Handout 4: Policy Analysis

Appropriate research and consultation, which will contribute to policy development, is undertaken and documented in accordance with organisational policies and procedures.

Research into policy development involves looking at ways to approach new problems and look at old problems in different ways. Analysing the problem and the underlying issues is a fundamental stage in the policy cycle since analysing and researching is the basis for developing options and good decision making.

The following strategy of researching the problem involves a five-step framework. By applying this method it will hopefully provide a logical, ordered and sequential process whereby all options are identified, assessed and compared.

Relevant stakeholders are consulted throughout the policy development process to ensure relevance and acceptance of the product.

When analysing the policy it is important to include in this process the feedback from those who will be affected by the policy. Without the feedback from stakeholders the policy is set to fail.

Appropriate mechanisms are provided to facilitate open constructive discussion about policy issues.

The five-step process is as follows:

1. Identifying and defining the problem
2. The objectives are established
3. Identify the parameters for making a decision
4. Look for alternatives
5. Come up with a proposal or solution to the problem.

1. Identifying and defining the problem:

Once an organisation has been made aware of a problem or issue the policy makers then need to identify the size and extent of the problem, what form it takes and how it is characterised.

For example using the hypothetical case study at CPCC, policy makers would be asking:

- How the incidence of more children at risk in their region came about?
- Who are the people affected by this problem and why?
- What do other professionals in the area say about the problem?
- Are there any figures coming through that show this trend?
- Do the problems identified here show up as a trend in any other region?
- Can the problem be broken down into smaller parts and looked at as a series of related problems?
• Are there any programs that can be utilised?
• Who else other than Carmen Poldis Community Centre should be involved in owning this problem?

*HINT* visit the tearoom for further discussion on identifying issues using the Carmen Poldis hypothetical case study above.

2. Objectives are established:

Defining the objective in a way that will encompass the problem is a difficult process. If they are too specific it is likely to miss some of the issues that impinge on the problem. On the other hand if they are vague then evaluating the policy objectives becomes too hard. If the objectives are too broad then any activity could fit into them and if they are too narrow then the objectives would tend to favour one area over another.

Shaping and defining options by an organisation calls for it to be ethical in its decision making by considering all the options fairly and without prejudice. This is a difficult thing for an organisation to do with its own values.

3. Identify the parameters for making a decision:

Policy makers can identify options once they know:

1. What will be the likely objectives of the Management Committee or Board of Management, the strategic plan of the organisation and how it will fit in with their funding body
2. How likely it will be to get additional resources or have to work within the existing budget
3. The time frame for considering the policy and acting on it
4. How important the problem is in relation to other problems facing the Management Committee/Board of Management.

If it looks like the decision makers are faced with other more pressing concerns so this problem is not going to get strong interest, then the policy maker may choose to make minor changes to an existing policy or program or introduce existing procedures that work in another program to a new program to address this problem.

It may be that the problem has no solution. This could be because the problem is outside the professional scope of the policy maker or that the problem is just too hard and cannot be broken down into smaller more manageable problems. If the decision maker can’t come up with a solution it is important to let the decision makers know of this honest appraisal of the problem.

It may be that the problem can be revisited with new eyes.
4. **Look for alternatives:**

This is the time when the options are narrowed down so it involves collecting as much relevant information as required and to identify possible responses. Any option will identify the financial implications, the impact on clients, community and staff. The option could have an effect on the environment so this will need researching. Legal ramifications must be considered with each policy option and finally, research will need to consider the likely outcome of an option in relation to its acceptance and adoption by the decision makers of the organisation and government funding bodies.

To search for data when considering all the parameters above, policy makers will need to seek ideas from:

- current policies from other agencies here and overseas
- look how other agencies have tackled the problem
- search for reviews and articles in professional magazines and academic journals
- seek advice from key personnel and consultation with clients.

When presenting the various options it is important to present each of them as a model or as a logical argument highlighting supporting reasons for its inclusion and backing it up with evidence.

5. **Coming up with the solution:**

Finally the policy maker should be able to recommend a solution to the problem. This will usually be in the form of a report but often an organisation’s management committee /Board of management and staff will be briefed through a presentation.

This recommendation should be accompanied by a comparison with the other options and the reasons why one choice won over another.

If the management committee does not accept the solution because it is too costly, too political, or has widespread social consequences they may ask for further information or change some part of the plan. Policy makers should therefore be forewarned that they might need to revisit the report in search for more acceptable choices.