personal, professional, or business stake in a given public policy is higher than it first appeared.

Note: There is a wide range of stakeholders who *may* be involved in developing public policy, but two groups are *always* present:

- **Municipal government employees:** May exert a great deal of influence on elected officials, particularly by helping prepare information packages in support of a group's position.
- **Elected officials:** Have access to a range of resources and considerable power to influence opinion and make decisions.

Community stakeholders involved in public policy can be categorized in a number of ways. The table below uses three categories: 1) local institutions, 2) associations and community groups, and 3) residents. (Appendix 3 includes a worksheet to help identify stakeholders in your community.)

Table 1: A sample classification of public policy stakeholders

LOCAL INSTITUTIONS	ASSOCIATIONS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS	RESIDENTS
• Business • Healthcare centers • Hospitals • Police • Universities • Schools • Municipal government • Health authority • Cultural institutions: libraries, museums, theaters, etc. • Unions and special interest groups	• Religious groups • Advocacy groups • Local media • Charities • Community centers • Neighborhood councils	• Seniors • Young people • Women • Cultural communities • Linguistic groups

Adapted from McKnight and Kretzman (1993)

II – Allies and opponents

Once you have taken an inventory of the key community stakeholders, ask yourself where each one stands on the policy you want to promote. This exercise will help you form strategic alliances with some and prepare to confront others. Every stakeholder will either be in favor of the project (an ally), neutral, or opposed to it (an opponent). The positions taken by various stakeholders will depend on how the problem situation in question affects their short, medium, and long term interests.

III – Degree of influence and power to allocate resources

In public policy matters, it is crucial to assess stakeholders' degree of influence and the resources they control. O'Neill, Roch, and Boyer (1997, p. 83) define degree of influence as

> *[…] a stakeholder's ability, in conjunction with other stakeholders, to directly or indirectly exert influence on the decision to implement an action. Degree of influence depends on factors such as a group or organization's size (in the case of collective entities), financial wealth, physical resources, institutional power, prestige, and political jurisdiction [our translation].*

Every stakeholder, be they allies, neutral, or opponents, possesses human, financial, material, relational (contacts), or intelligence resources they can use to influence the development of public policy. The example in the text box below charts out the varying degrees of influence and resources of stakeholders involved in developing food policy in a high school (Appendix 3 is a worksheet to be used for this purpose).

Toolkit to Healthier Communities - Influencing Healthy Public Policies (2011), from the Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance, includes a number of easy-to-use tools to identify key actors.

Available free: http://www.ocdpa.on.ca/rpt_HCHandbook.gk

For a more in-depth discussion of stakeholders, their resources, and their influence, try the *Petit manuel d'analyse et d'intervention politique en santé* (2011) from Presses de l'Université Laval (French only).

Available online: www.pulaval.com/catalogue/petit-manuel-analyse-intervention-politique-sante-9571.html

A municipality wants to develop a food policy. One aspect of this policy is regulating food available in the school system. The following stakeholders are involved:

The school board:

- Supports adopting a food policy because it advertises its schools as "healthy schools"
- Possesses substantial human, financial, and material resources
- Wields a high degree of influence with political decision-makers and high schools

The high school parents' association:

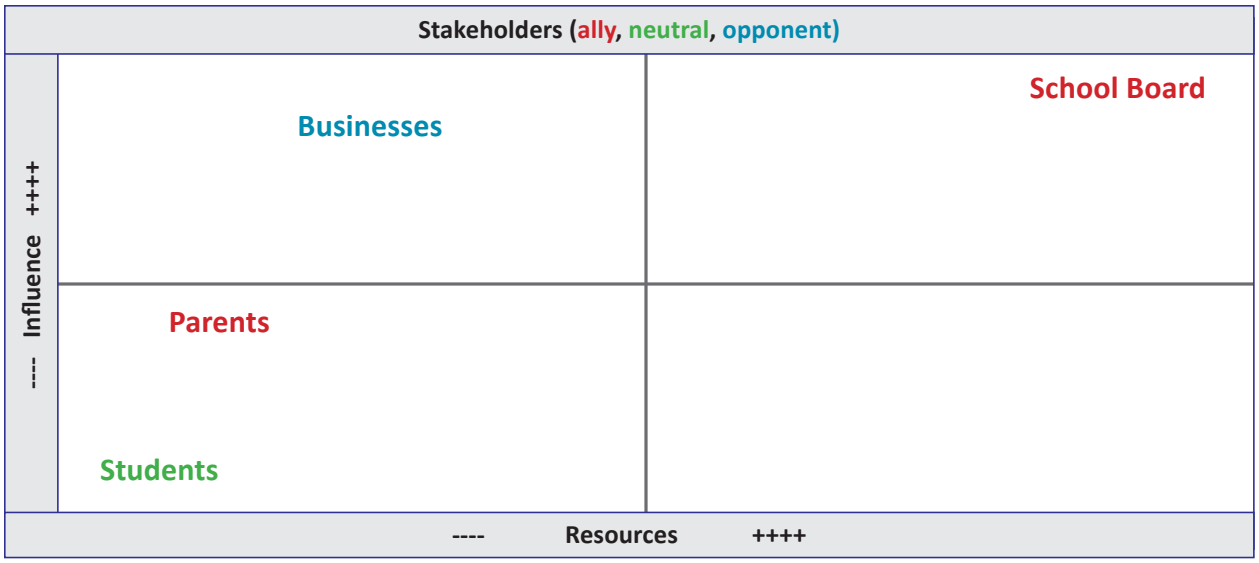
- Supports adopting a food policy
- Has few financial and material resources
- Has influence over other parents

An *ad hoc* group of businesses specializing in food service for school cafeterias:

- Is against the food policy because it fears the costs of implementing it will be too high
- Has little financial leeway to offer "perishable" foods (the cost of fruits and vegetables is high, and will mean lower profits and deficits)
- Has considerable influence because if it decides to stop bidding on school contracts, the school may no longer be able to operate cafeterias

Students:

- Weren't consulted or informed of the process
- Have little say in the matter in terms of power or resources



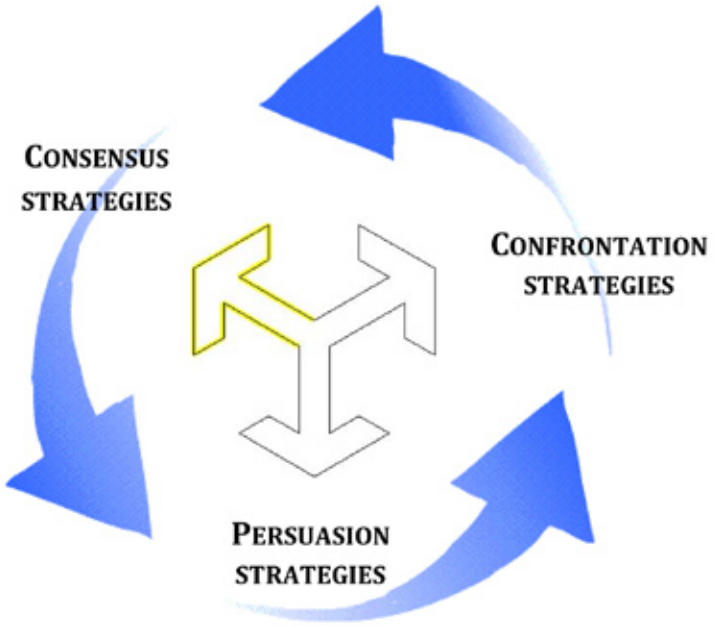
Adapted from O'Neil, Gosselin, and Boyer, eds. (1997)

In the scenario above, it would be in the municipality's interest to forge alliances with businesses to get them behind the policy. Measures such as financial compensation in case of deficits or gradual implementation of the policy over several years could help get businesses to endorse the food policy.

D - CHOOSE APPROPRIATE STRATEGIES

Once you have clearly defined the problem situation, analyzed the local context, and identified the stakeholders, it will be easier to decide on the most suitable strategies and determine the first actions to take. As illustrated in the figure below, taking part in developing public policy is a dynamic process that draws on three "families" of strategy: consensus, persuasion, and confrontation (Netting, Kettner, and McMurtry 2008).

In Appendix 4 you will find a worksheet to help choose an appropriate strategy. Appendix 5 outlines the different actions that can be included in each of these different strategies.



Warning! Consensus-based strategies, which involve cooperation and partnership, are often a first choice. But when results are unsatisfactory or slow to materialize, it makes sense to move on to strategies of persuasion and, eventually, confrontation. In practice, unforeseen events often force stakeholders to make sudden changes to strategies or combine various complementary strategies. Being involved in drafting and implementing public policies is not a linear process, and each experience is different. Therefore, you may want to plan a number of different scenarios. It is always a good idea to make the most of your knowledge of the community and tailor strategies accordingly.

I – Consensus strategies

Consensus strategies are based on consultation, partnership, democratic participation, and mobilizing decision-makers concerned with the problem situation. These strategies seek to include all stakeholders present and work under the following conditions:

- All stakeholders agree to work together and recognize that change is necessary.
- The general public is behind the process: public opinion is strongly in favor of the proposed changes.
- Political decision-makers are open to communicating and convinced of the need for change.
- Political decision-makers and various community stakeholders agree with the proposed changes and are ready to allocate the necessary financial, human, and material resources.

A consensus strategy includes actions such as networking, information sharing, and working toward compromise. *Putting forward* realistic, financially viable, socially acceptable solutions is key. This can facilitate the process for adopting or amending public policy.

Sample consensus strategies:

- Formal and informal meetings
  - With municipal employees
  - With politicians
  - With political advisors
  - With other influential stakeholders
- Formation of an intersectoral committee in charge of developing and executing public policy
- Collaborative work
- Sharing research results
- Drafting proposed solutions
- Negotiation
- Encouraging community involvement to implement public policy that meets the needs
- Citizen inclusion measures: round tables, public consultations, etc.

Note: When adopting consensus strategies, working with the media—meeting with journalists, producing press releases, giving interviews, etc.—is crucial in order to

- Avoid negative media coverage
- Anticipate and preempt new media offensives from opponents

Have an Influence on Public Policy, from YMCA Canada (2002), includes a number of tools to help you make effective informal and formal public statements. Available free of charge:

http://www.ymca.ca/media/59241/be_hipp_manual.pdf

II – Persuasion strategies

Persuasion strategies aim to put forward arguments to influence and convince others that your position is well founded, moving them to act. Persuasion is an appropriate strategy in the following situation:

- Political decision-makers are open to dialogue but not convinced that change is necessary.
- Political decision-makers refuse to invest adequate human, financial, or material resources to develop and implement a given public policy.

In these situations it pays to work with allies or build collaborative relationships with stakeholders who support your position with a view to exerting the greatest possible persuasive power and consolidating your position. Raising public awareness is an especially crucial part of persuasion strategies because politicians and civil servants keep a close eye on public opinion. Don't forget that the consensus strategies in the previous section can often be deployed in conjunction with persuasion strategies.

Toolkit to Healthier Communities - Influencing Healthy Public Policies (2011), from the Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance, and *Have an Influence on Public Policy,* from YMCA Canada (2002), both have useful tools for working with the media: communication plans, guides for drafting key messages, audiences to target, media relations strategies, and more.

Sample persuasion strategies:

MEDIA AWARENESS-BUILDING CAMPAIGN TARGETING

- The general public
  - Using media or public communications: ads, press releases, press conferences, letters to the editor, interviews, online campaigns, social media
  - Signs and canvassing (leaflets)
  - Support from influential local figures, groups, or elected officials (letters of support, press conferences, etc.)
- Influential stakeholders
  - In-person meetings
  - Phone calls
  - Letters and emails
  - Strategic mailings: meeting reports, quarterly updates, annual reports, position papers

OTHER POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Setting up a coalition or round table
- Participation in public consultations and hearings
- Lobbying
- Petitions
- Organizing a special event or guided tour
- Holding a community forum
- Hosting workshops to organize the public

Note: Working with the media is a cornerstone of persuasion strategies. A communication plan that includes a clear message, target audience, and timeline of activities is a must—especially since your opponents are also crafting their own media strategy.

III – Confrontation strategies

Confrontation strategies are used to exert maximum pressure to force dialogue on policy. Bear in mind that you are not opposed to a particular group or individual, but rather to the position they espouse. Confronting opposing points of view can be constructive and drive public debate forward. Confrontation strategies are appropriate in the following situations:

- It has proven impossible to persuade political decision-makers.
- Decision-makers are working to stifle dialogue.
- Decision-makers claim to support proposed amendments but fail to take concrete action.

It may become necessary to use confrontation strategies to adopt a public policy on a controversial issue. Healthy Cities and Towns (HCT) action principles such as working in partnership with allies and involving local residents are always recommended. Moreover, don't lose sight of the ultimate objective: a negotiated agreement with political decision-makers. This means that confronting opposing points of view should yield concessions on both sides and a compromise between the original positions.

Sample confrontation strategies

- Mediation
- Class action lawsuits
- Petitions
- Public events
- Demonstrations
- Boycotts

Note: Working with the media is also a key part of any confrontation strategy. All involved stakeholders (advocacy groups, political decision-makers, opponents, etc.) will be using the media to sway public opinion. The media components of persuasion strategies will prove useful when deployed jointly with confrontation strategies.

Warning! Never resort to confronting opposing points of view until you have tried consensus and persuasion strategies. Actions like demonstrations and class action lawsuits create open conflict in the public arena. This comes with the risk of alienating certain stakeholders, possibly for the long term, which may jeopardize future cooperation. Moreover, heretofore silent opponents of the project may become more vocal and take on a more active role in fighting the project.

Still, certain confrontation strategies like petitions and demonstrations, used along with persuasion and consensus strategies, can prove an effective alternative that consolidates gains with minimal drawbacks.

CONCLUSION

Local communities possess a number of mechanisms to act on the physical, social, cultural, economic, and political environments. Developing healthy public policy is one of the means by which local communities and municipalities can make a difference in the health and well-being of the general public. It is the responsibility of every member of the community to speak up and make their voices heard on health, get involved, and promote the health issues of greatest concern to them. As a local resident and stakeholder, you can make your ideas heard and put your skills to use, putting forward new solutions to the health and well-being challenges we face as a society.

Getting involved in public policy may seem daunting at first. But when you take an organized approach, one step at a time—define the problem situation, understand the local context, identify the stakeholders, and choose appropriate strategies—the picture changes. Public policy development is still a complex process, but you now hold the power to influence it! What is more, when you focus on inclusion and building alliances between local authorities, residents, leaders, and representatives from the community and public and private sectors, you can put health and quality of life issues at the top of the local political agenda.

RECOMMENDED COMPLEMENTARY RESOURCES

Toolkit to Healthier Communities - Influencing Healthy Public Policies.
Toronto: Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (OCDPA), 2011.

This guide for those seeking to influence healthy public policy at the local level is available in both English and French. It is organized around eight steps to help guide your reflection and action on public policy. Highly comprehensive with practical, useful tools. Choose from two versions: 1) the complete 93 page guide (the *Toolkit*), or 2) the abridged 25 page version (the *Guide*).

Available free of charge: http://www.ocdpa.on.ca/rpt_HCHandbook.gk

Be H.I.P.P - Have an Influence on Public Policy: A Manual and Tool Kit on How Voluntary Organizations Can Influence Public Policy, YMCA Canada, 2002.

This practical guide is designed to help Canadian volunteer organizations influence public policy at the local, provincial, and federal levels. It contains useful information on the workings of government and provides an eight-step action plan. Appendices include twelve action tools. Clear, easy to use, and clearly written in layperson's terms.

Available free of charge: http://www.ymca.ca/media/59241/be_hipp_manual.pdf

Petit manuel d'analyse et d'intervention politique en santé. (French only) O'Neil, M., G. Roch, and M. Boyer. Les presses de l'Université Laval, 2011.

This manual presents a method for analyzing and taking action on health policy. Focuses include analyzing issues, actors, and action strategies. The guide also features several detailed examples of actions taken to influence health policy.

Available online: www.pulaval.com/catalogue/petit-manuel-analyse-intervention-politique-sante-9571.html

Advocacy Tools and Guidelines: Promoting Policy Change. Sprechmann, S. and E. Pelton. Atlanta: Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc. (CARE), 2001.

This guide is designed for international aid project managers. Despite its international focus, this highly detailed document contains a wealth of information on such aspects as the main concepts underlying public policy. It also includes seven general steps in developing and implementing an action plan. Information is interspersed with worksheets and other practical tools.

Available free of charge: www.care.org/getinvolved/advocacy/tools.asp

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APPENDIX 1:
DEFINING THE PROBLEM SITUATION

DEFINE THE PROBLEM SITUATION YOU WANT TO ACT ON

The questions below are intended to spark reflection. Answers do not have to be complete or exhaustive.

Define the problem situation

What is the problem situation? Which individuals or groups are most affected?

What information, data, and research is available for documenting the problem? Is the body of research compelling? Is the problem a controversial subject?

What are the causes of the problem?

What are the consequences? For whom?

In the past, who has taken an interest in this problem (either in your community or elsewhere)?
What was the outcome?

What are the various stakeholders' views and attitudes regarding this problem? Do they recognize it as an important issue? Do they view the issue with the same conceptual framework?

What stakes do various actors have in this problem?

Solutions

What are the possible solutions? According to the available data, which solutions are deemed most effective?

_____

Are the proposed solutions economically viable?

_____

Would the solutions be easy to implement?

_____

Have these solutions been successfully implemented in other communities?

_____

Do the proposed solutions come under municipal, provincial, or federal jurisdiction?

_____

Do the public institutions involved possess the necessary legal, technical, and financial resources to act?

_____

Are the solutions in line with the dominant values and ideologies of

- Political parties (the governing party, the opposition)? _____
- Interest groups? _____
- The general public? _____

APPENDIX 2:
THE LOCAL CONTEXT

THE FIVE DIMENSIONS OF THE LOCAL CONTEXT

The questions below are intended to spark reflection. Answers do not have to be complete or exhaustive.

The political context

How do political decision-makers cooperate with the community (citizens, interest groups, coalitions, public institutions, etc.) when time comes to develop public policy?

_____

Are political decision-makers aware of the importance of healthy public policy? What is their track record on health and quality of life issues in the community?

_____

Is the ideology of the party in power in agreement with the public policy we are proposing?

_____

When are the next elections planned?

_____

The economic context

What would the financial costs of implementing this public policy be?

_____

Are these costs realistic? Can the community afford to pay for this public policy on its own?

_____

If not, what alternative solutions could be considered to fund the policy (step-by-step implementation, other funding sources, etc.)?

_____

What are the potential costs of inaction?

_____

The organizational culture context

Is the community (municipality, school board, etc.) working actively with community leaders to foster residents' participation?

_____

Is the community interested in the needs targeted and identified by residents and interest groups?

Is the community using a variety of methods to connect with different social groups (public consultation, surveys, focus groups, community forums, etc.)?

Is the community informing and making residents aware of the importance of getting involved in developing public policy?

The social context

Are community stakeholders in the habit of working together?

What measures are already in place to foster resident participation in the community?

Do these measures reach a cross-section of residents of the community, including socioeconomically disadvantaged residents?

Does a cross-section of local residents participate in political life?

The historical context

Has the local community adopted healthy public policy in the past? What determinants of health did such policy target?

In recent years, has the city/town council supported healthy public policy, or have such initiatives passed only after long struggles?

Have the community's recent attempts to influence public policy been successes or failures? How do you explain these failures?

APPENDIX 3: STAKEHOLDERS

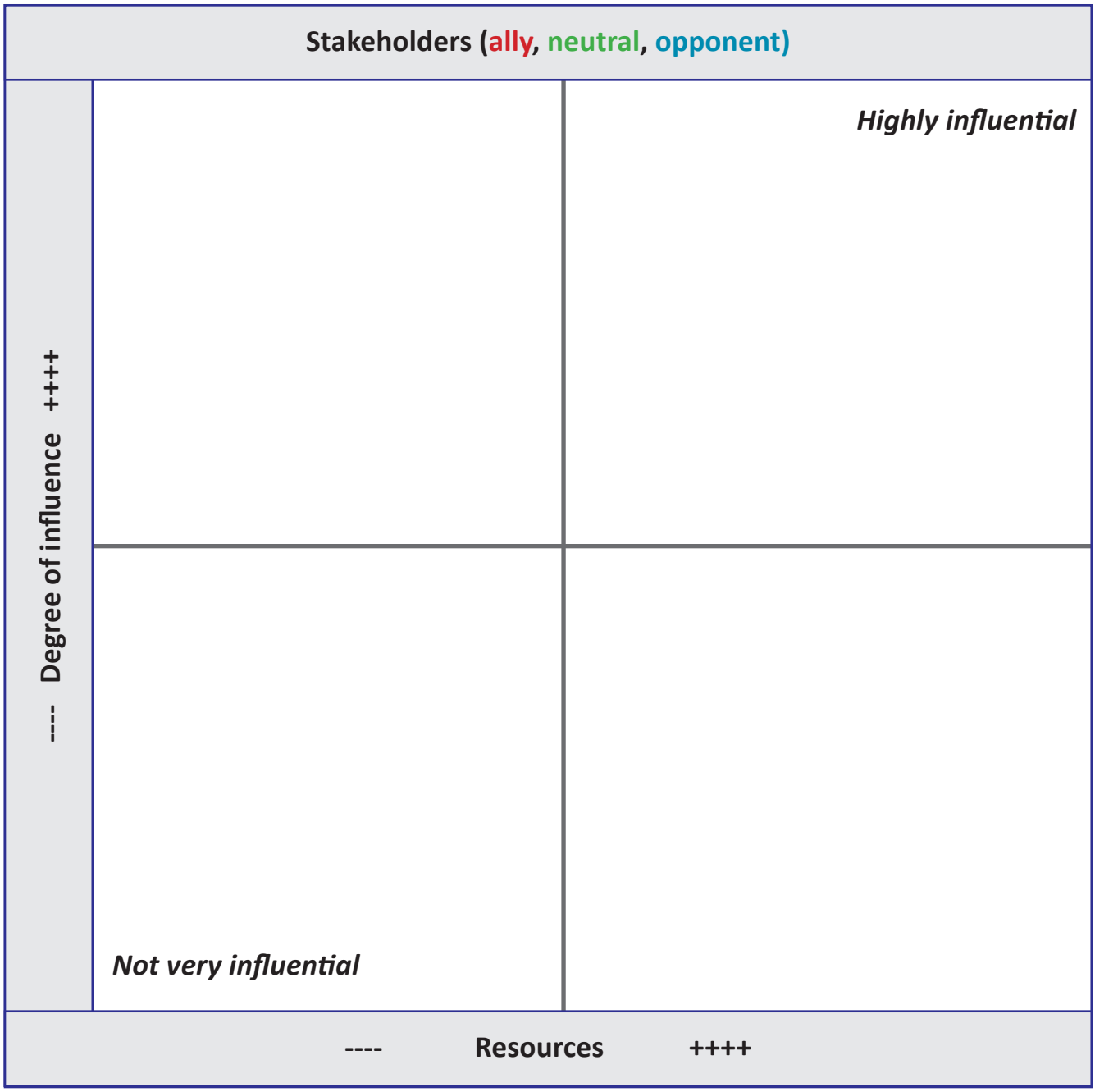
I – Types of stakeholders

In the table below, list the various stakeholders active in your community and affected by the public policy you wish to act on. Also indicate the position of each stakeholder: in favor, neutral, or against.

LOCAL INSTITUTIONS	POSITION	ASSOCIATIONS AND COMMUNITY GROUPS	POSITION	RESIDENTS	POSITION

II – Degree of influence and resources

Now that you have completed the list of stakeholders and where they stand on your issue, rank them in the four quadrants below according to degree of influence and resources at their disposal. *Tip: Write the names of allies in red, neutrals in green, and opponents in blue, to better visualize the results.*



III – Summary table - Stakeholders

	Stakeholders	Ally, neutral, opponent	Degree of influence	Resources
EXAMPLES	*Health center*	*Ally*	*Fairly influential*	*Financial and material* *Close relationships with decision-makers* *Information on public health*
EXAMPLES	*Ms. Gaudreau (resident)*	*Neutral*	*Community leader* *Highly influential with community associations*	*Network of contacts*

APPENDIX 4: CHOOSING AN APPROPRIATE STRATEGY

SUMMARY TABLE

Key aspects of the problem situation	
Key aspects of the local context	
Main stakeholders (allies and opponents)	

CHOOSING STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

	Strategy or strategies selected	Tactics	Timeline
EXAMPLE	*Persuasion*	1. *Set up a round table* 2. *Mobilize residents to attend public consultations* 3. *Develop a communication plan: press releases and press conferences* 4. *Meet with elected officials undecided on the best solutions to adopt*	*June 15, 2012* *April 4, 2012* *March 1, 2012* *May 15, 2012*

APPENDIX 5:
SUMMARY TABLE – STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

The table below includes strategies and associated actions that can help influence healthy public policy. The actions can be used as part of more than one strategy, as there is some overlap between the three main types of strategies. Keep in mind that the strategies and associated actions are not mutually exclusive but rather complementary, and should be used together.

	Strategies		
Actions	**Consensus**	**Persuasion**	**Confrontation**
Consultation	•		
Formal and information meetings with civil servants	•	•	
Meetings with politicians	•	•	
Meetings with political advisors	•	•	
Meetings with senior management from other sectors	•	•	•
Setting up working groups	•	•	•
Setting up coalitions	•	•	•
Sharing research findings	•	•	•
Drafting written proposals	•	•	•
Negotiation	•	•	•
Invitations to special events		•	
Organizing guided tours		•	
Attending public consultations and hearings		•	•
Lobbying		•	•
Awareness-raising campaign		•	•
Working with media: ads, press releases, press conferences, letters to the editor, interviews, Web campaign, social media campaigns	•	•	•
Signs and canvassing (leaflets)		•	•
Support from important figures, groups, or influential officials (letters of support, press conferences, etc.)		•	•
Petitions		•	•
Phone calls	•	•	•
Letters	•	•	•
Emails	•	•	•
Targeted mailings: meeting reports, quarterly updates, annual reports	•	•	•
Holding community forums		•	•
Public education, awareness-raising		•	•
Mediation			•
Class action lawsuits			•
Public events, demonstrations			•
Boycotts			•