

Agency Policymaking

Impacting your own work environment,
and that of your peers, for the good of
clients, the profession, and society

Agency Policies and Impact on Clients

- Program goals
- Evaluation techniques and outcomes measures
- Staffing levels and requirements
- Eligibility rules
- Incentives and sanctions
- Accessibility (hours, locations, language)
- Processes (appeals, notice of budget decisions)
- Access to power (Board, transparency)
- Implementation decisions

Organizational Imperatives

- Organizations are driven by:
 - Internal stability
 - Development and maintenance of human resources
 - Adaptation to environmental opportunities and threats
 - Efficient production in achieving goals
- These goals not always consistent with clients' best interests.

Monitoring Agency Policy

- From case to cause: identifying problems with agency policy as experienced by clients
- Reviewing formal documents of the organization
 - Strategic plan
 - Executive memos
 - Employee handbook
 - Intake, consent forms and other client documentation
- Interactions with colleagues—look for patterns

Interpreting Agency Culture

- Why is culture important in organizational change?
- Observed behavioral regularities in interactions
 - Language, customs/traditions, rituals
- Group norms
- Espoused values
- Formal philosophy
- Rules of the game
- Climate
- Embedded skills
- Habits of thinking
- Shared meanings
- Integrating symbols

Developing an Intervention Plan

- Create urgency around problem
- Create guiding coalition
- Develop vision and strategy
 - Include power analysis, crafting messages, preparing evidence, decide point of intervention
- Communicate vision for change
- Empower broad-based action
- Generate short-term wins
- Consolidate gains and escalate change
- Anchor new approaches in culture

Integrating Advocacy into your Practice

- Advocacy often seen as an 'extra' function of social welfare agencies
 - Advocacy can bring your organization credibility
- Client-centered administration will impel towards advocacy
- Need buy-in from internal decision makers
- Institute avenues for real, meaningful client engagement
- Training for staff on advocacy needs, skills, and opportunities
- Dedicate some staff time/revenues to advocacy

Integrating Policy Practice into Your Practice: 6 Things to Do TODAY!

- Join a coalition or organization that advocates on your practice area
- Review your agency's policies to identify areas of potential reform
- Write a letter to the editor about your area of concern
- Help a client craft testimony about the impact of a policy
- Register a client (or yourself) to vote
- Send your agency newsletter (highlighting a success story) to an elected official with a note

Advocacy Rules for 501(c)3 Organizations

■ It's OK to:

- Take positions on issues
- Lobby elected officials
- Conduct nonpartisan voter registration
- Take positions on ballot measures (counts as lobbying)
- Conduct nonpartisan public education on issues
- Sponsor candidate debates

■ You CANNOT:

- Endorse or contribute to a political candidate
- Spend more than 20% of your budget on lobbying (if 501(h) electing)
- Lobby without keeping financial and activity records
- Ask candidates to sign pledges on issues

Nonprofit Boards and Agency Policy

- Boards set agency policy in all agency functions:
 - Budget and Finance
 - Resource Development
 - Personnel
 - Program Development
 - Community Relations
 - Executive and Nominating Committees (internal to Board)
- Boards oversee implementation/execution of policy
- Communicate policy (internally and externally)

Agency Budgets as Policy

- Staffing levels
- Program cuts, elimination
- Failure to keep pace with increasing need
- Increases in some programs
- Differences in non-staff resources
 - Space, technology, support, prestige
- Sources of funding
 - All have restrictions and 'costs', and will influence service delivery
- Fees and cost-sharing

Social Workers as Policy

- Agency policy serves a purpose: to limit the discretion of individual workers, bring order to work processes, protect agencies and staff from unreasonable demands, and to protect clients from arbitrariness
- Social workers work around policies that do not meet their needs:
 - Noncompliance
 - Carving out exceptions
 - Passive compliance
 - Compliance with advocacy

Ethical Dilemmas in Agency Policy

- Most difficult when choosing between two good or two unsatisfactory options (or more)
- Common sources of ethical dilemmas:
 - Resource allocation
 - Program design (eligibility rules, etc...)
 - Supervision, staffing policies
 - Dual obligations to client and agency (when in conflict)

What you may hear

- “But we have budget constraints”
- “You don’t have all of the information that we, as experts/Board members/CEO have”
- “We need more evidence/cases/study”
- “With those types of clients, we can’t expect much”
- “There are more pressing issues here”
- “My hands are tied/other stakeholders would never accept change”

What may result

- Change and positive increase in your status
 - Should be always working to enhance your power in order to facilitate effective change and protect you as an advocate
- Informal power gains (internally)
- External approval and recognition
- Superficial appreciation from leadership
- Alienation and shunning
- Resistance from peers
- Sanction
- Dismissal

Administrators Building Climates for Change

- Institute processes that invite change
 - Opportunities for worker participation in organizational improvement built into structure & workers' job descriptions
- Acknowledge value choices within major decisions
- Invite innovation with transparency--value judgment and creativity
- Communicate shared vision—end goal
- Practice strengths-based supervision
- Constantly supply new ideas from your networking, study—tailored to your context
- Examine where rules tie workers' hands and find alternatives

Questions/Discussion?
