# INCREASING THE "POLICY READINESS" OF IDEAS

BY TOM KALIL

NASA and the Defense Department have developed an analytical framework called the "technology readiness level" for assessing the maturity of a technology -- from basic research to a technology that is ready to be deployed.

The premise of this memo is that it is also possible to increase the "policy readiness" level of an idea. This work can increase the chances that (1) a policy-maker will embrace an idea; (2) the idea will be successfully implemented; and (3) that the idea is "worthy" of being implemented.

Examples of the work that can be done include:

1.  Clear description of the problem or opportunity

2.  Root cause analysis – what are the drivers of the problem?

3.  Past and current efforts to address the problem
    **Learning from history.**  If past efforts to address the problem have not been successful, what's different?

4.  Learning from comparative perspective.
    e.g: What can we learn from the experiences of other countries?

5.  Rationale for government involvement and policy change, such as market failure, problems associated with existing policy

6.  Key metrics used to evaluate progress

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7. Identification and evaluation of potential policy options

Legislation, budget, different allocation of existing budgetary resources, regulation, executive action, personnel, coalition-building of different organizations

Evidence to support different options

Logic model – why is it likely that a given policy change will have the desired impact?

Benefit/cost ratio – ideally expressed as "outcome per dollar."

Feasibility (political, administrative)

Potential unintended consequences of policy

8. Draft the documents that are needed to (a) facilitate a decision on the idea; and (b) implement the idea, e.g.:

Decision memo

Executive Orders or Presidential Memoranda

Budget proposal

Strategy document

Legislation

Notice of Proposed Rulemaking

Charter for inter-agency working group

Job descriptions for new recruits

Request for Proposals

Descriptions of potential "commitments" from companies, non-profits, universities, philanthropists and foundations, state and local governments, investors, etc.

9. Critique of the idea by experts, practitioners, and stakeholders

Can the idea be improved?

Are there changes to the idea that need to be made to accommodate the concerns of important stakeholders?

What are responses to critiques?

What are the drivers of disagreements (e.g. areas of uncertainty, different interpretation of data, ideological disagreements, clashing interests of relevant groups)?

Are there creative ways to reconcile differences of opinion and differences of interests?

## 10. Pilots and demonstrations to generate evidence of effectiveness, learn from real-world policy development

"Agile" policy development – learning lessons from human-centered design and agile software development

Pilots could be at different levels of government (e.g. federal, state, local)

## 11. If legislation

Draft, introduce, and hold hearings on legislation

Identify potential vehicles, such as legislation that enjoys bipartisan support (e.g. National Defense Authorization Act)

## 12. Communications strategy

Most compelling language for describing the problem and the proposed solution

Endorsements from opinion leaders, experts, groups

Material for a speechwriter (stories, examples, quotes, facts and figures) or op-ed

Q&A – responses to most difficult critiques

# DEMOCRATIZING THE "IDEA GENERATION" PROCESS

There are a series of steps that former policy-makers and think-tanks could take to increase the number of people that can meaningfully participate in the idea generation process.  People who have expertise that is relevant to a particular policy domain might be able to describe a problem or identify a goal, but are less familiar with the tools that the government might use to address it.

1.  Create library of examples of policy documents (e.g. decision memos, the documents that implement policy decisions)

2.  Provide summary of different policy instruments (e.g. strengths and limitations, when and under what circumstances might one use this, canonical examples of uses of this policy instrument, etc.), with annotated bibliography for people who are interested in learning more – e.g:

    ‣ Competitively awarded grant programs

    ‣ Block or formula grants

    ‣ R&D

    ‣ Information interventions to help people and organizations make better decisions

    ‣ Entitlements

    ‣ Loans, loan guarantees, capital stacks

    ‣ Tax policy (rates and base, simplification, tax incentives, taxes designed to address negative externalities such as price on carbon)

    ‣ Creation of civil or criminal penalties

    ‣ Increased enforcement of existing laws

    ‣ Personnel and personnel policy

    ‣ Performance management (e.g. continuous improvement)

    ‣ Human-centered design

    ‣ Improve/create digital services

    ‣ "Commitments" events

    ‣ Public-private partnerships

    ‣ Goal-setting (we will accomplish X by date Y), including "moonshots" or stretch goals

    ‣ Regulation, deregulation, regulatory reform, regulatory "sandboxes"

    ‣ International treaties

    ‣ Federal, state, local partnerships

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- Mechanism design (design of markets that require matching as opposed to using ~~~~ ~~ – e.g. kidney donations)
- Encouraging self-regulation through the creation of codes of conduct
- Incentive prizes, milestone payments, Advance Market Commitments
- Evidence-based policy (tiered-evidence grant-making, "preference points" for applicants that build or use evidence, agency-wide learning agenda, expanding access to administrative data, pay for success, etc)
- Open data (make data available in machine-readable format to encourage new services)
- Creation, elimination, or restructuring of organizations
- Behavioral interventions
- Procurement
- Efforts to improve coordination of different organizations
- Advisory Committee

3. Interview experts in different policy domains to see if there are policy tools that are useful but have not been adopted outside of a particular policy domain (e.g. Advance Market Commitments have been used in global health but not outside of global health).