

Introduction to Planning Institutions and Processes in Developing Countries (11.701)
Assignment 4, due November 12, Wednesday
(covering Section IX) on the syllabus, covered in class on 11/6-11/20)

Successful planning and policy design depends, in part, on an understanding of how past implementation of similar programs and policies has worked. Similarly, the best-designed policies and programs allow flexibility for monitoring and evaluation along the way, in accordance with the problems and advances that occur as implementation proceeds.

Though it may seem obvious that lessons from implementation should be drawn upon to improve policy and program design, this often does not occur: the pressure to design and enact policies and programs is often much greater than the pressure to learn lessons from existing experiences or even those that are currently unfolding for any particular plan or program. Correspondingly, the resources devoted to planning and design as *vs.* implementation are often greater—staff time and financial resources—and the best professionals are often assigned to such tasks. Finally, the literature on planning and policy design is often separate from that on implementation, and this gets replicated therefore in the training programs of planners and policymakers.

Though there has been considerable improvement in bringing the lessons of implementation to bear on program and policy design over the last decade, this separation of the two activities results in the same kinds of mistakes being repeated over and over and unnecessarily. Though most policies and plans look good on paper and seem to make good sense, therefore, they run into trouble because they are not realistic: though the lessons of implementation might suggest a less ambitious or 2nd-best approach, following the 1st-best approach may result in worse-than-2nd-best outcomes. Similarly, lesson-learning from ongoing implementation experiences—by trying to understand why some parts of the program are working better than others—allow us to change our conception of what actually *is* 1st-best.

Section IX presents a series of implementation studies that attempt to relate the outcomes back to policy and program design in three areas where lessons from implementation tend to be particularly neglected and, hence, where there is a tendency to repeat mistakes: (1) inter-agency coordination; (2) decentralization and local government; and (3) the processes by which decisions at the local and community level are made (#3 is, in a sense, a subset of #2).

This assignment asks that you write a paper, based on the readings, in which you suggest concrete changes that could be made in policy and program design that would incorporate what has been learned about implementation of these kinds of programs. Be sure to be specific and give examples. You may use the three categories noted above, or you can combine the lessons of the readings in other ways (since there is some overlap across the three categories). You can answer this question directly, or write up your response in the form of a memo to the planning or policy director of your imagined agency. Whichever approach you choose, be sure to state your recommendation(s) concretely, and also explain the learning from implementation that has led you to this suggestion. Though you do not have to include all the “learnings” of each particular paper, you should—by the end of the paper—have referred to all of the readings.

The assignment should be no longer than 6 double-spaced pages or 1,500 words, ***whichever is shorter***. The papers can also be shorter, and should have at least ***one-inch margins*** for written feedback. Be sure to check your word count, as mentioned in class. The assignment is due by the ***end of the day on Wednesday, November 12***. Hard copies of the papers should be delivered to Prof. Tandler’s mail slot and to Teaching Assistant’s mailbox. For last-minute delivery ***only***, send electronic copies (with a request to print). Students who will be out of town on the due date of the paper should send it electronically. ***No late papers will be accepted, and students should not miss class in order to complete a paper***. Late-paper grades will be automatically reduced.