**Handout 1: What Is Policy?**

**What is policy?**

When a sample of workers in the community services area was asked what is policy, they gave the following replies:

- Rules or guidelines
- Our organisation’s structure that we work by
- Procedures for workers to follow
- Guides established to determine how we do our work
- Standards for our organisation
- Our agencies guide to best practice.

As you can see there are many answers to this question. These different responses to what is policy show that the word policy is used in many different ways.

Elements of policy include:

- Policy creates a framework for action within the Carmen Poldis Community Centre
- Policy is a decision
- Policy is grounded in legitimate authority
- Policy is a written product
- Policy creation is an ongoing process
- Legitimate authority within the Carmen Poldis Community Centre makes policy.

Examples of policy include:

- Who is eligible to use the services of the Carmen Poldis Community Centre?
- How to lock up the premises
- What to do if a client becomes violent
- What to do if you discover child abuse.

The definition of policy that will be used here is: *A statement, which either expresses broad or specific management decisions, based on a philosophy and ideology of the organisation (Hint: if you would like to understand this definition a bit more try listening to the conversation in the tearoom).*

**What is the Purpose of Policy?**

Policy is about achieving objectives. It is a means to an end. Through consultation and interaction governments, organisations and groups determine courses of action that will gain them certain results.

For example residents living with excessive aircraft noise complained to their local council about the constant roaring of planes overhead. Local councils appealed to the Australian government and a policy was drawn up stating that large aircraft could not take off or land between 11.00pm and 6.00am.
In the example above it shows how policy is a mechanism to implement laws. An example of the way policy is implemented to become law in the Community services sector, can be seen in the state laws relating to mandatory reporting of child abuse and neglect.

Policy also ensures a standard response to commonplace issues that arise in the workplace. For example an orientation policy ensures that all new workers receive the same process and forms to complete.

The final purpose of policy is to be an accountability mechanism for staff and management. For example a policy on Equal Employment Opportunity makes the organisation adhere to issues relating to equal right of workers to promotional opportunities, study leave and flexible work arrangements to name a few.

What is Social Policy?

Workers in community services agencies such as the Carmen Poldis Community Centre are often involved in social policy.

- Social Policy can be defined as a way of regulating social relationships
- It implies welfare, social security, and redistribution of resources
- It incorporates equity, fairness, and social justice
- Economic and social policies are closely connected. For example every economic decision has social costs and affects i.e. health, housing, transport, education
- Traditionally social policy has been concerned with social welfare including the poor, the disadvantages and the dependent.

Criteria for good policy

Will it be useful for the users?
I.e. will it be useful for all the staff, users of the service management committee at Carmen Poldis and outside agencies?

Does it take other policies into account?
i.e. Does it take into account Carmen Poldis policies on Duty of Care, Access and Equity, Occupational Health and Safety and other related policies?

Will it improve the quality of the service?
I.e. Will it improve the usage of the conference room, improve the booking system and bring in some revenue for Carmen Poldis.
Steps in evaluating if the policy is good policy

Evaluation is a tool for collecting and managing information about policies and procedures.

1. Are the policy objectives clear and precise
2. Do the objectives achieve the stated outcome? Why or Why not?
3. Is the policy relevant in the light of current circumstances? Why? Why not?
4. Research whether there are better ways of achieving these objectives.

Handout 2: Policies, Procedures And Accountability

Policy & procedures

Policies are sometimes difficult to understand for many reasons. Each policy may have a procedure that sets out how to follow the policy. Policies are usually collected together in a policy and procedure manual. This manual is an instructions manual on how to operate the community agency.

Policies and procedures as an accountability mechanism

- For the client a policy and procedures manual should contain information on how to make complaints about the agency and how to give feedback to staff and management
- For volunteers and students on placement it should contain an orientation plan for new workers in the agency their rights and responsibilities and the expectations of the agency
- For the workers it should contain a code of conduct, legislative requirements such as mandatory reporting of suspected child abuse, disciplinary procedures, job descriptions, OH&S procedures and the role and functions of the agency
- For management the information will describe their role and responsibilities.

Who makes policy in a community organisation?

Policy is made by the management of the organisation. The workers may make suggestions and draft policy but the management must agree to the policy before it becomes part of the organisation rules.

Policies are often developed because of an incident where something happens and staff really don’t know what to do and find there is no policy to guide them. They deal with the issue then the organisation writes up a policy.
Effective Policies

How do we know whether a policy is effective or not?

Effective policies:
- Are structured clearly with a recognised sequence of steps
- Have clear and honest objectives
- Are useful for the intended people such as staff, clients, volunteers and management committees
- Cover all relevant areas relating to Federal, State and local government rules including requirements for government funding?
- Provide the framework for best practice?
- Assume an ability to draw lessons from policy experience and to apply that information in policy review
- Make a difference in the ways intended.

Handout 3: Developing And Reviewing Policy

How is good policy developed?

1. Issues are identified e.g. a new problem arises for the agency or an existing policy requires an overhaul
2. Then it is time for research and reflection
3. One important method to test the strength and feasibility of a new policy is consultation with all stakeholders.
   - New ideas about how agencies function can be generated.
   - It provides effective ways for client groups to feel empowered
   - There are opportunities for the clients and other stakeholders to have input into policies and programs, which affect them prior to their design and implementation.
4. Coordination of people and resources is now crucial. There may be issues between agencies with similar issues to resolve and a funding budget must be considered.
5. The time for a decision has arrived. At this stage it is necessary to see whether there is too much information and the whole process becomes bogged down or not enough information with which to make a decision.
6. Implementation must follow and then the whole process starts over again.

Reviewing policies

It is crucial that community agencies review their policies at regular intervals. The following points should be taken into account:
- Has the purpose of the policy been clearly and accurately described?
- Are its objectives clear and specific?
- Is it up to date?
• Do all stakeholders easily understand it?
• Is it accessible?
• Have resources been taken into account when writing the policy?
• Have legal and external accountability requirements been included?
• Was there consultation with all appropriate stakeholders before the policy was implemented?
• Is it workable?
• Are some policies of the organisation in conflict with other policies of the same organisation?

**Handout 4: The Role Of Research In Policy Development**

**Contribute to research for policy advice**

Reasons why agencies collect data for research.

1. **Planning purposes:**
   • To identify current use of services by the agency
   • To identify the type of person using the agency service
   • To identify the needs of people using agency services
   • To identify what other agencies are doing
   • To identify improved ways of managing a task or incident.

2. **Accountability purposes:**
   • To ensure the agency services all the sections of the community for which it receives funding
   • To inform the funding body about who is using the services.

From the above list you can see that Coordinators and other staff in community services agencies are engaged in research on more or less a daily basis.

The gathering of information and consultation techniques may include:

• Interviews: structured, semi-structured unstructured, group and individual
• Conversation by phone or face to face
• Observation and listening
• Collecting of materials such as reports, policies, statistics
• Attendance at workshops, meetings and forums
• Questionnaires.
Survey

A survey is a term that describes one of the broad methods for the collecting of information for research. It involves selecting a group of people and asking them a set of questions. The questions are pre-planned and you obtain the answers to your questions through interviews either face to face or over the phone or through questionnaires. Questionnaires are where there are a set number of written questions that people respond to.

Surveys have a number of advantages:

- You can collect a lot of information relatively easily
- The worker doesn’t have to be involved in the collecting of the information
- A wide range of answers can be collected
- The results can easily be compared with other results
- Surveys can be cheap to carry out.

Areas on which data is collected

- Age
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Socio-economic group
- Disability
- Area in which they live
- Services they use
- Client needs.

Handout 5: Data Collection

How is data collected?

Through existing information such as:

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS statistics)
- Local community profiles
- Relevant reports.
  This is called secondary research.

Through collection of new information such as:

- Questionnaire completed when client uses the service
- Community meetings
- Survey of community groups.
  This is called primary research.
Ethical and confidentiality issues when collecting data

Questions to consider:
- Should we tell people before collecting data on their circumstances?
- How do we show respect for cultural and individual differences?
- Should we keep the information we collect confidential?

When doing research always remember the rights of the people you are researching.

The rules of carrying out research

- Work with others rather than in isolation. Share and seek ideas and listen to others input
- Be clear about the questions you ask by being exact in what you are saying
- Be clear about why you are asking the question and if anybody else has a stake in your findings
- Don’t be happy with the first answer until you have sought more information and looked at the question in other ways. It might be that its not the best answer
- Be aware of the constraint on your agency in terms of time, money skilled people to help, access to others for research
- Don’t take on a piece of research that is too ambitious. It’s better to tackle something smaller and more achievable than something large that you can’t finish
- Think of clever ways to present your research to get your message across
- Continuously review your research and question the results
- Be flexible. Problems will arise and sometimes it is necessary to change the focus of your research.

Doing a simple survey

People often think that they don’t have the skills to do research that it’s too “academic” and complex for them. Now this is true for large research projects where many thousands of dollars have been set aside for the project but a simple local survey can be done with little previous experience as long as there is forethought and preplanning.

Step 1

Know precisely what it is you want to know. This sounds pretty simple but in fact it isn’t. It’s important to spend the time really examining what it is you want to know. For example as a community worker at Carmen Poldis Centre you want to know if the services in New Cedar are adequate.
Ask yourself if this is really what you want to know. Or rather do you want to know about the services Carmen Poldis might be able to offer? For example housing or transport needs are not something Carmen Poldis can address.

So the question will be narrowed down to identify if the services at Carmen Poldis are adequate. Can you measure “adequate?” What is adequate for one person is inadequate for another. Are we interested in those people who already use the Carmen Poldis centre or those who were unable to access the services or those who didn’t even know the services existed. Are we really only interested in those clients who have been attending the Family Work program in the last 12 months?

You can see from the above example that it’s very important to get your ideas about what you are researching very clear in the beginning.

**Step 2 choosing the research method**

Once you know exactly what it is you do want to research you have probably been thinking along the way about how you will collect the data you need to provide you with the answers.

It may be that in some instances Local Council or the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) or journals and reports may have the answers. (secondary research). On the other hand you may need to get the information from staff, clients and staff from other community organisations (primary research).

If you need to collect your data through primary research you may organise:

- A focus group of key people
- An interview
- A questionnaire.

**Step 3 what resources are needed**

Before you begin it’s important to work out what resources you need. For example:

- Will you need extra staff or can you us volunteers
- What training, if any, do people need to carry out the research
- What stationery is needed, photocopying, stamps and phone calls
- Will you need people who have interview and telephone skills
- Will there be a computer free to analyse and write up the results.

The resources you have will affect the type of research you can do. However if you have few resources it doesn’t mean you can’t do the research but rather limit it’s scope so it becomes manageable.
Step 4 designing the questions

Remember when designing the questions you need to keep reminding yourself about what answers you are looking for i.e what is it you want to find out.

Don’t ask questions that are superfluous, or may be interesting to know. Remember that every question you ask has to be compiled, collated, analysed and written up.

The type of question is also important. Some questions require only a short one sentence, one word response. These are called “closed” questions. An example of a closed question is personal particulars, or answers that require only a “Yes” or “No”. For example have you left school?

Closed questions are easy to collate but they don’t give much information about an issue you are researching.

Open questions allow the respondent to expand on the answer saying what they want either by writing in the space on the questionnaire or through an interview where the responses are recorded or written down.

Open questions are useful when you need a full answer. For example “What are the reasons why you stopped attending the Family Services program?

A disadvantage of open questions is the difficulty of analysing and collating the results as the answers are often very varied.

Most questionnaires and interviews have a combination of both open and closed questions.

Additionally, make sure your questions are not long and drawn out nor double barrelled meaning that they have 2 questions in one.

Questions you design can be used in either a questionnaire, or a structured or unstructured interview.

If you design a questionnaire then you can distribute it through the post, placed into letter boxes (self administered) or handed to people personally. (face to face)
Remember to tell the people who fill out the form (the respondents) how they can get the forms back to you and by what date.

Step 5 testout the questions

Now you are ready to see if your questions work. This is sometimes called trialing or piloting. Ask a few people to take part in order to test your questions for clarity, length of the whole questionnaire or interview, its relevance and overall impact. Make any alterations before you start the official survey.
**Step 6 sampling**

If your survey involves a small and discreet range of people then you will be able to survey all or most of them. For example staff at Carmen Poldis Community Centre, all the members of the New Cedar Youth Club. Often though it’s not possible to ask all the people if you have a large number of people, e.g all the people of New Cedar, so you then take a sample.

The problem is who do you ask? The survey has to represent a mix of all the different people living in New Cedar otherwise it isn’t representative of the group and so your survey is biased.

One method is a *random sample*. If you were surveying all the residents of New Cedar then you would get their names from the electoral list and randomly allocate a number to those who are to be surveyed. There are computer packages that will allow this to happen or for a smaller survey you can put all the names in a hat and a number is drawn against them from another hat. All equal numbers are interviewed for example.

Another method of sampling is called Systematic sampling which is easier than random sampling. You select the respondent at regular intervals. For example every third person who comes through the door, every 10\textsuperscript{th} person on the electoral role.

Remember when choosing the site and you are sampling will it be representative of the population you wish to survey?. For example a shopping centre for late night shopping is unlikely to get a representative group of the older people. During the day it might not be representative of the area’s citizens who are in paid employment.

**Step 7 administering the survey**

Now you are ready to begin. Will you need to let people know that you will be asking them to complete a questionnaire or call on them to complete an interview?

If so then you might announce it at a meeting, ask the local paper to put it in as a press release, write to the school for permission to announce it through their newsletter or letterbox drop. Announcing it in this way gives the research credibility and people are forewarned. When you do conduct the survey wear an identification card and show it when you introduce yourself.

Clearly explain the reasons you are conducting the survey and how long it will take and how their information will be used.

Other issues to consider when carrying out your survey:
Time of day – when are the shopping centres their busiest
Location – shopping centres, railway stations
Language – is there a dominant migrant population so do you need to have the survey translated.
Step 8 analysing and interpreting the results

Now you have all the data you have to get the results into a form that is useful. The first step is to categorise all the questions so they can be counted. For example all the closed questions and multiple choice questions are easy to count and then list the number as a percentage of the total population surveyed which is 100%.

For example: present as part of a questionnaire
Question 4: Which service at Carmen Poldis Community Centre do you use?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family Centre</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth programs</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education programs</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

150 was the total population surveyed.

Open and close questions are more difficult to collate as the responses can be so varied. Sometimes the responses are similar so they fall automatically into a category while at other times you may need to make up a category as an umbrella to include a number of somewhat similar responses. This is called coding. Coding is subjective as you are determining if one response is like another to fit under an umbrella category and it could be that another person may code it differently. It may be a good idea to get others to also determine a code separately, compare the results and come up with a compromise.

If you are concerned that some good points may be lost when the answer gets coded you can illustrate the answer with a quote as an example.

Once you have the open questions coded you can count them in the same way as you have the closed questions.

Step 9 writing up the results

Now you have all the data collated you need to decide the best format to distribute them. This will depend on your original reason for doing the survey. If you are using the results to lobby the management committee for a new service you will probably want to include a table to show the results of your research and put it in a report or briefing paper.
Handout 6: Provide Briefing Materials On Policy Issues

Once the data collection and consultation with stakeholders have been completed the results are then collated and presented in a format that is appropriate for the audience, the purpose and the context.

For example you may write individual papers around each of the major issues or themes that become evident from your research. You may write it in a style suitable for a newspaper or newsletter if it for a broader circulation.

Whatever the style writing briefing papers has a structure. It must be:

- Easy to read
- Easy to understand
- Attractively set out
- Professional in its style.

Briefing materials formulate the problem, establish objectives, identify parameters, state alternatives and often conclude with one or more recommendations.

Government ministers use briefing papers to explain to the public the history behind the introduction of new policy. Activists distribute briefing papers to educate society on social issues. For example Cariitas Australia believes we all have a duty to speak up for the victims of injustice and poverty. To do this we have to know the facts behind the issues. Each year they issue briefing papers on issues they believe are relevant and urgent.


**Briefing Papers**

**Briefing Papers 2001 – Globalisation**

The Briefing Papers for 2001 explore the issue of globalisation and how it is possible for us to respond.


Briefing Paper one deals with the effect on developing countries of the information revolution, speculative financial flows and the expansion of world trade.

[Globalisation - Part 2](http://www.caritas.org.au/newsroom/pub_bpapers.htm)

Briefing Paper two looks at identity, fundamentalism and nationalism and social and cultural issues.
Handout 7: Structure Of Briefing Papers

The writing requires a correct sequence and must be consistent irrespective of the topic. Often it is easier to write the conclusions first and then work backwards. An alternative method is to put the central issues first and then build the briefing paper around these issues. The most important part is to come up with a balanced paper.

The sequence of headings for a new proposal will be different for a proposal that concerns an existing problem.

Sequence for a new proposal is as follows:

- Overview
- Presenting problem
- Proposed solution
- Advantages and disadvantages of the solution
- Conclusions
- Depending on the type of paper – recommendations.

Sequence of a proposal that concerns an existing problem will be:

- Overview
- The aims and objectives of the proposal
- Development or outline of the aims and objectives
- Advantages and disadvantages of the existing procedures
- Conclusion
- Depending on the type of paper – recommendations.

Following the structure above will allow your briefing paper to be easily read and understood by others, reinforce your own feelings on the matter and produce a more confident style.

Handout 8: Promote Informed Policy Debate

Develop a communication plan that includes:

- Meetings with staff and clients
- Printed material
- Possible advertising.

It is also necessary to consider any special communication needs for remote areas or widely separated staff and for staff and clients with special communication needs (e.g. languages other than English). The communication plan should include opportunities for feedback so that the implementation team can gauge reaction to the policy and identify possible problem areas.
Strategies to stimulate informed debate would include:

- Public meetings
- Focus groups
- Surveys from key stakeholders and clients
- Circulation of the proposal for written comment
- Advisory committees
- Interest group meetings.

It is important to consider the appropriate strategy for the consultation with other workers, management, and clients. For example, a public meeting may not be appropriate because consultation is only required with a select group rather than with the wider community. Public consultation would involve the hiring of a large hall, which a community agency may not be able to afford.

If time frames need to be adhered to then relying on the circulation of the material for written comment may take too long and other strategies may need to be considered in its place.

It may be necessary to translate policy materials into languages easily understood by clients and other stakeholders. Therefore, it is necessary to consider translating materials with English as a second language, ensuring the language is appropriate. This includes the consideration of signed language.

Strategies to stimulate informed debate will include:

- Oral presentations
- Written material
- And/or visual methods using a third party as a translator/interpreter.

To ensure that there is an exchange of ideas and the opportunity for additional information to be included into a policy document, staff meetings should be held to discuss the proposed new policy and procedures.

Feedback should be sought from the users of the service if it has a direct impact on them. It may be necessary to consider the most appropriate strategy to get feedback from such a large group, taking into account financial and human resource constraints.

Once the policy is developed, it is crucial that it becomes a living document, used and reviewed regularly. Too often policy documents sit on a shelf and never get used.

To ensure the policy is used, the following strategies need to be put into practice.

Involve all staff affected by the policy in its design. Make sure the management committee is part of the ongoing debate and own the policy. Make it the responsibility of one person to review and update the policy. Make sure all new staff are aware of the policy and procedure manual. When undertaking a yearly planning session, include the review of policies.