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 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 is aware of the policy and procedure manual. When undertaking a yearly planning session include the review of policies.