

MODULE FIVE

In the content session, members use a set of questions to analyze a policy. In the action session, members examine a policy related to the problem area that they are focusing on.

CONTENT SESSION: POLICY ANALYSIS

An essential citizenship skill is being able to evaluate policies. This session provides members with a method for examining policies and an opportunity to practice policy-analysis skills. First, members read about a policy (boot camps for young offenders). Then, using a set of policy-analysis questions, they evaluate the policy.

Facilitator Checklist

- Pens and paper for members
- Copies of Handout 5A for members

Learning Objectives

Members will be able to:

1. Define policy.
2. Evaluate a policy using a set of questions.
3. Explain why examining policies is important.
4. Discuss policies they have encountered as AmeriCorps members.

Notes

Policy Analysis

Introduction

Will you vote for a new environmental initiative? Will that politician's education proposal work? Do you support spending more tax money on public safety? As a citizen, you'll need to evaluate government policies and policy proposals. Take, for example, the policy of sending young non-violent offenders to boot camps. Is it a good policy? Read the following essay and decide for yourself.

I. Boot Camps for Young Offenders

When young adults commit a non-violent first offense, what should happen to them? Should they go to prison, or is this too harsh? Should they get probation, or is this too soft? What should happen?

One proposal is to send them to "boot camps." About 30 states have already established boot camps. Boot camps provide short-term lockup (usually up to six months) with a daily routine emphasizing military-style discipline, drills, and respect for authority. The young inmates also put in a long day of hard work. Those who fail the program are sent to a regular adult prison.

Advocates say that boot camps give young offenders a chance to change their ways. They also say that boot camps keep youthful first-timers apart from hardened offenders, who might influence the young offenders. Moreover, advocates say that boot camps, which are far cheaper to run than main-line prisons, free up prison space for hardened career criminals.

Critics reply that there is no proof that strict military-type discipline will straighten out young criminals. They cite studies that show the rate of repeat offenders does not differ much between boot camp graduates and those put on probation or in a regular jail. Critics argue that the "yes sir" attitude instilled in boot camp soon disappears once the offender returns to the old neighborhood.

II. Activity

In small groups, use the following policy-analysis questions to evaluate boot camps. Write down your answers.

1. What is the policy?
2. What problem(s) is the policy designed to address?
3. What are the policy's pros and cons?
4. What are the alternatives?
5. Is the policy more effective than the alternatives? Explain.

III. For Discussion

1. Would you recommend that your state build boot camps? Explain.
2. What are policies? Why is analyzing policy important?
3. Do you think it's important to ask these policy-analysis questions? Why or why not? Can you think of other questions worth asking?
4. What policies have you learned about as an AmeriCorps member?

Conducting the Session

1. Ask members to imagine that a state legislator is proposing a new law meant to reduce crime. Ask them: "What questions would you ask to decide whether to favor or oppose this law?" Hold a brief discussion.
2. Make sure they understand what a policy is. (If they are not sure, explain that policies can be laws or official directives of how things should be done. You might ask them what AmeriCorps policies they know about, such as the AmeriCorps policy on Prohibited Program Activities, which is on **Handout 2C**.)
3. Inform them that they are going to evaluate a policy proposal using a set of questions. Tell them that they could use these questions to analyze any proposed law or policy.
4. Distribute **Handout 5A**. Ask members to read the **Introduction** and **Section I: Boot Camps for Young Offenders**. When they finish, briefly answer any questions they may have.
5. Place members in groups of two or three. Ask them to evaluate the boot camp policy using the five policy-analysis questions in **Section II: Activity**. Make sure they write down their answers.
6. When they finish, hold a discussion using the questions in **Section III: For Discussion**. To conclude the discussion, ask them to compare the questions they thought of in Step 1 to the five questions they used in the activity.

ACTION SESSION: POLICY WORK

In this session, members discuss research of their problem area and analyze a policy related to the problem area. First, members discuss the three question areas they have researched. Then they read about analyzing a policy that they have uncovered in their research. Next, using a set of policy-analysis questions, they evaluate a policy related to their problem.

Facilitator Checklist

- Pens and paper for members
- Copies of Handout 5B for members

Learning Objectives

Members will be able to:

1. Discuss and make presentations on their research on a community problem.
2. Discuss policies they uncovered in their research.
3. Evaluate one of these policies using a set of questions.

Notes

Policy Work

Introduction

In the last session, you practiced analyzing policies. In your research, you've found policies and policy proposals for dealing with the problem. Now it's time to analyze one of these policies or policy proposals.

I. Analyzing a Policy

1. Select one of these policies or policy proposals. Describe it.

2. What problem(s) is the policy designed to address?

- 3a. What are the pros of this policy?

- 3b. What are the cons of this policy?

4. What are the alternatives to the policy?

5. Is the policy more effective than the alternatives? Explain.

II. Activity

Divide into pairs. Select a policy or policy proposal and analyze it. Prepare to report your analysis to the whole group.

III. For Discussion

1. Do you think it's easy or difficult to analyze policies? Why?
2. What additional information would you like to know about these policies?

Conducting the Session

1. Ask members to meet in the three research-question groups. Ask the groups to:
 - a. Discuss their research.
 - b. Develop answers to their questions.
 - c. Prepare a presentation on each question.

2. Have the three groups make their presentations. Hold a discussion on their research. Be sure to write down on the board any policies mentioned. (Those researching policy questions should have some policies, i.e., approaches that government is taking toward solving the problem.)

3. Distribute **Handout 5B**. Ask members to read **Introduction** and **Section I: Analyzing a Policy**. Answer any questions they may have.

4. Ask them to read **Section II: Activity**. Divide the group into pairs. Have each pair select one of the policies written on the board and analyze the policy.

5. When they finish their analysis, have a pair report on a policy. Let any other pair who analyzed the same policy comment. Repeat the process for each policy. Conclude by holding a discussion using the questions in **Section III: For Discussion**.

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