

County Solutions Step Five: All About Public Policy

Time Needed: One class period



This is lesson five of nine in a series that culminates in a final class project. All steps can be found at www.icivics.org/curriculum/countysolutions

Materials Needed:

Student worksheets

Copy Instructions:

Reading pages (*double-sided; class set*)

Worksheet (*double-sided; class set*)

Learning Objectives. The student will:

- Define public policy.
- Identify action and regulation as two types of public policy.
- Distinguish between examples of actions and regulations.
- Match government agencies with examples of actions they carry out.
- Evaluate the restrictions and benefits of hypothetical regulations.

STEP BY STEP

- ANTICIPATE** by asking students to think of one way the government might show where it stands on an issue (not just in words, but in actions also).
- DISTRIBUTE** one "Public Policy" reading page to each student.
- READ** the material together as a class, pausing to discuss and explain as necessary.
- PROJECT** the *Active Participation* overhead. If you cannot project in a way that lets you uncover one line at a time, you can do this activity by reading each question aloud.
- UNCOVER** (or read) one question at a time with its answers. Have the class answer "A," "B," or "Both" as a chorus. Discuss correct and incorrect answers as appropriate.
- DISTRIBUTE** one review worksheet to each student.
- ASSIGN** students to complete the worksheet.
- REVIEW** the answers if you wish.
- CLOSE** by asking students to think of one kind of problem that would be best solved by government action and one that would be best solved by a regulation.

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Government Problem-Solving: Public Policy

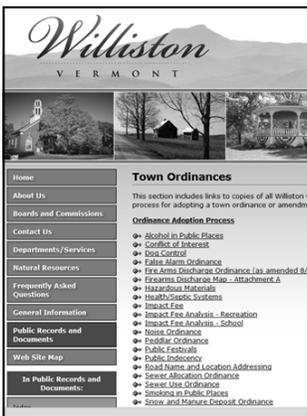
You already learned about the differences between individual, group, and government action. When a problem requires a wide-reaching solution, the government is in the best position to act. You will often hear the term “public policy” in connection with government action. **Public policy** is the stand the government takes about a problem or an idea for improvement. The government’s stand might be to do more—or to do *less*. For example, a state might decide to spend money on an anti-smoking campaign—or to *cut* spending on anti-smoking campaigns. The two ways the government works to solve problems are through *regulation* and *action*.



Government Regulation

One thing the government can do to help solve problems is regulate what people and businesses do. **Regulate** means to monitor and control. The government regulates behavior by passing a law saying what must be done or not done. When the law applies to individuals or businesses, the government either makes it a *crime* to violate that law or imposes a *civil penalty*, such as a fine or revoking a license, for violating the law. A county government can regulate the sale of alcohol by controlling where, how and to whom it may be sold. Some counties choose not to allow the sale of alcohol at all. Businesses that violate those regulations face severe penalties.

The government also regulates itself. It does this by making rules about how it carries out its activities. A state law might allow jails to charge inmates a fee for the cost of their daily care, but prohibit charging more than \$2 per day.



Regulations can be found on government websites

Restrictions vs. Benefits

Government regulation usually involves both a restriction on behavior and a benefit of some kind. For example, a county law against littering restricts your ability to throw trash wherever you want to, but citizens benefit from a cleaner county.

Because regulation restricts behavior, regulation is a huge area of debate for public policy. People almost always disagree about whether the trade-off is worth it. For example, if you own property that has a wetland on it, there are government laws restricting what you are allowed to do with your property. Wetlands are protected because they affect drinking water quality, provide wildlife habitats, and help with flood control. Even so, many people believe that an individual’s right to do what they want with their private property is more important than the benefits of wetlands, and they oppose regulation.



Public beaches are closed at Rookery Bay, Florida to protect beach-nesting birds

Constitutional Limits: Stop Right There!

There are some rights that a regulation cannot interfere with because they are rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution. For example, hatred is a problem. It might be good for the government to regulate whether people are allowed to say hateful things about other people. But this would violate the First Amendment right to free speech. So before the government can regulate behavior, it must ask whether the regulation would violate individual rights under the Constitution.



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Government Action

The government can also take *action* to solve problems. The government takes action in two ways: by providing money and by providing services. These two actions are closely related because it costs money for the government to provide services. When you think about what the government's public policy should be on an issue, you need to consider how much it will cost for the government to take different actions.



Help During Hard Times

Sometimes the government gives money directly to people who need it. For example, the government may help unemployed people by giving them money every month for a limited time. The government might also give people a “voucher” or coupon that the person can use to obtain certain services. Low-income families with small children may be able to get child care vouchers to help with the cost of daycare while the parents are at work. The government's “food stamp” program helps low-income people buy food and other necessities.



Getting the Job Done

When the government provides services, it can either do the job itself or hire a private company or a charity to do the job. For example, the government usually repairs roads. In some cases, the government might use its own equipment and employees to fix a road. In other cases, the government might hire a private contractor to fix the road. Either way, a service is being provided because the road is being fixed. If the government does not already have the necessary equipment and people to do a job, it must decide whether to create a new office and hire new employees. Depending on the government's long-term goals, this might be a more expensive option than using outside companies.



A department of the City of Albuquerque, New Mexico



The City of Tulsa, Oklahoma partners with businesses and individuals to reduce pollution

Cooperation with Others

Many times, public policy involves government cooperation with private organizations. This is often true on the local level, where it makes sense not to have two groups—government and private—doing the same thing. For example, a county might decide to merge its Animal Control department with the local Humane Society into one large animal shelter. This combined shelter might also work with other animal rescue groups in order to foster animals that arrive at the shelter. Partnering with these groups toward a common goal becomes part of the local government's public policy.

Public Policy Changes

Public policies are set in motion—not in concrete! There are many reasons public policy might change. One reason is because the problem itself has changed and requires different solutions to address it. Another reason is because people decide that the problem is no longer a priority, and they would rather spend money on something else. When you think about what the government's public policy should be, always ask whether there is an existing policy that should be changed.



Active Participation Activity: A, B, or Both?

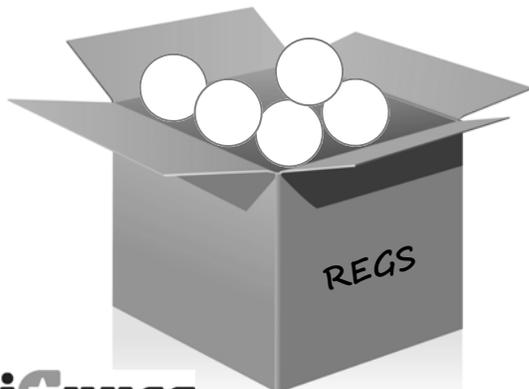
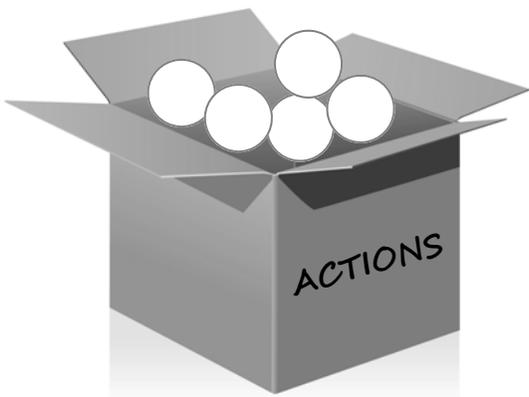
	A	B
The government solves problems through	action	regulation
The penalties for violating a regulation can be	civil	criminal
Regulations cannot violate	The Constitution	Common sense
Regulations involve	restrictions on behavior	benefits
The government takes action by providing	money	services
To help out, the government might give people a	wetland	voucher
The government's public policy might be to	do more	do less
To carry out a public policy, the government can	act alone	cooperate
When it comes to public policy, there is a lot of	agreement	debate
Over time, public policy will	change	stay the same

Step Five: All About Public Policy Name: _____

True or False? Decide whether the phrase in italics makes the statement true or false. If false, write the correct word or phrase on the line.

	T/F	Correction
1. The position the government takes about a problem is called <i>government action</i> .	_____	_____
2. There are <i>four</i> main ways that government works to solve problems.	_____	_____
3. The government works to solve problems through <i>regulation and action</i> .	_____	_____
4. Regulate means <i>to monitor and cooperate</i> .	_____	_____
5. Violating a law might be a crime or might carry <i>civil rights</i> .	_____	_____
6. A regulation cannot violate peoples' rights under the <i>public policy</i> .	_____	_____
7. The government takes action by providing <i>regulations and laws</i> .	_____	_____
8. Public policy often involves government <i>cooperation</i> with private organizations.	_____	_____
9. The government partners with groups to achieve a common <i>trade-off</i> .	_____	_____
10. Public policy <i>never</i> changes.	_____	_____

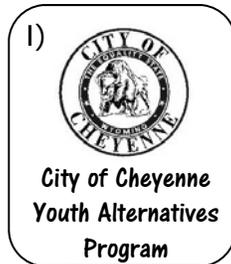
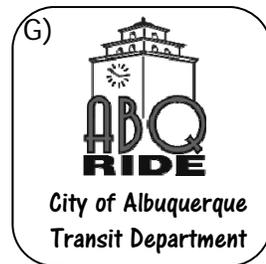
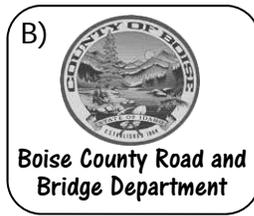
Action or Regulation? Decide whether each statement describes an action or a regulation. Write the statement's letter in the correct box.



- A. Stores may not sell alcoholic beverages to people under age 21.
- B. A factory that pollutes a stream must pay to clean up the stream.
- C. A county decides to plant 100 trees to improve the local park.
- D. The state Department of Education pays for rural schools to install solar panels.
- E. A school district provides students transportation to and from school.
- F. Children under age 16 must attend school.
- G. A town pays for children to have free vaccinations.
- H. A county offers employment and money-management counseling to low-income families.
- I. Farmers may not use certain dangerous pesticides on their crops.
- J. A state adoption agency must not consider race when placing a child for adoption.

Step Five: All About Public Policy Name: _____

Who Does That? Match each government action with the real-life government agency that performs the action.



- ___ 1. Holds job fairs for unemployed people looking for work
- ___ 2. Provides bus service and mass transportation
- ___ 3. Offers legal services at a reduced fee
- ___ 4. Lets residents call one number to request non-emergency city services
- ___ 5. Oversees a network of performing arts facilities such as theaters
- ___ 6. Offers counseling services for kids and their families who are having problems
- ___ 7. Works to prevent and investigate abuse of elderly people
- ___ 8. Removes snow and puts sand on the roads
- ___ 9. Sponsors Ocean Safety Day activities to teach kids about being safe in the water

Restrictions vs. Benefits. Think about the problem presented below. Then read the list of county regulations that could help solve the problem. Rate each regulation for 1) how much it restricts behavior and 2) how much benefit it would provide.

Problem: Too many small children in our county fall into swimming pools at home and drown.

RESTRICTIONS

1 = no restrictions
5 = heavy restrictions

BENEFITS

1 = would not help
5 = would help a lot

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <p>1. No house may have a swimming pool. Only community pools are allowed.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
1 2 3 4 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
1 2 3 4 5 |
| <p>2. Swimming pools must be enclosed inside 5-foot fence with a child-proof latch on the gate.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
1 2 3 4 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
1 2 3 4 5 |
| <p>3. No person with a child under the age of 6 may live in a house that has a swimming pool.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
1 2 3 4 5 | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
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| <p>4. No child-safety precautions are required around swimming pools.</p> | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
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Explain Yourself. Choose one regulation above and explain your rating.

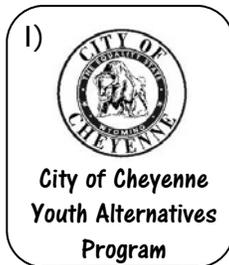
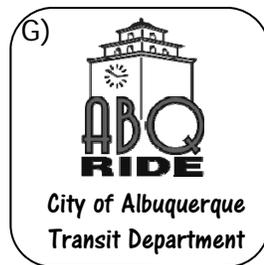
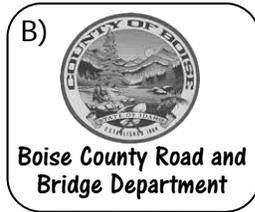
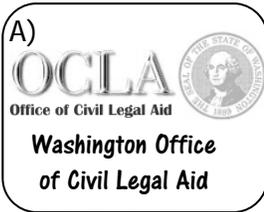
Regulation # _____. I gave it a _____ *Restriction* rating and a _____ *Benefits* rating because _____

Active Participation Activity: A, B, or Both?

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Explain Yourself. Choose one regulation above and explain your rating.

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Answers will vary. Possible answers above shown in ranges.