Writing an Effective Policy Memo using the Bardach Eightfold Path

February 3, 2026

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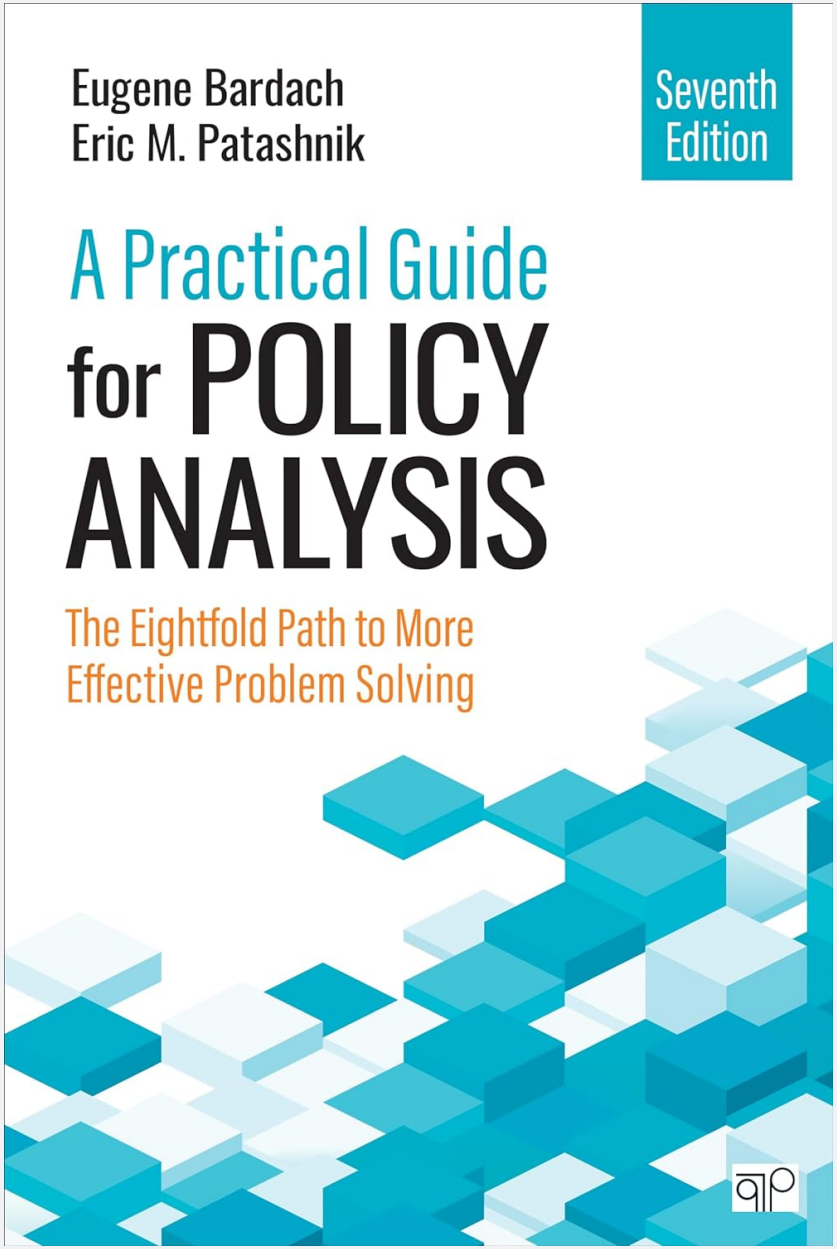
  - What is your purpose?
    - Inform
    - Persuade

Bardach Technique for Policy Analysis



Bardach Technique for Policy Analysis

- Step 1: Define the Problem
- Step 2: Assemble Some Evidence
- Step 3: Construct the Alternatives
- Step 4: Select the Criteria
- Step 5: Project the Outcomes
- Step 6: Confront the Trade-Offs
- Step 7: Decide
- Step 8: Tell Your Story

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  - Short statement (1-3 sentences) summarizing the issue to be considered.
- What do we want to accomplish with the problem statement?
  - Grab attention and spark interest
  - Convey the importance of the problem

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  - "There are too many families experiencing homelessness."

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  - "The 1993 Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides up to twelve weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons. However, nearly 40% of workers are not covered by FMLA, or do not use it because of the financial implications of unpaid leave.

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  - "The 1993 Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides up to twelve weeks of unpaid, job-protected leave for specified family and medical reasons. However, nearly 40% of workers are not covered by FMLA, or do not use it because of the financial implications of unpaid leave.
  - "Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teens. According to the CDC, every day, six teens ages 16-19 die from motor vehicle injuries."

Bardach Step 1 - Define the Problem

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Editorial

April 23/30, 2019

Lowering Cost and Increasing Access to Drugs Without Jeopardizing Innovation

Robert M. Califf, MD[1,2]; Andrew Slavitt, MBA[3]

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JAMA. 2019;321(16):1571-1573. doi:10.1001/jama.2019.3846

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Interviews

US drug costs have reached unacceptable and unsustainable levels. Evidence shows that "financial toxicity" arising from drug costs and other medical expenses is reducing financial security for many families[1] and prompting difficult choices, as patients defer or forgo therapies they cannot afford.[2] In stark contrast, comparable countries negotiate drug prices and use drugs more effectively. Recent data suggest that other high-income countries have an average life expectancy approximately 3 to 5 years longer than that of the United States, which ranks last among high-income countries and is losing ground compared with peer nations.[3] Although drug prices account for only part of these trends, they nevertheless add to disparities that dominate the trajectories of US health outcomes.

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- What has worked in other places?
- How do we know if something has worked? (More to come when we discuss research designs.)

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- Start comprehensive, end up focused.
  - "How would you solve a problem if cost were no object?"

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- Some examples:
  - Equity
  - Efficiency
  - Cost
  - Political feasibility

Bardach Step 4 - Select the Criteria

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An effective policy solution to this problem must satisfy the core requirements of reducing drug costs and increasing access to beneficial drugs, while continuing to incentivize development of new therapies. The path forward requires a sustainable, fair payment system in which drug prices reflect the value provided and reward innovations that improve outcomes. Four Viewpoints in this issue of *JAMA*[4-7] recommend different but overlapping approaches for achieving these goals.

Bardach Step 7 - Decide

- Recommend the policy proposal (or proposals) that would solve or mitigate the problem.

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The most effective ways to address pricing involve 4 categories: importation from other countries; reduction of bloated administrative and marketing activities; direct negotiations between federal payers and industry; and creation of a value-based system.

Bardach Step 8 - Tell Your Story

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- Gauge your audience

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- Apply the grandparent test
- Gauge your audience
- Consider your medium
  - Policy memo
  - Infographic
  - Leave-behind document
  - Give your story a logical narrative flow