

P – Policy Development

The Role Of The Board
Developing Policy

The Fundamental Role of the Board in Policy Development

Most people would agree that the board's most important responsibility is establishing policy. At the same time we all know organizations where boards have failed to develop policies or to keep track of the ones they have made.

Later we find the Board is faced with the prospect of discussing a crisis issue which could have been avoided by a well-developed policy process.

Understanding Policy

Development

What is a policy?

A policy can be:

a governing principle;

a guideline or framework for carrying out work;

a way for the board to delegate authority and still maintain control;

a definition of the values and the philosophies - even the goals - of the program or organization.

Policies are a general description of boundaries within which a board would conduct its business. Without policies, the organization does not know where its going , or the direction it needs to take to resolve an issue.

Policies tell people what to do. Procedures tell them how to do it.

A procedure tells:

- how a governing principle will be carried out
- the rules and regulations to apply

There is sometimes a gray area between policy and procedure in sudden and unexpected situations. If a media problem arises, then policy must be developed at the same time as action takes place.

For example, if the board has not yet created a policy regarding who speaks on behalf of the agency, it will have to be made at the same time as the staff and board members are being approached by the media for comment.

Characteristics of a good policy

In *A Handbook for Cultural Trustees*, Marion Paquet identifies the following as characteristics of a good board policy:

> It is philosophically based and reflects values. It states what is believed, valued and desired.

It is a general statement of a board's beliefs on a certain matter.

It tells what is wanted of a board or staff. It tells why certain things are wanted.

It constitutes a clear basis for the development and implementation of regulations and procedures.

It provides positive direction to the board and staff, but does not, and should not, prescribe methods for arriving at the result.

It permits board and staff to interpret it in such a way as to adjust for changing conditions without making any basic changes in policy.

It provides a standard for evaluating the performance of the board and staff.

United Way/Centraide Canada

Guide for Developing Policy

Policy Requirements

What is the issue, problem or opportunity for which we need a policy? Can we define it?

Do we have a policy that does/should address this issue, problem or opportunity?

Do we need an effective guide for our actions and decisions in this area?

What do we intend this policy to do? o What outcomes do we expect to see? v

What is the purpose of this policy?

Why do we need this policy?

Sample Policy

Please refer to Volunteer Canada's policies on the Web, or Volunteer BC's policies available on the web.