Handout 3: Starting The Policy Development Cycle

Identifying the Issue and its relevance and currency for the organisation and its clients:

What drives organisations and governments to review its policies?

Existing organisational, government and other policies relevant to the issue are evaluated to determine currency and relevance for the organisation and its clients.

Much policy that organisations develop comes about through identified problems in existing policies articulated usually through the staff and/or clients.

1. An organisation will be more likely to review its existing policy if it challenges the values of the organisation. For example an existing policy that discriminates against client self determination by not allowing them an equal voice in a case management plan.

2. If the agency is seen less favourably than another agency because of its policy, the agency is likely to pay attention to its impact. For example if CPCC offers less staff entitlements than the large non government agency nearby, it will lose staff and all their knowledge and skills. Also it becomes costly to retrain new workers.

3. Responding to policy review as a result of legislative changes will make organisations review existing policies.

4. An organisation or government will only review its policy if there is agreement on a problem. Unless there is significant interest and a coalition of voices agree, then a policy is unlikely to be reviewed.

5. There must be the hope for a solution. If a problem seems insurmountable then it is less likely to gain attention.

6. With organisations and government concerned about budgetary constraints a policy review is more likely to get up when the decision makers can be persuaded that this issue is more worthy of attention than another.

7. The problem has to fit with the organisation or government ideology. If the focus of the issue is not a comfortable fit with the values of the organisation/government then it is not likely to succeed.

In the example of the children at risk hypothetical case study (in Handout 2) the CPCC responded to a policy review because of the wider public attracting the attention of the media. As the media has any number of issues it can take up, the identifying issue has to be seen by the media as more important than the other issues also seeking attention.
The media will be more biased towards taking up issues that attract public attention make a good story and highlight the deficiencies in current government policy addressing such issues.

Pressure groups will also have a role to play in highlighting deficiencies in government policy when serious problems emerge but must wait until the media coverage carries it to the political forum. An example of how this works is the media coverage on asylum seekers has made the issue a political one with calls for a review of existing policies.

However professionals working with asylum seekers have for a long time tried to highlight their concerns about detention centres but most of their concerns have fallen on deaf ears. It was not until the scope of the problem became larger through the added issues relating to boatloads of people in Australian waters, human rights issues and concerns about overseas ownership of detention centres gained public interest intensified. As well the issues appeared to become more pressing and intense and the media drove the agenda with media coverage that allowed for visibility of the issues.

The example of the asylum seekers and the hypothetical case study will highlight how government is then likely to respond if the media and those with influence and access to government decision making believe the issue need attention.