STRIDE
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Understanding Policymaking and Building Meaningful Careers

A guide to public policy and social impact in India: ten questions, answered

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EDITION DETAILS

A guide to public policy and social impact in India

This guide explains how policy is made in India and how to build a working life in it, for people who are new to the field. Every figure is linked to its source in the text. Where a finding comes from STRIDE's own research, we say so.

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Digital book. Free to share and print.

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Ten questions in two parts, a one-page map and a glossary. About an hour of reading.

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FROM THE TEAM

Why we wrote this

Every week, someone in Public Policy India's community asks a version of the same question: I care about how India is governed, so where do I start? Some are in college, some are a few years into a job, and some are considering a move from another field.

This guide is our answer. It explains how policy is made in India in plain language, then shows how people build careers in it, and Part II builds one map of the field as it goes. It draws on STRIDE's research, including The State of Policy in India 2026, and on some of the best writing on the Indian state. It offers general guidance, not personal advice; your own situation will decide what is right for you.

Yash Agarwal, for the STRIDE and Public Policy India team

Who this guide is for

- Students and recent graduates curious about public policy or social impact as a career.
- Early-career professionals in government, NGOs, think tanks or consulting deciding what to do next.
- People in other careers considering a move into policy.
- Teachers and mentors looking for something to share with students.

How to use this guide

Ten questions in two parts, then a one-page map. You can read it in any order.

IF YOU ARE	START WITH
In school or college	Questions 1 to 3, then 6 and 7, then the map in "The field at a glance"
A recent graduate looking for a first role	Questions 6, 7 and 8
Two to five years in	Questions 6, 9 and 10
Weighing a master's degree	Question 9, then 6 and 10
Switching from another career	Questions 6, 7, 10 and 11
Preparing for UPSC	Questions 7, 3 and 5

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BEFORE YOU START

The guide in one minute

1. Public policy is the state using its power to make rules, tax and spend. Ask why the state should act, and whether it can deliver.
2. Policy choices compound over decades, and delivery decides results.
3. Most daily services are state subjects. Follow the law, the money and the delivery.
4. A policy moves through a long pipeline from data to delivery, and every stage is a job.
5. A policy can go wrong at four points: diagnosis, response, design and delivery.
6. Describe any job by its space, subject and function. Pay usually depends on who funds the work.
7. Finding job openings is the hardest part. Know the routes, and keep a strong writing sample ready.
8. Six skills matter across the field, including using AI well and checking its output.
9. A master's often works best when it sharpens a career you have started.
10. Depth in one subject, a public record of your work and a strong network build careers that last.
11. "The field at a glance" brings it together: spaces, funders, routes in, skills and paths on one page.

START HERE

Before you begin

What this guide covers, and how to use it

IN BRIEF

1. The policy and impact field has grown fast, but it is hard to see from the outside.
2. This guide answers ten questions: five on how policy works in India, five on building a career in it.
3. Every term is explained and every figure is linked to its source.

India has a large and growing world of policy work. It runs through state secretariats, district offices, think tanks, research groups, consulting firms, NGOs, company policy teams, foundations, multilateral agencies, newsrooms and universities. India had 612 think tanks in the last edition of the University of Pennsylvania's Global Go To Think Tank Index (2020), the third-highest count of any country.

Yet the field is hard to read from outside. There is no single entry exam, no standard degree and few fixed job titles. STRIDE's annual report, The State of Policy in India 2026 (SPI), is built on more than 18,000 responses from respondents across India. Its Pulse Survey asked what is hardest about building this career, and the most common answer was finding job openings.

27%
named finding job openings as the hardest part of building the career

76%
rated jobs and fellowships as the most helpful form of support

64%
said formal study gave them theory but few usable skills

Source: STRIDE, The State of Policy in India 2026, Pulse Survey.

Five common myths

THE MYTH	WHAT IS ACTUALLY TRUE
"Policy means the IAS."	The civil services are one route among many. Much policy work happens in state offices, think tanks, consulting firms, NGOs, companies, foundations and the media.
"You need a policy degree to start."	People come from engineering, law, commerce, medicine, journalism and the humanities. About a quarter of SPI respondents described themselves as largely self-taught.
"Real policy is made only in Delhi."	Police, health, agriculture, land and local government are state subjects, and many states now hire policy fellows and advisers.
"Good policy is mostly about good ideas."	Much of the work lies in delivery, and people who understand implementation are always in demand.
"Passion is enough."	Pay varies widely and many roles are fixed-term, so a lasting career needs a plan for money, skills and community as well as commitment.

The idea behind this guide

One idea runs through every chapter. Deciding what to do is only the start of public policy; getting it done on the ground is the larger part. That is where much of the work, and many of the careers, sit. **Part I** explains how policy is made in India. **Part II** shows how to build a working life in it, and builds a map of the field one chapter at a time, which comes together at the end, in "The field at a glance".

PART I

I

How policy works in India

Five questions on what policy is, why it matters, who makes it, how it is made, and why some policies work better than others.

1 What is public policy, really?

2 Why does public policy matter?

3 Who actually makes policy in India?

4 How does a policy actually get made?

5 Why do some policies work and others fall short?



1

QUESTION 1

What is public policy, really?

The state's power, what it is for, and the tools it uses

IN BRIEF

1. Public policy is the state using its power to make rules, tax and spend on a public problem.
2. The first question is why the state should act at all; the second is which tool fits.
3. Citizens also shape policy, through courts, campaigns and their own institutions.

In January 2016, Delhi tried to reduce winter smog by letting private cars run only on alternate days, by odd and even number plates. The problem was real, but private cars are only one source of Delhi's winter pollution; dust, trucks, industry and crop burning in neighbouring states add a great deal more. Vijay Kelkar and Ajay Shah, in In Service of the Republic, use the scheme to show a common pattern: a real problem, met with a tool that did not match its main causes. That one story holds most of what this chapter covers.

1.1 A working definition

Public policy is what the state decides to do, or not do, about a public problem, using its power to make rules, to tax and to spend.

- **The state.** Parliament and state legislatures, ministries, regulators, courts, district offices and local bodies. Others shape policy, but only the state can make it binding.
- **Its power.** Every policy is backed, in the end, by the state's authority: a fine, a licence, a tax demand. That is why the case for using it should be clear.
- **Or not do.** Choosing not to act is also a policy choice.

A policy and a law are not the same thing. A policy is the decision about what to do. Laws, rules, budgets and schemes are the instruments that carry it out, and only some of them are binding. Many documents called a "National Policy" are statements of intent; only a law

passed by a legislature can require people to act, and only a budget can authorise public spending. So ask of any document: *what legal force does this have?* Question 4 shows the main kinds of document.

1.2 Why the state steps in

Most of the time, people, markets and communities sort things out themselves. Economists describe four classic cases where markets fall short, called **market failures**. Redistribution is a separate reason to act, based on fairness rather than failure.

REASON TO ACT	WHAT GOES WRONG ON ITS OWN	AN INDIAN EXAMPLE
Externalities	People affect others without paying or being paid	Burning crop stubble adds to winter smog in north India
Public goods	Nobody can be kept out, so no firm can charge for it	Clean air, public safety, reliable statistics
Hidden information	One side knows far more than the other	A patient cannot tell whether a medicine is substandard
Market power	A few firms dominate and raise prices	Concerns about dominant digital platforms
Redistribution (fairness)	Markets reward some and leave others behind	Subsidised grain, pensions, scholarships

A useful first question for any proposal, Kelkar and Shah argue, is: **what failure is this meant to fix?**

1.3 The state's toolkit

The state has three levers.

1

Rules

Telling people what they must or must not do, backed by penalties.

For example: a speed limit, a licence, a state pollution standard.

2

Taxes

Raising money, and sometimes discouraging something harmful.

For example: income tax, GST, higher tax on tobacco.

3

Spending

Running services or giving money to people and organisations.

For example: government schools, pensions, scholarships.

It can use them in three ways. In school education, it can **run** schools, **regulate** private schools, or **pay** for children to attend a school of their choice, as the Right to Education Act's 25% quota in private schools does. Each needs a different kind of organisation.

1.4 Society is a third actor

Rohini Nilekani's *Samaaj, Sarkaar, Bazaar* argues that society, government and markets all shape outcomes. Panchayats, cooperatives, water user groups and self-help group federations govern shared problems every day. The Right to Information Act of 2005 began with organised citizens. To act where you live, PPI's Polis shows who is responsible, how to raise an issue and how to follow it up.

1.5 Citizens shape policy too

On 12 April 1950, less than three months after the Constitution came into force, the journalist Fram Nusserwanji Balsara challenged Bombay's prohibition law in the Bombay High Court. Rohit De's A People's Constitution shows how ordinary citizens used the new Constitution from the start: in 1950 alone, the Supreme Court heard more than 600 petitions to enforce fundamental rights. Good policy work plans for how people will respond.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR CAREER

Every job in this field starts from four questions: what is the problem, why should the state act, which tool fits, and can it be delivered.

Practise them on one news story a week. They are the backbone of every policy brief.

DO THIS NEXT Use Polis to find who is responsible for one problem where you live.

2

QUESTION 2

Why does public policy matter?

Choices compound over decades, and delivery decides results

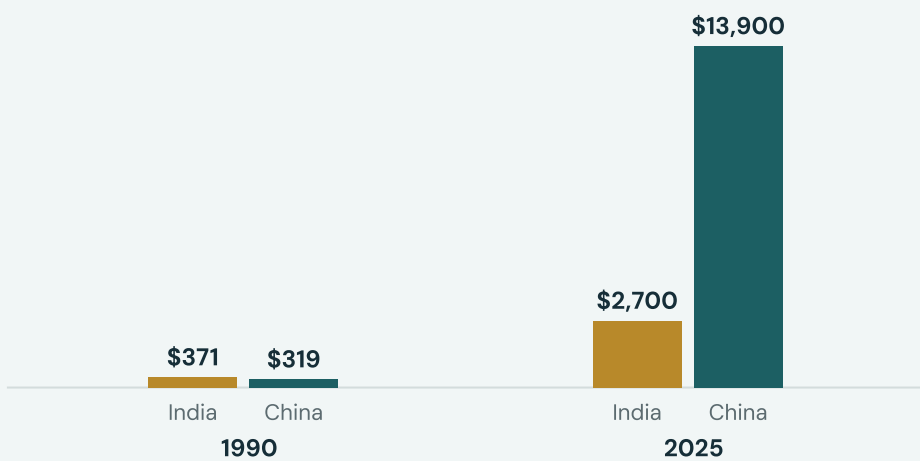
IN BRIEF

1. Small differences in policy choices add up to large differences over a generation.
2. Every rupee the state spends has a real cost, and spending alone does not guarantee results.
3. Good design and delivery can make a large difference, and India has strong examples.

In 1990, the average Indian earned slightly more than the average Chinese citizen. By 2025, the average Chinese income was roughly five times India's, according to World Bank data.

Income per person, India and China

GDP per person, current US dollars, rounded



Source: World Bank, World Development Indicators.

History, demography and global conditions all played a part. So did decades of choices about land, schools, industry, trade and cities, and how well those choices were carried out. **Policy choices compound.**

2.1 Three reasons it matters

Public money has a real cost. Raising a rupee through taxes changes how people work, save and invest. Kelkar and Shah estimate that each rupee of public spending costs society between Rs 2.5 and Rs 3.5, so a scheme should deliver benefits well above its budget.

Good design can save large sums. When the government pays subsidies and welfare benefits directly into people's bank accounts, checked against Aadhaar, it becomes much harder to pay fake or duplicate beneficiaries, and less money leaks along the way. A study by the BlueKraft Digital Foundation, released through the Press Information Bureau, estimated savings of Rs 3.48 lakh crore between 2009 and 2024 from such direct benefit transfers.

Spending and results are different things. Kelkar and Shah note that spending per student in government schools rose from Rs 2,455 in 2010 to Rs 4,385 in 2016, while the share of Class 5 government school children who could read a Class 2 text was 50.7% in 2010 and 42.2% in 2014. The ASER 2024 survey later recorded a clear recovery, from 38.5% in 2022 to 44.8% in 2024.

2.2 Where policy touches your day

MOMENT IN YOUR DAY	THE POLICY BEHIND IT	WHO DECIDES
Your phone asks you to accept a privacy notice	India's data protection law and rules	Parliament, the IT ministry, the Data Protection Board
You pay for groceries	GST rates and each state's share of the tax	The GST Council
You take a bus or metro	Fares, routes and subsidies	State governments and city bodies
You sit an entrance exam	Rules on fair exams and on reservation	Legislatures, exam bodies, courts
You check winter air quality	Emission standards and emergency action plans	Central and state pollution bodies

States also differ widely. PPI's Many Indias lets you compare them on key indicators.

2.3 Strong at the top, harder on the ground

Some of India's systems work at enormous scale: elections for nearly a billion voters, a space programme that has landed on the Moon, and digital payments used by hundreds of millions. Everyday services, such as a clinic, a school or a police station, are often harder to run well, because they depend on millions of frontline workers in very different places. In his 2009 paper Is India a Flailing State?, economist Lant Pritchett described this as a capable head whose links to its limbs were weaker. He saw it as solvable. Since then, direct transfers, digital identity and online services have strengthened that link in many areas. For anyone entering the field, this is where much of the work lies.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR CAREER

Roles close to delivery, in state governments, district fellowships, NGOs and evaluation teams, teach you how the state really works.

Questions 6 and 7 show how to reach them.

DO THIS NEXT Compare your state with a neighbour on Many Indias.

3

QUESTION 3

Who actually makes policy in India?

The Constitution, the money, and the institutions in between

IN BRIEF

1. The Constitution splits power between the Union and the states, and most daily services are state subjects.
2. Money moves through the Finance Commission, the GST Council and centrally sponsored schemes.
3. Institutions are shaped by their mandates and by the people who lead them.

Ask who makes policy in India and most people say "the government in Delhi". That is half the picture.

3.1 The Constitution's map

The Seventh Schedule divides subjects into three lists.

1 Union List

Only Parliament can make laws.

Defence, foreign affairs, currency, railways, the Census.

2 State List

State legislatures make laws. Much of daily life sits here.

Police, public health, agriculture, land, local government.

3 Concurrent List

Both can legislate; central law prevails in a clash.

Education, forests, labour, electricity, criminal law.

Police, health, farming, land and local government are state subjects. **For most people, most of the time, the state government shapes daily life more directly than the Union government.**

3.2 Follow the money

The Centre collects most large taxes; states carry most spending responsibilities. Three institutions connect the two.

- **The Finance Commission**, set up every five years under Article 280, recommends how central taxes are shared. The 16th Finance Commission, covering 2026-27 to 2030-31, kept the states' share at 41% and added each state's contribution to the national economy to the sharing formula.
- **The GST Council**, created in 2016, brings the Union and every state's finance minister to one table to set GST rates.
- **Centrally sponsored schemes** carry central funds to states for national priorities, usually with a state share.

The Planning Commission, created in 1950, once steered investment across the economy, as Nikhil Menon describes in Planning Democracy. In 2015 it was replaced by **NITI Aayog**, the government's think tank and a forum for the states.

3.3 The main institutions

INSTITUTION	WHAT IT DOES	WORTH KNOWING
Parliament and state legislatures	Pass laws and budgets, question the government, examine Bills in committees	Committees are where laws are examined line by line
Union Cabinet, Prime Minister's Office, ministries	Draft most Bills, run central schemes, write rules	Coordinating across ministries is a constant task
State governments and Chief Ministers' offices	Run police, health, agriculture, land and schools	Many now hire fellows, analysts and advisers
District administration	The Collector coordinates most schemes on the ground	Where policy meets people
Panchayats and municipal bodies	Local services and plans	Their powers and funds vary widely by state
Courts	Judicial review, writ petitions, public interest litigation	A route for citizens to hold the state to its laws
Regulators	Bodies such as the RBI, SEBI, TRAI and the Competition Commission	Write detailed rules within their laws

INSTITUTION	WHAT IT DOES	WORTH KNOWING
Constitutional bodies	Election Commission, Comptroller and Auditor General, Finance Commission, UPSC	Each has a defined constitutional role

Parliamentary committees are one of the main places where experts and citizens can give evidence on a Bill. The share of Bills sent to them has varied: 71% in the 15th Lok Sabha and 16% in the 17th. When fewer Bills go to committees, there are fewer chances to give evidence in Parliament, so draft consultations and ministry processes become more important ways to shape a law.

3.4 Mandates and leaders both matter

Rethinking Public Institutions in India, edited by Devesh Kapur, Pratap Bhanu Mehta and Milan Vaishnav, shows that the Election Commission had strong constitutional backing from the start, yet came fully into its own in the 1990s, when T.N. Seshan used its existing powers, above all the Model Code of Conduct. The rules had not changed; the will to use them had.

The same book shows that between 1991 and 2011, while India's population grew from 846 million to 1.2 billion, public sector employment fell from 19.1 million to 17.9 million. A lean state with many tasks is one reason governments bring in contract staff, consultants and fellows.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR CAREER

Which list is it on? This tells you who can make the law.

Whose money pays for it? A central scheme, a state budget or local revenue.

Who delivers it? A ministry, a state department, a district office or a local body. The answer shows where the work, and the jobs, are.

DO THIS NEXT Pick one scheme you know and trace its list, its funder and who delivers it, using PRS Legislative Research.

4

QUESTION 4

How does a policy actually get made?

From a problem to a law to a working system

IN BRIEF

1. Policy moves through a long pipeline, from data to delivery, and every stage is a job.
2. Not every document is a law; know what legal force a document carries.
3. India's data protection law took eight years from a court judgment to working rules.

Textbooks draw policymaking as a neat circle: spot a problem, design a response, pass it, implement it, evaluate it. In practice, a court order, a crisis, an election promise or a ministry's own agenda can start the process; expert committees and consultations shape the design; and implementation can take years.

4.1 The policy pipeline

Kelkar and Shah describe reform as a pipeline. Each stage needs its own people, and a weak stage slows everything after it.

The policy pipeline

Adapted from Vijay Kelkar and Ajay Shah, In Service of the Republic

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Data	**Research**	**Proposals**	**Debate**	**Decisions**	**Legal text**	**Delivery**
Surveys, statistics	Think tanks, universities	Committees, ministries, consultants	Media, civil society, parties	Ministers, legislators	Acts, rules, guidelines	States, districts, regulators

Every stage is a job. Survey teams build the data. Researchers turn it into evidence. Committees and consultants draft proposals, while journalists and civil society carry the debate. Ministers and legislators decide, drafters write the law, and states, districts and regulators run the system.

4.2 Not every document is a law

INSTRUMENT	WHO MAKES IT	IS IT LAW?	EXAMPLE
The Constitution	The Constituent Assembly, amended by Parliament	Yes, the highest law	Article 21, the right to life and personal liberty
An Act	Parliament or a state legislature	Yes	The Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023
Rules and regulations	The government or a regulator, under an Act	Yes, within the limits of the Act	The Digital Personal Data Protection Rules, 2025
Notifications and scheme guidelines	Ministries and departments	Notifications under an Act are binding; scheme guidelines bind the scheme, not citizens	Guidelines for a centrally sponsored scheme
Policy statements and circulars	Departments	No; they state intent and guide officials	A national policy document on a sector

The lower a document sits in this table, the easier it is to change. Since 2014, the Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy has asked ministries to publish draft laws for public comment, one of the best openings for people outside government to shape a law.

4.3 One law, start to finish

Case 1 India's data protection law

What started it, and who acted at each stage

It began with citizens in court: petitions challenging Aadhaar raised the question of whether Indians have a right to privacy.

2017 **The Supreme Court:** a nine-judge bench held, in the Puttaswamy case, that privacy is a fundamental right.

2018 **An expert committee** set up by the IT ministry and chaired by Justice B.N. Srikrishna submitted a report and a draft Bill.

2019 **The government** introduced the Personal Data Protection Bill, and **Parliament** sent it to a Joint Parliamentary Committee.

2022	**The government** withdrew that Bill and published a new draft for public comment.
2023	**Parliament** passed the Digital Personal Data Protection Act.
2025	**The IT ministry** notified the Rules in November, establishing the Data Protection Board in law. Most duties on organisations apply from May 2027, after an 18-month transition.

WHAT THIS SHOWS

A law can start with citizens in court and take years and many hands. Each stage created different work: for lawyers, researchers, drafters, advocates, company policy teams and now data protection professionals.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR CAREER

Data: survey firms, statistical bodies, data teams.
Research: think tanks, universities, evaluation organisations.
Proposals and debate: consulting firms, policy units, journalism, advocacy.
Law and decisions: legislative research, ministers' offices, regulatory work.
Delivery: state departments, district fellowships, NGOs, project teams.
In practice, many roles span several stages.

DO THIS NEXT Read one draft law or rules open for public comment on a ministry website, and note what you would change.

5

QUESTION 5

Why do some policies work and others fall short?

Four points where a policy can go wrong, and what history teaches

IN BRIEF

1. A policy can go wrong at four points: the diagnosis, the response, the design and the delivery.
2. Delivery depends on data, money and management capacity.
3. Trusted data and public support tend to outlast any single plan.

Kelkar and Shah offer a simple way to sort the reasons a policy falls short. Read it as four stages, from first diagnosis to final delivery; a policy can go wrong at any of them, and the fix is different for each.

STAGE	WHAT CAN GO WRONG	WHAT IT MEANS	EXAMPLE
1. Diagnosis	Acting where nothing is broken	The state steps in where people and markets were doing fine	Limiting stock exchanges to Indian daytime trading hours
2. Response	Interests shape the response	A real problem, but powerful groups steer the solution	A subsidy that keeps growing because its beneficiaries lobby for it
3. Design	The wrong tool	The goal is sound but the design does not match the cause	Delhi's odd-even car rationing for air pollution
4. Delivery	Weak delivery	The idea is sound but cannot yet be carried out	Disease control that exists on paper but not in the field

5.1 What delivery depends on

Governments need timely **data** ("what you measure is what you can manage", in Kelkar and Shah's words), **research** on what works, and **management capacity** alongside frontline staff. Some tasks are easier than others: setting interest rates involves a few people and public data, while policing or tax administration involves millions of daily decisions. Where capacity is thin, simple designs usually work better than complex ones.

Respondents to the SPI survey agree: they ranked institutional capacity and last-mile delivery as the sector's top priorities.

5.2 Learning from elsewhere, carefully

Many reforms borrow ideas that work abroad. Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett and Michael Woolcock warn against copying the form without the function: an institution can look like the original without working like it. What works is adapting an idea to local conditions.

Case 2 Direct benefit transfers

An idea adapted to Indian conditions

Cash transfers to poor households were used in other countries, such as Brazil and Mexico, long before India scaled them up. India built its own version, starting in 2013, on infrastructure it already had: bank accounts opened for millions of households, Aadhaar to confirm identity, and mobile phones. A study released through the Press Information Bureau estimated savings of Rs 3.48 lakh crore between 2009 and 2024 as duplicate and fake beneficiaries were removed.

> **WHAT THIS SHOWS**
> A borrowed idea works best when it is rebuilt around local systems. India took the idea of direct cash transfers and made it work through its own bank accounts, ID system, phones.

5.3 What history teaches

Nikhil Menon's history of planning shows that institutions built to produce trusted information outlast individual plans. The National Sample Survey, designed by P.C. Mahalanobis and approved in January 1950, started almost from nothing: for about 16% of India's land area, no population or area figures existed. It is still used to measure consumption and poverty. The system keeps being renewed, as when the statistics

ministry moved GDP and inflation data to more recent base years in 2026. Menon also shows how the young Republic worked to build public support for its plans, through films, music and college forums. Policies last longer when people understand them.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOUR CAREER

Each stage where a policy can go wrong creates work: research on the diagnosis, advocacy on the response, better design, and support for delivery.

Notice which of these you most enjoy. It is a good guide to your first role.

DO THIS NEXT Find the data behind one policy debate with Sarani.

PART II

II

Building a career in policy and social impact

Five questions on the jobs, the routes in, the skills, higher education and building a career that lasts. Each adds a piece to one map of the field.

6 What does a policy career look like?

7 How do you get in?

8 What skills matter, now that AI is here?

9 Should you do a master's, and where?

10 How do you build a career that lasts?



6

QUESTION 6

What does a policy career look like?

Where you can work, what you do, and what it pays

IN BRIEF

1. Every policy job can be described by its space, its subject and its function.
2. The field spans government, research, consulting, NGOs, philanthropy, companies, multilaterals and media.
3. Pay usually depends on who funds the work, though there are always exceptions.

Ask a doctor what they do and you get one word. Ask a policy professional and you get a paragraph, because every policy job sits where several choices meet.

6.1 The three parts of any policy job

1 Space

Where you work.

Government, think tank, consulting firm, NGO, company, foundation, multilateral.

2 Subject

What subject you work on.

Education, health, climate, technology, cities, public finance.

3 Function

What you do all day.

Research, programme management, communications, partnerships.

A researcher at an energy think tank works in the *think tank* space, on *climate*, doing *research*. A policy manager at a technology company works in the *corporate* space, on *digital policy*, doing *government relations*. The combinations are many, which is why the field recruits from every discipline.

6.2 Where you can work

SPACE	WHAT THE WORK LOOKS LIKE	EXAMPLES OF EMPLOYERS	WORTH WEIGHING
Government	Analysis, scheme support and delivery in central ministries, state departments, Chief Ministers' offices and districts	NITI Aayog, central ministries, state departments, Chief Minister fellowships	Fixed-term roles; close to decisions
Legislatures	Research and briefs for MPs and MLAs	The LAMP Fellowship, legislators' offices	A close view of politics
Think tanks and research	Research, data, policy papers	PRS, CEEW, ICRIER, NIPFP, ORF, Vidhi, Takshashila	Depth in one subject
Consulting	Governance consulting, social impact consulting, and research and evaluation for clients	Global strategy firms, professional services firms, international development consultancies, Indian governance consultancies, evaluation organisations	Fast learning, long hours
NGOs and grassroots groups	Delivery, community work, advocacy, evaluation	Pratham, SEWA, PRADAN and many local groups	Closest to people
Philanthropy and CSR	Grant-making, portfolio management, evaluation	Azim Premji Foundation, Tata Trusts, Gates Foundation, company foundations	A view of the whole field
Corporate public policy	Tracking rules, engaging government	Technology, telecom, finance and consumer firms	Usually hires after some experience
Multilaterals	Technical support to governments	World Bank, UNDP, UNICEF, WHO, Asian Development Bank	Global exposure
Media and communications	Explaining policy to citizens and decision-makers	IndiaSpend, India Development Review, newspaper policy desks	Writing-heavy

Examples are illustrative, not endorsements. For a closer look at the consulting space, including the five kinds of firm, see our companion e-book, Policy, Social Impact and Development Consulting in India. PPI's free Policy Career Navigator maps 100+ careers and

1,500+ pathways across 12 domains.

6.3 What you do all day

Most roles combine a few functions: **research**, **programme management**, **monitoring and evaluation**, **communications**, **partnerships** or **legislative work**. Knowing which you enjoy matters more than picking a sector early.

6.4 The social impact sector

Policy and social impact overlap heavily. Dasra's India Nonprofit Report 2026 counts more than 515,000 registered nonprofits employing about 16 million people; most are small, and most work in rural or mixed settings. Since 2014, larger companies have been required to spend a share of profits on corporate social responsibility (CSR), which created roles in grant-making, programme management and evaluation.

6.5 A week in the life

These scenes come from real work in our community. The settings and events are real; we have left out names and details that would identify anyone.

First year

A district fellow

Monday is a review meeting in the Collector's office on how many anganwadi centres have working weighing scales. Tuesday and Wednesday she visits two blocks to check the numbers against what she sees. By Friday she has a two-page note on the gap, and a fix the block officer can make without new money.

Two years in

A research associate at a think tank

He spends most of the week reading a draft Bill, the committee report behind it and five years of state budget data. On Thursday he builds three charts. On Friday a senior colleague cuts his fifteen-page draft to four, and he learns more from that edit than from the week of reading.

Three years in

A programme associate at an NGO

She spends Monday on calls with field coordinators in three districts, Tuesday on a report for a funder, and Wednesday at a village meeting where the programme's assumptions meet daily life. On Thursday she shortens a training module the field team found too long.

6.6 Pay

Pay usually depends on who funds the work. Government-funded roles pay published rates. Roles funded by philanthropy or CSR often pay in a similar range or a little more. Privately funded roles pay the most. This is the typical pattern, not a rule: individual offers vary with the organisation, the city and your experience. Published monthly stipends give firm anchors.

PROGRAMME	PUBLISHED MONTHLY PAY	CYCLE
NITI Aayog Young Professional	Rs 70,000	2026
Maharashtra Chief Minister Fellowship	Rs 61,500, including travel allowance	2026
Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Fellowship	Rs 40,000	2026
Bihar Chief Minister Fellowship	Rs 80,000 to Rs 1.5 lakh, by experience	2026
Chhattisgarh Good Governance Fellowship	Rs 50,000, plus a sponsored IIM Raipur MBA	From 2025
LAMP Fellowship	Rs 23,000	2026-27
NITI Aayog Internship	Unpaid	Ongoing

Pay changes between cycles, so check each programme's current advertisement.

For pay ranges at consulting firms and four common career paths, see our consulting e-book. In the SPI survey, 43% said a policy career is financially workable for someone from a middle-class background, and 38% said it is hard to sustain without outside support. Planning for money early keeps more options open.

Building the map

QUESTION 6 ADDS THE SPACES

SPACE	WHAT THE WORK LOOKS LIKE
Government	Analysis, scheme support and delivery
Legislatures	Research and briefs for MPs and MLAs
Think tanks and research	Research, data and policy papers
Consulting	Strategy, programme design, PMUs and evaluation for clients
NGOs and grassroots groups	Delivery, community work, advocacy
Philanthropy and CSR	Grant-making, portfolio management, evaluation
Corporate public policy	Tracking rules and engaging government
Multilaterals	Technical support to governments
Media and communications	Explaining policy to citizens and decision-makers

Highlighted columns are new in this chapter. The full map is in "The field at a glance", at the end of Part II.

TRY THIS: MAP YOURSELF

Write one line each for **my space**, **my subject** and **my function**. A blank line shows what to explore next.

DO THIS NEXT Explore 100+ careers on the Policy Career Navigator.

7

QUESTION 7

How do you get in?

The main routes in, state fellowships, and applying well

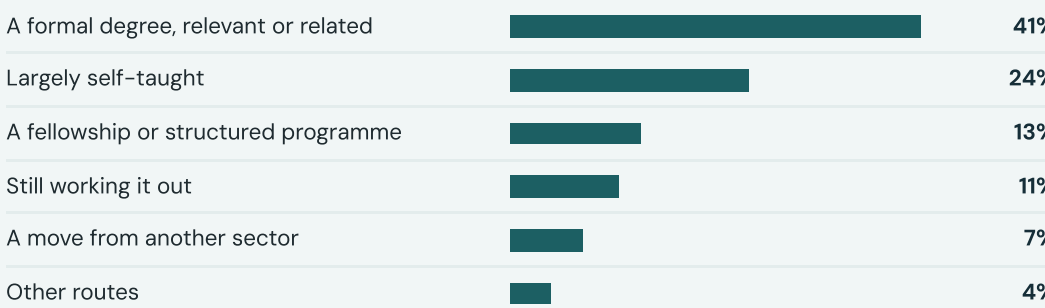
IN BRIEF

1. People enter through degrees, direct hires, fellowships, internships and state programmes.
2. The hardest part is finding job openings, so knowing where to look matters.
3. A strong writing sample and a few good conversations go a long way.

7.1 How people actually enter

How people found their way into the field

Share of respondents, one answer each



Source: STRIDE, The State of Policy in India 2026, Pulse Survey.

A formal degree is the most common route, but fewer than half of SPI respondents arrived that way, and about a quarter describe themselves as largely self-taught. Asked what makes the career hardest to build, respondents named finding job openings (27%) and reaching the right networks and mentors (20%) ahead of building skills (15%).

7.2 The main routes

- **Internships** at think tanks, NGOs, ministries or legislators' offices, including the NITI Aayog Internship Scheme. Most ask for an application with a writing sample. Many are unpaid.
- **Associate roles** in think tanks, NGOs and consultancies, one of the most common first jobs. They usually ask for a degree, good writing and some comfort with data.
- **National fellowships,** such as LAMP with Members of Parliament, the Gandhi Fellowship in district education, SBI Youth for India in villages and Teach For India in classrooms. Their alumni networks are strong.
- **Central government contracts,** such as NITI Aayog's Young Professional and consultant roles, recruited through its Work for Viksit Bharat portal. They are fixed-term and have an age limit.
- **State fellowships,** which place young professionals in districts and secretariats, often with a state domicile requirement (see below).
- **Consulting firms,** which hire analysts for government advisory and social impact work. The companion consulting e-book explains how each type of firm hires.

7.3 State fellowships

More than a dozen states run fellowships that place young professionals in government. Each programme's page has the latest details.

STATE	STARTED	WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE
Gujarat	2009	The first Chief Minister fellowship
Maharashtra	2015	About 60 fellows a year in the Chief Minister's office and departments
Haryana	2016	Chief Minister's Good Governance Associates, placed in every district
Uttar Pradesh	2022	Fellows in aspirational blocks and towns; 515 fellows at work in early 2026
Karnataka	2021	The Indian Administrative Fellowship, with The/Nudge Institute, pairs senior professionals with civil servants for 18 months
Chhattisgarh	2025	Fellows work in government while studying for a sponsored MBA at IIM Raipur
Bihar	2026	121 posts across government, with a certificate from IIM Bodh Gaya

PPI's fellowships database lists current state and national fellowships, with links to apply.

7.4 If you are preparing for UPSC

Each year several lakh candidates sit the civil services examination for around a thousand vacancies. In 2026, about 5.49 lakh of the 8.2 lakh applicants appeared for the preliminary examination, for about 933 vacancies. Preparation builds a strong understanding of Indian governance. Many aspirants find it useful to keep some research, writing or volunteering going alongside, so their preparation also builds a policy career.

7.5 Access and inclusion

The field is more open than it looks, but not equally open to everyone.

- **Money.** Unpaid internships and low early stipends favour people with family support. In the SPI survey, 38% said a policy career is hard to sustain without outside support. Several routes pay from the first month: state fellowships, NITI Aayog Young Professional roles, many NGO and research roles, and consulting jobs.
- **Language.** Most professional policy work in India runs in English, but fluency in Hindi, Tamil, Marathi, Bangla or another language is a real strength in state and district roles, where much of the work happens.

- **Location.** Delhi has the most policy jobs, but Bengaluru, Mumbai, Hyderabad, Chennai and many state capitals have think tanks, policy schools, NGOs and government roles. Remote research and writing roles are more common than before. State fellowships often favour local candidates.
- **Caregiving.** In the SPI survey, 62% said the field loses the most women at a caregiving break. Ask employers about flexible work, leave and returnship options before you join.
- **First in your family.** If no one around you works in this field, the routes in this chapter are still open to you. PPI's free chapters and Policy Circles exist so you can meet people a few steps ahead.

Many organisations also welcome applicants with disabilities and those from groups under-represented in the field; ask about accessibility and support when you apply.

7.6 Applying well

- **Lead with what you did.** A one-page CV showing a survey you ran or a brief you wrote often says more than a list of courses.
- **Keep a writing sample ready.** A tight two-page brief on a live Indian issue, with sources linked, is enough.
- **Write a short, specific note.** Say why this organisation, why this role. Show you know their work.
- **Talk to people, and ask about pay early.** Ask for fifteen minutes of advice, prepare three questions, follow up with thanks.

7.7 Where to find job openings

PPI's free resources page gathers databases of fellowships and scholarships, organisations that hire, courses and events. The Policy Post brings job openings every week. PPI's city chapters and Policy Circles connect you with people a few steps ahead. A good first step: note two deadlines from the fellowships database this week.

Building the map

QUESTION 7 ADDS THE ROUTES IN

SPACE	WHAT THE WORK LOOKS LIKE	HOW PEOPLE GET IN
Government	Analysis, scheme support and delivery	NITI Aayog Young Professionals, state fellowships, the civil services
Legislatures	Research and briefs for MPs and MLAs	The LAMP Fellowship and legislators' offices
Think tanks and research	Research, data and policy papers	Internships and research associate roles
Consulting	Strategy, programme design, PMUs and evaluation for clients	Campus hiring and analyst roles
NGOs and grassroots groups	Delivery, community work, advocacy	National fellowships and programme associate roles
Philanthropy and CSR	Grant-making, portfolio management, evaluation	Usually after some experience; some analyst roles
Corporate public policy	Tracking rules and engaging government	Usually after government, consulting or law
Multilaterals	Technical support to governments	Young professional programmes, consultancies, often after a master's
Media and communications	Explaining policy to citizens and decision-makers	Internships, fellowships, freelance writing

Highlighted columns are new in this chapter. The full map is in "The field at a glance", at the end of Part II.

8

QUESTION 8

What skills matter, now that AI is here?

Lasting skills, good sources, and using AI well

> IN BRIEF
>
> 1. Six skills matter across the field, including using AI well.
> 2. Know where India's primary sources live.
> 3. Let AI draft, and always check what it gives you.

AI tools now draft, summarise, clean data and build charts in minutes. The skills that matter most are the ones they cannot supply: knowing what to ask, which source to trust and how decisions get made in India. In the SPI survey, 64% said formal study gave them theory but few usable skills; most of these skills are learnt on the job.

8.1 Six skills that matter

- **Structured problem-solving.** Breaking a broad question, such as how to improve learning in a district, into smaller questions, hypotheses and the evidence needed.
- **Research and data.** Going to primary sources, such as the Bill, the budget, the committee report or the survey itself. Reading tables, samples and spreadsheets with care. Excel is the minimum; R, Python or Stata help.
- **Writing for busy readers.** Putting the answer first. A Member of Parliament wants a two-page brief; a senior officer wants a one-page note with options.
- **Working with people.** Running a useful meeting, knowing when to push and when to listen. Asking of any proposal: who gains, who loses, who decides?
- **Using AI well.** Using AI tools to draft, summarise and code, then checking every source and figure they produce.
- **Subject depth.** Less important at entry, and more important after two or three years.

8.2 Sources to know

SOURCE	WHAT YOU GET	USE IT FOR
PRS Legislative Research	Summaries of Bills, budgets and Parliament's work	Any question about a law or budget
India Budget	Union budgets and the Economic Survey	Where public money goes
Ministry of Statistics	National accounts, prices, jobs and household surveys	Growth, jobs and consumption
Sansad	Parliamentary questions, committee reports, debates	Official answers to specific questions
ASER Centre	Household surveys of learning	What children can read and do
Sarani	STRIDE's guide to 240+ Indian public data sources	Finding the right dataset

8.3 Using AI well

AI saves hours of drafting, yet it can produce confident errors, especially on recent Indian data, state-level detail and Indian-language sources. Let AI draft, and check everything yourself. Three kinds of skill remain hard to automate and are worth building on purpose: **fieldwork**, which shows how a scheme works in practice; **judgment** about which numbers to trust and what to recommend; and **relationships** built through follow-through and shared credit. AI governance is also a growing field: India released AI governance guidelines in November 2025 and hosted the India AI Impact Summit in February 2026.

8.4 A short reading list

- In Service of the Republic, by Vijay Kelkar and Ajay Shah: when and how the state should act. Start here if you read one book on Indian policy.
- Is India a Flailing State?, by Lant Pritchett: why delivery is the harder half.
- Rethinking Public Institutions in India, edited by Devesh Kapur, Pratap Bhanu Mehta and Milan Vaishnav: how India's key institutions work.
- Planning Democracy, by Nikhil Menon: how India planned and built its data systems.
- A People's Constitution, by Rohit De: how citizens used the Constitution from its first year.

- *Missing in Action*, by Pranay Kotasthane and Raghu S Jaitley, and *Samaaj, Sarkaar, Bazaar*, by Rohini Nilekani: friendly introductions to the state and to society's role.

PPI also keeps a courses database and a podcast list. Policy Panchayat carries conversations with practitioners.

Building the map

QUESTION 8 ADDS THE SKILLS

SPACE	WHAT THE WORK LOOKS LIKE	HOW PEOPLE GET IN	SKILLS THAT MATTER MOST
Government	Analysis, scheme support and delivery	NITI Aayog Young Professionals, state fellowships, the civil services	Working with officials, short notes, data
Legislatures	Research and briefs for MPs and MLAs	The LAMP Fellowship and legislators' offices	Legislative research, short briefs, political judgment
Think tanks and research	Research, data and policy papers	Internships and research associate roles	Research methods, data, writing
Consulting	Strategy, programme design, PMUs and evaluation for clients	Campus hiring and analyst roles	Structured problem-solving, data, writing
NGOs and grassroots groups	Delivery, community work, advocacy	National fellowships and programme associate roles	Fieldwork, working with communities, programme management
Philanthropy and CSR	Grant-making, portfolio management, evaluation	Usually after some experience; some analyst roles	Judging programmes, finance, evaluation
Corporate public policy	Tracking rules and engaging government	Usually after government, consulting or law	Regulatory knowledge, writing, relationships
Multilaterals	Technical support to governments	Young professional programmes, consultancies, often after a master's	Technical depth, writing, cross-country knowledge
Media and communications	Explaining policy to citizens and decision-makers	Internships, fellowships, freelance writing	Writing, data storytelling, checking facts

Highlighted columns are new in this chapter. The full map is in "The field at a glance", at the end of Part II.

DO THIS NEXT Write a two-page brief on a live issue and share it in your PPI city chapter.

9

QUESTION 9

Should you do a master's, and where?

When a degree helps, the kinds of programme, and the cost

IN BRIEF

1. A master's often works best when it sharpens a career you have already started.
2. Programmes differ widely, so judge each one on its teaching, projects and outcomes.
3. Funded and part-time options exist; weigh the full cost before you commit.

A master's can be a strong investment when you know what you want from it. This chapter offers general guidance; your own situation will decide what is right for you.

9.1 When to apply

Many people work for one to three years first. They learn which skills they lack and which subject they want, and their applications are often stronger. Several major scholarships expect work experience in any case. Going straight through can suit people heading for a PhD, and state-sponsored programmes change the calculation by removing the cost.

9.2 Which kind of degree

- **A master's in public policy** gives you economics, statistics, policy analysis and a cohort. It often suits think tank, government and consulting roles.
- **A master's in one subject,** such as health, environment, education or cities, gives depth and suits people sure of their subject.
- **An MBA with policy electives** builds management skills for government advisory and corporate policy roles.
- **Law** builds legal reasoning for regulation and legislative work.

9.3 Studying in India

India's policy programmes have grown quickly. Writing in the SPI report, Dr Ajit Phadnis of IIM Indore notes that India had about 10 public policy schools in 2016 and 56 by 2023. Programmes now run at public and private universities, law schools, management institutes, technology institutes and online. PPI's policy schools database lists them, in India and abroad, so you can compare.

Before choosing, read the course list closely, look for real project work and fieldwork, ask where recent graduates went, and check how much the teaching draws on Indian cases. In the SPI survey, half of respondents said real project work with a route to a job would make formal education most useful.

9.4 Studying abroad

A master's in the UK usually takes about a year; in the US, about two, with more room for internships and a higher total cost. Several government-funded and private scholarships cover tuition and living costs. Most expect some work experience. PPI's fellowships and scholarships database lists current options. Deadlines usually fall well before the course begins.

9.5 Weighing the cost

Fees at private residential programmes in India can run into several lakh rupees, before living costs and lost income. An unfunded degree abroad usually costs more. Compare the cost with the salaries common in the roles you want. Look at scholarships, sponsored programmes and part-time options.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

What will the degree let me do that I cannot do now?
Do I know which subject I want to go deep in?
Have I spoken to recent graduates about where they work now?
Is there a funded, sponsored or part-time option?
Could work experience first make the degree more useful?

DO THIS NEXT Compare programmes in PPI's policy schools database.

10

QUESTION 10

How do you build a career that lasts?

Funding, growing areas, and the long view

IN BRIEF

1. Policy careers often move across organisations rather than up one ladder.
2. Knowing who funds the work helps you choose roles.
3. Depth in one subject, a public record of your work and a strong network build careers that last.

In many professions, the path upward is fixed. In policy, careers usually move across organisations: research, then delivery, then a foundation or a state role. That makes the field flexible, and it rewards planning.

10.1 Where the money comes from

- **Public spending** is by far the largest source. Bain and Dasra's India Philanthropy Report 2026 estimates that public spending makes up about 95% of social sector funding.
- **Private philanthropy** was estimated at about Rs 1.43 lakh crore in FY25 and is growing.
- **CSR** spending by companies reached Rs 40,794 crore in FY25 and funds many programmes, often for set periods.
- **Foreign funding** is governed by the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, updated by new Rules in June 2026, and many organisations now draw more of their funding from Indian sources.

10.2 Building capacity that stays

When outside teams work inside government, the best results come when they work alongside officials, leave working systems behind and train the people who stay. Roles built this way also build the skills governments go on to hire for.

10.3 Where demand is growing

- **State governments** run most services and are building policy teams, so they hire fellows and analysts in Chief Ministers' offices.
- **Data protection and AI** rules apply to organisations that handle personal data, creating privacy, compliance and technology policy roles.
- **Climate and energy** work is growing with India's net-zero goal for 2070 and its carbon market.
- **Data and evaluation** skills are in demand as national statistics are updated and a new Census is carried out.
- **Public finance** work on tax sharing, state budgets and GST needs budget and fiscal researchers.

10.4 The middle level

Experienced managers are in demand. In a Bridgespan survey of about 250 Indian NGOs, more than half were not confident that someone inside could lead if their senior leader stepped away. People who build management skills alongside policy skills are valued, and mid-career professionals from other fields can join through programmes such as India Leaders for Social Sector.

Most SPI respondents (82%) said they feel they belong in the field. It helps to plan early for the middle years: caregiving, money and a second kind of work (see Question 7 on access).

10.5 Building career capital

- **Go deep in one subject, and move across spaces.**
- **Build a public record of your work:** briefs, articles, datasets, talks.
- **Keep a financial buffer,** so you can choose the right role.
- **Stay in community.** Peers, mentors and alumni shape careers. PPI's city chapters are open to all, and PPI Executive brings together people with more than five years of work.

For four common career paths and how pay tends to grow along each, see our consulting e-book.

Building the map

QUESTION 10 ADDS FUNDING AND PATHS

SPACE	HOW PEOPLE GET IN	SKILLS THAT MATTER MOST	WHO FUNDS IT	WHERE IT CAN LEAD
Government	NITI Aayog Young Professionals, state fellowships, the civil services	Working with officials, short notes, data	Public budgets	Senior advisory roles, consulting, foundations
Legislatures	The LAMP Fellowship and legislators' offices	Legislative research, short briefs, political judgment	Legislators' office budgets and fellowship programmes	Policy research, advisory roles, public life
Think tanks and research	Internships and research associate roles	Research methods, data, writing	Foundations, grants, government and multilateral projects	Senior research, advisory roles, academia
Consulting	Campus hiring and analyst roles	Structured problem-solving, data, writing	Governments, multilaterals, foundations, CSR	Implementation, corporate policy, lateral moves
NGOs and grassroots groups	National fellowships and programme associate roles	Fieldwork, working with communities, programme management	CSR, foundations, government programmes	Programme leadership, founding, foundation roles
Philanthropy and CSR	Usually after some experience; some analyst roles	Judging programmes, finance, evaluation	Endowments and company profits	Senior roles in philanthropy, boards
Corporate public policy	Usually after government, consulting or law	Regulatory knowledge, writing, relationships	Company budgets	Heads of public policy and government affairs
Multilaterals	Young professional programmes, consultancies, often after a master's	Technical depth, writing, cross-country knowledge	Member governments and donors	Senior technical and global roles
Media and communications	Internships, fellowships, freelance writing	Writing, data storytelling, checking facts	Readers, advertisers, grants	Policy journalism, communications leadership

Highlighted columns are new in this chapter. Question 6 describes the work in each space. The full map is in "The field at a glance", at the end of Part II.

A LONG-TERM VIEW

Early years: many people learn one function well in one subject.

Middle years: adding a second kind of work or employer builds range.

Later years: leading teams, mentoring others and connecting the worlds you know.

DO THIS NEXT Subscribe to The Policy Post for job openings every week.

PUTTING IT TOGETHER

The field at a glance

Spaces, funders, routes in, skills and paths on one page

IN BRIEF

1. This section brings together the tables from Part II.
2. Read each row from left to right to follow one space from who funds it to where it can lead.
3. Six skills matter in every space; a few matter most in each.

Each chapter in Part II added one piece of the picture: the spaces in Question 6, the routes in from Question 7, the skills from Question 8, and funding and career paths from Question 10. Here they come together.

Government

WHO FUNDS IT	HOW PEOPLE GET IN	SKILLS THAT MATTER MOST	WHERE IT CAN LEAD
Public budgets	Fellowships, Young Professionals, the civil services	Working with officials, short notes, data	Senior advisory roles, consulting, foundations

Research and consulting

WHO FUNDS IT	HOW PEOPLE GET IN	SKILLS THAT MATTER MOST	WHERE IT CAN LEAD
Foundations, governments, multilaterals, CSR	Internships, research associate and analyst roles	Research methods, structured problem-solving, writing	Senior research, implementation, corporate policy

NGOs and philanthropy

WHO FUNDS IT	HOW PEOPLE GET IN	SKILLS THAT MATTER MOST	WHERE IT CAN LEAD
CSR, foundations, government programmes	National fellowships, programme associate roles	Fieldwork, programme management, evaluation	Programme leadership, foundation roles

The full map

ALL OF PART II

SPACE	WHO FUNDS IT	HOW PEOPLE GET IN	SKILLS THAT MATTER MOST	WHERE IT CAN LEAD
Government	Public budgets	NITI Aayog Young Professionals, state fellowships, the civil services	Working with officials, short notes, data	Senior advisory roles, consulting, foundations
Legislatures	Legislators' office budgets and fellowship programmes	The LAMP Fellowship and legislators' offices	Legislative research, short briefs, political judgment	Policy research, advisory roles, public life
Think tanks and research	Foundations, grants, government and multilateral projects	Internships and research associate roles	Research methods, data, writing	Senior research, advisory roles, academia
Consulting	Governments, multilaterals, foundations, CSR	Campus hiring and analyst roles	Structured problem-solving, data, writing	Implementation, corporate policy, lateral moves
NGOs and grassroots groups	CSR, foundations, government programmes	National fellowships and programme associate roles	Fieldwork, working with communities, programme management	Programme leadership, founding, foundation roles
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Corporate public policy	Company budgets	Usually after government, consulting or law	Regulatory knowledge, writing, relationships	Heads of public policy and government affairs
Multilaterals	Member governments and donors	Young professional programmes, consultancies, often after a master's	Technical depth, writing, cross-country knowledge	Senior technical and global roles
Media and communications	Readers, advertisers, grants	Internships, fellowships, freelance writing	Writing, data storytelling, checking facts	Policy journalism, communications leadership

11.1 How to use this map

- **If you are starting out,** pick the row whose daily work appeals most, then read the matching scenes in Question 6.
- **If you are applying,** look along the row to "How people get in", and prepare a writing sample for that route.
- **If you are a few years in,** look at "Where it can lead", and decide which subject to go deep in.

AFTER YOU READ

Next steps and resources

What to do after you close this guide, and where to find help

Knowledge becomes a career through action. Here are some steps people often find useful, by where they are now.

In college

Join the PPI city chapter in your city and come to a Policy Circle. Read one book from the reading list each term, and try one internship.

A recent graduate

Use the Policy Career Navigator to explore two kinds of role, talk to people doing them, and keep a strong writing sample ready for applications.

Two to five years in

Think about the subject you want to go deep in, consider adding a second kind of work, and weigh whether a master's fills a real gap.

Switching careers

Map your skills to policy roles; data, finance, law, management and communications all transfer. With five or more years of work, you can join PPI Executive.

Scan to stay connected

All resources
Every PPI and STRIDE tool and database

Career Navigator
100+ careers, 1,500+ pathways

The Policy Post
Weekly openings and policy news

City chapters
Join people in your city

Free resources from STRIDE and Public Policy India

RESOURCE	WHAT IT GIVES YOU
All resources	Every PPI and STRIDE tool, database and publication in one place
Policy Career Navigator	100+ careers and 1,500+ pathways across 12 domains
Fellowships and scholarships	Current state and national fellowships and scholarships
Policy schools	Policy programmes in India and abroad
Hiring organisations	Organisations that hire in policy and social impact

RESOURCE	WHAT IT GIVES YOU
Sarani	STRIDE's guide to 240+ Indian public data sources
Many Indias	Compare states on key development indicators
Polis	A plain guide to civic action where you live
The Policy Post	A free weekly newsletter with job openings and the week in policy
PPI City Chapters	WhatsApp chapters in India's 25 largest cities, and the Policy Circles they host
Policy Panchayat	Conversations with practitioners on their work and paths
PPI Executive	The network for people with more than five years of work
The State of Policy in India	STRIDE's annual report on the people entering the field
Policy, Social Impact and Development Consulting in India	Our companion guide to the consulting sector

FOR STUDENT SOCIETIES, CITY CHAPTERS AND TEAMS

Discussing this guide in a group

Ideas stick better when they are argued over. If you lead a student society, a PPI city chapter or a team, you can use this guide for a ninety-minute discussion. Ask everyone to read the chapters beforehand, then use these six prompts.

Question 1 asks what legal force a document has. Pick a recent "national policy" and find out.

Question 2 shows how states differ. Use Many Indias to compare your state with a neighbour, and discuss one difference.

Question 3 says most daily services are state subjects. Name one state policy that affects your life, and who pays for it.

Case 1 follows India's data protection law from a court case to working rules. Which stage would you most like to have worked on?

Question 6 maps jobs by space, subject and function. Map your own next role.

Use the map in "The field at a glance" to trace one space from funder to career. What would you need to learn first?

METHOD

How this guide was checked

We use primary sources wherever we can: laws and notifications, government data and the reports of public bodies. We also draw on secondary sources, such as published books, research and independent reviews, and on news reports where they were the clearest public record. Every source is linked in the text. Facts were checked in October 2026; programmes, stipends and figures change, so check the official page before acting on any detail.

What is our own

Findings from The State of Policy in India 2026 describe the views of its survey respondents. The scenes in Question 6 come from real work in our community, with names and identifying details left out. The map in "The field at a glance" and the frameworks throughout are our own synthesis of public sources and our community's experience; the guidance is general, not personal advice.

How examples were chosen

Organisations, programmes and books are named to illustrate a point, and many others could have been named. Naming one is not an endorsement, and leaving one out is not a judgment. PPI's own tools are mentioned because they are free and built for the readers of this guide.

A habit worth building: five questions for any number

Policy work runs on numbers from reports, ministries and the news. These five questions help you judge them quickly.

1. What does it measure?
Read the definition before the number.

2. Is it for one year, or many?
A cumulative total and an annual figure tell different stories.

3. Compared with when?
A change depends on the starting year chosen.

4. Who is it about?
A survey describes its respondents, not everyone.

5. Who produced it, and why?

Knowing the source helps you judge how closely to look.

Where to find current figures

Figures that change often are dated where they appear. These are the places to check for the latest ones.

FIGURE	WHERE IT IS UPDATED
UPSC candidates and vacancies	UPSC press notes and the Press Information Bureau
Learning levels	ASER Centre reports
Fellowship and stipend details	Each programme's current advertisement, and PPI's fellowships database
Bills, Acts and rules	PRS Bill Track and the ministry's website
Tax sharing with states	Finance Commission reports and the Union Budget
Philanthropy and CSR	Bain and Dasra's India Philanthropy Report, and the National CSR Portal
Who is entering the field	STRIDE's State of Policy in India

No organisation funded or reviewed this guide before publication. To suggest a correction, write to contact@publicpolicyindia.com.

ABOUT US

STRIDE and Public Policy India

STRIDE (Strategic Research and Impact Development Enterprise) is a new age policy think tank that inculcates and enacts the perspectives of India's youth into policymaking and the impact sector, working in cohesion with partners across the ecosystem. It grew out of Public Policy India and was launched on 14 August 2026 at the first National Policy Forum at the India International Centre, New Delhi.

Public Policy India (PPI) is India's first and largest pan-India community of public policy and social impact professionals, students and institutions, 150,000+ members strong. Founded on 15 August 2020, it runs 40+ city chapters across India's 25 largest cities and The Policy Post, a weekly newsletter with 22,000+ subscribers, and has held 80+ in-person sessions across 40+ universities. More than half its members are women, and more than half live outside the largest metros. Everything in the community is free for its members.

Both are guided by a Board of Advisors of senior practitioners.

Community

Policy Circles, city chapters, The Policy Post, Policy Panchayat and PPI Executive.

Capacity building

Workshops and academic engagements, the Policy Career Navigator, career databases, Sarani and Polis.

Consulting and research

The State of Policy in India, pulse surveys, policy communication, youth engagement and programme design.

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REFERENCE

Glossary

Terms you will meet in your first month

Anganwadi centre
A village or neighbourhood centre for young children's nutrition, health and early learning, run under Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0, which took over the Integrated Child Development Services.

Block
The administrative unit below a district, through which many rural schemes are delivered.

Centrally sponsored scheme
A scheme funded partly by the Centre and run by states, with central conditions attached.

CSR
Corporate social responsibility: the share of profits larger companies must spend on social causes under the Companies Act, 2013.

Direct benefit transfer (DBT)
Paying subsidies and benefits directly into beneficiaries' bank accounts.

District Collector
The senior civil servant who heads a district's administration and coordinates most schemes there; also called the District Magistrate or Deputy Commissioner.

FCRA
The Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, which governs foreign funding of Indian organisations.

Finance Commission
A constitutional body, set up every five years, that recommends how central taxes are shared with states.

GST Council
The body of Union and state finance ministers that sets GST rates.

LAMP
Legislative Assistants to Members of Parliament, PRS Legislative Research's fellowship.

Market failure
A situation where free exchange produces poor outcomes, such as pollution or monopoly.

NITI Aayog
The Union government's policy think tank, which replaced the Planning Commission in 2015.

PMU
Programme management unit: a team placed inside a ministry or department to run a scheme or reform.

Public interest litigation (PIL)
A court case filed on behalf of the public or a group that cannot easily approach the court itself.

Rules
Detailed provisions written by the government under powers given by an Act.

Seventh Schedule
The part of the Constitution that divides subjects into the Union, State and Concurrent Lists.

SPI
The State of Policy in India, STRIDE's annual report on the people entering the field.

State capacity
The ability of the state to design its policies and carry them out.

Young Professional
A contractual entry role at NITI Aayog and in many ministries and state governments.

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Now do the work

This guide is free, and meant to be shared. If it has been useful, pass it to a classmate, a junior colleague, or anyone weighing a move into policy or social impact work.

ALL FREE RESOURCES	publicpolicyindia.com/resources
MAP YOUR CAREER	Policy Career Navigator
EVERY WEEK	The Policy Post
JOIN YOUR CITY	PPI City Chapters
WRITE TO US	contact@publicpolicyindia.com

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