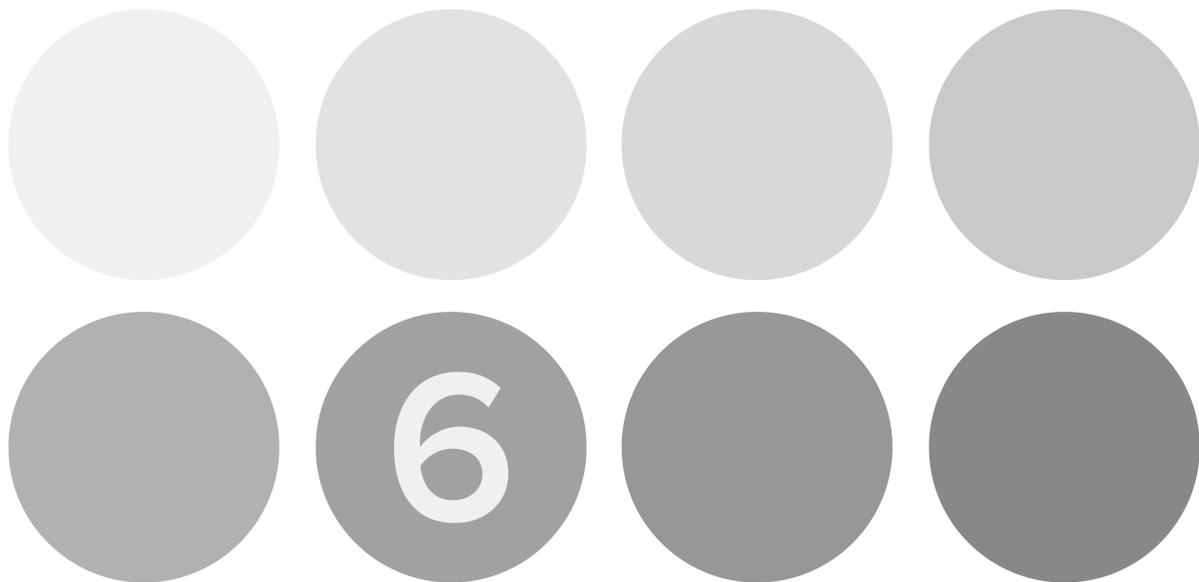


A Guide to Health Reform

Eight Practical Steps

Step Six: Conducting Political Analysis



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Step Six: Conducting Political Analysis and Designing Political Strategies

Policy reform is a profoundly political process, and advocates need to manage the politics of change, through careful political analysis and innovative political strategies. Understanding and managing the political context of health policies is crucial to improving the chances of effectively designing, adopting, and implementing health reforms that can achieve their intended objectives. Step Six involves assessing the political feasibility (i.e., doing applied political analysis) of each proposed reform option and then designing political strategies and adapting proposed reforms as needed through negotiation to improve the political feasibility of the reform options (*GHRR-Chapter 4*).

Applied political analysis: A systematic investigation of the interests, positions, and power of stakeholders regarding the formulation, adoption, or implementation of a policy, and includes the development of political strategies to assist in managing change.

Applied political analysis helps you improve your chances at success in changing public policies by:

- Designing strategies to put a particular topic on the policy agenda (topics such as: introduce new cadres of health workers, create new forms of health insurance, or control pharmaceutical prices).
- Increasing the likelihood of support of important groups for a proposed policy and decreasing the opposition of other groups.
- Managing key stakeholders affected by a proposed policy (such as physicians' associations, different government agencies, health worker unions, associations of pharmaceutical companies, insurance organizations, taxpayers, and patient groups).
- Identifying implementation risks early on.
- Assisting in communication among different organizations (by working with journalists, creating regular press conferences, and reaching out via social media).

Political analysis is not a one-off exercise. Instead, it should be done early and often, using the following key actions:

Key actions in Step Six:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Identify stakeholders (persons or organizations) with a vested interest in your policy and the potential to influence related decisions
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Assess the position, interest and power of your stakeholders
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Design and implement a set of political strategies to increase the likelihood of success
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Evaluate your strategies and re-do your analysis as often as needed

You can use [Worksheet 6-1](#) to prepare to conduct a political analysis for health reform.

Identify stakeholders

The first step in political analysis is identifying key stakeholders; [Worksheet 6-2](#) provides guidance on identifying your stakeholders and a table for documenting your findings. Whether you are identifying a health issue, designing solutions to address it, or implementing solutions already adopted, you are likely to encounter the stakeholders shown in Figure 6-1.

Figure 6-1: Stakeholders



- **Political leaders** – executive and legislative branches of government, and political parties
- **Donors** – external actors or partner organizations who are invested in the issue
- **Financial decision-makers** – those who control the budget and financing of the solution.
- **Beneficiaries** – those who will (directly or indirectly) benefit from the solution.
- **Bureaucracies** – those who carry out the work of government, from ministries to front-line workers (known as “street-level bureaucrats”), and a range of agencies and directorates.
- **Interest groups** – associations of persons or organizations with an interest in the issue or solution who are (often) trying to affect policy, such as the private sector, lobbying groups, civil society, non-governmental or non-profit organizations, professional associations, the media, etc.

Source: Campos and Reich, 2019

The list of stakeholder categories in Figure 6-1 is not exhaustive and should be adjusted based on your context and reform package. You can think of any other group of stakeholders that may be relevant to your objective, for example, expert academics. Actors at different levels need to be considered, including national, state, and community levels. Remember that these actors can be from the health sector or from other sectors that have an impact on health, such as energy, finance, labor, transportation, and education.

Assess the position, interest and power of your stakeholders

Once you have identified your key stakeholders, you need to come to know them better. Knowing your stakeholders means clearly understanding: what is at stake for them, what motivates them, what interests them, and how best to work with them. Knowing your stakeholders enables you to seize opportunities, anticipate and navigate challenges that are bound to arise, and determine how best to collaborate and communicate with them.

One way to learn more about your stakeholders is to conduct interviews with them. (If you decide to conduct interviews, consider asking interviewees if they can suggest other stakeholders to consult.) But interviews are not the only way to understand the perspective of stakeholders—media articles, position statements, and other written materials can also be used.

Use the information you gather to assess each stakeholder’s position on the proposed health reform and how much power they have. This is not an easy task. It requires a careful triangulation of perspectives across interviews and other data (i.e., published and unpublished documents).

Here are some questions that can guide your analysis (and help you decide whether you need to conduct interviews to answer the questions):

- Who are the most important stakeholders for the issue your reform addresses? Who holds power related to the issue? Who has access to decision-making processes?
- What is each stakeholder’s position on the proposed reform? Do they support it, are they neutral, or do they oppose the reform? With what level of intensity?
- What are the stakeholders’ interests in the issue? How would the reform affect them?
- Which stakeholders have (or might form) alliances?

The aim of stakeholder analysis is to establish the position of each stakeholder (support, non-mobilized, opposed, and the intensity of support or opposition as high, medium, or low); their power (financial and administrative resources, access to decision-making process, also assessed as high, medium, or low), and their formal and informal relations with other stakeholders.

Assessing the power of key stakeholders is also partly based on identifying the political resources available to each player. Those resources can include material and financial resources, capacity to mobilize an organization or votes, and symbolic resources (such as leadership charisma or social media followers), as well as actual decision power over a specific policy arena. Asking different stakeholders about who holds the most power over a specific policy decision can be used as an input in assessing the power of stakeholders. [Worksheet 6-3](#) provides further guidance on analyzing your stakeholders and presenting your conclusions.

The [PolicyMaker software](https://michaelreich.com/policymaker-software) (<https://michaelreich.com/policymaker-software>) can be used to help you through this process, including to produce a visual representation of the “political map” of stakeholders in the policy landscape. This map will help you in the next step, identifying key areas of opportunity or challenge for which strategies to improve the political feasibility of the reform can be developed. One example of applied political analysis that uses the PolicyMaker software is provided by Glassman et al. (1999).

Design and implement a set of political strategies to increase the likelihood of success

Stakeholder analysis is not an end in itself but rather a means to managing change. Just describing the political landscape is not sufficient to produce change. The results of the stakeholder analysis should be used to develop strategies to change the political landscape in ways that improve the political feasibility of the desired policy reform.

How does categorizing the various stakeholders help us understand who might support, resist, or obstruct the implementation of a proposed reform? And how does it help us figure out what you to do? Implementing health reform successfully requires an active commitment to engaging stakeholders. You are more likely to be successful in enacting health reform if you can figure out how allies can be mobilized, how neutral stakeholders can be turned into allies, and how opponents can be managed or disarmed. All of these efforts require *political strategies*.

Political strategies have four main purposes:

- seeking to change the power of actors;
- seeking to change the position of actors;
- seeking to change the number of actors (in support or opposed)
- seeking to change the perception of the problem or the solution.

These four factors (power of actors, position of actors, number of actors, and perception of problem and solution) all influence the political feasibility of adoption of a proposed policy or the political feasibility of implementation of an accepted policy. [Appendix 6-1](#) provides additional questions to help you develop a set of political strategies.

For each salient stakeholder, the reform team can identify a strategy that will improve the political feasibility of the proposed reform: the specific action to be taken, the expected impacts of that action (on power and position and number of actors), and any anticipated problems with the action. (Indeed, the creation of a change team itself can be considered a political strategy, to ensure that different stakeholders are involved in the reform and that explicit attention is given to the political dimensions of change.)

Political strategies can be creative, but they can also involve risks and potentially adverse consequences. They are also often time-limited. They may only work for so long, or may be relevant during one administration but not another. So the reform team should periodically assess whether its current political strategies are having the intended effects. If not, it is time to start the process over again.

You may also find that the proposed reform itself needs to be reshaped through negotiations with opponents. Changing the contents of the proposed reform thus can be considered a strategy to improve political feasibility. One key challenge in making compromises to improve political feasibility is to avoid reducing the technical effectiveness of the proposed interventions.

Past experience in the local context (in the health sector and in other sectors) is one great source for ideas. You can also look further afield. Applied political analysis has been used to help reformers successfully manage the processes of adopting health financing reforms in Mexico (Gómez-Dantés et al., 2015) and Turkey (Rossetti, 2004). The published literature includes many case studies on health policy processes and political strategies used to promote adoption or implementation. Finally, the [PolicyMaker software](https://michaelrreich.com/policymaker-software) (available at: <https://michaelrreich.com/policymaker-software>) includes a “toolbox” of around 30 possible political strategies that can be adapted to different contexts.

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Worksheet 6-1: Getting ready to do your applied political analysis

In preparing to do your applied political analysis, you should discuss and decide the following:

Item	Key information
Audience/Client for the political analysis: Who will read your report?	
Who will put into action the political strategies suggested by your analysis?	
What is the key health system performance problem to be addressed by the reform?	
What is the current stage(s) of the health reform in the policy cycle?	
Policy proposal: What is the proposed solution to the performance problem you have identified?	
What are the key elements of the policy proposal?	
What is the current level of stakeholder knowledge about the proposal and its details?	

Worksheet 6-2. Identifying your stakeholders

Consider the following questions as you complete the table of stakeholders (on the following page) for each category:

- Who is affected by the health system performance problem? Who is currently disadvantaged or benefitting from the status quo?
- Who is likely to be affected by the changes that would result from the implementation of your policy reform? Who will be affected positively or negatively?
- How will these benefits or losses be distributed across different groups or sub-groups?
- Who are the key actors making decisions about the performance problem or the policy reform to be implemented? Who has influence over them?
- Who will lead the reform's implementation?
- Are there any civil society groups that might influence the perception of the issue, or the alignment of actors for or against your chosen solution?

In compiling your list of stakeholders, think of groups that are already mobilized around the performance problem, including groups that are affected directly by it, groups that will have a major role in deciding on whether and how the performance problem is addressed, and groups that would like to shape whether and how the problem is addressed. Experienced policymakers, political advisors and activists often have in their minds their own list of important stakeholders, with a good intuitive sense of each stakeholder's position, level of power, and interest in an issue. Find someone you trust, and use them as a guide in the political analysis.

Your list of stakeholders should seek to be complete, but not so long that it is hard to manage. There is no "correct" number for your list of stakeholders. But the Health Reform Team (or a sub-team on political analysis) should discuss each potential stakeholder and come to a group judgment and decision about which groups to include in the stakeholder analysis.

The table on the next page is designed to help you create a preliminary list of stakeholders, your initial estimate of their position on the health reform, and how you might contact them.

List of Stakeholders

Stakeholder Category	Stakeholder	Estimated Position on Reform	How to Reach Them
Beneficiaries			
Interest Groups			
Bureaucracies			
Financial decision-makers			
Donors			
Political Leaders			

Worksheet 6-3. Analyzing the positions, power and interests of your stakeholders

Once you have created your list of potential stakeholders, you can expand the table from Worksheet 6-2 using the format on the following page to analyze each stakeholder's position on the reform, their level of power, and interest in the effort.

You can also use [PolicyMaker software](https://michaelreich.com/policymaker-software) (available at: <https://michaelreich.com/policymaker-software>) to create a position map (with power and position) that presents your findings in a graphic format.

How can you ensure that your assessments in the position map are accurate?

One way to systematically assess stakeholders' positions on your health reform proposal is to conduct interviews with key individuals. If you decide to conduct interviews, you need to develop an interview guide.

Keep in mind that some stakeholders, even in a direct face-to-face interview, may not state their positions and interests explicitly. Other stakeholders may refuse to participate in interviews.

Deciding on the position and power of stakeholders can be assisted by triangulation of information across different interviews (including the views of other stakeholders) and sources (such as public statements, news articles, social media posts, and published and unpublished documents).

Assessing the power and position of stakeholders inevitably involves some degree of subjective judgment. This subjectivity can be reduced to some degree by discussion and debate among members of the political analysis team.

For additional instructions on how to conduct an applied political analysis, see:

Reich MR, Campos PA. 2020. A Guide to Applied Political Analysis for Health Reform. Working Paper No. 1. Boston, MA: India Health Systems Project, Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2216/2020/08/Guide-Applied-Political-Analysis-final-2020.08.29-FINAL.pdf>

Worksheet for political analysis of stakeholders

Use this worksheet to identify key stakeholders for your reform, and their position, level of power, and level of interest in the reform.

STAKEHOLDER	POSITION (support/oppose; low/med/high)	LEVEL OF POWER (low/med/high)	LEVEL OF INTEREST IN REFORM (low/med/high)

Worksheet 6-4. Develop and track your political strategy implementation

Use this worksheet to develop and track your political strategies, including goals.

Start with the most important stakeholders, in your Team’s assessment. Add rows for additional stakeholders, as needed.

Stakeholder/ Position and Power	Purpose of the political strategy	Political strategy	Expected impact	Anticipated problems	Responsible person	Milestone 1	Milestone 2	Result

Appendix 6-1: Developing a set of political strategies

These questions can help you develop of a set of political strategies to influence key stakeholders.

Objective	Guiding question	Sample political strategies
Change the <u>position</u> of opponents	How can a key opponent be persuaded to change its position from high opposition to low opposition—or even support?	Negotiate a change in a technical aspect of the policy Provide desired resources elsewhere
Decrease the <u>power</u> of opponents	How can the power of opponents be decreased?	Publicly question opponents' motives Reduce opponents' public visibility Deny opponents material resources
Increase the <u>power</u> of supporters	How can the power of supporters be increased so that they have more influence over the policy process?	Increase the financial resources available to supporters Increase supporters' visibility in media and public dialogues
Increase the <u>number</u> of supporters	How can the number of supporters be increased?	Mobilize neutral actors (providing them with technical analysis about how the policy would benefit them; offering them incentives to show public support for the policy)

The [PolicyMaker software](https://michaelreich.com/policymaker-software) (available at: <https://michaelreich.com/policymaker-software>) includes an expanded set of suggested strategies, organized by the categories of power, position, player, and perception. Here is a sample of what the software includes:

3B. Suggested Strategies

Double click on a suggested strategy to build a strategy.

Power Strategies:		▲
Increase the organizational strength of supporters, by providing increased material resources or by providing experienced staff or		
Increase access to political leaders, by organizing through a lobbying campaign.		
Mobilize supporters in groups and communities in public demonstrations to call for action		
Create a coalition of supporting groups or players, with a recognizable name and sufficient resources.		
Provide information and evidence to supporters, including technical and political information.		▼
Position Strategies:		▲
Persuade supporters to strengthen their position, by reminding supporters of the promised benefits compared to other policies.		
Persuade supporters to strengthen their position, by adding more benefits as an incentive.		
Persuade supporters to strengthen their position, by changing the policy to remove contested goals or mechanisms.		
Persuade supporters to strengthen their position, by adding desired goals and mechanisms to the policy.		
Persuade non-mobilized to take a position of support, by promising them benefits compared to other policies.		▼
Player Strategies:		▲
Create a new organization or partnership of existing organizations and individuals.		
Persuade non-mobilized groups to take a supporting position, by providing incentives, removing objections, or adding desired poli		
Persuade political candidates or elected officials in the legislature or executive to adopt your issue, through personal meetings, po		
Change the decision-making processes (eg, through public hearings) in order to expand the number of supporters.		
Create a new organization or partnership of existing organizations and individuals, to involve non-mobilized		▼
Perception Strategies:		▲
Enhance the legitimacy of supporters, by connecting them to positive social values.		
Use symbols to increase public support of the policy, by organizing a media campaign or finding sympathetic vic		
Use the media to increase public visibility of the issue and change perception of problem and solution		
Persuade supporters to take a more public stand on the policy.		
Enhance the legitimacy of policy, by connecting it to positive social values.		▼