

How to Conduct Policy Research

Focus on Ocean Policy

Grades 9 – 12
The Ripple Effect



Main Objective

The objective of this activity is to introduce the concept of policy research and show students the general process of conducting (ocean) policy research.

Learning Outcomes

After completing this activity, learners will be able to:

- Understand policy research and its application
- Conduct research to find resources that help in understanding and interpreting policy
- Gain a high-level understanding of conducting policy research

Length of Activity

This activity can be separated in three sections, each section taking approximately 45 minutes

Materials Required

- Internet-enabled device

Activity 1

Conducting Ocean Policy Research

Propose a municipal government policy to band the single-use plastic products soon (e.g., in a year) with the purpose of mitigating plastic pollution in the ocean.

Key questions you need to answer for this policy research:

- Which kind of plastics or plastic products should be and can be banned in a year?
- How does this policy affect the public?

Step 1: General Procedure for Activity

Learners will be separated into four groups and each group will have their own tasks. Learners need to finish their tasks before the next class and share results in the form of presentation.

Group 1: Search for an existing plastic ban policy to understand:

1) what can be proposed for the municipal policy? If there is an existing policy, whether city can do something more? 2) what are the (potential) impacts of this policy on the public?

Example:

Single-use shopping bags ban in Vancouver (<https://vancouver.ca/green-vancouver/bags.aspx>). After reading this material, learners will need to understand:

- 1) What has been implemented? This should include who the by-law applies to, what is banned and what is alternative for single-use shopping bag.
- 2) How to enforce the rule and the resource of municipality policy required for enforcement.

Group 2: Interview of stakeholders

Learners will interview at least two stakeholders in this activity. It might be hard for them to connect with stakeholders in busy roles. Therefore, interviewees could be from their school, household, friends, or relatives. The purpose is to understand different people's perspectives on the plastics and their plan to reduce the use of plastics and deal with plastic waste in the ocean.

It is important for learners to make sure the two interviewees are in different positions. For example, one of the interviewees may want an immediate ban of one or more plastic products. These could include environmentalists from governmental or non-governmental organizations, professionals from ecology and environmental sciences, and other persons who are extremely concerned about current plastic pollutions. The other interviewee could also advocate to stop using plastic products, but they are concerned about the immediate ban because this could potentially bring them negative impacts. These interviewees could include medical staff, owners of fast-food restaurants which are still using plastic containers or lids, and employees from industries which make plastic or plastic products.

Group 3: Survey of the public

Learners are encouraged to formulate their own survey form to understand the public opinions. At least 20 people need to be surveyed. People can be from school and local community.

Examples of survey form available online:
http://letsleanupeurope.altervista.org/alterpages/files/questionnaire_plastic.pdf
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/plastic_bag_survey

Group 4: Collect scientific evidence

A lot of scientific information is readily available online and learners can look for relevant information based on their interests. Instead of looking at general information, learners are encouraged to focus on a specific topic, like the impact of plastic waste on the life cycle of specific aquatic species.

Key resource for teachers: Science assessment of plastic pollution published by Environment and Climate Change Canada and Health Canada.

(<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/evaluating-existing-substances/science-assessment-plastic-pollution.html>)

After completing the group work, learners will present their finding to the whole class. Each group will be given 5-7 minutes of presentation time and 3 minutes of Q&A time. Teachers can guide the discussion activities and draw conclusions based on the evidence collected by learners.

Background Information

- Seven different types of plastic and their uses
<https://programs.greenlearning.ca/path-player?courseid=what-are-plastics&unit=60772877a5c89056e81ea017Unit>)
- Upcoming ban on single use plastics: Government of Canada moving forward with banning harmful single-use plastics
<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/news/2021/12/government-of-canada-moving-forward-with-banning-harmful-single-use-plastics0.html>)

- United Nations Environmental Programme (2022-03-02): End plastic pollution: Towards an international legally binding instrument (<https://wedocs.unep.org/handle/20.500.11822/38525>)
- Ocean Plastics Charter (June 9, 2018): Canada, France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the European Union adopted the Ocean Plastics Charter to demonstrate their commitment to take concrete and ambitious action to address the problem. (<https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/managing-reducing-waste/international-commitments/ocean-plastics-charter.html>)

Activity 2: Overview of Ocean Policy Research and the Resources Required for Policy Research

Librarians are usually familiar with how to conduct online research and may be a good resource for this. They may also have access to the resources which require a subscription.

What is public policy:

Public policy is a broad statement regarded by parliament, a legislature, or by the courts as being of fundamental concern to the state and the whole of society and therefore a principle that guides action. Public policy forms the foundation of public laws.

Resource: LawCentral Alberta

(<https://www.lawcentralalberta.ca/en/public-policy>)

What is policy research:

Policy research is defined as the process of conducting research on, or analysis of, a fundamental social problem in order to provide policymakers with pragmatic, action-oriented recommendations for alleviating the problem.

What is ocean policy research?

The ocean policy research is mainly focusing on policy research in the space of oceans.

Why we need policy research?

Policies affect all areas of our lives. Policy research can provide policy makers guidance on the policy making process. No policy is perfect and public opinion changes overtime. Frequent review and research are required for all the laws and regulations.

How to find information related to the policy you are interested in?

Find relevant policy by conducting an online search using search engines such as Google. Learners can start their policy research by looking for a policy that they are interested in using Google. Key words for search include, but not limit to, country (e.g., Canada), ocean, and terms related to public policy (e.g., law, statute, legislation, regulation). For example, if learners are interested in Canadian ocean policy, they can simply put "Canada ocean law" or "Canada ocean regulation", then they will find Oceans Act, Law of the sea and Marine regulations in the search results. If these are the topics that learners are interested in, they can open the information and conduct further investigation. If they do not find the results they want, they can always change the key words to optimize the search results. Using basic search can help learners quickly find some useful resources. However, learners may also notice that the information related to public policy is limited and after the first two pages, they might find that most of the results are linked to general public websites like Wikipedia and news media.

To make the search effective and efficient, learners can use advance Google search (https://www.google.ca/advanced_search) to find policy information in a particular jurisdiction or executive branches. For Canadian policy, learners can add sites such as Canada Justice Laws website (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/>) or Government of Canada's website (<https://www.canada.ca/en.html>) into the site or domain section to refine the search results.

Canada ocean law

About 143,000,000 results (0.60 seconds)

The **Oceans Act** is Canada's flagship marine protection law, and celebrated its 20th anniversary in 2017. ... It mandated the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans & the Canadian Coast Guard to develop a national oceans strategy and a national system of MPAs.

<https://www.wccf.org/oceans-act>

Oceans Act | West Coast Environmental Law

People also ask

- Is Canada under maritime law?
- Are there ocean laws?
- What is Canada doing to protect the ocean?
- Where do international waters start in Canada?

https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/sc_1996/c_31

Oceans Act (SC 1996, c. 31)

Federal laws of Canada.

You visited this page on 29/01/22.

https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/sc_1996/c_31

SC 1996, c. 31 - Oceans Act

Federal laws of Canada. ... An Act respecting the oceans of Canada ... WHEREAS Canada promotes the integrated management of oceans and marine resources.

Canada ocean regulation

About 79,600,000 results (0.55 seconds)

<https://tc.canada.ca/marine-safety/marine-regulations>

Marine Regulations - Transports Canada

Mar 25, 2019 — Marine Safety Resources ... Please select an act to view relevant regulations. ... Transport Canada is closely monitoring the COVID-19 situation. In ...

People also ask

- What is Canada's oceans Act?
- What is Canada doing to protect the ocean?
- Is Canada under maritime law?
- Where do international waters start for Canada?

https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/sc_1996/c_31

Oceans Act (SC 1996, c. 31)

Federal laws of Canada.

Canada's Maritime Zones **Canada's territorial sea and...**

You visited this page on 29/01/22.

When learners open the advanced Google search website, they will see an interface demonstrated below. Learners can put the same key words "Canada ocean law" in the key words search box. While in the site or domain area, they can put Canada Justice Laws website then click the "Advanced search" button at the end of this page. They will see search results only from Canada Justice Laws website. Besides policies they found in the early section, learners will find more ocean policy related information in the first few pages of the search results, like Canada Marine Act, Department of Fisheries and Oceans Act, Canada Shipping Act, Marine Liability Act, Coastal Fisheries Protection Regulations, Disposal at Sea Regulations and so on. This information is more relevant and the probability for learners to find policy that they want to explore is higher than the basic search.

all these words:

this exact word or phrase:

any of these words:

none of these words:

numbers ranging from: to

Then narrow your results by...

language:

region:

last update:

site or domain:

terms appearing:

SafeSearch:

file type:

Key government resources to understand the policy making process

To generate a better understanding of the policy, learners will need to know the policy's history (the process of debating and enacting legislation, amendment and judicial review), implementation, and legal interpretation. Many factors like positions of political leaders, the international environment, and the opinion of the public towards a social event during specific period, will also influence the policy making process. Therefore, reading policy alone cannot give learners comprehensive understanding on a specific policy and the rationale behind the policy making process. Learners are encouraged to read more materials related to the policy. The link here

(<https://guides.library.utoronto.ca/c.php?g=250755&p=1671776#s-lg-box-15758176>) is a very useful guide to governmental and grey literature sources for public policy research prepared by Sam-chin Li, University of Toronto Libraries. Learners can use this guide to find the history of policy making process including the political debates, the passage of the bill, versions of the bill, votes, major speeches at second reading, coming into force data, government reports, press releases and backgrounders.

Collect other important information and conduct "academic" research

Besides the government information, news media articles/opinion-editorials, policy institute, and non-government organizations, and expert led blogs are also good resources. Talking to academic experts and law makers/administrators can also quickly give learners insight on the specific topic.

However, learners need to be careful about reports from partisan as sometimes the opinions may be biased/politically polarized. Caution should be used by learners while studying these sources because they may include "Fake News," lies and propaganda which requires readers to sort fact from fiction. Comparing with opinionated resources, documents generated by policy researchers and law practitioners may be a better resource to help learners understand the policy and provide them guidance in policy research. However, understanding this information may require some extra training or professional background. And most of these resources will require a subscription. Learners may check with their school/university librarians and may be able to get printed documents using interlibrary loan or document delivery services.

Peer reviewed journal articles from quality journals are good resources for learners. A peer reviewed article reports original work done by one or more researcher. It can also describe existing research or comment on the trends in a specific area. But before publication, the documentation needs to be reviewed by two or more researchers in the same field—this is called the peer review process. It is the reviewers' responsibility to raise questions on the work and point out its limitations. The authors should address all questions and challenges raised during the peer review process.

This process is critical to ensure the content meets the journal's standards of quality and scientific validity. The work is published only when all reviewers and editors have given their approval to publish the work.

Activity 3: Interview and Survey for Advocacy Research

Advocacy research needs some basic research. It can be used when people try to get legislation passed or create community concern which requires attention. It can also be used when misconduct is found in government.

For ocean policy, learners can use this concept to understand the public opinion on specific ocean issues (e.g., plastic pollution in the ocean) and collect information to influence policy makers. The activity below helps learners get familiar with the whole policy research process.

General process for advocacy research

- Collecting evidence:
Policymaking that is rooted in sound theory and empirical evidence should lead to better policies and regulations (Lues, 2018)
<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00014788.2018.1470151>
- Means of collecting evidence:
Interview: find the right people and use interview or informal conversation to collect as much information as possible.
Survey: survey can help reach out a lot of people quickly. It helps learners find out what most people in the community think about something.

Note: it is also important to consult all the stakeholders. Take plastic pollution as an example, learners need to interview plastic manufactures in cosmetic industries and fast-food industries which produce or use plastics. And understand the impact of plastic policy on these industries and local economies.

Scientific research: it is critical for learners to understand the scientific background of specific social problem. The evidence generated by the scientific research can sometimes provide a strong justification for the need of new policies (e.g., climate change and global warming).

Data analysis and conclusion:

Data collected in the interview or survey should be categorized and contextualized for useful information extraction. Then evidence, which refers to information that is relevant to understand or solve the problem, can be further compiled. Detailed information for data collection and interpretation can be found in textbook in social science. Learners will learn some basic data analysis skills in the activities given below. With all the evidence collected by learners, they are ready to make their own conclusion and use it to influence the policy makers.