

PX CONFERENCE REPORT

DETAILS

Date: May 6-8, 2026	Conference: Implementing Policy and Managing Change a component of a Certificate in Policy Development & Implementation
Time: 11:00 am – 3:00 pm	Location: Sobey School of Business, Saint Mary's University (Halifax) (virtual)
PX: Joel Swaan	

SUMMARY

Saint Mary's University in Halifax, Nova Scotia is located on the ancestral lands and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq People. These lands are covered by the Treaties of Peace and Friendship, signed in 1725 by the Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik peoples with the British Crown. The treaties recognized Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik title—surrendering neither land nor resources—and established rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations.

Implementing Policy and Managing Change, taught by Rosemary Landry and donalee Moulton, is the third module in the four-course Certificate in Policy Development and Implementation. I signed up for this certificate with Governance and Fiduciary Education funds to support my work as chair of the Bylaw & Policy Committee, as well as my obligation to maintain the Provincial Executive Procedures Manual (Bylaw I, Part VIII, 8.4 (e)).

Policy Implementation

Policy implementation is the phased process of translating a policy into routine organizational and individual behavior. It sits within the broader policy cycle (agenda-setting → development → decision → implementation → monitoring) and requires aligning technical systems with human adoption.

Effective implementation balances **technical change** (structures, processes, tools) with **human change** (skills, behaviors, relationships). Core activities include defining requirements, designing solutions, building systems, and managing transition and rollout. A critical factor is ensuring that individuals are not only *aware* of the policy but are **ready, willing, able, and doing**—a progression from understanding to action.

Common challenges include weak sponsorship, unclear direction, insufficient planning, and low engagement. Strong executive sponsorship and stakeholder engagement significantly improve success rates. Ultimately, implementation succeeds when infrastructure, strategy, and people are aligned and supported through follow-through.

Change Management

Change management focuses on helping individuals and organizations adapt to and thrive in a new future state. While implementation addresses the technical rollout, change management addresses the **people side of change**, ensuring adoption and minimizing disruption.

Change involves a transition from current to future states, often accompanied by uncertainty, resistance, and a temporary productivity dip. People experience change differently (e.g., worried, undecided, or supportive), so strategies must be tailored. Effective change management includes building **A**wareness of the need for change, fostering **D**esire, developing **K**nowledge and skills, supporting sustained **A**ction, and **R**einforcement to sustain the change over time (“ADKAR”).

Leadership plays a critical role: sponsors champion change and remove barriers, while managers act as communicators, coaches, and resistance managers. Organizations with strong change management practices are far more likely to meet or exceed project objectives.

Communication

Communication is essential throughout the policy lifecycle—before, during, and after implementation—to build awareness, understanding, and compliance. Policy itself defines intent and direction, while communication ensures that stakeholders interpret and act on it correctly.

Effective policy communication increases understanding, reinforces importance, builds culture, and drives engagement. It must address challenges such as message control, complexity, timing, and consistency. Early communication (consultation and engagement) helps shape policy and build buy-in, while ongoing communication supports rollout and adoption.

Organizations should use multiple channels (written, in-person, digital) depending on audience size, complexity, urgency, and sensitivity. Stakeholder engagement is critical—key groups must be informed, consulted, involved, or empowered to ensure success. Managers play a frontline role in interpreting and reinforcing messages.

This course diverged from the “good policy/bad policy” construct and moved into change management: when and how do stakeholders participate in the policy process, and how is leadership walking with them on the journey. There’s much to think about here, from the perspective of an organization which has Provincial Council making Policy decisions once per year, without delegates necessarily having a connection to the policy development process over the course of the year. I continue to appreciate the theoretical and practical nature of these courses, and I look forward to ongoing opportunities to implement what I’m learning. Thanks to the Provincial Executive for approving the funding for this work. Last up for this certificate program is Policy Evaluation (June 25-26).

Respectfully submitted,



Joel Swaan
Provincial Executive