



 **Combat Poverty
Agency** *working for a
poverty-free Ireland*

10 INTEGRATING POLICY INTO WORK PLANNING

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PREFACE

As part of its role as a national community development centre, the Combat Poverty Agency provides information, advice, training and resource materials for the community and voluntary sector.

Under the current Strategic Plan 2005-07 Combat Poverty initiated the Having Your Say Programme that aims to strengthen the policy voices and practices of communities experiencing poverty. This new title, the 10th in the Managing Better series was commissioned as part of this Programme.

The *Managing Better* series aims to provide accessible and clearly written booklets that offer a basic introduction to key issues faced by community and voluntary groups. The aims of this publication, *Integrating Policy into Work Planning* are:

- to increase knowledge and understanding of community development processes
- to support 'know-how' and practical application of community development and policy development in anti-poverty contexts
- to enhance policy and community development skills and capacities of groups of people experiencing poverty, their representatives or organisations supporting them, including community, voluntary and statutory bodies.

The title was commissioned to offer guidance, tools and checklists to support anti-poverty and community and voluntary groups to integrate policy work into work planning associated with strategic plans, annual work plans, programme and project planning and practice.

September 2006

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September 2006

1 INTRODUCTION



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

The right of people, including those living in poverty, to participate in the formulation of public policy is now generally accepted. It is also generally accepted that policies intended to tackle poverty are more likely to work if the people they are designed for are involved in their planning and implementation.

This new title in the *Managing Better* series offers guidance to groups on ways of integrating policy work into their strategic plans, annual work plans, and programme and project planning and practice. The Guide suggests a process, under 14 Tasks, whereby local community groups can begin to influence policy decisions that affect them.

1.2 Background and Context

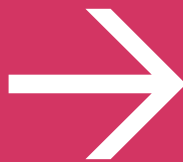
In 2005 Combat Poverty launched the *Having Your Say* Programme. The focus of the programme is to strengthen the voice of people living in poverty in the development and implementation of anti-poverty policies and programmes. (See website listing.)

The four objectives of the Programme are:

- To promote the right of people in poverty to participate in, and influence, public policy decisions that affect them
- To initiate or support work that enhances the policy skills and capacities of groups of people experiencing poverty, their representatives or organisations supporting them
- To work in partnership with policy-makers to increase their understanding of the issues related to, and implications of, involving people in poverty in policy making
- To strengthen the integration of anti-poverty practice by community and voluntary organisations into the policy advice role of Combat Poverty.

Integrating Policy into Work Planning is one of the publications in a range of educational resources that is being published in support of the Programme's second objective. It is complemented by *Community Development and Public Policy* (Lynam 2006), also published as part of the *Having Your Say* Programme.

2 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY WORK



2 COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND POLICY WORK

This section emphasises the fact that involvement in public policy decision-making is fundamental to community development work. It outlines the four levels at which community groups in Ireland are already involved in influencing this process.

2.1 The Place of Policy Work in Community Development

Policy work is an essential element of community development practice at all levels. The principles and processes at the core of community development as an approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion distinguish it from other forms of work in and with local communities. For Combat Poverty community development is characterised by:

- A focus on empowerment and participation of marginalised groups in decision-making that impacts on their lives and communities
- A collective rather than an individual approach to tackling problems
- A social analysis and understanding of the causes of poverty and disadvantage and a commitment to equality and social justice.

Community development deliberately sets out to target and bring together individuals and groups who are affected by poverty and who are excluded from participation in society because of prejudice, discrimination, lack of resources or power. It aims to empower them, to give them a voice, to help them come into the centre of the public policy-making process.

2.2 What is Public Policy?

Policy is a statement of values, aims and objectives that a government, a community organisation, a political party, or a private corporation wishes to realise, together with strategies and instruments for achieving them. Most community organisations have already engaged in a policy-making process, for example to decide and define their aims and objectives and the general principles upon which the organisation is guided in its activities. These decisions are incorporated in the organisation's memorandum and articles of association.

Public policy is commonly understood as the combination of basic decisions, laws, regulatory measures, commitments, courses of action and funding priorities that are made, in the public's name, by those who hold or affect government positions of authority.

In most instances these arrangements result from interactions among those who demand change, those who make decisions and those who are affected by the policy in question. Many community organisations are actively involved in this process, in various ways and at various levels.

- **At local level**, groups are actively engaged in trying to get much needed services delivered locally or delivered more appropriately, or attempting to refocus regeneration initiatives so that these can have a sustainable impact on their currently disadvantaged communities. Many are engaged in local development partnerships, where they try to sharpen the partnership's focus on the social and economic inclusion of particularly marginalised groups. Many are engaged in encouraging the local development partnership to take on a more active policy-influencing role.
- **At national level**, community organisations in the Community Platform are actively engaged in trying to influence policy that will, for example, result in new targets to reduce poverty, new targets for a minimum income, action to increase social housing stock, standardised remuneration, training and career paths for carers, care assistants and home carers; action to address discrimination experienced by Travellers, older people, disabled people and immigrant communities; the adoption of the National Adult Literacy Agency's Implementation Plan.
- **At EU level**, community organisations are members of networks of European voluntary organisations established to influence policy and to lobby the European Commission, European Parliament and other institutions. For example, the European Anti-Poverty Network brings together European and international organisations concerned with poverty and social exclusion in Europe; the Platform of European Social NGO's attempts to influence the EU toward stronger social policies; the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) is a network of European NGOs working to combat racism in all the EU member states. (See website listing.)

- **At international level**, organisations in the community sector have effectively used international human rights instruments to influence policy development at national level, in particular through the preparation of Shadow Reports to the International Committees that monitor the implementation of the various UN Covenants that Ireland has ratified. They have documented their experiences and concerns in relation to the progress being made by government in enumerating economic, social and cultural rights, and in relation to holding the state accountable for fulfilling its obligations under the legally binding agreements that it has ratified.

3 HOW IS PUBLIC POLICY MADE?



3 HOW IS PUBLIC POLICY MADE?

This section stresses the importance of community organisations becoming involved in the complex process of decision-making, and outlines the actual stages of that process.

3.1 A Complex Process

Public policy is generally made by government, or initiated by government. Policy development is one of the key functions of government. The structure of government and public administration very much determines how policies are formulated and implemented. In Ireland the system of government is highly centralised. Policy design is primarily at the national level. Implementation is handed over to the local administrations and they deliver services within the overall national policy framework.

Public policy development and decision-making, however, involves a complex interplay of interests and expertise between:

- Ministers
- Key civil servants in government departments
- Politicians/political interests
- A whole range of diverse interest groups, e.g. local or regional interests, international corporate interests, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), small and big business, cultural and religious interests.

The policy development and decision-making process also often engages semi-state agencies, local authorities/government, the social partners, expert working groups, and consultative, advisory and monitoring bodies established by government.

Influencing decision-making successfully involves working with many of these different groups and bodies.

Decisions taken at EU level impact on public policy in Ireland. The 'europeanisation' of policy across a wide range of government responsibilities results in modern governance becoming more co-ordinated across the Member States (Combat Poverty, 2006). However, some aspects of state responsibilities, including the eradication of poverty and social exclusion, are not within the competence of EU institutions.

3.2 The Importance of Having Your Say

Policy-making can be a complex process, but there are many reasons why community organisations need to engage in this process and integrate policy into their planning. These include the following (Lynam, 2006):

- Power imbalances exist in the decision-making arenas and, as community organisations are well aware, the farther you are from the decision-making process, the more difficult it is to have your voice and concerns heard and addressed. The genuine participation of marginalised groups can address power imbalances and advance social inclusion.
- When the voice of those rooted in knowledge and experience of poverty on the ground is brought into the policy-making process, this allows local-level reality to inform policy-making and improve the quality of the decision-making. It can result in more relevant, realistic and focused programmes to address poverty and inequality. It can identify appropriate roles for community organisations in delivering effective programmes. Communities can monitor the implementation and evaluate and draw lessons about the impact of particular policies on social exclusion and poverty reduction.
- There is a pressing need for anti-poverty and community organisations to assert influence on decision-making with regard to the distribution of resources in Irish society. Despite the substantial wealth generation in Ireland over the past decade, there is cause for alarm in relation to the reality of relative poverty. The 2005 Human Development Report (UN, 2005) found Irish people to be the second wealthiest in the world. However, Ireland was one of the most unequal, with the third-highest level of poverty in 18 industrialised countries surveyed.

- The most difficult problems that people experience were not created locally, nor can they be solved locally. Social and economic policies developed by the state have the capacity both to cause and alleviate poverty. Therefore influencing government policy is of utmost importance. Governmental responses to poverty are of primary importance. All other responses will have a limited effect if the state does not commit to a process of structural reform that will alter the manner in which society is organised and will contribute to a fairer distribution of wealth amongst the citizens of the state.
- The right and the potential of community organisations to inform and enhance policy-making is acknowledged in the National Action Plan Against Poverty and Social Inclusion, in the Irish Government's White Paper *Supporting Voluntary Activity, in Better Local Government* and in a vast range of other government policies and action plans. This right is also widely acknowledged at EU and international level, e.g. by the European Commission, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme and the World Health Organisation; and is enshrined in the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

3.3 Stages in the Policy-Making Process

There are a number of stages in the policy-making process, e.g.

- Policy design and formulation
- Policy implementation
- Policy review and evaluation.

Community organisations are often engaged at all of these stages in the policy cycle. Policy-making, however, is not always a clear-cut process. Problems may be quickly identified but sometimes solutions may only emerge over time. A decision taken at the end may not be quite what was expected. Sometimes policy is made by the non-decision of government, decisions can be shelved, or a policy decision is taken but the systems and budget are not put in place to ensure its proper implementation.

It is generally accepted that there are a number of basic steps in policy making.

There needs to be an *understanding* of the problem to be addressed:

- Defining the problem
- Resolving tensions
- Identifying stakeholders and deciding their roles.

Solutions need to be developed:

- Collecting information and evidence
- Appointment of committees, task forces, working groups etc
- Consulting widely, working with other involved individuals and organisations
- Developing options/choices
- Estimating the cost of each option

Policy requires a *decision/non-decision* by government.

- *Implementing* solutions
- Communicating policy
- Supporting service providers (training, advice)
- Testing different options

Testing success:

- Evaluating
- Adjusting (Combat Poverty, 2006)

4 INTEGRATING POLICY WORK INTO PLANNING



4 INTEGRATING POLICY WORK INTO PLANNING

This section focuses on community organisations and addresses the question: How can an organisation integrate public policy work into its planning and activities? Fourteen key tasks are outlined to assist in this process.

4.1 Key tasks

Policy work is a collective process driven by a commitment to social change in favour of those groups and communities that are currently socially, economically and culturally marginalised.

Policy work is also an ongoing process, and it requires careful planning to ensure effective outcomes. The following tasks and planning tips are designed to provide a step-by-step guide in this activity.

TASK 1: GET THE AGREEMENT AND COMMITMENT OF THE MANAGEMENT GROUP TO ENGAGE IN POLICY WORK

If the community group has not been engaged in policy work previously, it is important to engage with the management group of the project/organisation and spend time considering the following:

- Why it is important to engage in the policy process and the value of doing so for the local group/organisation?
- The role that the community organisation could play in influencing policy
- The implications of engaging in policy work.

Integrating policy into planning will introduce a new dimension to the work of the project. Serious engagement will require:

- A commitment of resources, particularly of staff time
- Networking with other organisations and projects
- Setting a policy agenda for the organisation
- Developing and enhancing the profile of the group.

Furthermore, engaging in policy work will:

- Bring a greater clarity to why, and how, the community organisation will engage in local partnership arrangements, what it wants to negotiate at the partnership table and what outcomes it wants to achieve
- Give a strategic focus to the planning process for annual plans, programme reviews and evaluations
- Require not only an interest in policy-making but also a commitment to follow up on how policy is implemented in practice.

→ **Planning tip:** A good time for the organisation to consider policy work is when it is developing its Strategic Plan or Annual Work Plan. This way the 'policy' aspect of the organisation's activities can be formally built in from the start. Much policy work is ongoing and strategic in nature and timeframes for engaging in the process should be clearly acknowledged.

Other opportunities to get agreement to advance policy issues arise when the organisation undertakes a review of a particular project, when staff are being employed, when a public invitation is extended to the organisation to comment on a policy proposal, or to attend a public consultation meeting in relation to a review of a particular policy.

TASK 2: ACKNOWLEDGE THE POLICY-INFLUENCING ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY ORGANISATION

If the community group is committed to influencing policy then it should consider incorporating a statement to that effect into its mission statement, or inserting it as one of the goals of the organisation. An example of such a statement is found in the mission statement of the Community Workers Cooperative:

"The Community Workers Cooperative ... seeks to influence economic and social policies to ensure the inclusion of, and to bring about equality of outcome for, those who experience exclusion and inequality. It works to contribute to the creation of a more just and equal society through promoting a policy agenda drawn from local action and experience."

The organisation should use its Annual Report to present its objectives in relation to policy. It should select one or two examples of work being undertaken, present a critical analysis of the problem and outline the solution being proposed by the organisation.

It should assign a section in the newsletter to policy issues and use the newsletter to inform readers about how policy is made, to stimulate discussion on policy issues arising in the work of the organisation, and to present the key features of public policy proposals that will have an impact on the local community.

TASK 3: DECIDE ON THE KEY ISSUES THAT THE GROUP IS GOING TO WORK ON

Policy issues arise in the course of everyday work for community organisations that engage with the reality of poverty and exclusion. It is very important that the organisations give the necessary time to analyse the causes of the problems, and to engage in a process that will change the reality of disadvantage for the groups with whom they work. The solutions to many of the problems being faced by marginalised communities can only be addressed by national policy change.

Undertake Social Analysis

Social analysis is a powerful tool that can provide a comprehensive understanding of the problems communities experience and the context from which they arise. It can be a very helpful process for community groups who are engaging in the policy process for the first time.

Social Analysis

Social analysis can be understood as an exercise or a tool to enable members of community work groups or the broader community to understand the reality that they are faced with on a daily basis. At its most simple it involves asking and seeking answers to a range of different questions.

One of the most famous names in the area of social analysis is Paulo Freire, a Brazilian whose work has inspired a range of different social analysis techniques.

(See website listing)

Social analysis is not limited to one possibility. For example, a social analysis exercise could be undertaken by the group and facilitated by the community worker. A broader social analysis effort could be initiated using techniques that will facilitate the participation of the wider community. Finally, a social analysis programme could be designed that would combine community analysis and the input of outside 'experts'.

Social analysis should incorporate a strong gender dimension and a focus on the different situations of women and men and their different experiences of problems and issues. Furthermore, the diversity within communities should be adequately acknowledged.

Some community organisations wonder if they should work alone or collectively with others. Networking with other community organisations who share values and a commitment to equality and social inclusion provides valuable opportunities for the exchange of information and/or co-operation in the development of social analysis and the establishment of common objectives and agendas for action that can then be advanced with a greater collective effort.

Establish priorities

Social analysis will not necessarily provide answers but it can help organisations to identify the actions that will be needed to bring about change. It will help them to define priorities for action. It will help them to formulate key questions, e.g.

- What is the reality now, the problem(s), the experience of exclusion?
- What would the community organisation like to see as the reality in five years, in ten years?
- What precisely does the community organisation want to achieve
 - In the short-term (over the next number of months)?
 - In the medium term (one-two years)?
 - In the long term (three-five years)?

→ **Planning tip:** Social analysis exercises should form part of the work of the organisation with all groups who participate in its programmes so as to enable them to reflect on the issues that trouble them most and on which they would like to work for change. Social analysis courses can be organised

for target groups and for the wider community. These can be prioritised in the annual Work Plan. The organisation may wish to engage a trainer to conduct these courses.

Many organisations and bodies, e.g. community development projects, local development partnerships, RAPID, City/County Development Boards, have drawn up area profiles and area plans, many of which confront the problems of lack of investment and services in the area.

This process provides a useful opportunity to reflect on:

- The analysis of the environment in which the community organisation is working, both locally and nationally
- Identification of local policy issues and the links between local poverty, social exclusion and national policies
- The profile of excluded groups and their experiences of exclusionary processes in local service provision
- The area's crucial short and long-term needs
- The most critical areas of under-investment
- Analysis of social and economic trends
- What actions could make a difference to the area in the immediate and in the longer term
- Other priorities and objectives for the area (Harvey, 2002)

TASK 4: DEVELOP UNDERSTANDING OF THE POLICY-MAKING PROCESS AND WAYS OF INFLUENCING POLICY DEVELOPMENT, IMPLEMENTATION AND REVIEW

Understanding the policy-making process is a necessary first step for an organisation that wishes to impact on policy. For community organisations, engaging in the policy-making process usually takes two forms:

- The organisation responds to draft plans and policies that are presented by officials, by suggesting alterations or amendments. It may also engage in the consultation processes pertaining to policy reviews, e.g. NAP/Inclusion, National Drugs Strategy.
- The organisation can develop a set of policy positions and priorities that it wishes to advance. This is called agenda setting. It then brings its

agenda to relevant social partnership arrangements, national conferences, and the Social Inclusion Forum; or it can decide to advance its agenda using a range of other strategies (Lynam, 2006).

In setting its agenda, the organisation must be clear about the policy context that it is working in. This means having knowledge of a range of local, national and international policies, legislation and processes.

- At local level, the organisation needs to be aware of local government arrangements, local partnership structures, and the various community development and local development initiatives, etc.
- At a national level, it should be aware of national policies that impact on the organisation's work, legislative proposals and policy reviews that government proposes to undertake. It should also be aware of the negotiations and implementation of national partnership agreements.
- At an international level, it will need to keep up-to-date on events within EU and UN levels that may help lend weight to the organisation's proposals for change (CWC, 2003).

Policy priorities for the community group are usually developed and agreed with the membership. This can be appropriately done in a series of workshops or group sessions.

National networking organisations can provide valuable information and help local community organisations keep up-to-date with developments at a national and international level. They can give advice and support to community representatives to help strengthen the case on the ground. They can bring local experience into a national context and help to make national development relevant to local situations. Additional supports provided by national networks might include:

- Preparation of briefing materials
- Presentations to seminars/meetings
- Guidance on how to prepare individual submissions
- Co-ordination of the preparation of joint submissions (Combat Poverty, 2005).

The Community Workers Co-operative provides the secretariat for the Community Platform whose membership currently comprises twenty-eight organisations committed to and engaged in anti-poverty, social inclusion and equality work. (See website listing.)

The European Anti-Poverty Network can provide a link to the ten national anti-poverty networks. It can also provide information on developments and NGO activity at European level. (See website listing.)

Local community organisations will find pertinent, up-to-date information and articles in relation to policy development, policy implementation and policy review in the quarterly *Action on Poverty Today* published by Combat Poverty and in *Equality News* published by the Equality Authority. (See website listing.)

→ Planning tips:

- Establish links with national bodies, organisations and networks to enhance understanding of the issues and the evolving policy context.
- Place the community organisation on the mailing list for national organisations' newsletters, and on emails for information about events and policy updates.
- Feed-in information from the local projects. This can facilitate national organisations to collectivise information, to deepen analysis, to enhance collective understanding of issues and to enhance the capacity of the organisation to impact on national policy development and evaluation.
- Attend policy-oriented conferences. Seek the conference papers in advance and the workshop titles. Discuss issues within the organisation locally before attending the conference so that the organisation's representative can bring forward the views of the local organisation and feed back a report of the conference proceedings.
- Keep the local community informed on policy issues and policy developments.

TASK 5: PREPARE THE CASE FOR CHANGE: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION AND THE DOCUMENTATION OF LOCAL EXPERIENCES

The social analysis exercise will support the organisation to develop a critical analysis of the issues to be addressed. However, undertaking research can be very important in preparing a case for change and is an essential element in the policy-influencing process.

Research undertaken locally can present new information and deepen understanding of a problem and its impact on local communities. Hard evidence, backed up in some cases by statistical data, will reinforce the organisation's argument for change. It can help the organisation to devise ways of addressing the issues of local concern. It can recommend short-term measures to address immediate problems or can identify alternative longer-term practice and policy directions.

Research is not just about understanding problems; it can also be about understanding solutions. It can add to an organisation's credibility, requiring others to look at the organisation in a different light and give greater respect to its capacity to justify its views. Research can provide the organisation with valuable information for use with media.

Research can be carried out by members of the organisation, or by outside specialists. Organisations may wish that the specialists working with them will teach skills to members of the organisation who can then be involved in carrying out elements of the research under the direction of the specialists.

Community organisations undertaking research should be able to draw on pertinent local information already gathered and documented, e.g. area profiles, needs assessments of a particular target group, reports of local workshops with a particular target group, and any surveys that may have been undertaken locally. Organisations should also draw on research prepared by other local or national organisations on similar issues. Contacting national organisations and joining national networks can provide the local organisation with valuable support.

→ **Planning tip:** Research is an essential element in influencing policy-makers. This should be borne in mind when the organisation is considering and

preparing its Strategic Plan and its Annual Work Plan. The organisation should be mindful of the precise purpose of any research it proposes to undertake, the timeframe for the research, and the best time for using the research findings to promote policy solutions. It needs also to be clear about how the research findings are to be publicised.

TASK 6: SET OBJECTIVES

The objectives are the specific outcomes that the organisation plans to achieve. They will set out what the organisation can realistically achieve within the limitations of its resources. In setting the objectives the organisation will take into account all of the factors, internal and external, that will have a bearing on policy work. Policy development can be complex, and policy change is often a very slow process. It is therefore helpful for community organisations that they define what they wish to achieve in the short-term (months), medium term (1-2 years) and longer term (3-4 years).

Objectives must be:

- Realistic
- Clear
- Specific
- Timed
- As concrete as possible
- Measurable
- Achievable (Clarke, 2001).

→ **Planning tip:** Time needs to be given to working out the organisation's precise aims and objectives so that they can then be pursued with a clear sense of direction. Without clearly defined objectives, the organisation will not be in a position to review or evaluate its progress.

TASK 7: DECIDE ON THE STRATEGY FOR INFLUENCING POLICY

There are many ways to influence policy. Some may be more effective than others, depending on the issues the organisation wants to advance.

Depending on the circumstances, groups and organisations might try:

- Engaging in social partnership arrangements
- Low-key discussions, e.g. with key officials in local authorities, government departments
- Policy submissions
- Advocacy campaigns
- Political lobbying
- Media campaigns
- Protests and demonstrations.

Or they may try to use a combination of all of these. The exact nature of the issue being addressed, the openness or not of the policy makers who have actual decision-making responsibility, the human and financial resources available to the organisation, timeliness and other factors should influence their choice of strategy. The following is an elaboration on a number of these strategies.

(a) Engaging in local social partnership arrangements

If the organisation decides that engagement in local social partnership processes will help the organisation to achieve change, it needs to figure out the most appropriate arenas that it wants to engage with. This will involve making choices that might be informed by the following:

- The role and remit of the local social partnership structures in the particular area
- Who is represented on each one
- How much time the organisation will need to give
- What kind of resources will be needed
- What kinds of resources are available to support the organisation's participation
- What the organisation wants to achieve
- What the organisation needs to do to get a place at the table
- What the organisation will do when it gets to the table
- The most appropriate person to represent the concerns of the organisation
- How the organisation will support that person (CWC, 2003)

The next step is to make the case for participation and a place in the relevant fora, using the appropriate processes, i.e. nomination from a local platform, election, etc.

Local Development Partnerships – These are partnership arrangements within which statutory agencies, representatives of the employer organisations, trade unions, farming organisations in rural areas, and community organisations, along with designated locally elected representatives come together as partners and contribute their expertise to develop and implement a plan for integrated local social and economic development that is specifically focused on the social and economic inclusion of particularly named target groups. (See website listing: Pobal.)

Strategic Policy Committees – These are policy-oriented committees, whose role is to advise and assist the county/city council in the formulation and development of policy for the county in the areas in which the county council has specific duties, e.g. roads/infrastructure, cultural/heritage. It gives councillors an opportunity for full involvement in the policy-making process from the early stages, and it gives other interests, e.g. community, business, farming sectors, an opportunity to input into policy at local level. (See also CWC, 2001.)

City/County Development Boards (CDBs) – These were established to draw up and work towards the implementation of a strategy for economic, social and cultural development for their areas covering a 10-year period. CDBs have a specific remit to co-ordinate actions on social inclusion. (See also CWC, 2001.)

(b) Policy Submissions

Organisations can suggest alterations or amendments to draft plans and policies that are presented by officials. They may also wish to make submissions in response to invitations by government departments, task forces, expert working groups, etc. They can draw on their experience and social analysis and present the reality of the everyday lives of local communities to inform the policy process.

Organisations may also engage in a consultation process pertaining to policy reviews. Networking with other local community organisations and national networks can be very beneficial in keeping up-to-date on community sector campaigns, proposed policy developments, or proposed policy reviews so that they are in a position to respond.

To facilitate local communities to participate in and contribute to policy reviews, it is always helpful if a designated person (usually the community worker) prepares an overview of the policy in question and of the issues that have arisen in its implementation, along with a series of questions that the community can reflect on. These questions would be related to the policy's effectiveness, relevance in addressing needs and the adjustments etc required to produce more positive outcomes.

To conduct a consultative process with the local community it will be important to prepare for the event with facilitators and note takers. The latter will have an important role in feeding back on the issues that are raised. The organisation should make it clear to the community that it will be making a submission and outline how it will try to influence developments. It should also commit to give feedback on progress.

What should go into a Policy Submission

Information about the community organisation

- What the organisation does
- When it was established, how long it has been around
- The activities of the organisation

What the problem is (the view of the organisation)

- The organisation's view of its extent and nature
- The reputable and independent sources of information that the organisation relies on
- The negative consequences of the problem (pain, suffering, hardship)

What can be done about it

- The various proposals under consideration (if any)
- What the organisation thinks should be done
- What the solution would look like
- The benefits of solving the problem
- The costs of not solving the problem
- The organisation's vision of the solution. (Harvey, 2002)

(c) Media Campaigns/Using the Media

Community organisations wishing to influence policy know that media attention can intensify concern about an issue and can add considerable weight to their work in other areas to influence decision makers. The level of media interest in an issue has come to be seen as an indication of the level of public concern about an issue.

It is good practice for community organisations to develop good contact with a number of journalists in the local and regional print media, in local radio and indeed in national radio. As is the focus with all policy work, the purpose of engaging with the media is not just to raise awareness of the issue/problem, but also to ensure that policy makers feel obliged to respond and do something about the problem.

Organisations should try to ensure that the issue they want addressed is well aired in the media, that it is portrayed sympathetically, and that a climate of public opinion, which favours change, has been created. Representatives of the organisation should be well prepared with the facts of their case – the extent of the problem, the impact of the problem on the local communities, the cost of not doing anything about the problem. They should be able to outline what precisely should be done to address the problem and by whom. They should be confident and be ready for questions. (See the checklist in box.)

Remember local radio and local newspapers will be also interested in local responses to proposed policy development or policy reviews.

→ **Planning tip:** Planning a programme to influence decision-making is one of the most difficult but important activities for a community organisation. Good advance planning can mean the difference between success and failure, between making the best use of the energies in the organisation or wasting effort. Influencing policy is complex. Policy-making can be a slow process and is demanding of the resources of community organisations. Engaging with the policy-making process can be frustrating, especially if policy commitments, made after a long campaign by community groups, seem to lose their priority for government.

The organisation should take time to consider the various options available to it to influence the policy-making process. Collective agreement on the strategies that will be adopted by the organisation is essential and will prevent the possibility of internal divisions at a later date.

TASK 8: DEFINE THE RESOURCES THAT WILL BE NEEDED

The organisation must define the resources that will be needed to undertake the policy work. It will allocate resources from its existing budget and define the additional resources and sources of funding that it can secure for its policy work. It will be important to take into account the cost of the different elements, e.g.

- Staff, management and participants development needs
- Participation costs, including childcare, eldercare, transport
- Local consultations and agenda setting workshops
- Networking events and workshops
- Research and publication of reports
- Preparation of policy submissions
- Contracting the expertise of specialists, e.g. facilitators, researchers
- Reviews
- Attendance at national conferences and events
- Administrative costs associated with the above.

Staff time is a key resource and will need to be defined.

→ **Planning tip:** Taking on policy work has important resource implications. Budgeting for policy work will help the organisation to anticipate and calculate costs and to keep them within reasonable limits. It will also ensure that the policy work is planned and integrated within the Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan.

TASK 9: DEFINE AND AGREE ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES

Systems, structures and procedures need to be put in place to support the policy work of the organisation. The organisation will need to agree how the staff, management, and other resources are organised to achieve the agreed programme of work. It will need to consider:

- The mandate being given to staff with a clear policy brief within their role
- Whether, for example, a sub-group of the management group will have responsibility for supporting the community worker(s) and for enhancing understanding of the policy-making process
- The resource allocation for policy work

- The organisation's engagement in the local network/Community Platform
- Its links to national networks
- The type of structures it will need to put in place to consult with the community
- How it can use participative planning techniques
- The structures for review and evaluation of the work.

Most importantly it is essential that the organisation consider effective feedback and accountability mechanisms for its representatives who are engaged in the attempts to influence policy.

Representing the organisation's agenda or representing the network of community groups in local social partnerships arrangements, and engaging in negotiations and attempts to change policy at national level, can be a very challenging experience. Those at the coal face need to feel that they are not on their own. They need to be able to feed back reports on progress. They need to have a place to review and (re)consider strategies. However, most importantly, they need a clear structure that enables them to be accountable, clarify positions and be reinforced in their mandate to represent the interests of the community.

→ **Planning tip:** The structures that will enhance the capacity of the organisation to successfully engage in policy-influencing need to be considered at length in the planning and preparation of the Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan. The organisation may need to plan for developments in its existing structure at that stage, e.g. additional staff, training for management, setting up new committees, formation of a local community network or community platform.

TASK 10: DEFINE AND AGREE THE PROGRAMME OF WORK

The community organisation will need to present and agree its programme of work. This will define:

- The course of action the community organisation plans to pursue, i.e. what will be done and how it will be done
- The key tasks to be undertaken and the people to carry responsibility for implementation
- The timescale for undertaking the tasks
- The resources that will be used to implement the plan

- How a policy focus will be promoted and integrated into all aspects of the organisation's work.

→ **Planning tip:** A programme of work may be prepared by the community development worker with the support of a sub-committee following wide-ranging consultations. This, however, in no way suggests that policy work is divorced from the wider practice of the organisation. The preparation of a programme of work offers the opportunity to present an overview of the context within which the organisation is undertaking its policy work, an outline of how and why it has defined its agenda, and the particular strategies and actions that it intends to pursue to achieve its objectives. The programme of work should be incorporated into the Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan.

TASK 11: AGREE INDICATORS THAT WILL BE USED TO MEASURE PROGRESS

It is important for the community organisation to define and outline what would be a measurement of success, or what for the organisation would indicate that progress is being made and that the desired outcomes from the collective effort are being achieved. It is difficult to measure success if a baseline or starting point has not been defined and if no prior targets have been set. Community organisations need to establish a baseline upon which to construct progress indicators.

→ **Planning tip:** Consideration will need to be given to the expected outcomes from engaging in policy influencing and the points at which progress will be measured. It is also important to outline the expected outputs from the process, i.e. research studies and reports, organisation policy position papers, seminars, etc.

TASK 12: SET A TIME FOR REVIEW, EVALUATION, LEARNING FROM THE WORK IN HAND AND DOCUMENTING THE LESSONS

Trying to influence policy can be a difficult, slow process. Sometimes, at the beginning, it may be difficult to see if any progress is being made. A community organisation should set a time when it will review its policy work so that it can make an assessment as to whether the programme of work that it has set itself is effective in achieving the original objectives, whether it is too ambitious, or whether the outcomes are worth the energy being expended.

Following a review the organisation can decide what changes need to be made to its programme for influencing policy. This will also involve documenting the lessons being learned.

It is helpful to use the progress indicators to review progress in discussion groups and to share the learning from the experience with other community organisations.

TASK 13: IDENTIFY AND MAKE PROVISION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT NEEDS OF STAFF, MANAGEMENT AND PARTICIPANTS IN TERMS OF INFLUENCING POLICY

Influencing policy is complex. It requires:

- General and specific knowledge including knowledge of the policy context and the policy and legislative framework at national, EU and international level
- Confidence, commitment to community development principles, persistence, patience
- A vast range of skills including:
 - research and information gathering skills
 - analytical skills including the capacity to analyse information and to present it to a wider audience
 - negotiating skills
 - advocacy skills
 - facilitative skills
 - a range of communication skills including those required for sharing information, listening, promoting understanding of complex problems, report writing, and the production of policy submissions
 - leadership skills
 - skills to deal with and manage conflict.

→ **Planning tip:** Consideration will need to be given to the skills and competencies required for supporting the policy work of the organisation when employing staff, when defining and providing staff support and supervision, when defining plans for training and development for management, staff, volunteers.

TASK 14: PUT THE POLICY WORK FIRMLY INTO THE ANNUAL PLAN

When the planning process is complete, the community organisation needs to outline its programme of work, its policy agenda as collectively agreed, its objectives and the details of the proposed programme of action, and then insert it into the Strategic Plan and Annual Work Plan as appropriate.

5 REFERENCES



5 REFERENCES

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6 USEFUL CONTACTS/WEBSITE LISTING



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Partners, 24 Northbrook Road, Dublin 6. Tel:01 667 3440 Fax:01 667 3438
e-mail: partners@eircom.ie.

This is an organisation that plays a role as an educational resource and delivers community education/ leadership programmes, particularly the well-known Training for Transformation programme, upon which much social analysis in developing countries has been based.

Combat Poverty Agency, Bridgewater Centre, Conyngham Road, Dublin 8.
Combat Poverty also produces a series of very useful fact sheets and summary reports that are available on its website, e.g.

- Building Healthy Communities – Community Participation in Tackling Poverty and Health Inequalities
- Lone Parent Families and Poverty
- Measuring Poverty
- From National to Local – NAPS and Local Government.

Website listing

Combat Poverty Agency
www.combatpoverty.ie

Community Workers Co-operative
www.cwc.ie

Equality Authority
www.equalityauthority.ie

European Anti-Poverty Network
www.eapn.org

European Network Against Racism (ENAR)
www.enar-eu.org

Having Your Say Programme
www.combatpoverty.ie/havingyoursay

Paulo Freire Institute
www.paulofreireinstitute.org

Platform of European Social NGOs
www.socialplatform.org

Pobal
www.pobal.ie

As part of its role as a national community development centre, the Combat Poverty Agency provides information, advice, training and resource materials for the community and voluntary sector.

Under the current Strategic Plan 2005-07 Combat Poverty initiated the *Having Your Say* Programme that aims to strengthen the policy voices and practices of communities experiencing poverty. This new title, the 10th in the Managing Better series was commissioned as part of this Programme.

The title was commissioned to offer guidance, tools and checklists to support anti-poverty and community and voluntary groups to integrate policy work into work planning associated with strategic plans, annual work plans, programme and project planning and practice.

