

**11.002/17.30J**  
**Fundamentals of Public Policy**  
**Fall 2004**

**Guidelines for the Policy Research Exercise**

In this policy exercise you will (1) work on a specific policy topic of *local* concern, (2) interview local “street level bureaucrats – people who directly implement policy – in your policy area, and (3) work in collaborative groups with other students in your recitation section.

**Rationale and Goals**

The goal of the policy exercise is to give each of you the opportunity to take a closer and more sustained look at policy-making in a substantive area (e.g. housing, education, environmental protection), and especially through the eyes of those responsible for implementing policy. In our experience, this kind of first hand encounter will help you grasp and think more clearly about the material we cover in the lectures.

Working on the project in a group supports this goal by giving you access to and requiring you to interact with different points of view, a central element of policy development and implementation.

**Organization**

We will suggest appropriate substantive arenas and help you make some initial contacts in these areas. You may request to focus your work on a topic other than those we suggest.

In either case, you should keep in mind three requirements. First, your study should focus on a policy initiative in the Boston area; national or international cases are not permitted. As you will see, this local orientation is important in meeting the second and third requirements. Second, your study should draw on primary data (your TAs will explain), especially interviews with individuals involved in the development and implementation of policy. Third, your study should focus on what happens when these individuals and others act on policy goals and try to produce change. This is often referred to implementation and involves the kind of practitioners Michael Lipsky has described as “street level bureaucrats.”

Procedurally, the policy exercise will be organized through the sections and require you to work in a group. Because we will use the sections to organize and support your work, and as the forum for presenting your findings, you must work with colleagues in your section. A group of two is too small; a group of six is too large. Four or five is an ideal number. You may divide work as you see fit amongst the members of your group, but *every member should participate in the interviewing*. The sections will provide opportunities to discuss your projects as you develop them, answer questions, and get help on practical matters like preparing for and conducting an interview.

**Scope**

The exercise is not meant to become a consuming activity and you should not need to devote an immense amount of time to it to do well. As a rough guideline, you should expect to hold one or two organizational meetings outside of class to frame your study and organize your group, do a bit of background research to prepare for the interviews, complete about two interviews each, and meet

again to analyze the results and put together a presentation. If you are going much beyond these guidelines, it should be because you have become fascinated with your topic (it happens), not because it is necessary to complete the assignment successfully.

### **Deliverables**

There are two deliverables for this project. You will make a group presentation in a combined meeting of the sections. Each group will receive a grade for the presentation, which will be based on its organization, creativity, usage and demonstrated understanding of key concepts, and research effort. The presentation grade will be a portion of your final participation grade. You will also draw on your group's research for the final paper. These papers will be written individually, but will draw on the collective research effort.

### **Timeline**

Discussion of the policy exercise will begin in recitations during the week of Session 10. During the next two weeks, students should begin to conduct preliminary research on topics that appear interesting to them. This means only that you should look into the basic facts of the policy topic, mostly using web resources. Topics will be discussed during recitations to determine which best suit the requirements of the exercise, are feasible and of interest to a sufficient number of people. By the week of Session 13, students should have selected topics and formed groups. Students should come to the recitations in early November prepared to discuss progress on their research and interviews. During these meetings, the TAs will discuss interview techniques and will help you prepare interview questions and refine your topic. Presentations will be given during the week of Session 21. We will try to schedule either one or two group meetings that combine sections for the presentations.

### **Possible Topics**

Policies reflecting new security regulations in either:

- Local libraries
- MIT
- Local police, fire and rescue departments
- Schools
- Public Transportation (MBTA)

MIT policies responding to new rules on immigration and the participation by foreign students in research

Boston or Cambridge policies on the homeless

Specific policy responses to “No Child Left Behind Act” in local school districts (standardized testing, requirements, dealing with achievement gaps)

MIT's affirmative action policies in light of last year's court cases

Local environmental and energy policy

Boston or Cambridge health policies (i.e. coverage or public clinics for the poor)

Local hospital policies on uninsured populations, including illegal immigrants

Response of MIT medical to healthcare privacy issues

The response of local officials, especially city clerks, to gay marriage regulations