

Tools and Guidelines for Position and Policy Paper Development

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Position Paper Guidelines

A position paper should present the basic, relevant information known about a problem, and should conclude with a recommendation. It should be based upon a clear understanding of the goals that the authors want to attain and should be presented in a concise manner. The position paper should be thought of as an executive summary that can stand alone from the supplemental material.

Types of Papers

Position Papers: These papers position the CFMS with respect to a given issue. In the recommendations and advocacy plan, the only action taken is usually to make public the CFMS' position or to defend this position when the issue arises (at government committee meetings or during interviews, for example). Position papers do not, however, generally require the CFMS to engage in proactive advocacy or to invest significant time and resources into a given issue. However, once a position is taken via the adoption of a position paper, the CFMS may eventually elect, through the Executive of the General Meetings, to engage in more pro-active advocacy on an issue. It is recommended, but not required, that in the Accountability Statement (see below) a specific executive, committee, or national officer is tasked with responsibility for this position paper.

Policy Papers: Policy papers not only position the CFMS with respect to a given issue, but also lay out a plan for pro-active advocacy and generally commit the CFMS to playing an active role in the issue. It is mandatory for the Accountability Statement to specify which executives, committees, or national officers have ownership of the position paper and its associated advocacy plan.

Reports: These are documents that offer analysis and background information for a given problem, without taking positions or making recommendations for action (though they may make recommendations for further reflection or research, or for the creation of a position paper on the issue). Reports will generally be commissioned by the Executive, but may be created by committees or individual members. Reports **do not** need to be passed at a General Meeting; in general, the Executive may approve reports for posting on the website (in their own section) as they do not entail the taking of a position. However, reports may be brought to General Meetings for approval, but should be voted on as a separate agenda item from Position and Policy papers. (Note: format for reports will not be discussed here. In general, these would follow a more academic format).

Format for Position and Policy Papers

Title (here the type of paper should be clearly indicated)

Policy Area

All proposed Papers must either fit into one of the existing CFMS Policy Areas or propose a new Policy Area be created. Those writing the Paper should coordinate with the National Officer of Health Policy in order to ensure they comply with this requirement.

Problem History

- A. Background of the problem
- B. Current status

Problem Definition

- C. Statement of the problem
- D. Identification of the actors involved
- E. Impact and importance of the problem, both generally and specifically for the organization for whom the paper is being written

Position Statement

F. A clear statement, which may be point-form, of the specific positions the CFMS is taking on a given issue. A short rationale may be included for each position if this rationale is not clear in the preceding sections.

Recommendations

- G. Description of policy recommendations
- H. Rationale for recommendations
- I. Options for implementation

Accountability Statement (Policy Papers: Mandatory, Position Papers: optional)

J. In Policy Papers, this statement should identify executives, committees, or national officers of the CFMS who will be responsible for this paper and for its advocacy plan. Mention should be made that the entire Executive is responsible for all papers, but specific executives may be given particular responsibilities for a given paper.

Note should also be made that those accountable for the Paper will also be responsible for updating the CFMS Advocacy Tracker with information relating to their progress on the issue.

Advocacy Plan

K. A concrete, step-by-step plan that the CFMS will follow in order to implement the Recommendations. In Position Papers, this is generally limited to making the position taken public and defending the position when the opportunity arises. In Policy Papers, this includes any steps to be taken (such as, but not limited to: meeting with stakeholders, letter-writing campaigns, direct lobbying of MP's, information and education campaigns, etc...).

A timeline should be included for each step in the plan.

Note should be made that the advocacy plan is generally subject to change as the situation changes at the discretion of those responsible for the paper, as long as they update the membership through the CFMS Advocacy Tracker.

In situations where providing elements of the advocacy plan in publicly available writing would compromise the CFMS' position, those elements should be verbally communicated to the membership in a closed session of the general meeting prior to voting on the Paper.

References

L. References (Vancouver format suggested; a consistent format must be used in any given paper)

Suggested Length

3 pages (maximum 5), single - spaced

Supplementary Material/Appendices

This section is intended to provide a more detailed discussion of the evidence. There is no page limit on this section.

Submission

While Papers must generally be submitted 3 weeks before a given General Meeting (or up until the day of the meeting for position papers requiring spending of less than 1000\$) to the Resolutions Committee, it is recommended that all those thinking of writing a Paper begin several months before the meeting and coordinate with the National Officer for Health Policy. The NOHP can provide advice on writing the paper and on where the paper will fit into the CFMS' overall advocacy strategy, and ensure that new Papers do not overlap with existing papers.

CFMS Advocacy Strategic Plan

Papers are encouraged, but not required to, endeavour to fit into the existing CFMS Advocacy Strategic Plan, and to make mention of this in the Paper.

All newly adopted Papers must be summarised by the COHP and the summary placed into the appropriate Policy Area Summary Statement (PASS) within one year of the Paper being adopted.

Appendix A: Tips for Paper Development

Please consider the following questions in drafting your position paper:

- Is the problem adequately contextualized?
- Are prior efforts to resolve the problem listed and evaluated, both by this organization and others?
- Is the significance of the problem highlighted?
- Have the relevant individuals or organizations pertaining to governance around this issue been properly identified?
- What are the consequences if the problem is not addressed?
- Are all the relevant constraints taken into account?
- Has feasibility been considered?

Starting the Position Paper Process

Before embarking on the position paper writing process, it is important to have a well developed outline and a clear goal and position identified. The following Policy Cycle[1,2,3] used for the development of policy position papers may be applied to the development of position papers to be approved by the CFMS. It is a guide, not a prescription, so please refer to the following steps as the help you to organize the construction of your paper.

Problem Definition/Agenda Setting:

Show that a problem exists that requires action.

Constructing Policy Alternatives/Policy Formulation

Consider all possible solutions. Remember that it can be difficult to achieve the “ideal” alternative, so try to focus your search on the most reasonable and realistic policy alternatives for the context.

Choice of Solution/Selection of Preferred Position

Evaluate each option and choose your preferred one. The following criteria may be applied in your decision:

Effectiveness: Will this alternative produce the desired outcome?

Efficiency: Based on a cost - benefit analysis, how will this option affect the target groups?

Equity: Is there a fair distribution of costs and benefits?

Feasibility/Implementability: Is there a suitable administrative/political/legal framework in place to allow for effective and efficient implementation of this option?

Flexibility/Improvability: Does this option have the flexibility to be changed to suit other possible situations or allow for improvements?

Design

How will you construct recommendations to achieve your desired outcome?

Drafting your position paper and supplemental material

A position paper is different from an academic paper in that its focus is on the applicability of research findings. The supplemental material must be used to argue for a specific set of recommendations to address the problem. It is important to strike a balance between providing a comprehensive problem description to allow for informed evaluation and including only the relevant knowledge and data necessary to support the argument.

Position Paper Pre-General Meeting Process

Be prepared to accept modifications and suggestions. Position papers are often collaborative and the final product is most likely to finally get approved once it has gone through many iterations. Try and show the paper to many people- both students and experts- and adapt it *before* bringing it to a General Meeting (as amendments on the floor are not permitted at CFMS General Meetings). Coordinate with the NOHP, who can help you get the word out about your paper ahead of the meeting.

References:

- 1 Pal, Leslie A. (2000) Context for Policy Analysis. Unpublished Open Society Institute Seminar Notes.
- 2 Bardach, Eugene. (1996). The eight step path of policy analysis: A handbook for practice. Berkeley: Berkeley Academic Press.
- 3 Young, Eoin and Lisa Quinn. (2002). Writing effective policy papers: A guide for policy advisors in Central and Eastern Europe. Open Society Institute.