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Policy Brief

Two Key Questions For Horizontal Policy Making & Implementation

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Introduction

In today's world of increasingly complex problems that cross over boundaries between governments and between the government sector and other sectors of society, horizontal policy making and implementation is increasingly necessary.[1] It is, however, very difficult to do well, primarily because of strong vertical lines of accountability. It also requires a considerable investment of time, resources and political commitment.

How then can we improve on the practice of horizontal policy making and implementation so that its potential benefits can be realized and the barriers reduced?

The Institute On Governance has conducted research and advised governments and other clients on the subject for more than a decade.[2] On the basis of this experience, we have identified two key questions that need to be addressed when embarking on a horizontal initiative:

1. What do you need to share?
2. When do you need to share it?

I will deal with each of these questions in turn in this brief and then illustrate how they can be applied with some practical examples.

What do you need to share?

A review of the literature reveals that different terms and concepts such as "cooperation", "collaboration" and "integration" are used when talking about working across organizational and sectoral boundaries. Often these terms are not defined or they are used interchangeably.

For the purpose of policy making, therefore, we have found it useful to make a distinction according to "what is being shared" – refer to Table 1.[3]

Table 1: What Is Being Shared?

What is Being Shared?	Key Terms
Information – the sharing of knowledge, views and advice among parties	Communication Consultation
Objectives – the coordination of separate policies, plans, programs or services to achieve a shared objective	Coordination Cooperation Collaboration
Authority – the sharing of authority, accountability and decision-making under a joint initiative	Integration Partnership

These terms represent a continuum, where one stage builds on the previous one. In other words, coordination requires consultation or the sharing of information, but also the sharing of objectives. Integration requires the sharing of information and objectives, and also the sharing of authority.

Obviously, it is easier to share information and hardest to share authority – and for that reason many horizontal initiatives are at the lower end of the continuum in terms of what is being shared.

The formality of the arrangement and the investment of financial and human resources increases significantly if governments want to move from sharing information to sharing authority with other governments or organizations. Accountability issues also increase in complexity as vertical

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[1] Horizontal policy making and implementation includes working across different orders of government, across different departments within one order of government, and across different sectors of society.

[2] This research was conducted for clients in federal, provincial, territorial and Aboriginal governments and dealt with policy, program and service delivery issues in a range of sectors.

[3] This distinction is drawn from a number of sources including the Institute of Public Administration Australia, *Working Together: Integrated Governance* (2002), Rounce and Beaudry, *Using Horizontal Tools to Work Across Boundaries: Lessons Learned and Signposts for Success* (2003) and the Treasury Board Secretariat of Canada, *Managing Collaborative Arrangements: A Guide for Regional Managers* (2003).

accountability within a department shifts to reciprocal accountability across partners.

When do you need to share it?

The second key question is: When should information, objectives or authority be shared in the policy making and implementation process?

Public policies entail the selection of goals and priorities, the identification of the means or strategies to achieve those goals, and the development of a course of action to implement those means. Policy making is the process of reaching those decisions; policy implementation is the process of implementing the decisions that are made.

Policy making and implementation is often represented as a cycle with the following stages: defining the problem; analysing the options and determining the best solution; making a decision on the best option; implementing; and monitoring, evaluating and adjusting.

Policy Making Cycle
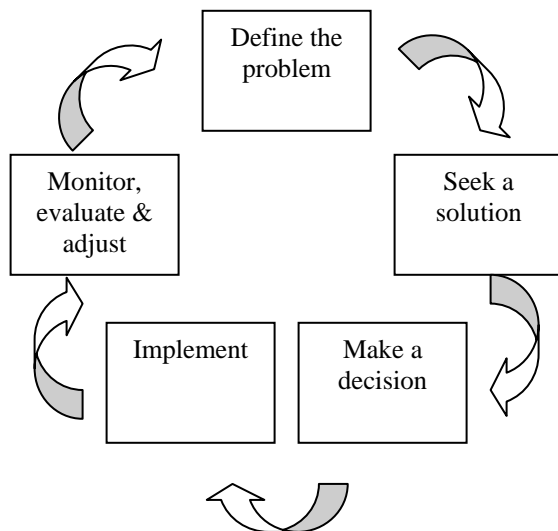
From a horizontal policy making perspective, the questions at each stage of the policy making cycle are –

- What information will be shared and therefore what communications and consultations should take place and when?
- What objectives will be shared through coordinated policies, plans, programs or services and when?
- What authority will be shared and when – for example, will there be a joint policy framework; a joint strategy; a joint action plan, program or service; a joint performance management framework; or a joint evaluation?

Examples of different approaches

So far, the discussion in this policy brief has been very general and not linked to specific initiatives. I will now look at some concrete examples to illustrate different approaches that have been taken to address the two key questions, focussing in particular on sharing objectives and sharing authority.

These approaches do not necessarily represent "best practices" – a suitable approach depends on the issues, the players, the context, the history and other factors that are particular to each situation and difficult to generalize across all possible situations. In addition, there has been very little evaluation of the costs, barriers and successes of most horizontal policies and initiatives. Those evaluations that have been conducted indicate very modest achievements, at best.

For the purpose of discussion, I have organized the different approaches into three categories, divided between policy making and policy implementation through program or service delivery.

1. Horizontal Policy Making Approaches

Within one order of government, one approach to horizontal policy making that has been used is a "whole of government" approach. Under this approach, a government identifies its overall goals and priorities and then plans, budgets and reports on achievement against this set of priorities across the whole of government. This includes reporting by individual line departments, reporting on specific interdepartmental strategies and initiatives, and consolidated reporting for the government as a

whole. The Alberta Government is one example of this approach.

The advantage of this approach is that it deals with the whole of government, is linked to the priorities of the government of the day, and is aligned to the business planning process. However, it operates at a very high level of aggregation; other approaches, such as those described below, would be needed for particular horizontal policies and initiatives.

Another horizontal policy making approach that has been used, usually within one order of government, is the development of a policy framework for a specific cross-cutting issue. The policy framework includes a vision, a set of strategic priorities, and guiding principles. It may also include an action plan for implementation. Policy and planning are therefore integrated across a number of departments, but implementation is carried out by individual departments in a more or less coordinated way. Quebec's *Act to Combat Poverty and Social Exclusion* and the related National Strategy and Action Plans are a good example of this approach.

The advantage of this approach is that it provides clear direction and accountability on a cross-cutting issue. However, it also requires sustained commitment, substantial resources and a strong coordinating unit.

An approach that has been used both within one order of government and across different orders of government is the development of framework agreements. These agreements set out objectives, principles, and procedures for planning, decision-making, implementation and funding. Implementation of framework agreements may be coordinated or integrated. Examples include the Labour Market Development Agreements between the federal and provincial/territorial governments; the Urban Development Agreements in Vancouver, Winnipeg, Saskatoon and Regina that involve all three levels of government; and the Social Union Framework Agreement between the federal and provincial/territorial governments.

The advantage of a framework agreement is that it can provide a clear vision, objectives and principles to guide implementation. It can also clarify roles

and responsibilities, funding arrangements, and accountabilities. As with policy frameworks, however, it requires sustained commitment, substantial resources, and a strong coordinating unit. The agreement also needs to be translated into concrete strategies and action plans.

2. ***Horizontal Program Implementation Approaches***

A common approach to horizontal program implementation, at least in the federal government, is a strategic initiative. The strategic initiative groups together a number of programs that address an issue under some sort of overarching objective. The programs may be new or may have already existed but are enhanced under the initiative with additional funding. Examples of this type of approach are: the National Homelessness Initiative, the Federal Initiative to Address HIV/AIDS in Canada, and the Asia-Pacific Gateway and Corridor Initiative.

Strategic initiatives are able to respond fairly quickly to an issue because they are built on existing programs. Coordination is more difficult, however, for the same reason – programs were not initially designed with a common objective and timeframe in mind.

Another approach to horizontal program implementation is the consolidation of programs or the pooling of program funds and delivery through a "single window" or a single funding agreement. An example of this approach is the Urban Aboriginal Strategy.

The approach has the advantage of reducing duplication or addressing gaps across programs; harmonizing processes (i.e. planning, reporting, and accounting) for the recipient; and integrating efforts. It is challenging to implement, however, because different programs may have different objectives, target groups, or terms and conditions. There is also a lot of resistance within departments to give up control while still being held accountable for results.

An alternative approach is to put the onus on recipients to integrate through partnerships. Governments have actively encouraged these

partnerships across non-governmental organizations, businesses or communities for the purpose of planning and delivering programs or services. An example is the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Partnership Program of HRSDC that promotes partnerships across the private sector, provincial or territorial governments and local Aboriginal communities on large scale economic development projects.

This approach has the advantage of moving integration out of the hands of government and into the hands of the private sector, NGOs or communities. It still requires substantial commitment, resources and time, but in this case, from the partners rather than the government. If the partnership is new, it can take time to form working relationships and build up the required capacity to lead and implement the initiative.

A variation on partnerships is to create a shared governance organization – a new organization whose governance is shared across different orders of government and with other sectors (non-profit, business or labour). Funding from the different governments is therefore consolidated at the organizational level. This approach has been used in the health sector for more than a decade and has led to the creation of not-for-profit organizations; such as, the Canadian Blood Service, the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer and the Mental Health Commission of Canada.

The potential advantage of shared governance organizations is their ability to marshal the commitment, expertise and resources needed to tackle national problems and to engage the non-governmental sector, the private sector, or citizens more actively than governments could do. There are, however, also challenges in terms of representation on the board and accountability to the new organization versus accountability to the different constituencies, funders, the public and legislatures.[4]

3. *Horizontal Service Delivery Approaches*

One approach to horizontal service delivery is to integrate access by businesses or citizens to multiple services through one point of contact – on-line, in person, and/or on the phone. These Citizen or Business Centres are best suited to standardized services that are available to all citizens or all businesses rather than to specialized services for particular target groups. Examples include Service New Brunswick and Service Canada.

Experience with integrated service delivery varies in terms of the extent to which departmental or jurisdictional silos still exist, management is integrated, and ownership is shared. Increasingly, different orders of government are working together and communities are being engaged.[5]

Another approach to horizontal service delivery is the clustering of services through teams of people from different service agencies. In the health and social sector, the teams assess needs, identify appropriate service providers, refer clients and follow up on the outcomes. A team approach has been used to coordinate the delivery of municipal services in neighbourhoods in Toronto and Vancouver. A team approach has also been used to coordinate security services on Canada's border, led by the RCMP.

The team approach has the advantage of better coordinating needs identification, service planning and service delivery on the ground. The teams may not, however, be well linked to the higher level planning processes or to more senior levels of the organization. Their autonomy and flexibility to respond to the needs they identify may therefore be constrained.

Policy Implications

As the previous section illustrates, there are different approaches that can be used at different stages of the horizontal policy development and implementation process to coordinate or integrate across departments, governments or sectors. Each

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[4] For further information on shared governance organizations, refer to Motsi and Plumptre, *Shared Governance: Innovation in the Health Sector,* Policy Brief No. 30, Institute on Governance, 2008.

[5] Kernaghan, Kenneth, *Integrated Service Delivery – Beyond the Barriers,* Institute for Citizen Centred Service, 2003.

approach has certain advantages, but also certain challenges.

In considering what approach to adopt, the two key questions that need to be considered are:

1. What is the purpose in working horizontally –
    ⇒ is it to share information with key players and stakeholders?
    ⇒ is it to coordinate key policies, programs, or services? or
    ⇒ is it to integrate those policies, programs or services into a seamless whole?

2. At what stage does information, objectives or authority need to be shared –
    ⇒ during policy development?
    ⇒ during policy implementation? or
    ⇒ at both stages?

Answers to these two key questions can then help to determine how direction is given, what will drive performance, how account will be rendered, and who needs to be involved.