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Implementing a Policy Network:
Current Status and Future Directions for the
Centre of Excellence for Children and Adolescents with Special Needs

Terry R. Barrett, Ph. D.

June 15, 2003

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The Centre of Excellence has as one of its functions the provision of policy advice to appropriate governmental agencies. In order to effectively provide such advice, it has been recognized that the Centre of Excellence needs to explore the possibility of developing a set of relationships among various important stakeholders in the policy process. That sort of relationship has sometimes been referred to as a policy network. The purpose of the present paper is threefold. First I will review the literature available concerning the history and structures of policy networks. Then I will address the current status of the efforts to implement a policy network by the Centre of Excellence. Finally I will offer some suggestions concerning “next steps” the Centre of Excellence may wish to consider in the implementation process.

1. The History of Policy Networks

According to Carlsson (2000), the traditional view of policy making is called the stage model of policymaking. In this view, the production of governmental policy takes place in a series of carefully regulated stages. He suggests that the stages of policy making in this model are agenda setting, problem definition, problem formulation, policy implementation, evaluation and termination. The most important concept of this model is

that all of these activities are conducted within the framework of a rigid political administrative hierarchy. That is, superordinate and subordinate units of government work together in a carefully regulated way to produce governmental policy.

A number of authors, including Carlsson (2000) and Sabatier (1999), have suggested that this view of the policy making process is, at best, an incomplete one. Authors like these make the case that in post World War II industrialized western society, the development of political policy needs to be understood as arising from the complex interplay of a variety of interest groups, both within and outside of traditional governmental agencies. Rather than think about formal governmental organization as the basis for policymaking, these critics believe that there exists “problem-solving structures (Carlsson, 2000, pg 504)” that are causal in the formation and implementation of new governmental policy. Further, Carlsson (2000) suggests that these problem-solving structures arise because of the complexity of the problem space. That is, it has been recognized by governmental agencies that there does not seem to be any simple and obvious problem solution that will prove sufficient to meet the needs of the various stakeholders impacted by the implementation of policy.

These problem-solving structures are commonly called policy networks (e. g., Richardson & Jordan, 1979). Kenis & Schneider (1991) and Thatcher (1996) have provided useful reviews of the development of the idea of a policy network. According to Klijn, Koppenjan, and Termeer (1995) policy networks are “...more or less stable patterns of social relations between mutually dependent actors which form themselves around policy problems or clusters of resources and which are formed, maintained and

changed by a series of games (pg 439).” The two essential components in this definition are networks and games.

2. Characteristics of Policy Networks

According to Klijn et al (1995), networks have a number of characteristics including actors, relations among actors and rules of conduct used in the games being played. The idea of a network is that the various actors are dependent upon one another (and hence can be thought of as a network) because, individually, the actors are unable to conclude the policy game without the help and cooperation of the other players. Through the various interactions that occur across policy games, a pattern of relations begins to develop among the actors. These relationships can be thought of in terms of differential power, status, knowledge, and monetary resources, among others. The idea of “rules” reflect the general procedures the actors adhere to in playing the policy games. These rules regulate the individual actor behavior in terms of what behavior is acceptable, which policy positions actors may take and which actors may contribute to which games. These rules are not static across the life of the network, but rather are dynamic and changeable. They are often not openly stated and, therefore, actors may not completely understand the nature of particular rules within a policy game.

The development of a particular political policy, or policy outcome, is said to occur through the successful completion of a policy game. Klijn et al (1995) argue that for any particular policy game, only some of the network actors take part. These actors play because they have specific objectives they want to see realized with respect to the particular policy outcome being developed. In order to realize their objectives the various actors develop and employ particular strategies for obtaining their objectives.

Strategies can be thought of as organized and more or less coherent sets of actions developed by players to reach their objectives.

A further characteristic of successful policy networks is that they have an institutional base (Marsh & Smith, 2000). This refers to the idea that the network needs to have a governmental agency responsible for policy implementation that believes in the usefulness of the network and, in fact, plays a central role in that network. According to Marsh and Smith (2000), networks are successful in influencing policy outcomes because they develop processes for habitual, or institutionalized, consultation among the various stakeholders and appropriate government agencies. It is regular and habitual consultation that result in the development of a set of basic premises across network participants. Over time, these premises begin to shape and focus the direction of the policy game toward particular types of policy outcomes valued by the members of the network.

Although various taxonomies have been suggested to distinguish between different types of policy networks, the most common distinction is between a policy community and an issue network (Bessers and O'Toole, 1998). Before describing this distinction, however, it is important to realize that there appears to be much confusion in the use of the terms policy network, policy community and issue network (Jordan, 1990). After a careful review of the use of these three terms, however, Jordan (1990) does believe that the three terms can be distinguished. The term policy network is most often taken as the general term with policy communities and issue networks thought of as specific types of policy networks.

3. Types of Policy Networks

Richardson and Jordan first introduced the term policy community in 1979.

Richardson (2000) suggests that the idea of policy community emphasizes the stability of the network, shared views within the members of the network and the restricted membership of the network. . For example, he indicates that several authors have defined policy communities as "... networks characterized by stability of relationships, continuity of a highly restrictive membership, vertical interdependence based upon shared delivery responsibilities and insulation from other networks and invariably from the general public (pg 1007)." These restrictive networks operate, in large part, to define the policy agenda for a particular governmental agency. Since the policy community is characterized by a strong consensus concerning the nature of problems to be solved and by a closely held view of the nature of potential solutions, policy agendas get reified and begin to define the boundaries of possible policy outcomes.

Consistent with this view of the nature of a policy community are features suggested by Toke (2000). He suggests that policy communities can be characterized by a short list of features. Policy communities have very limited membership with a quite narrow range of interests. Frequent bargaining and negotiation further characterize these networks. And finally, policy communities exhibit a high degree of consensus concerning policy principles and procedures used in policy games and on the types of policy outcomes that are permissible. As Richardson (2000) suggests, policy communities can be thought of as groups of political "insiders" who have control over the policy direction of the government.

Over the last 30 to 40 years, policy communities have been quite successful in controlling the political agenda without reference to all the potential stakeholders who are affected by policy outcomes. However, Richardson (2000) argues that established political insider groups (i. e., policy communities) have come under attack, both inside of government agencies and in the general society. The very success of policy networks has produced new players who have begun to demand a place in the policy game. For example, political parties who gain control of government with agendas geared to reforming existing policy have every reason to bypass existing policy communities. In addition, stakeholders outside of the government have begun to realize the possibility of using new venues or arenas to influence policy games. New information technologies have greatly increased the ability of political outsiders to communicate with one another, to get their message out to the general public and to directly influence key members of government.

Perhaps most importantly, there is now a growing realization in the general public that policy should be based on a clear foundation of valid knowledge (Richardson, 2000). The general availability of new information acts to destabilize the agendas of traditional policy communities. Individuals and groups who develop and understand the current state of the knowledge universe with respect to any particular policy game have an advantage in shaping the nature of the game and, consequently, the nature of policy outcomes.

A type of network structure developed to meet these new demands for inclusiveness and for a more knowledge-based policy debate has been called an issue network (Helco, 1978). He defines an issue network as "... a shared-knowledge group having to do with

some aspect (or, as defined by the network, some problem) of public policy... It is through networks of people who regard each other as knowledgeable, or at least as needing to be answered, that public policy issues tend to be refined, evidence debated, and alternative options worked out—though rarely in any controlled, well-organized way (pg 103-104).”

Helco (1978) thinks of issue networks as having a large number of participants with differential degrees of commitment to the network. He believes these participants move routinely in and out of the network. He also characterizes issue networks as having no recognized leader in control of policy or issues. Membership in an issue network is seen as quite diverse and can include anyone with knowledge and an interest in the policy issue including community activists, respected professionals in the area of interest and knowledgeable individuals at all levels of government. Helco (1978) does not believe that issue networks have replaced policy communities. Rather he sees issue networks as structures that allow formerly disenfranchised individuals and organizations to become players in the policy game, along with members of the policy community.

Skok (1995) has reviewed the work on the idea of issue networks and has come to the conclusion that issue networks are playing a large role in the development, implementation and evaluation of policy outcomes. He believes this is true because of the increasing emphasis on knowledge (because of the ubiquitous presence of information technology) as the primary resource in the policy game. So, he sees issue networks as primarily knowledge networks. That is, issue networks are groups of individuals and organizations inside and outside of government, all having valuable knowledge to contribute to the policy game. He argues that many authors who have

studied the idea of issue networks have come to the conclusion that issue networks are actually displacing traditional wielders of political power (such as political parties, chief executive and political insiders) as the major players in the policy game.

4. Considerations in Planning a Policy Network

Perhaps the first issue that needs to be considered is why one might be interested in the development of a policy network in the first place. There are at least two perspectives that one might take in considering this issue. Much of the previous discussion has been from the point of view of individuals who want to have a say in the policy process yet, individually, are not in a position to be taken seriously by policy makers. By developing a policy network, they begin to put themselves into a position to be powerful players in particular policy games.

The alternative perspective is from the point of view of government. Why would government agencies desire the development of a policy network? According to Blom-Hanson (1997), there are three reasons. Governmental agencies are beginning to understand that they need a consultative policymaking environment. That is, in order for policy to effectively address problem areas, policy makers need the help and expertise of a wide variety of stakeholders, both knowledgeable individuals and organizations. Having a policy network in place provides the government agency with just such resources.

A second reason for a policy network is the realization by government that knowledge, rather than politics, needs to be the basis for effective policy making. The utilization of consultation with a policy network tends to de-emphasize the role of politics in the policy game. Finally, Blom-Hanson (1997) believes that government agencies are

looking for a predictable environment in which to conduct the policy game. This is accomplished through regular, and perhaps habitual, consultation between the government and a recognized policy network.

Smith (1993) agrees that government needs policy networks in order to achieve policy goals. However, he cautions that the consultation between the policy network and government does not mean an equal power relationship between government and the policy network in the development of policy outcomes. Rather, he argues that it is the government that actually allows for the creation of an effective policy network. Without access to appropriate government agencies there is no effective role for the policy network in the policy game. In addition, it is the government that controls access to the policy game and generates the basic rules of the policy game.

Given that there are good and valid reasons for developing a policy network from both the point of view of network members and from the point of view of government, an important issue is to determine the type of policy network most suited to the values and goals of the Centre of Excellence. In this context, it might be useful to think of policy communities and issue networks as anchors on a policy network continuum as suggested by Smith (1993). According to him, actual policy networks rarely, if ever, meet all the criteria necessary to be called either a pure policy community or a pure issue network.

It seems to me that there are three major distinctions between policy communities and issue networks that are relevant to this discussion. First, policy communities are characterized by very restricted membership. Often membership in the network is granted only to members of one or two organizations. On the other hand, issue networks have a much wider and inclusive type of membership.

Second, the underlying theme of issue networks seems to be the development of policy outcomes based on a coherent and valid knowledge base. By contrast, policy communities tend to be seen as working to produce policy outcomes that protect the interests of the members of the policy community, irrespective of the information available about the problem space.

Third, policy communities and issue networks have been distinguished by the frequency and consistency of the consultation process between government and the policy network. Policy communities are networks characterized as having quite regular consultation in ongoing policy games. Issue networks, on the other hand, are generally seen to have only sporadic consultation with appropriate government agencies.

Given these distinctions, it seems to me that on the first two dimensions, the fit between the Centre of Excellence and the development of an issue network is one that is quite natural. After all, the Centre is a knowledge generation and dissemination organization that is committed to being community-based in its approach to issues being addressed. However, with respect to the issue of frequency of consultation, the Centre of Excellence might want to develop a policy network that looks more like a policy community rather than an issue network. There seems to be a degree of agreement (e. g., Marsh & Smith, 2000) that frequent consultation is a key component in the success of a policy network in influencing governmental policy. Consequently, it appears to me, at least, that the sort of policy network the Centre of Excellence might want to develop is neither a pure policy community nor a pure issue network.

5. Policy Network Implementation Strategy

A. Current Status. The discussion of the implementation of a policy network is seriously hindered by the fact that according to Hay (1998) “The assumption seems to pervade the existing literature...that networks are always present, always already pre-constituted. The question of their formation is thus persistently deferred (pg 45).”

The lack of a formal body of research concerning the implementation of a policy network means that a discussion of implementation must, of necessity, derive from implications arrived at by close examination of the established characteristics of policy networks. One useful guide for thinking about the development of a policy network is the work of Klijn, Koppenjan and Termeer (1995). As mentioned previously, these authors suggested that there are four common aspects of policy networks; the nature of the actors, the type of resources available, the rules of interaction and the perceptions of actors.

(1). Members. An important consideration is the nature of the actors or members of the policy network. The rule from thinking about issue networks is that one would want to structure the network to include individuals who are knowledgeable about the policy issues under consideration. These individuals provide the knowledge capital, if you will, to propel the discussion of policy issues in ways consistent with the existing knowledge base. There is also consensus that representatives from local, regional and national communities and/or organizations that will be impacted by the policy outcomes need to be included. These individuals provide a unique perspective concerning the nature of the problems being discussed and the ways in which various policy outcomes might play out in the community. Finally, individuals from within governmental

agencies with knowledge and interest in the policy issues need to be part of the network. These individuals provide an institutional perspective that can help direct policy discussions in politically helpful directions. They also carry weight in establishing the policy network as a policy game player to be taken seriously by relevant governmental organizations.

I know that the Centre of Excellence has been working on a network directory for some time now. This activity provides an excellent start to the development of an effective membership for the policy network. However, there are limitations to the current status of the network directory for the purposes of the development of a policy network. It is my understanding that the development of the Centre of Excellence network directory was primarily focused on facilitating the research function of the Centre of Excellence. I believe the Centre of Excellence has taken an important step in beginning to broaden the membership of the network by appointing as its spokesperson a person of national political importance. Mandell (1999) makes the point that effective policy networks often have a group of politically important individuals who have agreed to help the network become recognizable and respected by governmental policy makers. The spokesperson's continuing help in providing contacts with individuals at various levels of government should help in recruiting politically important individuals into the network. However, the issue of representativeness of members is a continuing one that will need to be addressed further in the future.

(2). **Resources.** The second consideration in the development of a policy network is the issue of resources. Klijn et al (1995) believe that one reason policy networks are successful is because the network changes the distribution of resources available to the

network members. They include as resources money, formal positions, manpower, information, expertise and legitimacy. Currently, the Centre of Excellence has money and the manpower to engage in efforts to develop a policy network. These resources are available through the funding of the Centre of Excellence by Health Canada. In addition, by virtue of the funding relationship between the Centre of Excellence and Health Canada, the Centre of Excellence maintains a formal position or relationship with Health Canada that is a valuable resource in the efforts to develop an effective policy network in conjunction with Health Canada.

Knowledge generation and dissemination by the Centre of Excellence provides a valuable source of information to potential members of the network. Further, the discussion within the Centre of Excellence concerning the ways in which information technologies might impact information delivery can represent a powerful way of getting information into the hands of potential network members, who otherwise would not have the power that information access brings.

Another consideration in the distribution of resources to potential network members is the idea of a learning organization. Mandell (1999) sees one of the essential activities of a successful policy network as developing the skills of network members and nonmembers by providing regular education and training. This activity also seems to be consistent with many of the activities of the Centre of Excellence. One might think of activities such as open houses, round tables, local conferences, presentations, workshops, and the production of newsletters, videos, and CD ROMS as various manifestations of the Centre of Excellence as a learning organization. Each of these activities could easily

be construed as an attempt to improve the information available to, and therefore the skills of, potential network members.

At least as important, the above activities also impact nonmembers of the policy community. According to Mandell (1999), the education and training of community members, not part of the policy network, is quite valuable to the network. The reason is what Brinkerhoff (1997) (as cited in Mandell, 1999) calls a virtuous circle. The idea is that these sorts of learning opportunities provided by a policy network encourage individuals in local communities to express their preferences and be more demanding of government for appropriate service delivery. That, in turn, leads to policy decisions that actually improve service delivery.

A quite natural fit between the idea of resources available to a policy network and the work and mission of the Centre of Excellence is the resource referred to as expertise. The development of the network directory already under way in the Centre of Excellence is an important example. The network directory is a powerful tool in establishing a link among a wide variety of individuals and organizations with varied expertise. It can be seen as a way of providing network members (and nonmembers) access to expertise that would not otherwise be available.

The idea of legitimacy as a resource that can be made available to network members is one that probably should not be overlooked. The fact that the Centre of Excellence is funded by Health Canada seems to me to be a very important source of legitimacy. The Centre of Excellence's ability to develop relationships with important stakeholders around the country is certainly enhanced by the relationship between the Centre of Excellence and Health Canada. In addition, the success of the Centre of Excellence in

meeting its goals undoubtedly provides an important degree of legitimacy to a variety of network members working for social change at the local and regional levels of government. This suggests that the Centre of Excellence's efforts to communicate the success of the Centre of Excellence and its close connection with Health Canada are all important activities in establishing an effective policy network.

Many of the resources currently at the disposal of the Centre of Excellence are a direct function of the funding relationship that exists between Health Canada and the Centre of Excellence. These include money, formal position, manpower, and legitimacy. The challenge that will need to be addressed is the availability of these critical resources at the end of the current funding cycle.

(3). **Rules of Interaction.** The third consideration mentioned by Klijn et al (1995) in the development of a policy network is the idea of rules of interaction. By that, the authors mean the implicit rules used by the network members when they interact with one another. There are two principles, or rules, that, I believe, form the foundation of all of the work by the Centre of Excellence. These principles are ones the Centre of Excellence might want to promote as the basis of interactions between network members. The first is that policy positions taken by the policy network need to be based on a sound knowledge base. The Centre of Excellence has consistently adhered to the idea that sound knowledge based on scientific research is the appropriate way to address complex health issues. The second is that policy positions need to be rooted in a community-based philosophy. From the start, the Centre of Excellence has understood that considerations concerning the health of children and youth in the north must be grounded in a careful understanding and appreciation of the cultural context of those children and youth.

These principles, of course, are consistent with the entire thrust of the action plan of the Centre of Excellence. While these might seem obvious, there is some usefulness in making them explicit to members of the policy network. For example, one might want to be clear about these principles in interacting with various advocacy groups who might wish to be included as network members. Perhaps more importantly, these rules of interaction will set the foundation for consensus building within the network.

(4). **Consensus Building.** Consensus building is akin to the fourth component of policy networks mentioned by Klijn et al (1995); that is the notion of perceptions. The idea is that a network manager needs to think very carefully about the consistency of perceptions that network members have about the direction the network is going with respect to various problem areas. Agranoff and McGuire (1999) think of this facet of network development as shaping the operating context of the network. In fact, Nyland (1995) has suggested that the first major step required of a policy network is the development of set of common positions agreed to by the majority of the network members.

Currently, there appears to be considerable consensus among individuals closely tied to the Centre of Excellence, especially those researchers that are affiliated with the various task forces of the Centre of Excellence. However, as yet, there does not appear to be any targeted activities directed at developing those common positions in network members more loosely associated with the Centre of Excellence. It will be a continuing challenge to help the network membership define common positions with respect to identified problem issues.

(5). **Co-productive Relationships with Government.** The NEAC, in its recent recommendations to the Centre of Excellence about policy communities, asked the Centre of Excellence to comment on its strategies for top-down and bottom-up consultation with government on policy matters. Specifically, in recommendation 2, the NEAC asked the Centre of Excellence to “... clarify its plans for the dissemination of direct and indirect policy advice from both the ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ perspective.”

Nyland (1995) defines top-down processes as ones in which the policy makers define the policy and the policy network is only consulted for purposes of policy implementation. By analogy, one might think of bottom-up processes as consultation in which the policy network raises issues with the policy makers that might result in policy outcomes. Nyland argues that neither of these approaches reflect effective policy implementation. Rather, she believes the consultation process between the policy network and policy makers should be one of co-production. From her research into effective policy production, she has concluded that policy consultation should be viewed as a relatively continuous kind of cooperation between the policy network and governmental agencies and governmental leaders. It should include the initial stages of policy direction and should continue all the way through policy implementation and evaluation (also see Marsh and Smith, 2000 for a similar view).

I believe this is a crucial point in the future development of a successful policy network. It seems to me that there is a general tendency for individuals and for groups to divide the world into “us” and “them”. One frequent consequence of such a characterization is that members of each group tend to see the “other” in relatively negative terms. This initial negative polarization of attitudes makes the development of a

positive working partnership between groups one that is often difficult to accomplish. A major challenge for the Centre of Excellence will be to find ways of promoting Nyland's idea of co-production.

B. Next Steps. From my understanding of the literature on policy networks and my understanding of the current state of affairs within the Centre of Excellence with respect to the development of a successful policy network, there are four major issues that require attention. These are maintaining resources necessary for the policy network to survive and evolve, the development of a co-productive relationship between the policy network and relevant government agencies, broadening the membership of the network and consensus building among members of the network.

(1). Maintaining Resources. Perhaps the most important consideration is the continued viability of the Centre of Excellence as a respected national organization beyond the current Health Canada funding period, which I believe ends in 2005. This is critically important because according to Hay (1998), leadership of a policy network is most often provided by a single organization that recognizes the need for the policy network, recruits partners to form a network and takes the lead in the evolution of the network. This is, of course, the sort of leadership structure inherent in the development of the policy network by the Centre of Excellence. It is the Centre of Excellence that has the motivation and currently can provide the resources and vision necessary to establish such a network. It can do that precisely because of its relationship to Health Canada.

Fundamental to maintaining a successful policy network is the continuing involvement of the various individuals and organizations, particularly the lead organization. In much of the literature on policy networks, the organizations involved in

policy networks (especially core organizations) are ones that have an economic incentive for being committed to the network. That is, these organizations have financial resources that they willingly contribute to a lead organization in the effort to maintain a viable policy network. And they do that precisely because they have a financial stake in the policy outcomes.

For the Centre of Excellence, the financial resources it receives for network development and evolution are those that come directly from Health Canada. Health Canada provides those resources because of the important benefits Health Canada believes it will reap from the formation and evolution of a successful policy network. In my view, it is the continued involvement of Health Canada in providing financial resources to maintain the infrastructure of the Centre of Excellence that will be critical in the long-term stability of any policy network established by the Centre of Excellence.

Without that direct financial tie between the Centre of Excellence and Health Canada, it is not clear from where those financial resources would flow. It appears that the Centre of Excellence has put itself into an excellent position to maintain the flow of research funds following the termination of ties between the Centre of Excellence and Health Canada. However in my opinion, it is quite unlikely that research funding would be available as a financial resource to maintain the national infrastructure of the Centre of Excellence necessary for the Centre of Excellence to continue in its leadership role with respect to the policy network. After all, it is Health Canada, rather than the various research funding sources, that desire the continued viability of the policy network.

The other organization that is currently involved in providing infrastructure resources to the Centre of Excellence is Lakehead University, the sponsoring organization. I have

no reason to believe that Lakehead University will not continue to maintain its current commitment to the Centre of Excellence. However, that commitment consists of providing in-kind resources necessary to house the Centre of Excellence at Lakehead University, administer the grant from Health Canada and support the involvement of university faculty, including the national director. I believe there is virtually no chance that Lakehead University would alter the type of support to the Centre of Excellence in the years after 2005.

My analysis of the current situation suggests to me that the Centre of Excellence needs to immediately establish a much closer cooperative relationship between itself and Health Canada in the planning necessary to develop and sustain a successful policy network. The Centre of Excellence should not wait until it has established a viable policy network to work toward a cooperative relationship with Health Canada. It is the cooperation between these two organizations from the beginning that will be necessary. The agenda of this cooperative planning process should begin with the establishment of a work plan to ensure continuity of resources to the Centre of Excellence so that the Centre of Excellence infrastructure funding is in place following 2005. I believe that in the end it is in the best interest of Health Canada to continue its support of the infrastructure of the Centre of Excellence and I recommend that the planning process work toward this goal. On the other hand, there may be other options that are not currently obvious to me that the cooperative planning process might uncover. Regardless, the continued support of the infrastructure of the Centre of Excellence is the critical foundation for the continued development and evolution of the policy network.

(2). **Building Co-productive Relationships with Government.** As Smith (1993)

has indicated, it is the government that decides if a policy network will have access to the policy making process. The cooperation of individuals within Health Canada in the initial planning stages of the policy network can only increase the likelihood of future cooperation of Health Canada with the policy network. To increase this likelihood, the cooperative planning process between the Centre of Excellence and Health Canada should include the goal of developing a work plan to institute a consultative process explicitly designed to impact the formation and implementation of health policy.

There are several issues that need to be explicitly addressed in developing the consultative process work plan. Who is going to be involved in the initial planning process that establishes a consultative process work plan? Who is going to be involved in the consultative policy planning and implementation process? What will be the initial goals of the consultative policy process? When will this consultative policy process be implemented and how often will consultation take place?

(a). **Initial Planning.** To establish the initial planning process, the Centre of Excellence should enlist the help of individuals within the secretariat charged by Health Canada with responsibility for the Centres of Excellence Program. The immediate goal would be to establish a workgroup to conduct the planning process. The membership of this workgroup should include key individuals from the secretariat and key individuals from Health Canada agencies that might be involved in the consultative policy planning and implementation process. It is this group that would prepare the work plan to ensure continued funding of the Centre of Excellence infrastructure and develop the work plan that would establish a co-productive consultative process for policy making.

(b). **Membership in the Consultative Policy Making Process.** One important question that needs to be discussed is the issue of the membership of the co-productive consultative relationship. Contained in that issue is the role to be played by each member of the co-productive relationship. I believe the work plan should include provincial, as well as federal agencies, as members because of the complex relationship that exists between federal and provincial governments with respect to health policy. One role that might be explored for the Centre of Excellence policy network would be as a facilitator of inter-governmental cooperation. For example, it might be possible for the Centre of Excellence to arrange workshops on appropriate topics in which key individuals from both the federal and provincial levels of government could participate.

(c). **Initial Goals.** It seems to me that the work plan should include initial goals that represent a consensus developed by the workgroup for the co-productive policy making process. The exercise of developing these initial goals for the policy making process should act as an important consensus building exercise for members of the initial workgroup. I think the goals at this stage ought to be quite general in nature. For example one general goal might be to implement (or increase) intra- and inter-governmental discussion and cooperation in the health policy making process.

(d). **Time-line for Implementation.** Two of the important questions that need to be addressed here are when will the consultative process begin and how often will consultation take place. I think it is important to establish as a goal an explicit start date and an explicit set of expectations concerning the number of consultations per year. The literature seems quite clear about the necessity of a continuing consultative process in developing a successful policy making partnership.

(3). **Broadening the Policy Network Membership.** The successful implementation of a workgroup as suggested above should be very beneficial in broadening the network membership in valuable ways. For one, I would expect that individuals who participated in the workgroup planning process would agree to be key members of the network. In addition, these individuals have important knowledge concerning other key individuals, especially inside of government, who you might want to involve in the network.

Another way to broaden network membership might be to form a workgroup that would bring together a group of key individuals from around the country. The specific goal of this group would be to provide important advice about the individuals and/or organizations you might wish to recruit into the network and what role each of these might play. I know that you have met with several key individuals from around the country upon the advice of your national spokesperson. Some of these individuals might agree to serve on such a workgroup. In addition, there may be one or more persons currently on the NEAC that would be valuable additions to this workgroup. In order for this group to function in a useful way, of course, it would be necessary for you to help this group understand the goals of the Centre of Excellence and help the group come to some consensus concerning the goals of the network. Of course, the individuals who agreed to participate in such a workgroup would be valuable additions to the network.

(4). **Consensus Building within the Policy Network.** Another issue that needs to be addressed in the overall work plan for the development of a policy network is building consensus among network members. One way to begin this process might be to take advantage of the omnibus conference you are planning for 2005. By that time, the Centre

of Excellence should have in place a broadened network membership, a work plan that outlines ways to ensure the future funding of the Centre of Excellence infrastructure and a work plan that details the development of a co-productive consultative relationship between the Centre of Excellence and various levels of government. In other words, the major foundation elements should be in place.

It seems natural that the individuals invited to the omnibus conference would be precisely those who have been identified as actual, or potential, network participants. The conference offers a unique opportunity to bring these individuals together for the first time. It will provide the network members with an up-to-date review and analysis of the work of the Centre of Excellence. That background should be a useful precursor to a consensus-building workshop. Holding this sort of workshop as part of the omnibus conference might entice important members of the network to attend the conference. More importantly, however, it will serve as the initial vehicle to establishing a consensual framework for the Centre of Excellence policy network.

6. References

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