

In Focus:

Policy development



Why is it important?

Policy development is the process through which an organisation identifies and articulates the changes it wants to see in the world, whether this involves changes to policies, legislation, laws or the delivery of services.

Policy development is therefore one of the key foundations of effective campaigning and influencing. It plays a central role in developing the vision, aims and objectives of any strategy to bring about change.

FIG.01 Policy development and the campaign cycle



What does it involve?

Policy development is one of the first and arguably most critical stages of campaigning and influencing work. It involves analysing and making sense of key problem or issue, identifying what changes or improvements you would like to see and then formulating those changes into clear messages that can be communicated to those you want to influence.

Policy development does not happen within a vacuum. It is inevitably informed by the wider work of your organisation, the views and needs of those you represent and support, as well as the values and principles that underpin your work. It is also influenced by changes in the external environment.

ETHICAL RESEARCH CHECKLIST ¹

POLICY DEVELOPMENT WITHIN YOUR ORGANISATION SHOULD BE...

1. EVIDENCE BASED

Your policy positions are supported by evidence

2. MISSION FOCUSED

Reflects the aims, mission, vision and values of your organisation

3. CHANGE FOCUSED

Outlines clear changes or improvements that you want to happen

4. PARTICIPATORY

The right people have been involved in the process

5. INNOVATIVE

Your positions are saying something new or offering a fresh perspective

6. STRATEGIC

Your policy positions are part of a wider strategy for effecting change

PRIORITISING

IDENTIFYING THE ISSUES THAT ARE IMPORTANT TO YOUR ORGANISATION

ANALYSING

MAKING SENSE OF THE PROBLEM OR ISSUES YOU ARE CONCERNED ABOUT

POSITIONING

ESTABLISHING YOUR ORGANISATIONS VIEWS ON THE PROBLEM, IDENTIFYING PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

COMMUNICATING

ARTICULATING YOUR POSITIONS, ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

Where do I start?

STAGE 1:

Issue identification

Every organisation, no matter how big or small, whether it has one or many areas of expertise, needs to set its policy priorities. These might be priorities for the next 12 months, or they may be priorities that an organisation focuses on over the next three or five years.

Your organisation's policy priorities will invariably be influenced by a number of different factors. These are likely to include:

- The vision, mission and aims of your organisation: what your organisation exists to do and what it wants to achieve
- The external policy environment: such as changes to the public policy agenda, changes within government, or changes to a specific policy or piece of legislation



- Your members, beneficiaries and other stakeholders: the needs and interests of those you support and represent, as well as the knowledge and expertise of practitioners you work with
- The activities your organisation carries out: the services and support you provide.

There are a number of ways you might go about identifying your priorities. These range from consulting with your beneficiaries and key stakeholders through to evaluating the services or projects you manage. The process you follow will largely depend on what your organisation does and how it operates.

In reviewing or setting your policy priorities you might want to consider the following questions:

- Are your priorities consistent with the mission, vision and objectives of your organisation?
- Do they reflect the needs or priorities of those you support or represent?
- Are they timely or relevant issues right now?
- Where do these issues currently sit within the public policy agenda?
- Are they niche issues for your organisation?
- Does your organisation have expertise on these issues?
- Do you intend to focus on these issues in the short-, medium- or long-term?
- Are other organisations working on these issues? Could working on the same issue strengthen the impact of your work or might it lead to duplication of effort?

TIP: The In Focus guide on Making sense of the external environment outlines a number of tools to help you analyse the external policy and campaigning context. The In Focus guide on Involving people that matter contains practical advice on engaging and involving your key stakeholders in your policy and campaigning work.

TIP: Always ensure you have enough flexibility within your plans so that you can respond to unplanned changes within the external policy environment. Significant developments may result in you needing to review and revise your priorities.

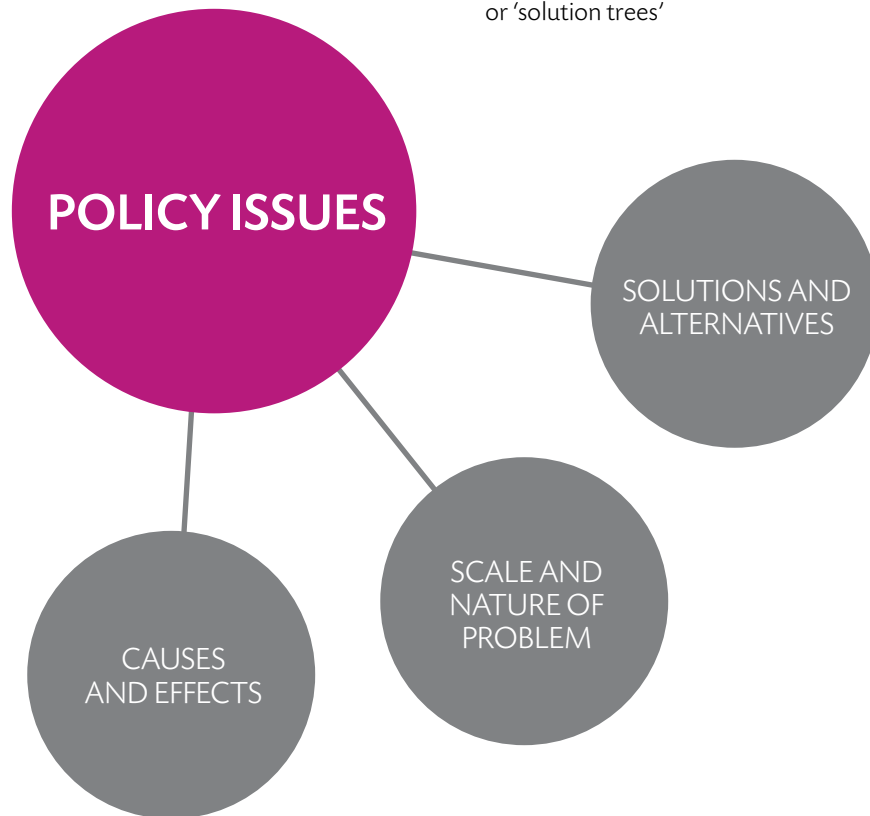
STAGE 2:

Policy analysis

The next stage of the process involves improving your knowledge and understanding of the policy issues you are focusing on. This is essentially an intelligence-gathering exercise that will invariably focus on three main dimensions: identifying the scale and nature of the problem; establishing causes and effects; and exploring possible solutions or alternatives.

Activities may range from the formal to the informal, including any or all of the following:

- Carrying out a literature review or desk research
- Conducting or commissioning primary research
- Holding focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders
- Meeting with external experts
- Reviewing evaluations of your services and projects or case information
- Constructing 'problem trees' or 'solution trees'



Producing a 'problem tree' is a helpful way of breaking down the issue into manageable chunks. It can establish gaps in knowledge and therefore what further information or evidence you need. It can also help you identify what specific parts of the problem or issue you might want to focus on. Carrying out this exercise within a group can help pool knowledge and generate a shared understanding of the issue in question (Please see FIG.02 An example of a problem tree).

At this stage in the process, you might want to consider the following questions:

- Is your analysis of the issue contributing something new to the debate? What fresh perspective can you offer?
- Which aspects of the issue does your organisation have particular expertise? Which aspects of the issue will you focus on?
- Have you identified gaps in your knowledge? How will you address these?
- Have you identified areas where evidence is unreliable or contested?

TIP: The In Focus guides on [commissioning research](#) and [building your evidence base](#) contain advice and suggestions on how to improve your knowledge and understanding of the issues you are working on.

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FIG. 02 An example of a problem tree



STAGE 3:

Developing your positions

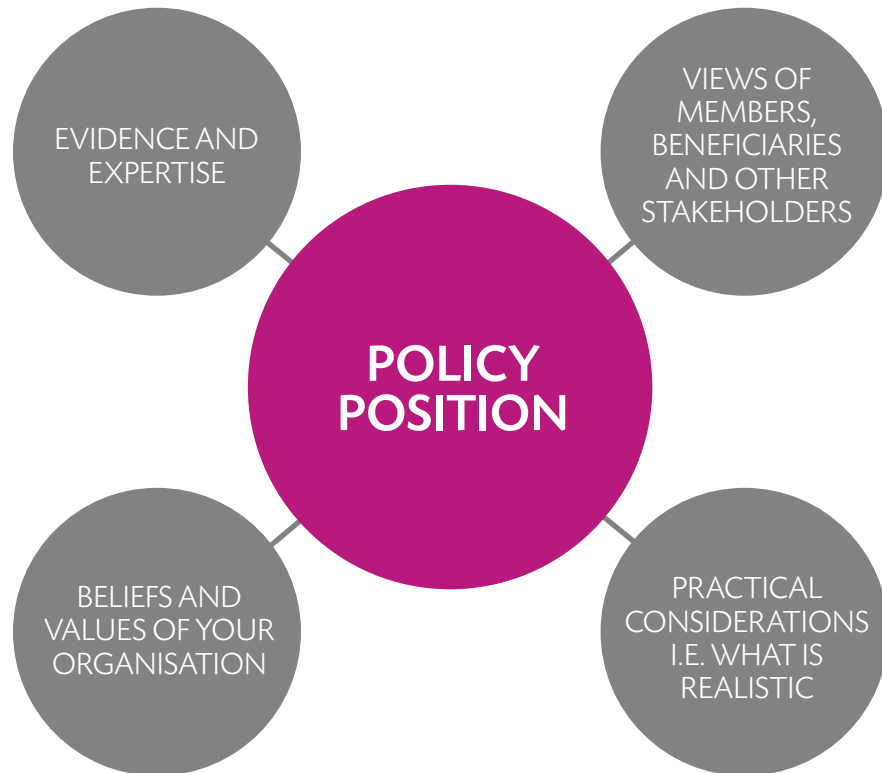
Although we increasingly talk of the need for policy to be evidence-based, evidence is not the only factor that influences the development of your organisation's policy positions. More often than not, policy positions result from the interaction of a range of different factors:

The importance of each of these factors will vary from organisation to organisation. A human rights organisation, for example, will inevitably use human rights principles and laws as a framework for developing their policies; a membership-based organisation on the other hand, may place greater premium on the views of the individuals or organisations they represent.

Either way, your organisation's policy positions are likely to comprise a number of different elements:

- Why the issue is important and relevant to your organisation
- What you see as a problem and why
- What alternatives or solutions you are proposing
- How they might be implemented, by whom and when
- What benefits or impact you see from the changes you are proposing

The process for developing your policy position may vary depending on the issue or particular context. A particularly controversial issue, for example, may require active dialogue and participation of key stakeholders over a long timeframe in order to reach a consensus. By contrast, the announcement of a new government policy or initiative may require organisations to develop a policy response in a much shorter time frame.



What next?

STAGE 4:

Communicating your positions

Communicating your policy positions does not mean simply producing a position paper or statement. Your policy positions comprise the key messages that your organisation has to say about the issues you work on and the changes you want to see. They should therefore be embedded within all your organisation's external communications work, whether it is through the media, campaigning and parliamentary lobbying, public outreach, general networking and even fundraising.

How you communicate your policy positions depends largely on who you are communicating to. Within the policy and campaigning context specifically, it will also depend on whether your communications form part of a dedicated campaign or whether they form part of a more general advocacy and influencing strategy. In either case, there are many tools and opportunities to communicate your policy positions:

Ways to communicate your policy positions

- Press releases and statements
- Reports and briefings
- Consultation responses
- Meetings with decision makers and opinion formers
- Speeches and presentations
- Campaign materials
- Online forums and discussions
- TV and radio interviews

Those who represent your organisation externally – whatever their role – need to be aware of and understand your organisation's policy positions so that they stay 'on message' and can communicate them to the audiences they have contact with. Updates at staff meetings, internal briefings and FAQs, as well as one to one meetings as part of staff inductions, are just a number of ways to ensure colleagues are fully informed and kept up to speed.

TIP: The Getting you Started factsheets on writing policy briefings, responding to consultations and communicating your campaigns provide further guidance and tips for communicating your key messages.

Policy development is part of a wider process for bringing about change. If policy development can be broadly understood as focused on what needs to change, advocacy and influencing can be seen as focused on how to bring about that change.

Whilst some policy priorities may be developed into specific, targeted campaigns, others will comprise part of your organisation's ongoing policy and advocacy work. The next stage of policy development therefore involves making choices about which policy issues you will proactively champion and those you will work on in a more reactive way i.e. responding to opportunities as and when they arise.

Putting it into practice

If you have five minutes...

- Download and read NCVO's free Getting You Started factsheets at www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/gettingyoustarted

If you have one-two hours...

- Carry out problem tree analysis as part of a team meeting or planning day. You might want to select a policy area you are already working on or alternatively select a policy area you are considering working on.
- Undertake a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis of your policy development work as part of a team meeting. Use the exercise to discuss with colleagues what your organisation does well and areas for improvement. Draw up a list of actions to follow up.
- Read the other In Focus guides in the series. Download from www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/infocus or email us for hard copies forumforchange@ncvo-vol.org.uk

1. Making sense of the external environment
2. Building your evidence base
3. Commissioning research
4. Involving people that matter

If you have one day...

- Carry out a review of your organisation's policy priorities as part of an away day. Establish what criteria you want to use to assess your priorities and think about who needs to be involved in the process.

Further reading

Toolkits and guides

In Focus: Making sense of the external environment

(http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sites/www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/files/In_Focus_external_environment_final.pdf)

Published by Campaigning Effectiveness, NCVO, 2009

In Focus: Building your evidence base

(http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sites/www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/files/In_Focus_evidence_base_final.pdf)

Published by Campaigning Effectiveness, NCVO, 2009

In Focus: Commissioning research

(http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sites/www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/files/document/commissioning_research.pdf)

Published by Campaigning Effectiveness, NCVO, 2009

In Focus: Involving people that matter

(http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/sites/www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/files/involving_people_that_matter.pdf)

Published by Campaigning Effectiveness, NCVO, 2009

Download other In Focus guides here

<http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/infocus>

Tools for Policy Impact

Published by the Overseas Development Institute, 2007

(<http://www.odi.org.uk/resources/download/156.pdf>)

About Campaigning Effectiveness, NCVO

Campaigning Effectiveness, NCVO

supports and empowers people and organisations to change their world through campaigning and influencing policy. We bring together experience and expertise and drive excellence in campaigning and policy work across civil society by providing support, knowledge, tools and resources. For further information about our work go to www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigningeffectiveness

About Forum for Change

The Forum for Change is a network for people influencing policy and campaigning for change across the voluntary and community sector. Membership is free and open to everyone. To join or for further information go to www.forumforchange.org.uk or email forumforchange@ncvo-vol.org.uk

About In Focus

In Focus guide are produced for Forum for Change members as part of the Policy Skills Development Programme. They accompany the Getting You Started factsheet series and In Practice case study series, all of which can be found at: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/campaigningeffectiveness/resources

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