

# **Community-Centered Governance for Effective Policy Making**

## **Curriculum**



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# Community-Centered Governance for Effective Policy Making Curriculum



*Designed for a diverse audience of public policy practitioners, including elected officials, policy administrators, and community advocates, this course equips participants with knowledge, skills, and tools to effectively and collaboratively navigate complex policy challenges with an equity lens.*

## 1 | Course Introduction

This course introduces A Framework for Community Centered Governance for Effective Policy Making. The overall curriculum is based on this new comprehensive framework and provides the essential ingredients facilitators will need to guide participants' understanding of a full policy lifecycle. The curriculum prioritizes meaningful community engagement, collaborative governance, values-based decision making, and inclusion as core principles, and emphasizes the iterative, often non-linear, and cyclical nature of the policy-making process.

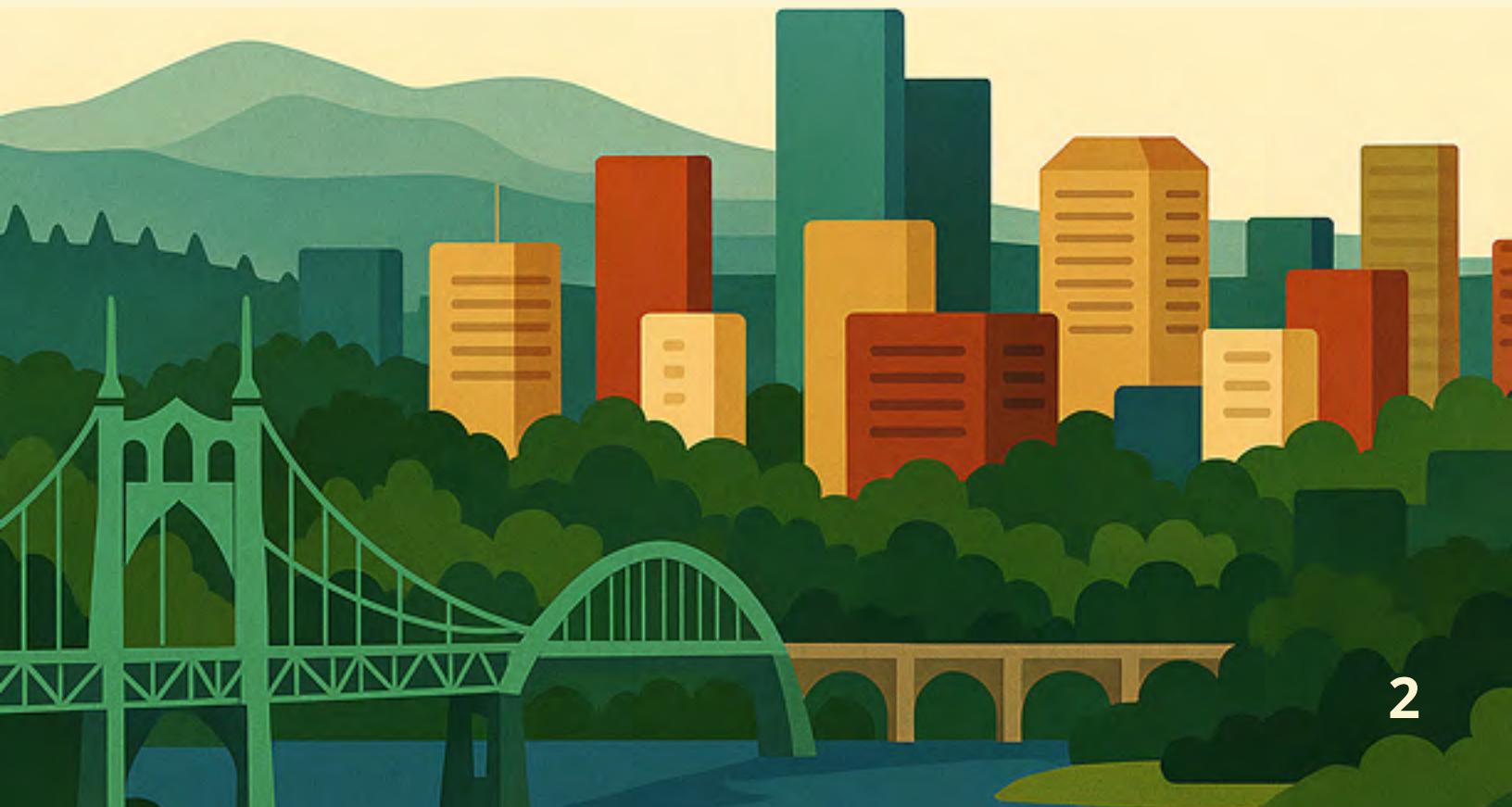
In this course, participants will engage in real-world scenarios, interactive discussions, and applied learning activities that facilitate the participants' understanding of the Community-centered policy framework. Through these activities, the course aims to strengthen the participants' ability to analyze and respond to policy challenges in diverse and evolving contexts. By the end of the course, participants will enhance their ability to collaborate effectively, develop responsive policies, and foster a mindset of mutual stewardship and sustainable governance that honors community wisdom and contributes to lasting, positive impacts for all.

## 2 | Learning Objectives

*By the end of this course, participants will:*

Understand the fundamentals of the policy-making process through a policy-making framework that is centered on an inclusive and community-centered approach to governance.

- Learn how to meaningfully engage and effectively collaborate with communities directly impacted by policy decisions at each stage of the policy-making process to achieve outcomes that are both equitable and impactful.
- Examine theories and practices of mutual stewardship and community-centered governance while learning how to apply values-based criteria to strengthen policy analysis and guide decision-making to address community-defined priorities.
- Learn how to apply community-centered evaluation strategies to assess policy impact through implementation, foster a culture of shared learning, and improve community outcomes through collaboration and continuous improvement.

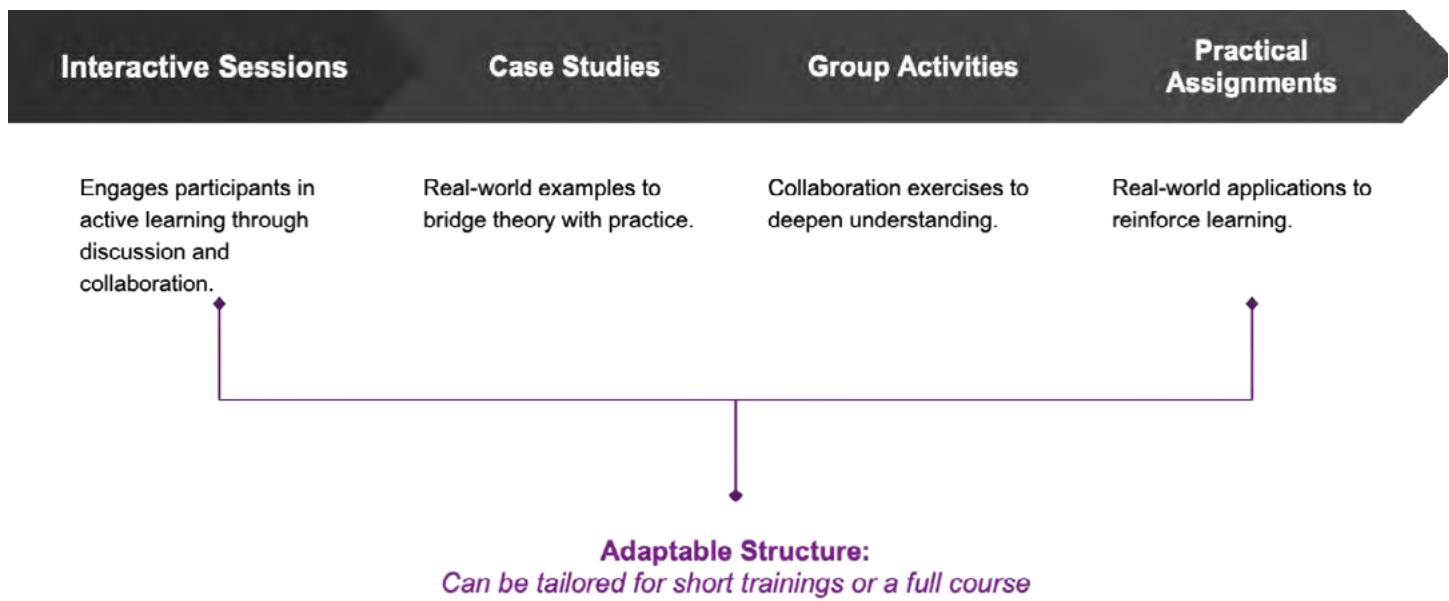


## 3 | Learning Approach

To foster strong adult learning conditions, our approach integrates the principles of the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework, specifically tailored to adult learners and grounded in the key principles of androgyny. The three core UDL principles are: multiple means of representation, multiple means of engagement, and multiple means of action and expression. This UDL framework is designed to enhance and optimize teaching and learning for all individuals by offering effective strategies to make the curriculum accessible and engaging.

Building on the UDL framework this course is organized with four key elements: 1) Interactive Sessions, 2) Case Studies, 3) Group Activities, and 4) Practical Assignments. (See Figure 1 below). These components promote collaborative learning and facilitate real-world application of the concepts covered in the comprehensive policy framework.

Figure 1. Designed Learning Approach to Comprehensive Curriculum Outline



1 UDL guidelines accessible at: <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

2 Andragogy refers to the method and practice of teaching adult learners. It is based on principles that recognize the unique needs, experiences, and motivations of adults, emphasizing self-directed learning, practical application, and problem-solving in real-world contexts.

3 The community-centered policy-making framework and the curriculum are designed as a complementary pair; each playing a distinct but interconnected role in fostering community-centered governance and effective policy-making. The Community-centered policy-making framework is an iterative guide for developing, implementing, and evaluating policies with an emphasis on inclusion, equity, and community engagement. It provides participants with a roadmap covering critical stages of the policy cycle. By centering community input, this framework ensures that decisions are responsive to the lived experiences of those most affected by policy outcomes. On the other hand, this curriculum facilitates learning and application. This curriculum is designed to serve as a practical and interactive guide for learning, applying, and embedding the principles of the policy-making framework. It offers lessons and tools that enable participants to engage deeply with each stage of the framework. Each lesson builds on theoretical and practical knowledge, equipping participants with skills to address real-world policy challenges.

### 3 | Learning Approach

The application of the UDL framework with the four key components allows the curriculum to be flexible and adaptable to a wide range of settings, contexts, and participant dynamics. The structure is dynamic, allowing facilitators to tailor the content to meet the needs of specific audiences and time frames. This approach allows the curriculum to be delivered in different formats ranging from a single-day session to a multi-session training series. This flexibility in the delivery of the course ensures that the curriculum maintains focus and coherence while supporting diverse learning environments and varying levels of participant engagement.

In addition, the four key elements allow the participants to learn through multiple sensors which facilitates the participants to develop deeper connections to knowledge, skills, and values. Each curriculum focus area is thoughtfully designed to align with UDL principles, incorporating multiple means of engagement to maintain motivation, representation to offer content through diverse formats, and action/expression to provide varied ways for participants to demonstrate understanding. This approach intentionally creates a learning environment that is not only inclusive and accessible but also highly responsive to the diverse needs and preferences of adult participants.

It should also be noted that this learning approach requires interactive facilitation techniques. To be effective, the facilitation approach should be tailored for a given audience, purpose, and the learning time available to participants in conjunction with the specific facilitation skills and knowledge of the lead trainers.

## 4 | Curriculum Roadmap

The full curriculum of this course consists of four focus areas. They are:

- 1:** Foundations of Effective Public Policy: Theory and Practice
- 2:** A Framework for Community-Centered Governance for Effective Policy Making
- 3:** Strategies to Support Community-Centered Governance
- 4:** Tools Supporting Use of the Framework

In each focus area, emphasis is placed on the importance of engaging communities and partners directly impacted by policy decisions. By doing so the overall curriculum ensures that the participants are not only introduced to the technical aspects of policy making, but also on how to utilize inclusive processes to achieve effective policy solutions that are informed by and responsive to community needs. Each focus area includes:

- An overview and purpose
- Key content presented as core themes
- A “check for understanding” with key questions and takeaways to ensure alignment with the lesson’s objectives
- Supplementary resources and tools (such as readings and templates) for practical application, and access to hands-on exercises.

While the curriculum is organized around the four focus areas, it is designed to be highly adaptable to accommodate varying needs and time constraints. For example, this curriculum can be condensed into a single intensive session by integrating key concepts and high-impact activities from each content focus area. Alternatively, it can be expanded into multiple sessions where each focus area is explored in depth, including supplementary case studies. Facilitators can adjust the pacing, scope, and delivery of the content based on the audience’s expertise, community needs, or organizational goals, ensuring practical and meaningful engagement.



## Overview and Purpose

This focus area introduces the fundamental principles, concepts, theoretical frameworks, and foundational practices that underpin effective policy making. In this introductory session, policy making is emphasized as a cornerstone of governance serving as both a primary responsibility of elected leaders and a critical avenue for community participation and social impact. For many participants this is a useful starting point to get at the "whys" and rationale behind the more actionable framework. Participants are equipped with foundational concepts embedded within our policy making systems, focusing on community and partnership dynamics, how systems are interconnected, and where data-informed, community-centered approaches can be used to solve collective challenges and create meaningful change.

## Key Content

### 1. Governance and Public Policy Basics

- Definition of public policy: defining public policy and its role in governance. Understanding what public policy is and how it differs from laws, regulations, and programs.
- Definitions of governance: exploring the wide range of ways people, policy makers, and academics consider what it means to actively govern with or without government authority.
- Roles in policy making: identifying/exploring key actors (elected officials, administrators, advocates, and community members) and their responsibilities.
- Levels of government: models of how policies are developed and implemented at local, state, national, and international levels.
- Exploring key governance principles: understanding how transparency, accountability and community involvement create more responsive, effective and equitable policies.

### 2. Understanding two approaches to governance (Stone, 2012):

- The market model views governance as driven by individuals making decisions based on self-interest, competition and efficiency. In contrast, the community model emphasized collective reasoning, cooperation, and mutual interdependence, recognizing that communities work together to achieve shared goals. (Stone, 2012)

### 3. Applying Systems Thinking to Address Complex Challenges

- Understanding the bigger picture: policies as part of a web of interconnected systems of social, economic and political factors. System thinking helps us recognize these connections and consider how one change can impact the broader system.
- Community collaboration: successful policies depend on understanding how different interests and partners (sometimes referred to as stakeholders) influence outcomes. Collaboration ensures that decisions are informed by a range of perspectives.
- Addressing root causes: by identifying systemic inequities and recognizing patterns, systems thinking helps develop solutions that address the root causes of issues. Emphasizing the lived experiences of diverse communities ensures that policies are fair and inclusive.

### 4. Defining a Policy Problem by starting with 4 community needs:

- Collectively identify and clarify the problem: engage partners to establish a shared understanding of the issue's scope and context.
- Using a root cause analysis: dig beneath surface-level symptoms to uncover the underlying causes driving the issue.
- Effectiveness-based Planning and Policy Development (Kettner and Moroney): ensure that problem analysis informs actionable and measurable solutions.
  - Guiding questions for defining and analyzing the problems:
    - Stating problems as solutions
    - What is the nature of the situation?
    - What is happening for those experiencing the situation directly?
    - What is the scale and distribution of what is happening?
    - What values are being supported and threatened?
    - How widely is the situation recognized?
    - What is the essence of the problem(s) as you understand it?
    - What are the roots of the problem?
    - What strengths and assets exist to address the challenge?
    - Are there other power dynamics at play?

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<sup>4</sup> A social issue must be translated into a policy problem to become actionable within the policy making process. Not all social issues require a policy intervention. For this transformation, it is essential to frame the issue effectively, analyze its root causes, and clearly define its scope and impact. This includes understanding how the issue is represented, identifying potential trade-offs, and evaluating the implications of proposed solutions when addressing the problem.

## 5. Values-based decision making and attention to changing practices are cross-cutting themes running through the entire framework.

- Values-based decision making:
  - Who decides and why
  - Clarity of purpose and scope
  - Prioritizing and translating identified principles and values into an agreed upon decision making criteria
  - Applying shared criteria with intentional weight and order leads to values aligned decisions
- Why changing practices spur change:
  - Policy does little if only left to words and statements on a page. Changing the practices of how policy is developed and implemented and seeing whether policy causes the desired changes in practice is an essential aspect underpinning the framework.
  - The value and art of collaborating across differences and the importance of inclusive design
  - Balancing personal values with the responsibility of listening to and respecting diverse community perspectives and interests.



## Check for Understanding: Governance and Policy Basics

- What is the definition of public policy, and how does it differ from laws, regulations and programs? And how do each of these support public policy and in what ways?
- Why is it important to translate a social issue into a policy problem, and what are the challenges in doing so?
- Consider a policy issue you have encountered, and how might you use systems thinking to approach its development?
- Consider how the transition from theoretical understanding to practical application will help you design and implement policies that reflect community needs.
- What are the essential practices of community-centered governance?
- What are the limits of what was discussed as it pertains to the active practical efforts of policy making?

# Resources

- Wu, J., Thomann, E. (2023). Governance in Public Policy. In: van Gerven, M., Rothmayr Allison, C., Schubert, K. (eds) Encyclopedia of Public Policy. Springer, Cham. [https://doi.org.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/10.1007/978-3-030-90434-0\\_66-1](https://doi.org.proxy.lib.pdx.edu/10.1007/978-3-030-90434-0_66-1)
- Sabatier, P. A., & Weible, C. M. (Eds.). (2014). Theories of the policy process (3rd ed.). Westview Press.
- Kettner, Moroney, and Martin (2022) 6th Edition. Designing and Managing Programs: An Effectiveness-Based Approach
- Deborah Stone (2012) Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making 3rd edition
- Fukayama, Francis. "What is Governance?" Governance, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2013), pp. 347-368.
- Kramer, Mark R., John Kania, and Peter Senge. ["The Water of Systems Change."](#) Report, FSG, May 2018.  
Nguyen, L. -K. -N., Kumar, C., Jiang, B., & Zimmermann, N. (2023). Implementation of Systems Thinking in Public Policy: A Systematic Review. Systems, 11(2), 64. <https://doi.org/10.3390/systems11020064>
- Michael Hill, The Public Policy Process, Pearson-Longman, 2005 (Book)  
The World Bank, Local Governance in Industrial Countries (Edited Book)
- McGhee, H. (2021). The sum of us: what racism costs everyone and how we can prosper together.
- Powell, John, Stephen Menendian and Wendy Ake, ["Targeted universalism: Policy & Practice."](#) Othering & Belonging Institute, University of California, Berkeley, 2019.
- Schneider, A., & Ingram, H. (1997). Policy design for democracy. University Press of Kansas.
- Sabatier, P. A., & Weible, C. M. (Eds.). (2014). Theories of the policy process (3rd ed.). Westview Press.

# 2

## Focus Area

### A Framework for Community Centered Governance for Effective Policy Making

## Overview and Purpose

This focus area is dedicated to the introduction of the framework and builds on the foundational concepts introduced in focus area 1. Policy design and development are influenced by the lived experiences and realities of the community members, city officials, and those in governing roles. Policy making does not occur in a vacuum; it operates within a complex ecosystem of inherited laws, regulations, norms, practices, and precedents that must be understood and acknowledged. Emphasizing solutions-oriented problem solving as a cornerstone of effective policy making, the simplified framework (Figure 1) and full framework is introduced. Participants will explore the policy framework and the critical roles policy makers, policy advocates, and directly impacted communities play in shaping policy proposals that are equitable, responsive and effective.



# Key Content

## 1. The cyclical nature of policy making:

- Explore how policies are continuously developed, implemented, and refined.

## 2. Revisit the role of various stakeholders in the process:

- Identify and understand the different actors involved/needed in the policy making process.

## 3. Introducing the Community-Centered Governance for Effective Policy Making Framework

- [The Full Framework](#)
- [An Open Framework for Participant Engagement and Sense Making](#)
- [Presentation Example Teaching the Framework](#)

### • Teach the Four Phases of the Framework:

- Understanding Context
- Setting Shared Vision and Building Alignment
- Policy Action, and Laying the Groundwork for Implementation:
- Observe, Learn, Adapt, and Improve

**Note:** *The details presented in the framework are not repeated here. These resources should be closely reviewed and utilized or adapted for the purposes of this lesson.*

## Check for Understanding

- What was learned about ways to more deeply understand community context?
- What do you think it means to "get the problem right" in the framework?
- What changes in your own practice or governance might come from giving more attention to partnerships and how to stay engaged with community voices while navigating towards policy passage?
- What places in your experience, or in the framework, have the most leverage for stewarding positive change?
- Where do you see impediments or barriers to good governance that you think are helpful for the group to discuss or work on in the future?

## Resources

- This [single link provides access to resources and citations](#) that information each aspect of the full framework.
- Dunn, W. N. (2018). Public policy analysis: An integrated approach (6th ed.). Routledge.

# 3

## Focus Area

### *Strategies to Support Community-Centered Governance*

## Overview and Purpose

In today's interconnected and diverse societies, effective governance requires moving beyond top-down decision-making to approaches that prioritize inclusion, equity and responsiveness to community needs. This focus area explores the principles and practices of community-centered governance, emphasizing the critical role of engaging communities as essential collaborators in the policy making process. Participants will examine foundational concepts, including the "polis model" of community and learn strategies to involve communities in decision-making processes. Through case studies and practical applications, participants will gain insights into fostering collective action, shared values, and sustainable policies that reflect the lived experiences and priorities of those most impacted.

## Key Content

### **1. Understanding Community-Centered Governance**

- Why a community-centered approach matters in contemporary governance
- Principles of inclusion, equity and responsiveness in policy making.
- Definition of Community within the policy making process:
  - Assuming a collective will that goes with a collective effort.  
Key words: Common interests, demands, goals
  - Defining who the members of a community are, how they engage, and agreed-upon community norms

### **2. The "Polis Model" of Community (Stone, 2012. Chapter 1)**

- Exploring the community as a network of interconnected relationships with shared goals and mutual interdependence.
- The polis model views the community as a network of interconnected relationships.
- It emphasizes shared goals, mutual support, and public welfare as guiding principles of collective action.

- Unlike the market model's focus on rational calculations, the polis model highlights strategic decision-making, which accounts for values, emotions, and group dynamics.
- The polis model focuses on collaboration and shared values rather than competition and self-interest.
- It underscores the interdependence of individuals and the need for collective efforts to achieve public good.

### 3. Engaging Communities in policy-making for Effective Policy Making Framework

- Strategies for identifying key partners, fostering collaboration and maintaining trust
- Introduce the [Spectrum of Family and Community Engagement](#) as adapted by Oregon Department of Education.
- Values and advantages of meaningful community involvement.
- Considering the first premises of policy design including an introduction to [Targeted Universalism](#)

## Check for Understanding

- What distinguishes community-centered governance from top-down decision-making?
- What community assets and creative/alternative perspectives might be helpful to engage in some way in the policy development and implementation stages?
- Invite a rapid sketch of constituencies and communities in the areas/regions/districts represented or engaged in a policy effort. What ways can apply the framework and the strategies in this focus area?
- While you might have your own sense - what would be ways to engage and hear from the many people you represent? If this is a universal problem (everyone has some sense of it) how might you prioritize which perspectives are most important to have at the table?
- How does the “polis model” inform collective action and shared decision-making?

# Resources

- [Biden Administration Releases New Guidance Seeking to Broaden Public Participation.](#)  
Published by: The National Law Review, 2023.
- [How to Do Community Engagement Right.](#) Published by: Nonprofit Quarterly, 2024.
- [Putting Communities at the Heart of Policy-Making.](#) Published by: Open Access Government, 2020.
- Barnes, M., & Schmitz, P. (2016). [Community Engagement Matters \(Now More Than Ever\).](#)
- Stanford Social Innovation Review, 14 (2), 32–39.
- Reed, M. S. (2008). Stakeholder participation for environmental management: a literature review. *Biological conservation*, 141(10), 2417-2431.
- The Participation of Stakeholders in Policy and Strategy Development" (OECD)
- [Best Practices for Community Engagement](#) pages 12-15 from Portland State University's
- Center for Public Service's Multicultural Community Forum Report.



# 4

## Focus Area

### Tools Supporting Use of the Framework

## Overview and Purpose

Effective policy-making requires authentic and sustained community engagement. Participatory approaches need to focus on listening and trust-building, so policy makers can ensure that community voices are integral to decision-making processes. Likewise, collaborative governance as an approach, make sure to bring together diverse sectors, public, private, and nonprofit, to work collectively toward shared goals.

This focus area equips participants with practical tools and approaches to engage communities, actively listen actively and incorporate diverse perspectives into the policy making process, and build cross-sector partnerships. Additionally, participants will explore collaborative governance frameworks and complementary roles that lead to a more resilient and responsive governance structure.

## Key Content

### 1. Tools and strategies for effective community outreach and understanding context

- Best practices for reaching and engaging diverse communities

### 2. Participatory approaches: listening and including diverse perspectives

- Inclusive practices that address barriers to participation and ensure representation of marginalized voices

### 3. Collaborative governance models/frameworks

- Frameworks for cross-sector collaboration in policy making
- Case studies illustrating successful collaborative governance initiatives
- The value and role for collaborative governance approaches
- Interests versus positions
- Interdependence
- Cooperation (game theory and the prisoner dilemma)
- The role of groups to make collective decisions

## 4. Effective solutions through partnerships

- The role of public actors, non profits, private sector, and citizens in policy development
- Understanding how different sectors contribute to policy making
- Building partnerships to align community needs with policy goals

### **Case Study: Review the Oregon Department of Education's "Equity Decision Tools for School Leaders"**

- This resource was initially developed during the COVID-19 pandemic as school leaders faced hundreds of rapid and significant decisions with impacts for staff, students, and community. The aim was to create a meaningful way to discern where a decision would benefit, even at speed, from thoughtful community engagement and/or targeted consultation.

## Check for Understanding

- Which of the tools shared feel most useful in applying the framework to your real-time efforts?
- What connections can you make between the tools shared and the underlying values and theories shared in focus area 1?
- Invite a rapid sketch of constituencies and communities in the areas/regions/districts represented or engaged in a policy effort. What ways can apply the framework and the strategies in this focus area?
- How do the decision tools in the case study support decision-making without sacrificing inclusiveness/inclusivity?

## Resources

- Emerson, K., Nabatchi, T., & Balogh, S. (2012). "An Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*.
- Ansell, C., & Gash, A. (2008). Collaborative governance in theory and practice. *Journal of public administration research and theory*, 18(4), 543-571.
- Ansell, C., & Gash, A. (2018). Collaborative platforms as a governance strategy. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 28(1), 16-32.
- Ansell, C. (2016). Collaborative governance as creative problem-solving. Enhancing public innovation by transforming public governance, 35-53.
- Video (from 2.34 min to 9.47 min): "What game theory reveals about life, the universe and everything" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mScpHTli-kM>

# 5 Supplementary Training Materials

The materials included in this section, such as the facilitator agenda and slide deck, are examples of the resources used during a pilot training with the elected members of the Portland City Council. These materials demonstrate how the content of the curriculum was tailored and delivered to support their governance roles, providing a framework for collaborative learning and decision-making.

- Pilot Training Facilitator’s Agenda
- Pilot Training Presentation Deck
- Example Participant Agenda from Pilot Training
- Learning Conditions

