

NDS Quality information pack

An NDS Quality Team Initiative

Developing and reviewing policies and procedures



National Disability Services

Queensland

A message from the NDS Queensland Quality Team

The National Disability Services (NDS) Queensland Quality Team is part of NDS's Industry Development and Support activities. It was set up to support disability organisations to implement the new Disability Sector Quality System. The purpose of this information pack written by the NDS Quality Team is to stimulate discussion and debate amongst stakeholders of disability services in the context of implementing the Disability Sector Quality System — it is not intended as a definitive reference on the topic.

For example, this material may be used as a basis for stakeholder workshops or staff meeting discussions. It may also be adapted freely to meet the needs of any intended audience. It is requested, however, that NDS Queensland be acknowledged as the source of the material and that any modifications do not change the intent or compromise the integrity of the original document.

Information packs are also available covering the following topics:

- recruitment and selection
- induction
- training and development
- networking, mentoring and peer support
- person-centred planning.

These can be downloaded from the NDS Quality web site: www.ndsqldquality.net or you can contact NDS Queensland directly:

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The information pack

This information pack is one in a series designed to help organisations review aspects of management as part of implementing a quality framework. The pack includes a series of information sheets, related questions and a facilitator's session plan that can be used by groups to review current practice and identify improvements. The information sheets are intended to stimulate discussion — they do not go into detail about the topic. There are numerous books, resources, courses, Internet sites and experts that can provide detailed information; some of these are listed in the resources section at the end of the pack. Accessing more detailed expertise will become more important as you move further into review or begin making improvements to practice.

For the facilitator it will be important to familiarise and tailor the workshop to the group and the organisation. The organisation's policies, procedures and any other resources for each topic will be needed to supplement the information in this pack. Similarly if the organisation is using the disability service standards as part of this review each participant will need copies of the standards.

About the topic

Policies and procedures are important documents in the delivery of quality service provision. The range of decisions or incidents that a practitioner in a human service organisation will confront on any given day is highly variable. How can policy and procedure best support staff members in dealing with these situations? Having a considered approach to policy and procedure, understanding the role it plays in the day-to-day running of the organisation and having a robust process for its development and review will go a long way to supporting staff.

The way an organisation develops and reviews policy and procedure has an impact on its usefulness and the impact it has on the quality of service delivery. Engaging all stakeholders in this process will also make the policy and procedure more robust.

The contents

This resource will help you review the way your organisation develops and reviews policy and procedure and help determine if there are any changes or improvements that can be made. The pack contains information covering:

- benefits of improving the development and review of policy and procedure and some assumptions to challenge
- obligations
- what is policy and procedure development and review — what does it look like
- policy and procedure development and review in focus (discussion questions)
- sample workshop design and facilitator notes
- other resources.

Benefits of improving the development and review of policies and procedures and some assumptions to challenge

Information sheet

This sheet lists some of the benefits of, and assumptions about, improving the development and review of policy and procedure. Participants will probably be able to think of more of these.



Benefits

Some key benefits include:

- a review process provides an opportunity for staff members to think about what they are doing and how policy and procedure assists them in their work
- a review process is an opportunity for service users to think about how staff do what they do and how well this meets the service user's requirements
- development and review provides a great opportunity for all stakeholders to be involved and to create relationships between stakeholders — service users can influence service delivery, staff members and volunteers can influence resources and the board/management can ensure their responsibilities are met
- it creates consistency and improves transparency of service delivery
- it assists in accountability
- development and review is part of continuous improvement and assists in meeting requirements of the disability service standards
- it ensures information provided in policy and procedure is current and relevant
- it provides a vehicle for conversations about what is working well and about how situations can be better dealt with in the future
- it provides a vehicle for conversations about responsibilities and expectations
- it assists in continuity of purpose and focus over time.

Some assumptions to challenge

Some of the common assumptions people have about improving the development and review of policy and procedure include:

- a new policy or procedure will automatically change the way staff do something
- all stakeholders have excellent communication skills and are open to change
- full agreement will be achieved about all policy and procedural matters
- service users will not understand



- there is not enough time or that the time is not worth taking
- it is just too hard
- it is easier in the longer term to issue policy and procedure without discussion
- anyone can write policy and procedure
- policy and procedure can be written for all circumstances.



This information sheet is not meant to be a definitive list of the legislative or organisational obligations relating to developing and reviewing policy and procedure. It is meant to highlight that there are some responsibilities that do need to be addressed by the organisation. If there are queries or concerns you can get more information directly from the legislation, standard or relevant governing body — it is important to be fully and accurately informed.

The disability service standards

Standard 8: Service management is particularly important when looking at improving development and review processes for policy and procedure, however many of the standards suggest either policy or procedure as evidence that a service provider is meeting that standard. This means that as part of a service audit the organisation will need to demonstrate that policy and procedure is in place and evidence that this policy and procedure is in use. As a result there is an emphasis on having both the development and the review processes of policy and procedure in place.

Other legislation

Many of the legislative obligations require policy and procedure to be in place and for staff to be trained in those policies.

Reducing exposure to risk

Ensuring staff members have policy and procedural information will reduce the risks of staff members not following the organisation's expectations (leading to for example increased risk to service users, increased workers' compensation costs or exposure to legal action).

What is policy and procedure development and review — what does it look like?



Policy — the 'what' information

Policy is the framework for why and what the organisation will operate. Policies set out the intent and statement of purpose on a given topic that is intended to provide the reader with information about where the organisation stands on its approach to that topic.

Procedure — the 'how' information

Procedure puts detail on the policy framework of the organisation. It is about how the organisation intends to enact its policy and often provides the reader with a step-by-step guide to do this.

Policy development and review process

A policy development and review process involves the relevant stakeholders in ensuring that the policy and the procedure enacts the vision, mission and values of the organisation and results in organisational performance that meets the needs of each stakeholder group.

Key aspects of a development and review process are:

- stakeholder engagement
- ongoing review and improvement
- an appropriate authorisation process
- an appropriate dissemination or implementation process
- a method for version control.

You should consider the following when deciding whether to put in place a policy or procedure:

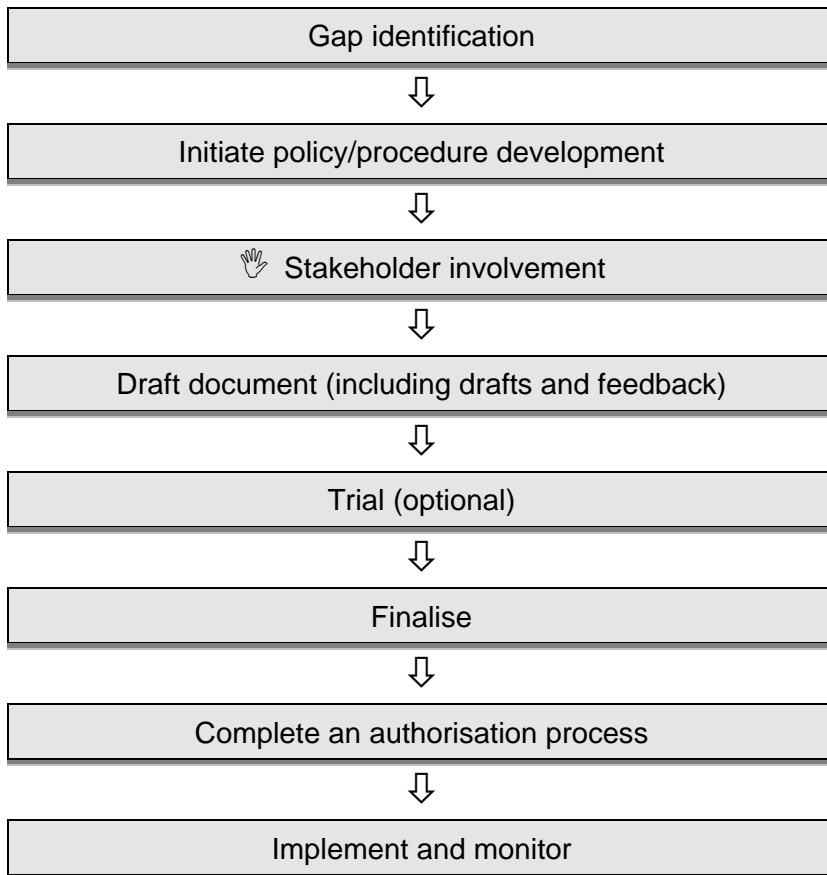
- limit the number of policies to the key determinates of quality
- consistency with the vision, mission and values
- legislative requirements
- focus on assisting good quality decision making rather than controlling behaviour
- how much flexibility must be built in to provide for the breadth and variety of the types of situations the policy user will be confronted with.

Many policy and procedure manuals arise over time in response to incidents and without a planned approach. This often makes them difficult to access and use — as a result they do not positively impact on staff decision making.



Developing policy and procedure

Listed below are some common steps for policy and procedure development.



: key step

Gap identification

You can identify the need for a policy or procedure through a number of means, for example:

- an evaluation or an audit may initiate the need for policy or a procedure
- an incident may occur where there is not a policy or procedure available
- a stakeholder may request one
- new legislation or standard may come into existence.

Initiate policy/procedure development

The organisation makes a decision that the gap identified does need a policy or procedure. It is useful to have a set of criteria or a list of circumstances that warrant policy or procedure to help make a decision, for example:

- the issue is critical to achieving the organisation's goals
- significant risks are involved



- there are legislative or compliance issues
- standardisation or consistency is important
- there is confusion about the best way to approach a task.

It is also important to be clear about whom is able to initiate policy/procedure development. Both of these can help avoid a haphazard or confusing policy/procedure manual.

Stakeholder involvement

Determine who will be involved in developing the policy and procedure and how best to involve them. Let stakeholders choose the level of involvement they wish and tailor the method to suit them (e.g. questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, meetings and newsletters).



Please note: Stakeholder involvement is a key issue for both developing and reviewing policy and procedure. It is vital to include the end users of the policy/procedure in this step.

Draft document

Develop a draft document in consultation with stakeholders — this may take some time depending on the complexity, the number of people involved and the sensitivity of the issues. This usually involves a circular task of drafts and obtaining feedback.

Trial

This is an optional step that can help to ensure the policy/procedure is relevant in use. It is often easier to provide feedback when using a policy/procedure than during the draft stage.

Finalise

Finalise the document based on the consultation and the trial.

Complete an authorisation process

Authorisation will depend on the delegations in place and may involve the board/management committee and the CEO. The finalised policy/procedure will have a:

- review date (timeframe will depend on the frequency of changes around the issue, the importance or sensitivity, and the level of resources)
- version control.

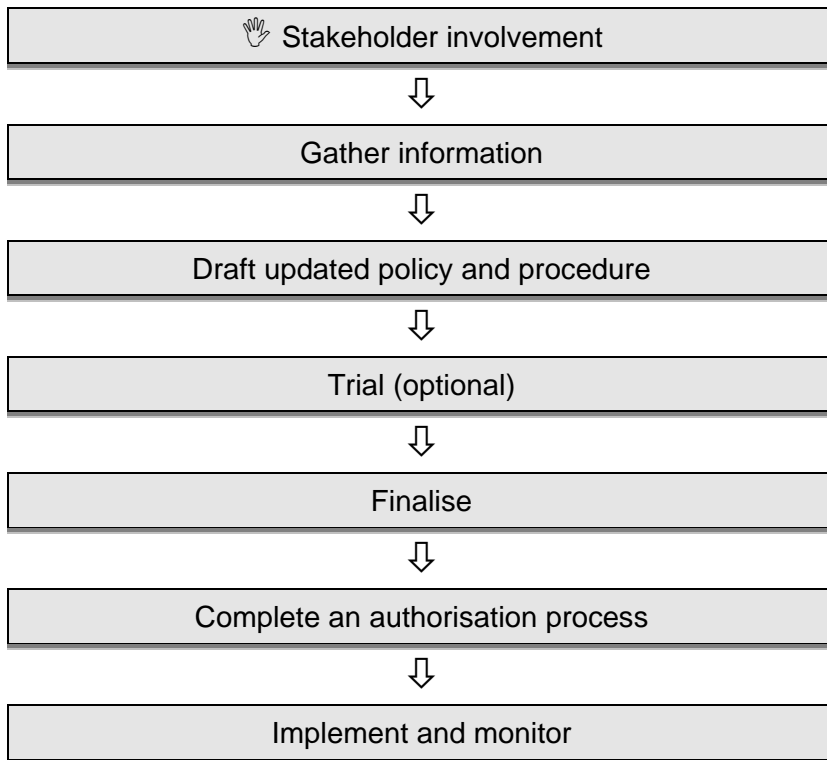
Implement and monitor

Start an implementation and monitoring process. This will require a plan that may need to include training and a communication process depending on the issues involved.



Reviewing policy and procedure

Listed below are some common steps for policy and procedure review.



: key step

Stakeholder involvement

Determine who will be involved in the review and how best to involve them. This may or may not be the people who were involved in developing the policy and procedure. It is important to include the people who have been using it during this stage.



Please note: Stakeholder involvement is a key issue for both developing and reviewing policy and procedure.

Gather information

Gather feedback on how useful the policy and procedure is. This may include information on the level of detail, the consistency with practice, any need for improved efficiency or effectiveness, alignment with vision, mission and values. Analysing this data is an important step where each piece of feedback must be tested for relevance, usefulness and practicality.

Draft updated policy and procedure

Review and develop the updated policy and procedure document based on feedback.



Trial

This may or may not be necessary. It is suggested that this step is only relevant where major changes have been made.

Final steps

The three final steps — finalise, complete an authorisation process, and implement and monitor — follow the same principles as for developing the initial policy and procedure.

Developing and reviewing policy and procedure in focus

Discussion questions

These questions aim to help you understand how your organisation develops and reviews policy and procedure and what might need to change. To get the most out of these questions locate a copy of some of your policies and procedures and read the information sheet '*What is policy and procedure development and review — what does it look like?*' before answering them.

How it happens now...

- Describe how a policy/procedure is developed here.

- Describe how a policy/procedure is reviewed here.

- What works really well about the way it happens here?

How it relates to what we want to achieve...

- How does this relate to what we intended or what we want to achieve?

- How does this reinforce our vision, mission and values?

- In what ways does this not reinforce our vision, mission and values?

How can we better align 'how it happens now' to 'what we want to achieve'...

- What could we do to improve the way it works here?


- What could we do to better align the way it happens here with our vision, mission and values?


Sample workshop outline — policy and procedure development and review


Information for facilitators

This section of the information pack provides a sample workshop that can be used to explore and plan for improving policy and procedure development and review practices within your organisation. For more information on how to conduct the workshop refer to the *Tips for facilitators* information sheet.

To prepare for the workshop make sure all participants have access to at least the *Developing and reviewing policy and procedure in focus* discussion questions and the information sheet on *What is policy and procedure development and review — what does it look like?*

Time	Suggested questions & prompts	Actions	
	<p>Welcome and introductions</p> <p>Introductions</p> <p>Ask participants to introduce themselves and share a word or phrase to describe the best policy and procedure development or review process they have experienced?</p> <p>Purpose</p> <p>To review the effectiveness of the policy and procedure development or review process.</p> <p>Alignment question</p> <p>In this workshop/meeting/in-service, we are seeking some alignment (everyone being on the same page), not necessarily agreement on all points.</p> <p><i>Note: To assist with this, ask: 'How can we be more aligned as a group?'</i></p>	Write up the response and refer to as needed to keep group on track.	
	<p>Overview of the session</p> <p>In this session we will be sharing our thoughts about developing and reviewing policy and procedure in this organisation with the aim of evaluating its effectiveness. To do this we will work through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ reminding ourselves of the business are we in ▪ sharing our reflections about our current process ▪ sharing our thinking about what good policy and procedure development and review is ▪ discussing what this means for how we develop 		

Time	Suggested questions & prompts	Actions	
	and review policy and procedure in our organisation and what we want to change (if anything).		
	What business are we in?		
	Revisit the organisation vision, mission and values. How does this relate to policy and procedure development and review?	Group discussion (large or small groups).	
	Sharing our reflections from the discussion questions		
	What are the steps in how a policy and procedure is developed as it happens now? What are the steps in how a policy and procedure is reviewed as it happens now? Can each person share with the group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ two strengths about the way policy and procedure development and review happens now ▪ two ways in which the way policy and procedure development and review aligns with what we said we wanted to achieve ▪ two ways in which policy and procedure development and review could be improved. 	Group discussion with facilitator recording the steps.	
	Discussing 'what is policy and procedure development and review — what does it look like?'		
	Discuss people's thoughts around the information on <i>'What is policy and procedure development and review — what does it look like?'</i> and our related obligations. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What was surprising? ▪ What was new information? 	Group discussion.	
	Where to from here		
	Recap on the themes that came from the reflections and discuss these in light of the information sheet <i>'What is policy and procedure development and review — what does it look like?'</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What do we want to change in the way we develop and review policy and procedure? ▪ What is the priority, the benefit and the 	Write up an action plan, indicating the priority, which person is to be responsible and when. Include a review date.	

Time	Suggested questions & prompts	Actions 	
	resources required of these actions?		
	Conclusion		
	<p>Review the discussions held and summarise the actions agreed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Is there anything that you wish to change or add? <p>Explain how and when the group will get feedback on what happens next (ideally within two weeks of workshop).</p>		
	Thanks and acknowledgements		

The following tips aim to help facilitators conduct the workshop provided in this information pack.



Important note: The session plan has been written assuming that people from the same workplace (or organisation) are working together on the issue and how it pertains to their organisation. The session plan will need to be altered if this is not the case.

Preparation

- Provide pre-reading information with enough time for the participants to digest it and have a chance to ask questions before the session begins. The pre-reading information will include the information sheets from this information package, the disability service standards and any policy/procedural information that is relevant to the topic.
- Gather information about the room, food, timing and travel requirements of the participants prior to organising the session and venue.
- Familiarise yourself with the session materials and if necessary adapt them to the group's characteristics and experiences for example: break into smaller groups for discussions or activities; think about the time you have for each activity and mark these on your workshop plan in the time column; allow time for extra activities if needed; or use two facilitators if working with a large group).
- Consider covering the associated costs for participants with disabilities e.g. transport, childcare, attendant carers etc.

During the session

- Take care to validate all contributions.
- Be flexible with timing and frequency of breaks. Aim for a break every hour. Allow more time for breaks if the interactions during these breaks are flowing freely (relationship building is the best outcome and worth sacrificing time spent on workshop content).
- Don't start by knowing the answers — participants will pick this up. The intention is to explore the possibilities, not confirm solutions you have already identified.
- When you are recording discussions make sure you label the information as you collect it to make the collation after the session easier.
- Keep an eye on all participants and their level of interaction; follow up with any individuals who may not be fully participating to see if there is any assistance that could be provided to increase their level of involvement.

After the session

- Always thank and acknowledge all participants (including staff) and those who helped organise the session.
- Make sure feedback is provided within two weeks of the workshop (be realistic when you give a timeframe at the end of the workshop).

Tips on conducting the sample workshop

Introductions

- The introduction part of the workshop can be altered to suit the group and the facilitator. The activity listed in the session plan is designed to warm people up to the topic, be a non-threatening sharing activity and to make sure everyone is aware of who is in the room. If people do not know each other you may wish to spend more time on this to ensure all participants are comfortable.
- You may agree on some ground rules for the session. If so these should be recorded and remain in sight of the group throughout the session.

Alignment activity

- This activity is about creating a good atmosphere for the group to work with each other on the session tasks. It is worth spending as much time as is required on this activity before progressing. The outcome will have a huge impact on whether the group will achieve the purpose of the session.
- The alignment discussion is designed to identify individual perspectives and how this will affect the work of the group. The more strongly aligned, the easier it will be to attack the workshop topic.
- One of the keys to successful group work is having an environment where there can be debate, questioning, curiosity, enquiry, disagreement and agreement around the topic at hand without personal agendas preventing all the issues being discussed.
- If people do raise significant concerns about whether they can work together you will need to facilitate a discussion to explore this. If this takes up the entire session the outcome will still be worthwhile.

Overview of the session

- Check with the participants about whether this meets their expectations and spend time clarifying and agreeing on how you will be spending the rest of the session.

What business are we in?

- This activity is designed to provide the context for the discussion. If there is disagreement on the vision, mission and values stop the session and discuss this issue. Agreeing on the vision, mission and values is vital for any of the work outlined in the session plan.

The next few activities (reflection and discussion)

- These require people to have read the pre-reading. If this has not happened you may need to give people time to individually read the information.

Where to from here

- This activity is the planning part of the session. Your role as a facilitator will be to ensure this is recorded and test out the feasibility of the plan. The plan needs to be owned, resourced and be reasonably practical to achieve.
- This write-up is able to be used as evidence of review of practice for the service audits; ensure the documentation is appropriate.

The information contained in this pack will not provide enough detail for more in-depth work on improving your policy and procedure development and review practices. The following list of resources is not exhaustive, however it is a useful place to start.

- *Other organisations policies and procedures*: many disability organisations face the same issues and collaboration may be useful
- *Susan L. Diamond*: Preparing Administrative Manuals (New York : AMACOM 1981)
- *Stuart P. Bloom & Evan L. Dold*: A Guide to Developing a Policies and Procedures Manual Management World, June 1981
- *Policies and procedures toolkit for community housing group*: Produced by Patricia McCallion Community Housing Resource Worker Brisbane/Sunshine Coast
- *Ethics in Community Organisations*: Published by Local Community Services Assoc. by Paul Bullen
- *NSW Department of Health*: Policy Development Guidelines
- *How and When to Write Policies and Procedures*: NDS Qld Division 1999
- *Rights in Residence, 2nd Edition*: by J Cootes, J Simpson, R West, published by Redfern Legal Centre Publishing
- *Best Practices in Policies & Procedures*: Stephen B Page
- *Achieving 100% Compliance of Policies & Procedures*: Stephen B Page
- *Management Alternatives for Human Services*: a website page on writing policy manuals <http://www.mapl.com.au/policy/tp.htm> (or follow the 'writing policy' link from the homepage)
- *Stephen Page*: this website makes reference to books around policy that are useful — two of those listed on this page are Establishing a System of Policies & Procedures and 7 Steps to Better Written Policies & Procedures: www.companymanuals.com
- *Society of Technical Communicators*: a paper on writing policies and procedures in a simple style: www.stc.org/confproceed/1999/PDfs/stc-37.pdf



Please note: These resources were current at the time of publication, however some website addresses or page links may change without our knowledge.