A POLICY DECISION GUIDE

Are your state's young people on track for lives with opportunity?

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GEORGE W. BUSH
INSTITUTE

States can lead with smart policy to ensure a bright future for young people.

The workforce and public education are profoundly connected. But the two systems typically operate independently in terms of policy and practice. As a result, improving access to opportunity is sporadic and slow.

The pandemic's disruptions mean that state leaders now need a renewed and serious focus on pathways to opportunity. Young people's lives have been interrupted by school disruptions, illness, and personal loss. The resulting learning loss has only increased the outcome gaps that existed before the pandemic. The impact of COVID-19 will be borne by our children for years to come.

The George W. Bush Institute created the Education and Workforce Pipeline, a data tool that features state level outcome metrics across young adulthood, postsecondary education, secondary and elementary education, and early childhood.
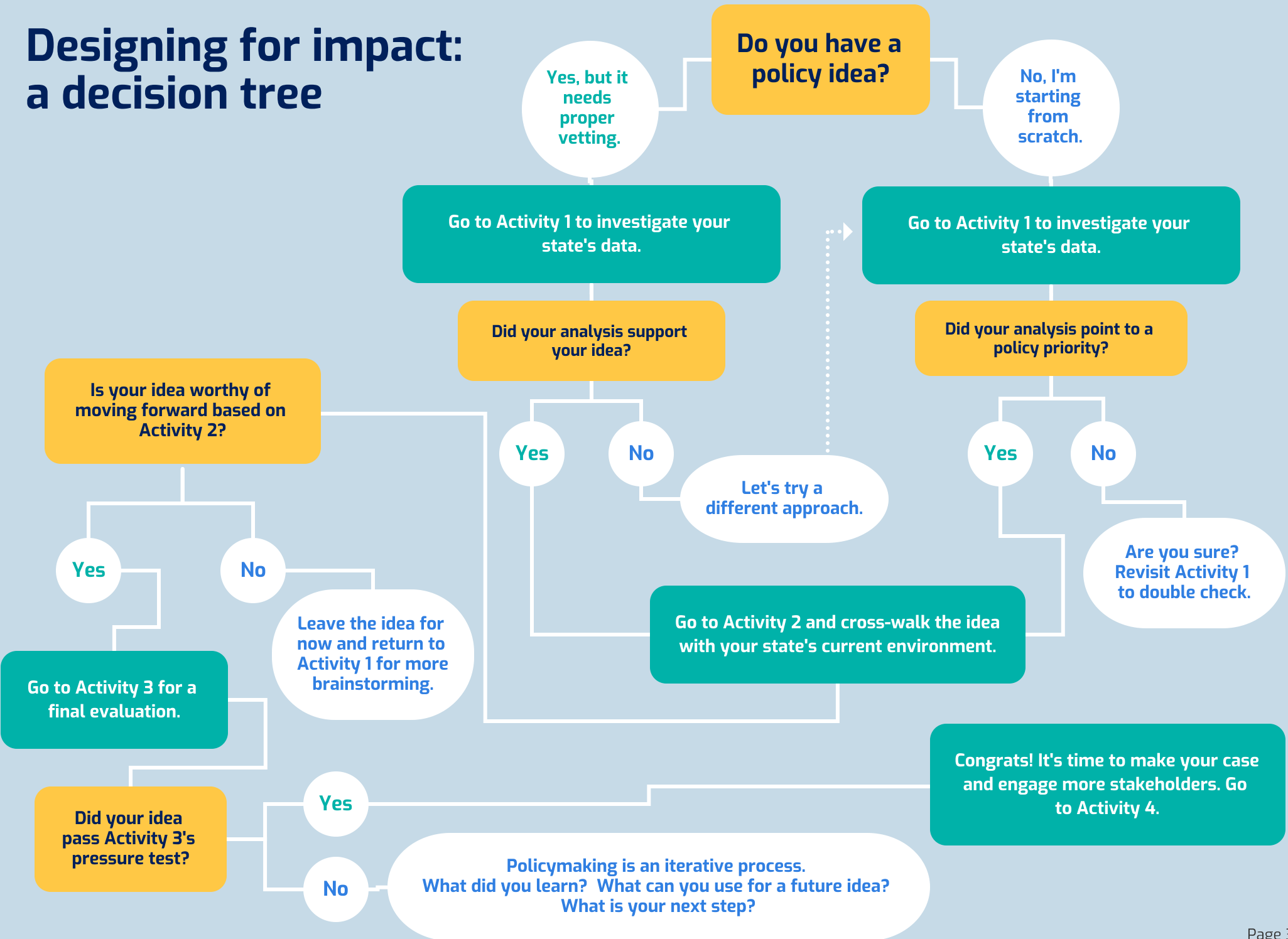
Deciphering multiple data sets over time – and across topics – to design policy is a significant challenge. This decision guide can help leaders analyze their state's data, priorities, and political landscape to design policy with strong potential to improve young people's access to opportunity.

What's inside

Designing for impact: a decision tree

Do you have a policy idea?

Yes, but it needs proper vetting.

No, I'm starting from scratch.

Go to Activity 1 to investigate your state's data.

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Did your analysis support your idea?

Did your analysis point to a policy priority?

Is your idea worthy of moving forward based on Activity 2?

Yes

No

Let's try a different approach.

Yes

No

Are you sure? Revisit Activity 1 to double check.

Yes

No

Leave the idea for now and return to Activity 1 for more brainstorming.

Go to Activity 3 for a final evaluation.

Go to Activity 2 and cross-walk the idea with your state's current environment.

Congrats! It's time to make your case and engage more stakeholders. Go to Activity 4.

Did your idea pass Activity 3's pressure test?

Yes

No

Policymaking is an iterative process. What did you learn? What can you use for a future idea? What is your next step?

1 Explore the data

INSTRUCTIONS

Access the Bush Institute's Pipeline to review your state's data along with one or two competitor state profiles. Use the questions below to guide your analysis of the data in the tool – as well as your analysis of relevant data that may sit outside the tool.

Early Childhood	Elementary	Secondary	Post secondary	Young adults
Are children ready for kindergarten?	**Are students on track for reading and math?**	**Are high school students ready for their next step?**	**Where do young people (18-24-year-olds) go after high school?**	**Are young adults (25-34-year olds) supporting themselves?**
Does the state use a Kinder Entry Assessment? What does it tell us?	How is the state's overall performance on fourth and eighth grade NAEP? Relative to the national average? Relative to "competitor" states?	How is the state's overall performance on the ACT? What percentage of students have access to AP classes and exams? Is AP data disaggregated?	What are 18-24-year olds in the state doing after high school? Are they in school, working, in the military, or none of the above? How does the data compare to the national average and competitor states?	What is the above median wage rate for young adults? How does the state compare to the national average and competitor states?
Is there relevant data outside the pipeline tool to track early childhood outcomes and demand for high quality seats?	What are trends in the NAEP scores? Are we improving, declining, or staying the same?	What percentage of students graduate from high school? Have requirements for high school graduation changed recently? If yes, how does that impact the data?	Is the state improving, declining, or staying the same on these measures?	Is the state improving, declining, or staying the same on these measures?
If yes, what does it tell us, and how is it used?	How do statewide assessments compare to NAEP? Have the state assessment definitions of proficient – or cut scores – changed recently? If yes, how does that impact the data?	Where are there performance gaps across subgroups?	Are there performance gaps across subgroups?	Where are the outcome gaps across subgroups?
If no, what data do you need for decision-making?	Where are there performance gaps across subgroups?	What data do we have to understand the impact of COVID-19 on student readiness for college and career? What has changed since 2019?	What data is available to understand the impact of the pandemic on young adults? What has changed since 2019?	What data do we have to understand the impact of COVID-19 on 25-34-year olds? What has changed since 2019?
	What data do we have to understand the impact of COVID-19 on student progress in reading and math? What has changed since 2019?			

Can you access the data you need to make decisions? If not, should you focus on improving your state's longitudinal data system (SLDS)?

1. Write out a possible policy idea that emerged from Activity 1.

2. Does the policy exist already in some form? Are you addressing a missing element or updating current statute language? Are you addressing poor implementation of an existing policy?

Yes, here's how...

No, here's why...

Before continuing, do you need to reframe or recast your policy idea to improve alignment with state priorities?

3. Does your idea align with current goals and policy priorities (e.g. from the governor or legislative leader)?

Yes, here's how...

No, here's why...

Before continuing, do state priorities need to change for your policy idea to have a shot at success?

4. How does timing impact your idea (e.g. legislative, regulatory, or budgetary considerations)?

Before continuing, is now the right time for this policy idea? Can you adjust if needed?

5. What is the state's readiness for change? Is there political will and capital available for your effort? Who would likely oppose your idea? Who would support it?

Is there enough alignment to move forward? If yes, move on to Activity 3.
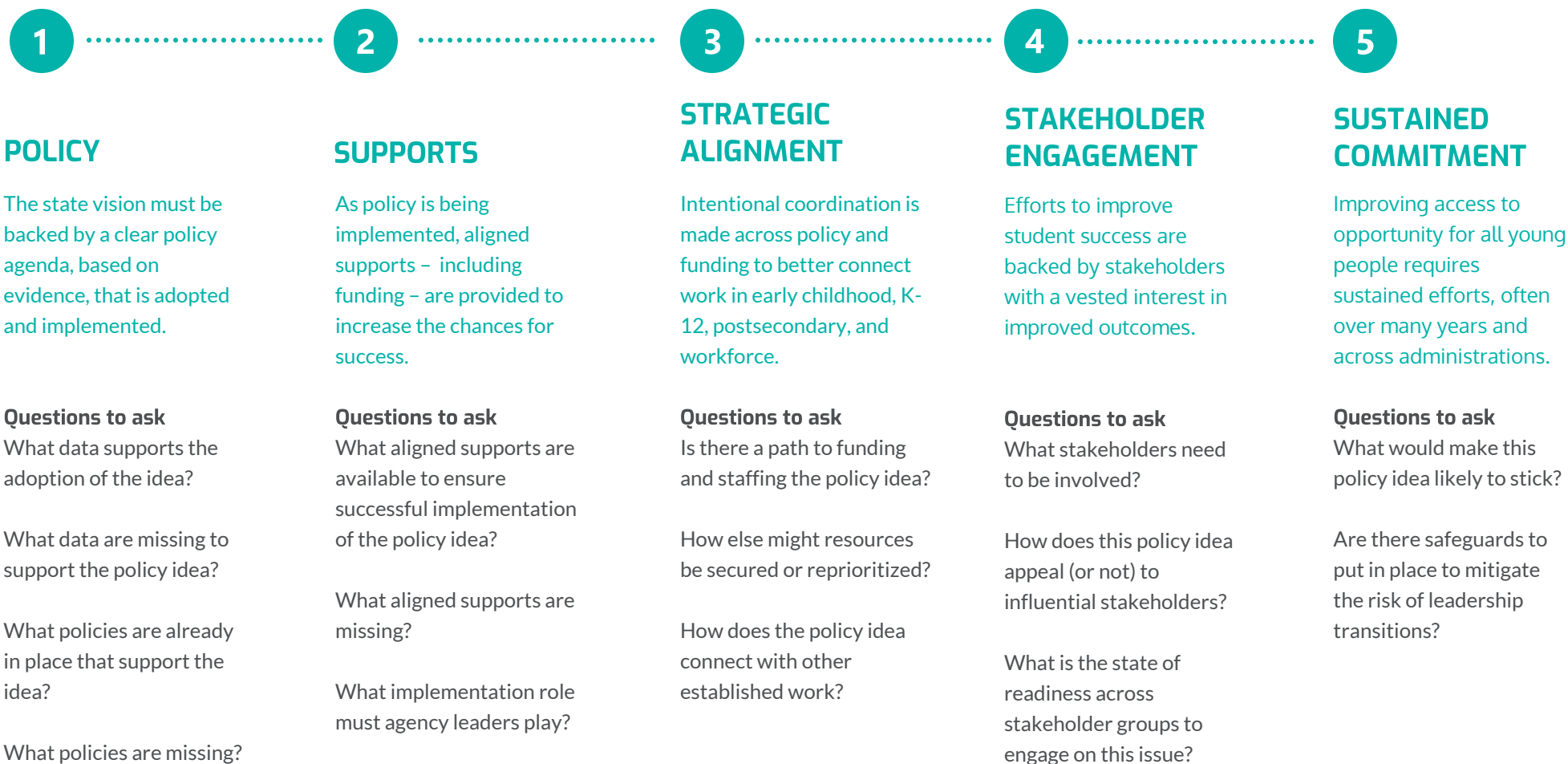*If not, return to Activity 1 to identify another area for impact.*

3 Pressure test your policy idea

INSTRUCTIONS

Conduct a final assessment of your policy action using the five factors of success* below. Answering the questions will help you determine the feasibility and viability of making a formal case for your action to proceed.

1 POLICY

The state vision must be backed by a clear policy agenda, based on evidence, that is adopted and implemented.

Questions to ask

What data supports the adoption of the idea?

What data are missing to support the policy idea?

What policies are already in place that support the idea?

What policies are missing?

2 SUPPORTS

As policy is being implemented, aligned supports – including funding – are provided to increase the chances for success.

Questions to ask

What aligned supports are available to ensure successful implementation of the policy idea?

What aligned supports are missing?

What implementation role must agency leaders play?

3 STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Intentional coordination is made across policy and funding to better connect work in early childhood, K-12, postsecondary, and workforce.

Questions to ask

Is there a path to funding and staffing the policy idea?

How else might resources be secured or reprioritized?

How does the policy idea connect with other established work?

4 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

Efforts to improve student success are backed by stakeholders with a vested interest in improved outcomes.

Questions to ask

What stakeholders need to be involved?

How does this policy idea appeal (or not) to influential stakeholders?

What is the state of readiness across stakeholder groups to engage on this issue?

5 SUSTAINED COMMITMENT

Improving access to opportunity for all young people requires sustained efforts, often over many years and across administrations.

Questions to ask

What would make this policy idea likely to stick?

Are there safeguards to put in place to mitigate the risk of leadership transitions?

*Success factors were developed by analyzing successful policy implementations that improved student outcomes.

4 **Make the case**

Exit this activity when...
You are ready to take your idea off the whiteboard and into the real world.

INSTRUCTIONS
Using the template below, bring your evidence and reasoning together to build a case of support for your policy idea.

NEW POLICY IDEA FOR [TITLE OF PROPOSAL]

Problem statement/reason for action

Explain the pertinent background to – and reasons for – the proposed policy idea. Include relevant data/evidence. Indicate 1) how the idea is aligned to existing state goals and priorities and 2) whether the idea is a new policy or revision to an existing policy.

Proposed policy idea

Summarize the elements and specific asks of the proposed policy. Include what success will look like upon implementation of the policy. Briefly outline any procedures to be used to implement it and cross-agency collaboration required.

Why now?

Explain why and how now is the time for this idea. Is it thanks to current policies? Data availability? Momentum? Resources? Political will?

Anticipated obstacles/challenges

Briefly summarize critical factors that might hinder the policy idea and how you intend to mitigate them.

Sponsor(s) and supporting stakeholders

List the sponsoring individual/agency as well as the additional stakeholders who are necessary to move this forward. Include those most knowledgeable about the subject matter and/or those in critical decision-making or influencing roles and/or those who would be most affected. Make the case for why they need to be part of this policy idea and any individual requests you are making.

Cost/resource requirements

To the extent feasible, identify anticipated cost or resource requirements of the proposed action step, including any human, financial, technological, or other resources that will be needed to carry out the policy idea.

Timeline

What's the proposed timeline for making the policy idea real? When will outcomes for young people change as a result of the policy?

References/footnotes

Highlight relevant sources that support the action step.

About the George W. Bush Institute

Housed within the George W. Bush Presidential Center, the George W. Bush Institute is an action- oriented, nonpartisan policy organization with the mission of developing leaders, advancing policy, and taking action to solve today's most pressing challenges. Through three Impact Centers – Domestic Excellence, Global Leadership, and an Engagement Agenda – the Bush Institute delivers measurable results that save and improve lives. To learn more, visit www.BushCenter.org.

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