

IMPORTANCE OF POLICIES

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Policies are formed as a “commandment” for decision making. They should be subject to much consultation and discussion before implementation. Policies act as a safety-net for an organisation and should be a priority.

Policies you may consider:

- **Complaints Procedure** - What avenues are available for staff, volunteers or clients to express concerns or lodge complaints?
- **Safety Policy** - (for staff visiting or being visited by clients)
- **Employment Policy** - acknowledge that the Treaty of Waitangi is New Zealand’s founding document, that the agency is an equal opportunity organisation.
- **Financial Management Policies** - Such as cheque signing
- **Dismissal Policy** - termination of employment
- **Conflict of Interest Policy** for Board Members
- **Sexual and Racial Harassment Policies**

Your particular organisation may wish to introduce other specific policies.

WHAT ARE POLICIES?

- A governing tool
- A framework

They provide guidelines, and a framework for all sectors of the organisation whether it be volunteers or board members.

Policies should be formed after consultation at all levels, discussion debate and shared experiences. They should be a fundamental tool of the organisation and be held in a “Policy Manual” which is available to all sectors of the organisation.

Policies should not be implemented to react to a current challenge. They should be implemented proactively so that when a challenge arises, they can be referred to for guidance.

The governing body, whether it be the management committee, executive, or board, should formulate policy. The body is responsible for the stewardship of the organisation and is responsible for policy formation where the Manager/ CEO/ Executive officer is responsible for the implementation of the policy.

Policies do not have to be lengthy, wordy documents - sometimes a one paragraph statement is sufficient.

SIMPLE MEETING PROCESS POLICY

“The board has as a goal the achievement of effective and efficient meetings. To this end meetings will:

1. Be based on a pre-prepared agenda, the preparation of which is the responsibility of the board Chairperson. Such an agenda should reflect the board’s governing role which at all times focuses the board’s attention on the governing process, addressing board ‘ends’ rather than involving in ‘means’.
2. Include the CEO as the representative and advocate of the paid staff and volunteers unless staff have been invited to the meeting by the board to present an issue or provide information or advice.
3. Be open to the public except when the board declares a section of the meeting to be ‘in committee’.
4. Have the right to go ‘in committee’ at any time it chooses but in doing so will;
 - make the reasons for this clear
 - reserve the right to include or exclude any non-board member it so chooses
 - make all efforts to look ahead and signal any such ‘in committee’ session in the agenda or at the beginning of the meeting.
5. Be held with the expectation that members have prepared for them and will participate in all discussions at all times within the boundaries of behaviour considered acceptable by the board.”

Healthy organisations have healthy open processes and policies which reflect the culture of the organisation, expectations and processes, eliminate confusion, assist progress and provide accountability.

WHY HAVE POLICIES?

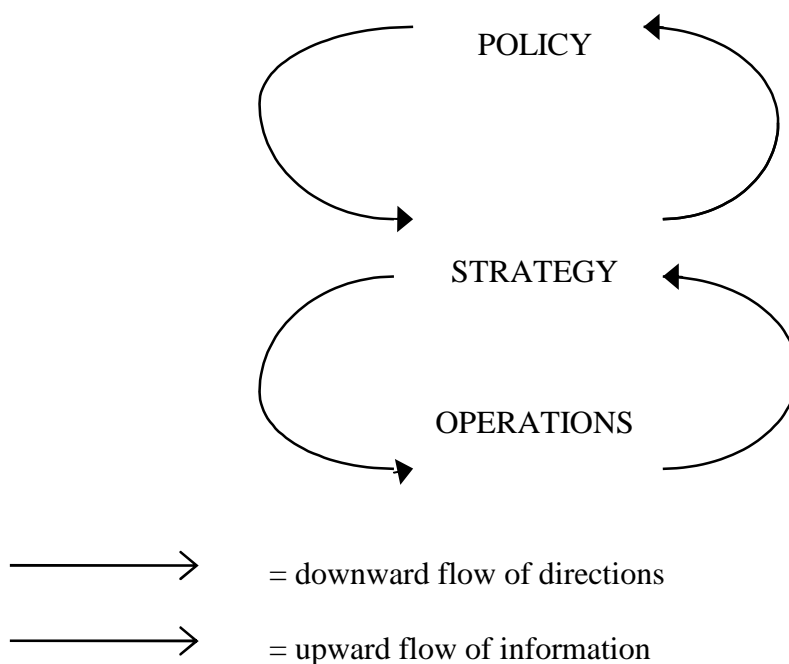
A voluntary organisation consists of two teams - the policy team led by the Chairperson and the management team led by the senior staff member. Effective co-operation and well-defined working relationships between these two teams are essential.

Decisions need to be made, procrastination and lack of decision-making is one of the worst scourges of community organisations. By agreeing on policies it removes much of that procrastination and dithering and provides the necessary framework within which decisions can be made.

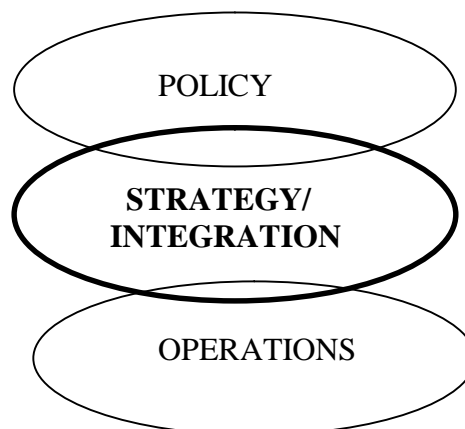
WHAT INFORMATION IS NEEDED FOR POLICY FORMATION?

Straddling this divide between the internal and external worlds of an organisation is important and has the following characteristics:

1. A three-level hierarchy of policy/strategy/operations
2. A double loop of learning which allows multiple feedback from information flows, direction-giving, and the monitoring of changes in the external and internal environments
3. A means of processing and integrating these information flows by positioning the direction-givers at the centre of the organisation's learning



Information flows in a learning organisation



HOW DO WE START THE PROCESS OF POLICY FORMATION?

Starting is always the hardest part! Many groups find it easiest for the Board to **draft** a policy and then circulate it throughout the organisation (including volunteers) for comment. A meeting or meetings with staff and volunteers are then held to listen to different comments and suggestions after which the Board finalises the policy. This process may take many months - the more contentious the issue the harder it will be to form policy.

Policies should not be treated lightly and once adopted should not be disregarded therefore it is worth investing time, energy and commitment to the process in order to have a successful outcome. The most successful outcome will be achieved if there has been true consultation and group decision making.

Remember policies often outlive management committees and employees so need to be clear, accessible and relevant.

FURTHER READING

The Learning Organisation - Bob Garvatt

“Boards at Work” Peter Darracott

Sexual and Racial Harassment Policy Resource Book - NSCSS PO Box 33 284, Takapuna. North Shore City

If you would like a list of our other community resources, or to be put on our mailing list, contact us at:



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