

The StFX Public Policy Case Competition Handbook

2023–24 Academic Year

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Public Policy
& Governance



Introduction

Welcome to the StFX Public Policy Case Competition, sponsored by the Public Policy and Governance Program and the Brian Mulroney Institute of Government (Mulroney Institute). This is a new event that gives students the opportunity to experience the challenge of developing real-world policy proposals. Working in small teams, participants will prepare a policy submission known as a Memorandum to Cabinet (MC). This Handbook sets out information on the what, when, who, and how of the competition.

We learn about public policy and governance in a variety of ways, including in-class study, research projects, and work experience. This case competition adds another dimension. Through the competition, participants will be able to simulate the process of preparing and presenting a policy submission to Cabinet.

The goal is to develop a formal proposal, answering a specific question that is rooted in a particular policy field. The question and the field will vary from year to year. All PGOV students, past and present, are eligible. Students can partner with a non-PGOV student as long as there are at least two PGOV students on a team.

The deadline for the completed policy submission is Friday, 2 February 2024. Submissions after this date cannot be accepted.

All submissions will be read and assessed by a panel of experts. The top three submissions will be presented at a public session in March 2024.

The winning team will share a monetary prize along with an inscription on the PGOV Policy Case Competition plaque to be displayed in Mulroney Hall.

The Prizes

First place team will share \$700

Second place team will share \$500

Third place team will share \$300

A Memorandum to Cabinet: What Is Involved?

All new policy proposals must be presented to the political executive – the First Minister and Cabinet Ministers – for approval. This takes the form of a Memorandum to Cabinet (MC).

These documents are prepared within the public service, by officials in the department responsible for delivering the program. Only after Cabinet has approved the proposal can action move forward on detailed program design, funding, and implementation.

Of the hundreds of submissions that might flow to Cabinet in a year, not all will be approved. But from a policy-making point of view, officials work to prepare the strongest possible proposal.

All submissions must conform to a standardized format that is set out by the Privy Council Office (the central agency that supports ministerial deliberations). The StFX Public Policy Case Competition follows a 2013 Government of Canada template. Teams should study the template carefully and prepare their submissions according to the prescribed format.

Calendar of Events

The Competition process begins in the Fall 2023 term, with the announcement (in classes) of the Public Policy Case Competition. Several orientation sessions will be offered throughout Fall 2023, during which the process will be outlined. This is a good time for students to decide on teams of three. Each team must include at least two participants who are taking/have taken a PGOV course.

The policy issue for the 2023–24 competition will be outlined in greater detail toward the end of the Fall term. Work can then begin whenever teams feel ready, although the pace will accelerate early in the Winter term.

From 8 January 2024 (the first week of the Winter term), teams will have four weeks (three weekends) to draft, revise, and finalize their MCs. Submissions are due on Friday, 2 February 2024. Early submission is welcome.

A panel of judges will read and assess all submissions. The top three will be invited to make a verbal presentation before a public audience, supported by a slide presentation.

FALL 2023

September	StFX Public Policy Case Competition announcement
September to November	Orientation sessions and team selection/registration
November	Release of the Policy Case scenario

WINTER 2024

4 January	Winter term begins and team work on submissions intensifies
2 February	Memoranda to Cabinet submission deadline
Late February	Finalists (top three teams) announced
March	Finalists present their submissions
Week of 13 March	Results announced

Queries can be directed to Dr. Peter Clancy at pclancy@stfx.ca.

Memorandum to Cabinet Format

Over the years, the machinery of government has created a series of standardized formats for decision-making. When ministers bring policy proposals to Cabinet, the MC is the designated format. For this competition, teams will use an adapted version of the 2013 format adopted by the Government of Canada.

Here is a useful perspective from a specialist on effective writing:

Approach the task strategically, with political acumen. Your task is to present complex issues in straightforward, plain language for the primary audience: the Minister's cabinet colleagues. Remember there are also other audiences for the MC and each has their own perspective or role (senior officials in the sponsoring department, political staff in the sponsoring department, officials in other departments and the central agencies.

- McKeown and Associates

Each MC will consist of the following parts.

1. Ministerial Recommendation (3 pages)

This begins with a title and a one-sentence summary of the question. Next are the recommendations being proposed. These are followed by the rationale, offering the principal arguments in favour of the policy. Then a section on possible problems and responses to them. Finally, there is a section on political considerations.

2. Analysis (5 pages)

This begins with the background to the issue (the sequence of events leading to the MC), the considerations (non-financial factors and interests that will be affected), and the options (pros and cons of three possible courses of action).

You may find that it is helpful to begin with the Analysis and move later to the Ministerial Recommendation, where your proposal will be narrowed to a single approach.

McKeown & Associates offer another piece of useful advice: “Assume your first draft will be too long, verbose and bureaucratic. Avoid all three by rigorously and ruthlessly editing and revising.”