

Palme Academy Introductory Course: **Module 3**



HOW TO RUN AND REPRESENT A PARTY

FORMULATING

POLICY AND

LEADING THE WAY

Policy development, participation and interaction with the outside world

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Olof Palme International Center, Stockholm 2020

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Introduction

What is a political party?

In most democratic political systems in the world, political parties play a crucial role in the way in which democracy functions. It is political parties that stand for election, who provide lists of candidates, and who write policy platforms for voters to consider. It is political parties that legislate and make decisions that affect all citizens. It is political parties that can be held accountable for their decisions and whose power can be taken away in free and fair elections.

Political parties' function as a link between citizens and political power. They organise people so that they can have a role in making political decisions. They can bring together voters, make them members, educate them on social issues, and mobilise them to make their own voices heard. When political parties function well, they are not only involved in creating policy in parliaments or running campaigns, but they also help to make political and democratic influence a living reality for more people. They become a tool for people to influence social development, and to take control over their own lives.

What kind of party does a social democratic party aim to be?

There are many different types of models for political parties. If you want to learn more about how to form and develop a party, you will first need to define what party model you intend to use. Is it a party that consists mainly of a group of elected politicians representing various interest groups? Is it a party controlled from the top down – termed a cadre party? Or is it perhaps a populist party centred around a strong leader, with supporters rather than full members in the party's base?

In this course material, we of course assume that a social democratic party is basically and ought to be a popular movement party where the power in the party derives from its members and moves upwards through its organisation. It needs an inclusive and democratic way of working that features internal democracy, representativeness, and transparency.

The basis of such a party is the democratic grass roots movement and substantial popular participation. It is a party that brings together people of flesh and blood, who have commitment and a common vision of how our society should function and develop. In this sense, there is no

difference between a popular movement party and other popular movements. People join forces to play football or put on plays in a theatre group, to form a cooperative, or to learn to sew or weave. Those who want to be involved in changing the conditions under which people live in a broader sense become active in a political party. That is the foundation of a popular movement party.

The organisational focus of such a party is on developing strong local structures with a lot of active members. It is based on the idea that parties in a democracy should not only play an important role in parliaments but also in the surrounding community and civil society. Political parties, especially if they are also in power, are often seen as representatives of parliament or the government and not as representatives of people in everyday life. To avoid this situation, parties must create broad, inclusive organisations with democratic structures and ensure that they work in a way that is visible and which makes a difference in people's everyday lives.

But how do you do that?

Democratic parties in different parts of the world can learn a lot from each other's experiences and practices. This introductory course and its modules focus on how a party can strengthen its organisational and political capacity to become a strong and democratic party with active members and inclusive structures and activities. The strength of a party depends to a large extent on how democratic it is and how well the organisation functions. This requires organisational structures and ways of working that function well, and a culture of openness to people actively sharing in and participating in the political work of the party. A strong democratic party that is confident in itself encourages debate, active participation and criticism, and self-criticism.



An introductory course in forming and running a party

This course is intended to provide an introduction to and an overview of how to form, organise, develop, and represent this kind of democratic popular movement party – from the top down and the bottom up.

Its target group is leaders and active members of social democratic parties. You might be leaders in many different areas at the national, regional, or local level. This course emphasises the local level, however, since the local level forms the base of a social democratic popular movement party, and is the level that involves the most people. The material for this course is also useful for active members who are not leaders, in which case it can be used for self-study or as part of local member courses.

A six-module course

The course is divided into six self-contained modules. Each module has its own course material, which is intended to be used for two or three meetings of leaders and others in the party in the form of a study circle to discuss the questions and ideas that the module raises. But the number of meetings to cover each module is flexible. One

meeting per module is also an option, although you will then need to pick out which of the topics and questions you are going to discuss, as you will probably not have time to cover everything. As a participant, you can of course choose to take the entire course or to focus specifically on one of its modules.

The six modules in this introductory course are:

Module 1

Forming and Structuring a party

Module 2

Holding Elections and Reaching Decisions

Module 3

Formulating Policy and Leading the Way

Module 4

Reaching Out and Connecting

Module 5

Growing and Consolidating

Module 6

Representing and Governing

Module 3: Formulating policy and leading the way

In this third module, we look at how important it is for political parties to have the capacity to respond to developments in society, and to formulate and reformulate their policies on the basis of these developments and thus remain relevant and able to lead. Society is constantly changing.

This calls for new policy solutions in pace with this change. In practice, politics is about working together to solve the practical social problems and challenges that people face in their everyday lives.

So in this module, we go through the process of developing policy in a party and highlight different methods that parties can use, in particular at the local branch level, in order to develop their policy and work consciously and in a structured way to ensure that their capacity to come up with solutions and lead does not stagnate and cease to function altogether.

In a party with the ambition of being inclusive and democratic, and built as a popular movement party and a federation with its members as the party base, it is essential that these processes are democratic and clearly involve the members and the people the party says it wants to represent.

This module has three chapters. The first concerns why a party ought to be programmatic and build its identity, its activities and its relationship with voters on politics and policy alone and not on other factors. The second chapter

deals with what these policy processes might look internally in the party. What are the party's formal and democratic structures? What forms can be utilised in practice? How does the party involve the members? This section is more practical in nature, with tips and advice on what you can do in practice. In the third chapter, we look at how the party's process of making policy, and updating the policies that it already has, should also include constituents and relate to other organisations, trade unions, civil society, the business community and other actors in the society in which it operates.

The goal of this third module in the introductory course on How to Run and Represent a Party is that, on completion, you will have an increased:

- Understanding of what it means to have programmatic parties that go to the voters with concrete and issue-based visions, platforms, and policies;
- Knowledge of how political parties formulate and continuously develop their policy in an inclusive and transparent manner, using democratic methods that allow members to express their opinions in the process;
- Knowledge of the roles of political party leaders in the policy development process and practical ways to work in inclusive, systematic and organised forms in policy development locally;
- Knowledge about methods political parties can use to relate to and interact with the society in which they operate and its actors in order to strengthen and develop their policy and policy development.



The Swedish Social Democrats' Party Chair Stefan Löfven with Party Secretary Lena Rådström Baastad, Minister of Finance Magdalena Andersson and members of the Swedish Social Democratic Youth League.



BASED ON THE SWEDISH EXPERIENCE

This course is based on the experiences and organisation of social democracy in Sweden. In other words, it is not meant to be a blueprint. The circumstances for political parties are different in different parts of the world.

Economic development will have progressed to different levels. The political conflict lines will be different. In some countries, ethnic conflict lines are very apparent. In others, class conflicts are the most predominant. In some countries, the political process is prejudiced by an earlier or ongoing struggle for freedom. In a country without a long tradition of a multi-party system, or in a relatively young democracy, the challenges are different from those in countries where democratic elections have been held over a long period of time. As a participant in this course, you may utilise the experiences of Sweden's social democratic movement and the ways it is organised. These experiences can then be applied to your own environment and adapted to your own experiences and circumstances.

That said, we would like to emphasise that the experiences of social democracy in Sweden can be of interest to study in other parts of the world. Sweden's Social Democratic Party has long experience of winning elections and being in government, always by virtue of being the biggest party. The membership of Sweden's Social Democratic Party has been consistently large. The party has had regional and local branches throughout the country for a

long time and, in collaboration with other parts of civil society, has often been able to dominate the political agenda. A brief explanation for this strong position is that the party has been successful in bringing together large groups in society around a common, future-focused and solidarity-based social narrative, and through having a consistent goal to grow and change in pace with societal development.

This does not mean that there are no challenges left for social democracy in Sweden. On the contrary. In recent decades, the labour market has changed dramatically. Traditional working-class occupations have become fewer. After several decades of neoliberalism, nationalism and more traditional values have become a new factor in politics, and have increased support for conservative parties. At the same time, strongly growing individualism, particularly in the larger cities, continues to attract voters to more liberal parties. More and more citizens are also choosing alternative forms of political engagement in single-issue organisations (e.g. the environment, feminism or migration). It is more difficult to get people to get involved in party politics, to sit on an Executive, and to take on time-consuming official roles. These are the challenges facing many political parties today.

In short, a party must always be flexible and ready to innovate in line with societal development. We are all part of an ongoing learning process. This is why it is

so enjoyable and challenging to be part of a political party.

Things to bear in mind

How a party is organised at different levels in the society varies from country to country. In some cases there may be more levels; and in others, there may be fewer. This module presents the models for the structure of the Swedish Social Democratic Party's organisation. So you will find that there may be differences in the structure of the party organisation in your country. If you do not recognise your party's model in this module, then you should try to match the levels described here to your party's structure and explain why your party is organised in this way. The important thing here is to understand how the party organisation's fundamental decision-making levels are linked to and function in tandem with the society in which it operates, and internally with the organisational levels in the party.

There may also be differences in the local branch. The local branch is the party's base and every party member must belong to a local branch. In the Swedish Social Democratic Party, this level is called the *arbetarekommun*, and corresponds to one of Sweden's 290 local government areas (municipalities). One local branch of the party per LGA/municipality. There may also be underlying social democratic associations and clubs that together form the local branch. ■

FACTS

FACTS IN BRIEF ABOUT THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS IN SWEDEN

The Swedish Social Democratic Party was formed in 1889 as part of a broader popular movement and organising process with the aim of demanding political and economic rights for workers. The party's founders included trade union organisations who believed that the labour movement needed a voice in parliament. In the first few years, it was about demanding democracy, universal suffrage, and better social conditions for workers. The party formed its first government in 1920 and has since then been in government for a total of over 70 years. During these years, the party's main project has been to develop, and further develop, within the framework of 'the Swedish

model' – a modern welfare state aimed at increasing citizens' equality, social security and freedom. For a long time, there were only five parties in Sweden's Riksdag (Sweden's national parliament) and the Social Democrats often received over 40 per cent of the votes in elections. Today there are more parties and the Social Democrats Party has lost some of its broad support, and often has to form coalitions with other parties in order to be able to govern.

90,000 members
290 local branches
26 regional organisations

The party currently has about 90,000 members who are organised in 290 local branches (*arbetarekommuner*). Under these are a large number of associations and clubs, in residential areas and city districts in particular, which together with the local branch make up the basic organisation of the party. The local branches are in turn organised into 26 regional organisations called party districts (*partidistrikt*). The Swedish Social Democratic Party is classed as a mass-based party and its organisation is based on federal principles, where the regional organisations together constitute the party nationally, with the National Conference as the highest decision-making body. ■



Political parties and the role of policy development

Political parties play a key role in democracy. They communicate with the voters and present candidates for political posts. Through their elected representatives, they are involved in making decisions in parliaments and governments. Put simply, political parties are the most important channel linking citizens with political power.

As a key part of this primary task, they must also perform another, which is perhaps the most important one for a party that wants to be viable and relevant and effect social change. They must show the way forward and present practical solutions to the problems and challenges that the country's citizens see as important. Parties must formulate and develop new policy on a regular basis. As part of that work, they need to respond continuously to developments in society, develop policies in the direction that the party wants, and make policy out of the party's visions and ideology. And they need to do this in a democratic way and include as many as possible in the process.

All too often, political parties do not function in this way. Parties that have been in power for a long time often end up in a kind of managerial role where they are unable to respond to citizens' demands for policy that is in line with societal development. Other parties become trans-

formed into efficient machines for conducting election campaigns, but lack any clear plans for what to do once they are elected. Another type of more undemocratic party is based entirely around a strong populist leader or functions fundamentally as a kind of clientelism party, where the party promises to provide specific groups of voters with goods and/or services in exchange for their political support. This is sometimes also referred to as pork barrelling.

In all these cases, the party is at great risk of losing – or never establishing – its ability to be relevant and to contribute to societal development. This will eventually lead to the party becoming irrelevant to both its own members and the electorate. Most people who become members or actively engaged members of political parties do so because they want to be involved in making their society better. Most voters prefer parties that have a plan, and

credible policies for how to implement that plan. That is why it is absolutely crucial for parties to create structures and activities which ensure that they continuously develop their policy. That they are able to take stock of and reform their policies and find new solutions to the problems in their society.

In all political parties, there is ongoing debate on the political situation and on what stands it is best to take and what policies it is best to pursue. There are internal meetings and processes for ballots on issues and decision-making. In the previous modules, we described the organisation and formal decision-making structures of a party that is constructed as a popular movement party, with a federal structure whereby the power in the party flows from the bottom up in the organisation. Such a party must pay particular attention to the internal democratic processes controlling how its policies and policy platform are made and updated. Reformulating the party's positions must be an ongoing process in the party's internal decision-making processes with its members – at members meetings, Executive meetings and National Conferences. In more specifically programmatic policy development, which has the aim of actively developing new policy in a specific area, this work is also often carried out in internal working parties or consultations. Here, too, it is important that the process is open, transparent and involves participants from the members of the party.

A successful party must also have the courage to develop and shape its policies in close collaboration with the country's citizens and the community at large. Parties cannot be closed, elitist, fragile bubbles. They need to know about and monitor how public opinion and ideas are developing in different social strata. In order to be relevant, the party must be aware of and base its actions on the needs and everyday lives of ordinary people. The party therefore needs to listen to the country's citizens, by regularly being out and about and talking to them about the party's policies and solutions to society's problems. It is also important to share information and maintain contacts with interest groups and researchers, experts, and popular movements. They have deep knowledge in their spheres and often have their own ideas for solutions. In short, a living and relevant party must maintain an active dialogue with the world around it.

But how do these political processes work in practice? How do they interact with the democratic decision-making structure of a party? How can the members and citizens be involved? What is the best and easiest way to pursue policy development at the local level in your party? How can the organisation remain open to the thoughts and ideas of other popular movements or other parts of the society in which it operates? How can we ensure that new policy is developed in a gender-equal way, giving everyone the same opportunity to contribute? These are the questions that this module deals with.

Shaping the future together

The most important lesson from the history of social democracy is that society can be changed. When social democratic parties emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, they encountered a conservative structure which claimed that hierarchies and power relationships were natural, God-given. That life had to be like it had always been. By forming a popular movement and parties with a bottom-up structure and the goal of empowering people, and by gradually improving the lives of the vast majority, social democracy has proved that society is, after all, capable of fundamentally changing. Society is not static.

“ Together, we can create a better future. The most important lesson from the history of social democracy is precisely this: Society can be changed. ”

Forward, Social Democratic Party Platform in Sweden

Social democracy is also driven by the realisation that freedom and equality can only be made a reality in solidarity with others. The idea of a society based on solidarity, fairness and efficiency, in which all people have the opportunity to develop together and shoulder their share of responsibility, is also reflected in how social democratic parties view their own organisations. If social democracy is to be able to change society, it must form open and transparent parties where people's engagement can grow, where people feel empowered together, and where they can shape policy for the future of the great majority.

This includes being a membership-based party with a federal structure, whose power derives from active members and is channelled upwards in the organisation. Centralised control, traditional hierarchies and strong non-inclusive norms, which hold back those who do not fit into them, only benefit those who already have power and influence.

There is also a strength in numbers and that the party has a multiplicity of local interfaces and networks. This is fundamental to inspiring engagement, increasing knowledge and finding solutions to the real challenges facing people in their everyday lives

Social democracy is fundamentally a political move-



ment for social change with the aim of including as many as possible in the democratic process, and thus policy development and an inclusive process for policy development play a particularly important role in the organisation and operation of social democratic parties.

Programmatic parties and their advantages

There are political parties all over the world and they can be categorised by their different strategies and methods for engaging with their members and the electorate. In the first module (Forming and Structuring a Party) in this introductory course, we identified a number of different categories of political party:

- **Cartel parties**, which are not based on membership or internal democracy but are more of a network that brings together various interest groups seeking to gain political influence.
- **Cadre parties**, which is a collective term for parties controlled from the top. The basic idea in a cadre party is that a small, well-educated and enlightened elite ought to control the direction of the party.
- **Personified parties**, which revolve around a single person, a strong leader, who brings together different voters and interest groups.
- **Clientelism parties**, which are based on a political culture where relationships are created through the exchange of goods or services between politicians and voter as their 'clients'. In exchange for loyalty, particular individuals or groups receive gifts that the politician has at their disposal from the national treasury.

One could also add in this context parties that become increasingly managerial rather than a force to change when they end up in parliament and/or in government. Or parties that develop into a campaign machine that is only activated prior to the elections, but which are unable to formulate any new policy between elections that would develop society and is anchored in the society in which it operates.

A programmatic party is a party that engages with the electorate primarily as a political alternative. The voters vote for the party because they like its policy platform and the concrete policies it presents. A programmatic party is a party that has:

- A set of policies which together constitute a structured and stable policy platform that the electorate is familiar with and can make up their mind about.
- An internal consensus on a number of policy positions and stands.
- A realistic opportunity to deliver on at least some of the key points in its policy platform.

In practice, however, it may be difficult to draw clear lines between parties based on simple categorisations. Often parties have components from several of these categories. A party can be programmatic but still have a kind of personality cult surrounding its leader. Another party can be ethnically based and also reasonably good at developing new policy. The important thing is that most parties fall mainly into one of these categories. These categories can also help a party to analyse its own structure and its own way of addressing the electorate and help it develop in the direction that its members want.

Why, then, is it particularly important for a party to be able to deliver concrete policies and clear policy platforms? A programmatic party is just better at representing the voters and the various groups of society. It can convey their

needs, their world views, formulate their demands and wants, and then turn them into concrete policies. It is also easier for voters to make demands of and hold programmatic parties to account because it is easy to measure and evaluate whether or not the party and its representatives have pursued the policies that they promised they would pursue. The research also shows that these parties are more likely to deliver positive societal development than other types of parties.

Parties that are unable to develop and present clear policies, and to build processes into how the party functions which ensure that its policies keep being debated, reviewed and reformed, these parties risk becoming part of the problem instead of an asset to democracy. Parties that give the appearance of being democratic through populist rhetoric but do not have an actual policy platform in practice often do very little to address the social needs of the great majority of the population.

Political parties should strive to promote pluralism in the political system by ensuring that a broad cross-section of opinions is represented and increasing citizen participation, thereby giving legitimacy to the system as a whole. Programmatic parties are better at doing this than other types of parties.

Politics is a never-ending process

Before we go on to discuss how a party can work to build its capacity to produce policies and policy platforms, we need to make three distinctions. The first distinction concerns the difference between a programmatic political party and a programmatic party system.

In almost all countries in the world, there are one or more parties whose work is based on being programmatic. Very often it is in fact social democratic parties that take on that role.

But if most of the parties in its environment are clientelism parties for example, there is a great risk that even the programmatic party will ultimately fail to maintain its programmatic core and instead be drawn into a clientelism way of thinking. Only when programmatic policy is generally regarded in the system as the primary method for conducting party politics can the wider party system be characterised as programmatic.

The second distinction is between a party that has a policy platform and concrete policies and a party in which there is an ongoing, never-ending process that discusses, revises and makes new policies. Most parties can write a policy platform. But for a party that wants to be a vital force for change in a society, that is not enough. A party that is unable to rapidly renew itself, and to respond to citizens' demands on their society even in times of significant

change, will become more rigid and less relevant over time.

The third distinction concerns the different ways in which programmatic parties make their policies. Some have more inclusive and participatory processes that clearly involve the members and the voters in general, while others are more centrally controlled with less inclusive decision-making processes. A party may be programmatic in principle, even though it does not have a democratic structure, and even if everything suggests that the policies in such a party are less likely to appeal to the voters, or, for that matter, to contribute to a democratic society.



THE BRITISH LABOUR PARTY IN THE 1997 ELECTIONS – AN EXAMPLE OF WHEN A PARTY ADDRESSES THE ELECTORATE WITH CLEAR POLICIES

Ahead of the British election campaign in 1997, the Labour Party launched a manifesto with a long list of very concrete policies. In total, the party promised 229 different changes if the voters gave them the majority. At that time, the Labour Party had been in opposition for 18 years, after Margaret Thatcher won government in the 1979 elections and instituted far-reaching neoliberal changes in British society. Throughout all these years, the British right had accused the Labour Party of being left-wing and out-of-date, and under the new party leader Tony Blair, Labour wanted to change that image.

The policies in the manifesto were divided into different subject areas and as part of the election campaign Labour printed pledge cards with five specific pledges:

- Cut class sizes to 30 or under for 5, 6 and 7-year-olds by using money from the assisted places scheme.
- Fast-track punishment for persistent young offenders by halving the time from arrest to sentencing.
- Cut National Health Service (NHS) waiting lists by treating an extra 100,000 patients as a first step by releasing £100,000,000 saved from NHS red tape.
- Get 250,000 under-25s off benefits and into work by using money from a windfall levy on the privatised utilities.
- No rise in income tax rates, cut VAT on heating to 5% and inflation and interest rates as low as possible.

These pledge cards also had the following text: "Keep this card and see that we keep our promises". Labour won an historic, landslide victory in the elections and then won the two following elections as well. Five years later, in 2002, the BBC evaluated Labour's record which showed that Labour had implemented 80 per cent of the policies the party had promised to pursue during their election campaigns. ■

What is policy development?

In order to understand how a party develops policy in practice, it's useful first to distinguish between two different things.

The first is that it's about having a continuous debate on the political situation and on what positions it is best to take and which policies it is best to pursue. It's about internal meetings and voting and decision-making. A democratic, membership-based party must pay particular attention to how its policies and policy platforms are made and updated. This work should be a regular part of the party's internal decision-making processes with its members. At members meetings, Executive meetings and National Conferences – and in the party's interactions with its representatives in elected assemblies and the party office and secretariat organisations where the party is in government.

The second concerns situations in which the party – at the local, regional or national level – needs to initiate a specific process to develop its policy, often in a specific area. The party then often adopts a policy development plan which includes, for example, working parties, consultation groups, study circles, voter outreach dialogue, and so on. Here, too, it is important that the process is open, transparent and encourages the members to actively participate.

The importance of an inclusive process

All experience tells us that the process matters. The better the process is, the more people are involved and the more thorough the party has been in its discussions and in anchoring its policies, the higher the quality of those policies will be. In addition, an inclusive process involving its members and the community in which it operates can:

- Strengthen the party's internal organisation and result in more members being capable of debating its policies. Political discussions are often fascinating and engaging and make it more fun and meaningful to be part of the party.
- Increase the chance that the policies the party proposes are based on real problems and offer real and realistic solutions. The more people involved in the process, the more people can verify that the party's thinking is along the right lines and if that is not the case, to point this out.
- Be the starting point for the party in trying to win support for its policies. If many have been involved in the process, it is more likely that the policies proposed will have many committed and knowledgeable 'ambassadors' out in the community.
- Make the party interesting to the mass media and on social media and through this get the issues that the party wants to address onto the agenda of the public conversation.

- Strengthen the party's networks with other parts of civil society, thereby increasing its knowledge, connections and impact.
- Increase opportunities to include women, young people and minority groups in the party's conversations and debates, thereby making the party a channel for their engagement in the political process and a path to reducing marginalisation.
- Strengthen the capacity of the party's elected representatives and officials to manage a complex legislative process. The party's work internally becomes a training ground for the party to win political power.

A process in three main steps

At the overarching level, policy development is a three-step process:

- 1 Formulate political objectives. What are the political objectives of the party? What areas of society do we want to change?
- 2 Formulate how we want to do this. What is required for this to become possible? What concrete policies is the party proposing? How could these policies be implemented in an efficient and financially responsible way?
- 3 Describe which part of the social apparatus is to be responsible for these changes. Should it be done by the national government and its agencies? Or the municipalities? Should business and industry and civil society contribute? In other words: How will the policy be implemented in practice?

It is also a good idea if the party asks itself some fundamental questions as part of that process. Is it possible to show that the policy is realistic and that there are financial resources to fund it? Is the policy designed with fairness and is it important for a significant portion of the electorate? The policies that are produced should also be weighed up against the party's overall values and vision. Are the concrete policies proposed compatible with the ideology of the party?

In the next chapter, we will study the internal processes for developing policy.



WHAT IS GOOD POLICY?

There is, of course, no general definition that, once and for all, defines what good policy is in all contexts. If it were that simple, there would be no need for political parties and political movements with different ideologies or visions of what society should be like. It is often easy to see differences between the policies of conservative, liberal, green or socialist parties or parties with other ideological foundations.

But this does not mean that we cannot crystallise out some of the features that ought to characterise good policy. And for a social democratic party, it should also be possible to say something about the policy's aims if we are going to define it as "good policy".

In short, good policy ought to:

- Solve a social problem, or preferably several at the same time.
- Help to bring society closer to the party's vision of a good society.
- Be in line with the party's other policies. Parties that present self-contradictory policies will find it difficult to be seen as credible.
- Have a clear goal; if we do this, things will be better for...
- Be comprehensible to a broad majority of the electorate. It should be possible to understand why the policy is being proposed.
- Contain a conflict line – it should be possible to see that things would be different if other parties were allowed to decide on this specific issue.
- Be realistic and feasible, both economically and organisationally.
- Provide some fundamental guidelines on who should implement it and how to implement it. ■



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What is policy? How is it made?
- What role does policy development play? For societies and for political parties?
- To what extent can society be changed?
- What should the policy development of political parties be based on?

- What is meant by democratic policy development?
- How does policy development in more democratic parties differ from policy development in less democratic parties?
- Is policy development in social democratic parties different from policy development in other parties? How is it different?
- How does broad-based, inclusive and democratic policy development lead to more powerful and relevant policy?

- What are the processes of policy development in our own country and in our party?
- Do we have a programmatic party system, and is our party a programmatic party? If yes, how? If not, why?
- What merits and strengths are there in being a programmatic party?
- What are the characteristics of good policy reform or good policy? Can you think of any examples?



Policy development within political parties

Policy and policy development are fundamental to the mission and day-to-day activities of all political parties. Policy development is a continuous process in many different contexts and at many different levels in the party.

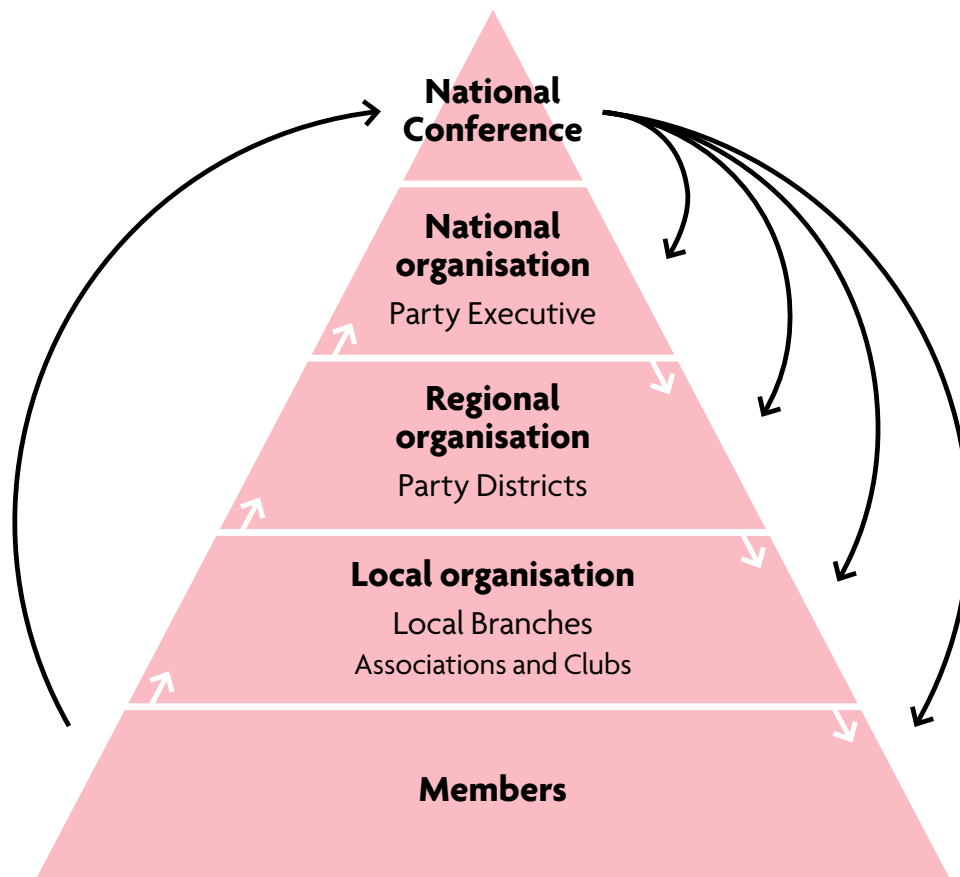
It is when the National Conference decides on a new policy direction, when members present new proposals at members meetings or write motions, when policy working parties are appointed, when internal consultations on various issues are implemented, when the party deals with specific issues in its parliamentary activities, but also in daily discussions in the various groups and meetings of a party.

In order to be successful and remain relevant, parties must maintain an open climate of debate, good internal democratic structures, and a lively debate on its political ideology. In a party that wants to be a broad, popular movement based and democratic party, it is important that the party base – its members and local branches – can take initiatives, be involved and have a clear role in the process of deciding on new policies and a new policy direction.

In the work of developing the party's policy, there is also continuous interaction between the leadership of the party and the members, and between the different

levels of the party. Regardless of how the process starts, it is always important that the issue is brought into the democratic structure laid down by the party's constitution. The basic principle is always that the party as a collective determines its policies.

When it comes to local issues, the party can usually make the decision locally. Here, the party's formal meetings have a central role in the process. The members meetings or annual general meeting (AGM) of the local branch can make decisions on them. But if it is a matter of principle or more regional or national significance, the question is escalated in the party hierarchy. Those who are locally active raise the issue at the annual conference of the regional party organisation and at the National Conference, which is the party's highest decision-making body. Read more about the decision-making structures and internal democratic processes of political parties in the second module of the introductory course "Holding Elections and Reaching Decisions".



The picture describes the different levels of the party, from the members and upwards. The arrow to the left shows the direct influence of members on the National Conference. The arrows on the right show that all levels must follow the decisions of the National Conference. The arrows inside the triangle reflect the flow of power from the bottom to the top in a federal organisation. The local level of the organisation is often different in different countries. Sometimes it is geographically based, sometimes it is based on other models such as numbers of members. In Sweden, the local branch (*arbetarekommun*) is geographically based (corresponding to one of Sweden's 290 local municipalities) and in turn made up of Social Democrat associations and clubs, which form the base level of the party's organisation.

FACTS

PARTY POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN ELECTED ASSEMBLIES AND IN GOVERNMENT

Much of what we are studying here concerns policy development internally within a party organisation. But a significant portion of a party's day-to-day decision-making and policy development takes place in the work of the local, regional and national parliamentary assemblies in which the party has representatives. The same applies to the party's elected representatives in power in local, regional and national governments, where a whole range of issues and initiatives need to be implemented in the role of government.

In both cases, but particularly when the party is in government, considerable resources are also available for policy development. These include secretariats, officials and an administration that can collect data and appoint investigators to assist in formulating government bills and making decisions that will govern the country or the municipality.

There is also considerable pressure from the community at large in relation to complex issues and decisions that need to be dealt

with, and you need to be able to act quickly in order to function in these roles. These groups also have a looser connection with the formal decision-making hierarchy in the party. While the party members have chosen them as their representatives, they also have their mandate from the voters by being elected to the parliament or elected to govern directly, and the voters are a much broader group than the party members.

It is each level's annual conference or AGM that has given the representatives in parliaments the authority to make political decisions on behalf of the party. The parliamentary party groups and elected representatives at different levels have an obligation to report regularly on their work to the party organisation at the same level, and to raise policy issues of principal on a regular basis. This means that you need to stay within the bounds of the policy that the party has decided on, and if suggestions or questions arise that are deemed to fall outside of this, they need to be first anchored in the party. Here, as in other cases, it is always the party that ultimately determines its policy.

The party leadership's role in policy development

Often the initiative to formulate and develop new policy comes from the party leadership at different levels in the party. This is natural since the national, regional and local party Executives and their main representatives are directly elected by the National Conference or the AGM – by the members – and they are accountable to the members.

They are appointed to represent the party organisation and have thus been given the right to speak for the members and to make certain decisions on behalf of the members. They have a special role as the highest decision-making body in the party organisation between National Conferences and AGMs or members meetings if the Executive is at the local level. In this role, it is important that they take responsibility for giving concrete expression to the objectives and stands that have been decided and are found in the National Conference's or AGM's policy guidelines.

Their task includes being visionary and pursuing policy development, and providing political leadership for the party organisation they lead. The Executive is to keep itself well informed about political trends in the country, region or municipality, as well as the debate in other sections of the party. This enables the Executive to regularly formulate strategy for its level of the party organisation, as well as its priorities and activities in general, and determine how to involve the members in these discussions and decisions.

The broad guidelines on policy priorities are decided at National Conferences and AGMs. It is the responsibility of the political leadership to ensure these decisions are implemented. In addition, new questions will always arise between National Conferences and AGMs – or between members meetings at the local level – which will require a position to be taken on them rapidly. And often there is no time for these meetings to be convened before the matter has to be decided, or the questions are not of such a crucial nature that convening a meeting is necessary. This is when the Executive and party leadership must determine the policy line for the party organisation. There is however an obligation to report regularly on this work to the party organisation being represented, and to raise policy issues of principle on a regular basis. This means that you need to stay within the policy framework decided by the party. If proposals or questions arise that are deemed to fall outside of this framework, they will

need to be anchored in the party organisation and among the members.

The need for proactive policy development

There is always a risk that as a political party that you get stuck in the present. That everyday political problems and questions take up all of the available time and all the political debate in the party. However, in order to be successful and relevant, parties must also work proactively to create the conditions for the party to be able to stay ahead of the game and develop practical policies on the issues that are important in societal development. The party leadership has the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that the party is able to maintain an open climate for debate, good internal and democratic structures, and a dynamic exchange of political ideas and opinions.

It also has an important role to play in evaluating and analysing changes in society and evaluating whether these changes mean a need to reform party policy. Is the global economy heading into a crisis? Is the housing market becoming overheated? Is congestion through the local town centre getting close to being unacceptable? Are results in local schools declining?

New policy might be needed in a completely new area, or an area that has already been discussed, but where party policy is too weak or outdated. Voter confidence in the party's policies might also have begun to wane. This might mean identifying and prioritising different areas, initiating talks and proposing policy, working parties or announcing consultations to discuss whether the party's policy needs to be reformed.

Generally speaking, policy development or a specific policy area will often not be considered a crucial part of the party's work unless the party leadership gets involved in the process and emphasises its importance.

It's wise for the party leadership at different levels to decide and clearly communicate how the different parts of the party are to be involved in developing the policy, and that it is desirable that as many parts of the party as possible are involved in this work. Such a decision provides clear guidance and removes any misconceptions that might arise about whether the party leadership appreciates initiatives from below. This is about the party leadership needing to support the process, but also being able to take a step backwards so that novel thoughts and ideas can be aired. A party leadership that shows in word and deed that they do not have all the answers also shows that there is potential for policy development and thus encourages debate and conversations on new policy solutions.



THE SWEDISH SOCIAL DEMOCRATS' WORK ON THE SCHOOLS ISSUE

In the 2006 elections, the Swedish Social Democrats lost power in the national government to a coalition of liberal and right-wing parties. As part of the process of analysing why the voters had chosen other parties, the Social Democratic Party conducted opinion polls which showed that the party enjoyed very little credibility when it came to education. This was an area that had become increasingly important in the eyes of the electorate in those years. The party then identified these issues as priority issues and started a process with the aim of changing that image.

Firstly, staff with a great deal of knowledge about education issues in particular were recruited to the national party secretariat and they were given the task of assisting the party and its representatives in the reformation of the party's policy in the field.

Secondly, the party gathered facts and the opinions of public servants within the government and government agencies who were working with schools. Social democracy thus signalled to the entire education sector the following: We are now reviewing our schools policy; come and get involved and give us your input on what can and should be done.

Just the fact that the party initiated this process generated positive waves in the education sector. The party became a force to be reckoned with in a different way than before.

The next step was to bring together politicians responsible for schools and education from Sweden's municipalities. In Sweden, this was done by establishing an annual schools policy day, which was held in the premises of the national parliament. At this event, national and local politicians could share experiences and discuss new ideas. Working parties were also appointed that involved national politicians and specially selected local government politicians along with experts from the research and higher education sectors.

Finally, the party leadership included the schools issue in all the important documents and policy platforms to be taken up at the National Conference, and gained support for the reorientation of its priorities and concrete policies within the party structure.

In development work of this nature, a quick fix is not an option. There is no magic wand you can wave to rapidly resolve the gaps in the party's policy that have been identified. The party leadership can give direction, initiate a process and ensure that it is brought to a successful conclusion. This is how a new direction and concrete new policies can be modelled and presented. ■

The party leadership's resources for policy development

The capacity and resources for formulating and developing new policy vary between political parties, as well as between different parts and levels of a party. Some parties are small and have limited resources to spend on internal working parties, investigations and the formulation of policy beyond what the members can provide in terms of time and energy.

The same applies within the party, where some levels and geographical areas will have more staff and more resources than others. At the local branch level, the focus often needs to be on involving the members, taking advantage of national and regional resources, interacting with other organisations, and the public offices and administrations in which the party is represented

Party secretariats, policy experts and special investigation resources

At the national level, the Party Executive and its leaders often have a party secretariat with skilled party officers and officials with specialist knowledge of the party's policy in different areas. In addition, there is usually a secretariat for the party's parliamentary work with policy secretaries and experts in various policy areas. They have deep knowledge and a broad overview of policy development within their respective areas.

In some parties there may also be special investigators whose sole task is to assist the party leadership in policy development within different areas or areas that span several policy areas. In parties with considerable resources, they may also be part of an analysis unit that can coordinate and be responsible for the planning and implementation of development processes. In addition to the guidelines from the party's leadership and inputs from the party organisation, these often take into account a number of factors in policy development, such as the analysis of external environment factors such as broad social trends, changes in the conditions underlying policy on concrete issues, the policy positions and manoeuvring of political opponents, and not least the state of public opinion.

Opinion polls

An important part of a party's work in developing policy is to track and evaluate citizens' opinions and shifts in public opinion on various political issues. Political parties exist so that the electorate can make their wishes a reality. In order for a party to remain relevant and successful, it is essential that its policies are consistent with the world view, stands and priorities of the voters and of the times.

In political debate, it is often said that many parties allow their policies to be guided too much by opinion polls. That may well be the case. Political parties that reduce themselves to this kind of role – measuring where

public opinion is heading and then moving in the same direction – these parties lack both soul and heart and are rarely long-lived. Adapting to public opinion must have boundaries. Political parties have other fundamental aims and tasks – such as implementing their visions for society and advocating for their ideological standpoints.

But opinion polls can also be used to identify areas where the party needs to improve. If the results show that the party has low credibility on any important issue, it is a sign that new policy is needed, and maybe even a new focus on this area. What exactly that reshaping will look like is a later question, where the party's own values and broader policy direction must play the decisive role. The most important thing is to maintain a pragmatic attitude to opinion polls – to see them as a tool for keeping up to date with the mood of the electorate, but also to stay grounded so that you do not become too controlled by them. Opinions and standpoints can change, sometimes rapidly, and in this context political parties have a special role as community leaders.

In parties, and in local branches, that have more limited resources, opinion polls are rarely possible. In these contexts, it is important to maximise your other contacts with voters by being present and transparent and to listen at outreach events, through canvassing, and at public meetings. By having many conversations with many people. These conversations often give a good picture of what people think and value. You can also conduct your own simple online surveys or take advantage of other organisations' survey results in many different areas.

Policy working parties

To get a general picture, increase knowledge, and to acquire skills and expertise and specific resources in policy development, it may sometimes be useful to appoint policy working parties. These can produce trend analyses, review practical considerations and needs, and present concrete proposals in an area of policy. This can be done at all levels of a political party, addressing local, regional, national and international issues.

How should a working party be appointed and how should it work? To answer that question, a number of questions need to be answered first.

- 1 What is the working party's focus? What is the policy issue that the working party is to work on? And what is its goal? Should the working party write a report? Or proposal for a policy platform to be adopted?
- 2 How will the working party be managed? Often a secretary and a chair are appointed to lead the working party, where the secretary works on writing texts and proposals that the working party discusses.
- 3 Should the working party start a broader discussion in the party or externally? Often, it is the job of a working party to listen to what the 'movement' thinks and to gather views from a variety of different organisational levels and across the network that surrounds the party.
- 4 What should the composition of the working party be? A working party often consists of the party's leading representatives in the area (at the level of the party concerned in the individual case), internal and external experts, researchers and the like, and representatives of the members.
- 5 What should be done with the working party's results after it disbands? As with all policy development, it is important that those involved in the process feel that their work is taken seriously and leads to concrete change.

Policy working parties have great advantages, since they can limit their work both in terms of focus and time. The working party often includes internal and external consultation and communication campaigns, which means that the party can receive external input, start advocacy within the area and garner support for the policy internally. The work can be combined with consultation rounds and specific study circles in the party organisation, which can help to ensure that the policy presented for decision is well thought out and realistic.

But it is important that the responsible politicians approach working parties and analysts with an open mind. If the attitude is that the party leadership is going to show that the party's policy is already the best possible, or that the party leadership in its infinite wisdom has already thought through all the problems that may arise, this work will quickly become meaningless.

Working proactively and strategically with policy development locally

Good ideas, arguments and visions are important, but easily become meaningless if they cannot be transformed into concrete policy. This applies at all levels of the political system. At the local level, it can sometimes be difficult to connect the grand visions of the party with the daily grind of political work, while politicians can also easily get caught up in the steady stream of practical issues that need to be resolved quickly.

It is therefore important for the local branch leadership to work proactively with local policy development. So that a disconnect between vision and reality does not arise, so that they don't become managerial, and so that they remain relevant and transparent.

On the flip side, there are unique opportunities at the local branch level. The party at this level is close to its constituents and the practical issues that politics is all about, and they have access to the members in the local branch.

The work of developing party policy always starts with deciding and actively planning for this. Policy development is a goal that requires a strategy, a method and a model for assessing whether the objectives have been achieved. It's the same as for any organisational work, but different because it goes to the very heart of the party: finding methods that drive societal development in the right direction.



1. Do a SWOT analysis

One way to start is for the local Party Executive, along with the members, to do a local SWOT analysis. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and a SWOT analysis is done by organisations and companies in order to better understand where they are today, where they need to improve, and how they can best do that.

Call the members to a meeting. Ensure that elected representatives from the local parliament are present and don't forget to include trade union representatives and representatives from the party's affiliated organisations such as the party's youth and women leagues. You can alter-

nate between conducting the debate in the group as a whole and in small groups. You can start by simply selecting one specific policy area to analyse further and start making a plan for it. You may otherwise need to first decide on which area to work with, based on questions such as:

- In which areas do we need to develop our policy locally to increase confidence in our party among citizens and to win the next elections?
- Which policy areas do we ourselves think are weak at the local level, and why are we weak in these areas in particular? Do our constituents think that we are weak in these areas?
- If the answer is that the voters feel we are missing something in our policies, why is that so?
- What policy areas do we need to improve on when it comes to concrete policies locally? Schools? Traffic and infrastructure? Child care? Housing? Aged care?

Once you have decided which policy area to drill down into, do a SWOT analysis step by step:

- 1 What specific strengths do we have in the policy area?
- 2 What specific weaknesses do we have?
- 3 What concrete opportunities do we see?
- 4 What concrete threats do we see in this policy area?
- 5 Concluding discussion: Overall conclusions, in which direction to develop our policy in this area.

2. Plan and implement

You have now started to identify the problem and the objectives, that is, which direction the party should develop its policy in a particular area. The next question is how this should be done and moved forward in practice? First of all, you need to further clarify what needs to be done. What are the objectives of this particular policy development project? What is it intended to deliver? What is its intended output? These should be SMART, i.e. Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound.

The next step will be the concrete planning. When should this work be done and when should it be complete? What methods can you use to develop your policy in the specific area? This module contains several examples of methods you can use. Most likely you have many thoughts and ideas of your own. The following are some questions which might be helpful in this part of the process:

Who is actually going to work with the project in practical terms?

You probably need to appoint a working party to lead the practical work of moving the process from the planning stage, through implementation and achieving the project's objectives. This working party should meet on a regular basis, gather data and analyse it, maintain a dialogue with the party leadership and the members, conduct interviews and make study visits, and finally draft formulations for new or reformed policy.

For example, the working party might consist of:

- Leading local elected representatives from the party with responsibility for the issues that the project concerns, or related areas.
- Experts in the field. These experts do not have to be party members – but they should preferably share the party's core values and general outlook on society.
- Members affected by the field.
- Representatives of other organisations, the private sector or civil society who can provide important input to the process.

Someone needs to be appointed as chair and someone as secretary in the working party. The secretary is the person who documents the background to the policy as the process nears its end, and takes care of much of the practical work in the working party.

In what ways should the members be engaged?

The most natural thing is to use members meetings or to hold special themed meetings in the area, but members can also be invited to participate in a study circle, or a thematic working day where the subject is discussed with experts and elected representatives. Also note that meetings do not have to be held behind closed doors with everyone sitting still around a table.

A meeting can also be members going on a study visit, meeting other groups, or acquiring knowledge and inspiration in other ways. Meet with school principals and teachers if the issue is to do with education. Visit intersections, roundabouts and car parks if the issue is to do with traffic.

How should citizens be engaged?

If you engage citizens from the very start of the policy development process, it generates confidence and gets their attention, and your policy will be better since it will already have been tested with voters in this phase.

This can be done in a number of different ways. Invite them to public, themed meetings. Visit workplaces, libraries, business centres and the like. Talk to people in local residential areas by door-knocking. Do this at an early stage so that their thoughts and ideas get used in the analysis phase. This also provides an opportunity to communicate to them that the party has listened to them when the party subsequently presents its new or updated policies.

How do you reach out to those affected by the policy area?

Go on study visits, hold meetings, or establish contacts with the media to get the media to report on your project. If you succeed in doing this, you will reach many people who are active in the policy area in question. This can lead to spontaneous contacts and suggestions that are valuable in this work.

How can you include groups that are not normally heard in politics?

Take a moment to plan in specific conversations and meetings that have the aim of including people and voices who would generally find it difficult to be heard in the party's policy development processes. Such groups might include women and ethnic minorities and other minority groups. Inclusion does not happen by itself.

What is the role of the leadership?

The political leadership plays an important role provided that they do not assume that they already have all the answers. A political leadership that listens, that shows that they are open to new ideas and input, is essential in this kind of process. The local Party Executive appoints the working party and is the dialogue partner for the working party and its chair – while the policy development is being done as well as prior to reporting the final results, at which point the Party Executive brings the work into party's formal democratic decision-making process. A constructive Party Executive can assist by opening doors, providing resources, and involving the party organisation.

3. Decision-making

When the work of the working party is finished, when all the discussions, analyses and meetings have been completed and – hopefully – led to a series of new policies to present – the results should be reviewed and examined by the members at a decision-making meeting. If they like the policy, it should then be incorporated into the party's local policies and policy platform. Make sure that you show clearly and transparently how the process led to the change. Half the point will be missed if the party does its democratic homework and reforms its policy without anyone noticing.

4. Evaluate

The final step in the process is to evaluate the new policy. Did we achieve our goals? Did we develop new policy? Did we engage the party organisation and did we contribute to democracy as a result? An evaluation will be invaluable to the next policy development project. The Party Executive has a particular responsibility here to make this happen.

5. Just do it!

No, sorry. There is one more step. Getting started!



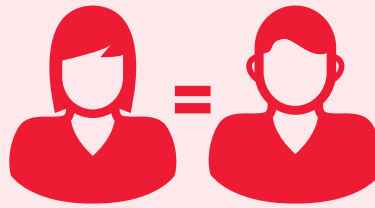
WHY GENDER EQUALITY PLAYS A ROLE IN A PARTY'S POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Ensuring a genuine representation of the views, interests and needs of all citizens – both women and men – is essential for political parties to function effectively and for their representativeness.

Failure to do so undermines the legitimacy of the party, and ultimately the entire political system. There are also consequences for the party's policy direction if half the population were not involved in developing it. Women have their own experiences and needs which would not be heard. This not only affects women, but the entire political system, and would lead to valuable knowledge, ideas and perspectives being lost. The outcome would be less democratic and policy development less competent.

All over the world, parties of different political persuasions have adopted goals to increase women's participation in and influence in policy decisions. One of the most important indicators of a party's commitment to gender equality is the number of women in its leadership, the initiatives it takes to increase women's presence and influence in different areas of political decision-making, and the extent to which it strives for a gender perspective in its policies and activities. Parties in many different countries have gradually adopted more measures to create a more supportive internal party environment for women. Evidence from these examples often suggests that political parties that take their gender equality commitments seriously have stronger connections with their voters and with new voter groups and that their standing within the electorate grows stronger over time. However, although the documents that govern many political parties and their policies include commitments related to gender equality, they rarely contain strategic measures to effectively implement these commitments.

One factor in creating more gender-equal policies is to ensure equal representation. A social democratic party should strive for an equal gender distri-



bution as far as possible among its members and elected representatives, and methods and tips abound for increasing gender equality in a party that has not yet achieved this. In this module, we focus on the process of policy development and it is easy to conclude that parties that do not have gender equality at all levels run a greater risk of gender equality being lost in their policy development.

Here are some tips for steps the party can take to strengthen gender equality in its policy development:

- Set up a working party whose task is to evaluate the party's policy from the gender equality perspective and to draw up work plans and policy documents that the party can subsequently adopt. A working party of this nature, for example, can consist of leading experts in gender equality, and representatives of the members and different levels of the party. It is also important, however, that the party leadership at the same level as the working party gives the working party legitimacy by having someone from the party leadership in this group.
- Carry out a survey and list what can be done in the short and medium term to increase gender equality. A survey of this nature can be usefully divided into two areas. One of these should be about what the party can do internally, in its own work and its own organisation, and the other should be about what the party can do in the form of policy.
- Make sure that the texts, platforms and policies that come out of this

work are formulated and decided on just like other policy areas, so that after extensive discussion they formally become part of the party's regular activities and policies. This increases the likelihood that everyone in the party will take them seriously and that real change will be enabled.

Even locally, there is a lot that can be done to strengthen the gender equality perspective. One way is to analyse all the policies that the party is working on locally and ask: What would that policy look like if viewed through the lens of gender equality?

Here are some areas that this kind of analysis could focus on:

Pay: What is the human resources policy in our municipality – are there discriminatory differences in pay and conditions?

Women's health: How much focus is there on women's health? Is there a difference between men and women regarding the content and extent of care services?

Elderly care: Do single men and women receive the same levels of support and attention?

Education: Do boys get more attention and time than girls? How do schools work with gender equality – at all levels from pre-school onward?

After school hours: Does the municipality give more resources to what are traditionally boys' activities than to girls' activities?

Abuse: How do we take care of abused women and how do we help the women concerned? Do women have a safe place to go?

There are examples and tips on how a party can work at the local, regional and national level to develop new policy under a number of headings in this module. The party has much to gain, not least in relation to the electorate, from making gender equality and gender issues an area for policy development. ■

Engaging the members is fundamental

People who join political parties do so primarily because they want to be involved in creating change and making their society better. For most people, this is about everyday challenges that they themselves or their friends and neighbours and their local area are facing. That is why the local level of the party is crucial. It is in this domain, and between elections, where the party can make contact with reality and voters are won.

In a social democratic party, a party that aims to be a broad-based, democratic and popular movement party, it is important that the party base – the members in the party’s local branches – is engaged and has a clear role in the process of formulating and developing new policy. The party’s organisation and constitution are based on this: that the party has a federal structure, that its power derives from the members and moves upward in the organisation. This means that a new policy direction or standpoint and new policy affecting the party’s policy direction need to have the support of the members. At the local branch level, this happens through decisions made at members meetings and AGMs, and at the annual conferences at the other levels of the organisation through decisions made by representatives directly elected by the members. Even on policy issues that do not directly mean a new interpretation of the party’s policy or new political positions on practical matters, the executives need to report back on a regular basis to the elected representatives at each level. This is to ensure that the members remain informed about on going decision-making processes. In truly democratic parties, party membership is the ultimate political authority.

Support from the members and referral procedures

A lively political conversation in the party cannot just involve the party’s leadership at the different levels or just its decision-making meetings and annual conferences. The whole party organisation needs to be involved. At the local branch level of the party in particular, there should be debates on local, regional and national policy.

One way of maintaining a lively conversation and ensuring support for policies among the members is to regularly consult with the party organisation at all levels. The local, regional or national leadership write a document describing a current issue and proposed policy direction. This document is then referred for comment to the party’s local branches, associations and clubs, and affiliated organisations, allowing the members to submit their views on the analysis and proposed policy direction.

For a democratic party, the members are always its most important asset, but all too often their role is merely as campaign workers. They are expected to argue and agitate for the party’s policies and to engage with the voters and encourage them to vote for the party. But the members can and should also be used more at the other end of the long process of developing party policy. An ongoing conversation and exchange of ideas can be achieved through engaging and motivating members meetings or themed policy days, using study circles and courses, special policy development projects and consultation groups.

With today’s technology, there is no limit to how member input can be obtained, and digital tools, networks and groups offer great opportunities to facilitate and increase engagement and participation among the members.

A party that is silent and restricts debate, where the members do not feel included and feel that they have to adapt their own opinions to guidelines from above, will never become a broad-based and dynamic party. A party like this will find it difficult to develop and reform its policies when trends in society change rapidly.





TIPS ON INCREASING MEMBERS PARTICIPATION AT PARTY MEETINGS

Often a large number of different meetings are held in a party. There are easy ways to increase member participation in discussions and thus boost creativity and meeting democracy so that more ideas and more members get heard. Even those who are reluctant to speak their minds can participate actively in smaller groups, and the meetings become more fun and more engaging. Even at more formal meetings, these kinds of elements and methods can be added to increase debate and boost engagement.



Conversations two by two

Present an issue and let the participants first talk two by two around this issue. For example, if the meeting is about traffic issues, let the members discuss what are the biggest traffic problems in their immediate vicinity. Let them write up their findings on a common flipchart/whiteboard. Then everyone has the opportunity to tell the whole meeting what they have arrived at before the discussion is moved forward and concluded. Make sure that everyone gets to have their say, so that the same men as usual don't take up all the space in the discussions.



Discussion in smaller groups

Use the same approach with themes and issues as in the first example, but let the participants discuss in small groups (3–5 people). Here, different issues can be discussed in different groups, and once they have presented their thoughts, the whole group can be involved in and conclude the discussion. Don't forget to mix up the groups if there are several group discussions so that as many people as possible have time to talk to each other.



Let everyone have their say

If there are not too many people at the meeting, it might be useful to let everyone in turn say what they think on a particular issue. The advantage of this is that no views will be left out because an individual finds it difficult to take the floor. The method is also a good "temperature gauge" if the issue is controversial or sensitive and it is important to sound out the whole group's attitude.



Open Space and World Café – methods for larger meetings

For larger meetings, you could use slightly longer process and workshop methods to structure and conduct active participation sessions. Organise a themed day in some area. National Conferences and AGMs are also meeting places that can be used for more than just reaching decisions in the formal process. They can become creative gatherings that generate thoughts and ideas that lead to new policy in the future by adding in side activities.

Set aside a few hours when the delegates or members have the opportunity to discuss and exchange ideas in smaller groups around one or more future policy themes that are not too close to the issues that will be debated in full session. These kinds of discussions can contribute to a more nuanced policy in the long term.

Open Space is a method that works well at the beginning of a change process when 'all cards are on the table' and it promotes active participation and collaborative problem-solving. The method requires a meeting with quite a lot of participants and often means that the meeting is split up into groups. It is also good if the meeting can be a little longer than the usual length of an evening meeting. If there are big issues to deal with and a more extensive development process, the meeting should be over a full day.

World Café is another simple yet powerful method to facilitate meaningful conversations that are driven entirely by the participants themselves and the topics that are relevant and important to them. The facilitators create a café space and provide simple guidelines. Participants then self-organise and explore a set of relevant topics or questions for the conversation.

For these methods to work, those who arrange them must be prepared to relinquish control. There should always be a process leader who sets the framework for the meeting, but the content is determined by the participants, who must therefore take greater responsibility for the meeting and its outcome. Read more about these methods and their different steps in the course study guide. ■

WRITING MOTIONS

As a party member you always have the right to move motions on policy at to the National Conference and to the AGMs of the local branch. Such proposals are called 'motions'. Before it reaches the National Conference, a motion needs to pass the other levels of the party organisation. This means that it should first and foremost be submitted to the local branch. The local branch then considers the motion at an AGM or a members meeting at which everyone can express their opinion on what it proposes. If the meeting votes in favour of the motion, the entire local branch then stands behind the proposals in the motion and passes the motion on to the annual District Conference. If the District Conference votes in favour of the motion, the whole regional organisation then stands behind the motion and it is sent to the National Conference. If the majority vote against the motion at the local or regional level, there are two options, depending on how the party chooses to organise the process. When a motion is not passed in the local branch or regional party organisation, it can mean the end of the motion. It is not passed on to the national level. But the party can also choose a model whereby the motion is passed on upwards in the party organisation as the mover's own individual motion.

The first thing you should ask when sitting down to write a motion is: What do you want to achieve with it? If your answer to that question is unclear, the motion will also be perceived as unclear. So be sure to answer this question before you start writing. It's a good idea to base your motion on your own personal experience. How you perceive reality to be is always a good starting point for a political discussion. But you should also bear in mind that political organisations can rarely take on your personal problems or individual issues. A political party solves problems at the society level.

You might also think about whether there are more people in your local branch who might like to sign the motion. If more than one person signs a motion, this demonstrates that the problem you are raising it's affecting more than just you.

A good motion has a clear formulation of the problem and is clear about what decision you are proposing. It usually has three parts.

1. The title

This briefly summarises what your motion is about. For example: "Motion concerning changes to the school curriculum in the municipality".

2. The text

This is where you explain what problem your motion is about, why it is important to solve that particular problem, and why your solution is the best one. Remember to be brief and concise. It's all too easy for the text to become overly long and for the arguments to be academic and complicated. Be as straightforward as possible. A better place for in-depth arguments and information about the subject matter is in the discussion of your motion.

3. That clauses

A that clause is a proposal for a decision. This is where you formulate in concrete terms what you want to achieve. Be especially clear here. The meeting must understand what you are proposing. It is good to divide your motion into several that clauses if it's about more than one concrete proposal. It will be easier if the meeting can make a decision on each proposal separately. Similarly, it is helpful if your proposal includes a that clause which describes what you think should happen to your motion after the meeting has made its decision. For example: "That the meeting sends the motion on to the National Conference", or "That the local branch pursues the issue in the local parliament".

An example of a motion that was written and moved at the Swedish Social Democrats' National Conference in 2019. The subject matter is Swedish, but it is the form of the motion, the way it is written, which is the crucial thing here:

Motion for the improvement of public health – preventive health hour for everyone

We are facing an increasing public health challenge. More people need to exercise more. In order to make this happen, we need to ensure that everyone has both the opportunities and a structure that encourages them to do so. One obstacle for many people is the unpredictability of the daily grind such as getting children to and from school/pre-school and other things that must be done in everyday life. Therefore, many employers, often after negotiations with the trade union, have introduced the option of exercise one hour per week in paid working hours. There are a number of studies that have shown that this has had positive effects.

On the other hand, far from everyone has the right to a preventive health hour like this today. In a study conducted by the union ST, it became clear that about half of the respondents were entitled to a preventive health hour. Being able to maintain good health should not be dependent on your employer.

That is why we ought to legislate the right to a weekly preventive health hour for all workers.

We move:

1. That the Social Democrats work for the introduction of legislation that would give all workers the right to one preventive health hour per week.

2. That Kungsholmen Social Democratic Club and thereafter the Stockholm County Party District adopt the motion as their own and convey it to the Social Democratic Party's National Conference in 2019.

The motion was adopted as its own by the Kungsholmen Social Democratic Club's members meeting.

Motions from members

The most concrete and usual way for a member who wants influence the party is to write a motion and submit it to the members of their local branch – or AGM. A motion is another word for a proposal, which is formulated and drafted in a way that allows a democratic meeting to take a stand on a specific proposal. For most people, it is not obvious how the system of writing and discussing motions works and it might therefore be a good idea in some instances to educate the members in how to do this.

Often, the local branch leadership of the party also needs to remain attuned to when a member – perhaps in a general political debate or a discussion where members merely express their views loosely – actually puts forward a proposal that could become a motion and thus become part of party policy. Prompting them to ‘write a motion about it!’ can be enough to motivate the member to take that next step.

Before the AGM, it may also be worth holding a meeting at which the members get a chance to discuss together what motions ought to be written this time. What questions should we be asking? Have we discussed something during the year that could become new concrete policy? And then the meeting can support members to sit down and write a motion on the spot.

Members ballots

The most common method for reaching decisions on party policy is to add the issue in question into the hierarchical, democratic party structure. However, this structure can sometimes be perceived as cumbersome and somewhat unwieldy. Members may feel that they cannot have a direct influence. In order to avoid this feeling growing, on issues of particular importance, the party can hold a member ballot. This allows the members to decide the issue in the same way as citizens in a referendum.

A members ballot outside of a formal decision-making meeting ought to be grounded in the party’s constitution, both in terms of the decision’s status and how it is implemented, and a balance needs to be struck with the basic democratic decision-making process.

This also requires that the party leadership does preparations for the ballot and provides solid information to the members. It might be appropriate to arrange a study circle on the issue or to produce a different kind of material for the discussion before the ballot. Members of the party leadership can then travel round to the party meetings themselves and argue for the motion and discuss it with the members. The ballot itself must be planned and carried out so that there is no discussion about its validity. If handled in this way, a members ballot can strengthen the feeling that all members of the party are of equal value and facilitate active participation in the party.



POLICY DEVELOPMENT IN THE UK'S LABOUR PARTY

The Labour Party in the UK has created what they call their National Policy Forum (NPF). It is a body of 200 representatives from all parts of the Labour Party and its task is to develop new policies for the Party. The NPF is divided into eight policy commissions, each covering a policy area:

- Economy, Business & Trade
- International
- Health & Social Care
- Early Years, Education & Skills
- Justice & Home Affairs
- Housing, Local Government & Transport
- Work, Pensions & Equality
- Environment, Energy, & Culture

Between each Annual Conference, the policy commissions develop detailed positions on the party’s policies. These are then sent out for comment to the party organisation, and the submissions received are incorporated into the document that is then presented to the Annual Conference.

The Labour Party’s work to strengthen the policy development process aims to include the members, local branches, trade unions, the party’s elected representatives at various levels, but also the broader society outside the party. The members and people who share the party’s values can participate and interact with the party’s policy development processes through the National Policy Forum’s website. It’s the party’s “online home of policy development and ideas”. On this website you can:

- Submit your own policy ideas to Labour’s policy making process
- Make comments on other submissions and join policy discussions with others
- Find and respond to consultation documents published by Labour’s policy body, the National Policy Forum (NPF)
- Receive updates on the ongoing work of the NPF
- Search for policy updates, find consultation events in your area, access training webinars and discover new online content

Read more at www.policyforum.labour.org.uk.



Consultations and policy development projects with the members

If the party is faced with a particularly important choice on policy direction, it can let the members discuss the matter in a special consultation group conference, or internal consultation process in several steps, and develop a position. This might be a question that is of great importance in principle for the ideological direction of the party or an issue that is highly charged and controversial. It can also be used to inject energy and new input into the party organisation's more forward-looking policy development work.

The basic idea is to allow the members to come together to discuss problems and solutions in an open and open-minded way, so as to move step-by-step towards taking a position on the issue. Ultimately, it is important that the issue is brought into the ordinary, constitutional decision-making structure, but the way there can be very different in a consultation group conference of this kind.

As a rule, a consultation group conference or process is well prepared and organised as a clearly structured dialogue. The party often produces a discussion paper with facts and arguments for and against different alternatives. This is sent out to the different parts and levels of the party organisation. Special members meetings and themed days can be organised, study circles can be held, and there are also a range of digital tools that can be used to gather in views and opinions.

In addition, expert groups and working parties with representatives from civil society and the party's own ranks can be effective instruments. See the example of Framtidsstaden (City of the Future) for further study.

It is quite possible and appropriate to use the consultation group method locally as well as regionally and nationally – and as a rule it is an opportunity for members to grow and develop and become more engaged in the party. It is not uncommon for citizens and other parts of the society to be included, even though the discussion that decides the party's direction must be conducted by the party's members and its elected representatives.

It is important that there is a clear channel up to the top of the organisation so that members do not feel that their discussions and positions are for show only. If such a feeling does creep into the party organisation, it will be deeply problematic for faith in the ability of the party leadership to act in a democratic way.

Digital solutions offer great opportunities

All the meetings organised by parties are important for making and shaping party policy. But people might not always be able to get to the meeting at a specific time. The COVID-19 pandemic in particular has demonstrated how vulnerable an activity is if it is entirely dependent on physical gatherings. But the pandemic also opened the eyes of many to the huge potential of new digital technologies. A political party can benefit greatly from these and create new processes and arenas for its members to make their voices heard on political issues.

These tools and social media have created an ongoing political conversation. They are a source of knowledge and engagement that can be used both in the party's communications and in policy development processes, both within the party and with the community at large.

They have the potential to facilitate the organisational work involved in circulating proposals for comment and consultation groups, and they can enable parties to reach new groups in the community. Maybe a Facebook group to discuss issues related to schools or health care or some other policy area? Or a blog with live posts that can be responded to and discussed by the readers?

Through platforms for virtual meetings, political parties can also hold members meetings, lectures and discussions online. It is also possible to hold digital ballots and AGMs and national conferences. If you use both audio and video in digital communication, there is really no difference between the voting process and a normal physical meeting, and there are special digital tools today for conducting national conferences and AGMs.





CITY OF THE FUTURE: A LOCAL CONFERENCE IN STOCKHOLM

In the 2014 election, the Social Democrats in Stockholm regained power, but the year after the election was marked by setbacks in public opinion. At the beginning of 2016, the party in Stockholm decided to take the electorate's criticism seriously and to invest in developing policy and taking the initiative again in public debate on the city's problems.

The work was to be done both internally in the party and externally through public meetings and discussions with the community at large. Initially, a steering committee was appointed that included some of the younger leading politicians in the party. They formulated three horizontal thematic areas on which discussions would be based.

1. Modernise the city, focusing on infrastructure, housing and the environment.
2. Time, freedom and quality of life, with a focus on working life, quality leisure time, and being able to combine the two so that everyday life functions.
3. Equality and cohesion, focusing on segregation between people and suburbs, racism, homophobia and gender equality.

These three points did not say where the discussions would lead to or what policies were appropriate, but they set the framework, with topics and direction. The themes were sufficiently loosely formulated to arouse curiosity, but concrete enough to ensure focus in the discussions. An investigator then produced an analysis of a number of broad trends on which the discussions could be based. These were population trend, the situation for the business sector, the labour market, housing and the like.

The next step was to initiate the consultation group process itself. The initial step was that two of Stockholm's leading social democratic representatives wrote an opinion piece in one of the large, nationwide newspapers, where they talked about the party in Stockholm having started a project to reform its policies and listen to its members, voters and local organisations.

Stockholm's leading social democratic politicians and party officers then travelled around to visit the social democratic associations and clubs and discussed with them the City of the Future. What should Social Democrats in Stockholm be giving priority to in the coming years? What were the visions that people had? What was the party's view on the housing issue, infrastructure, schools and all the other matters on the table for discussion? The discussions revealed, in particular, that issues of criminality in the socio-economically disadvantaged suburbs were high priorities. This was something that the party members saw and experienced early on as a problem in their own everyday lives. These were also issues that came to dominate the party's internal policy debate several years later.

In addition to the talks in the associations and clubs, the party also organised a full-day gathering for around 120 local branch members. The theme was: What are the most important challenges for Stockholm looking ahead 30 years? The meeting used the Open Space method, where the participants themselves controlled much of the meeting's structure and content. By the end of the day, they had a list of priorities and policy proposals that had been processed by the participants in detail. Later, a similar meeting was also arranged to which the party invited representatives of sports clubs and associations in Stockholm in order to get input from this sector of the community.

In parallel with these activities, a number of round table discussions were also held, attended by some of Stockholm's leading politicians, and a group of invited experts on the topic of the discussion and some party members. One of these round table discussions for example was about what platform party had for working to prevent young people from becoming involved in criminal activities and developing social problems. These meetings were about producing serious and clear proposals for action.

Another part of the project involved a group travelling to Berlin and Hamburg to learn more about how these cities were handling the issues identified in the work of the City of the Future. On these trips, the group gained a number of concrete ideas on things that could be included in their own policy platform and pursued in local government politics.

The final step was that the party presented a policy platform which concrete proposals were presented under the following themes:

- Transport and infrastructure
- The right to good work and leisure
- Schools
- Health and medical care
- A safe and secure Stockholm
- Citizen empowerment and influence

Under each theme, they wrote about the challenges being faced for the future, the vision of what Stockholm ought to be like, what the party was doing in concrete terms at that time and – last but not least – what policies the Social Democrats should pursue to ensure that this vision could become a reality. The closer they came to the end of the project, the more formal the process became. It was important that the crucial decisions on what policies the party was going to adopt were steered into the party's constitutional decision-making structures. All in all, the consultation group process was appreciated within the party and gave the party organisation new impetus and confidence in the future.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How is party policy developed in practice?
- How does policy development function in our own party?
- How does it interact with the internal democratic process?

- Is support for the party's policy positions anchored with the members? If yes, in what ways?
If no, what is missing for this to happen?
- Is everybody getting the opportunity to speak and be heard?
What's it like for the female members of your party for example?
- Does the principle apply that the party ultimately establishes policy?
Even if the decisions are made in elected assemblies or in government? If not, why not?

- What is the role of the leadership in the party's policy development?
- What resources does the party and its leadership have for policy development?
- How does it work at the local branch level in our party?
What are our main resources?

- Is there a need for more proactive policy development in our party?
- Are specific policy development projects established or are other initiatives implemented?
Give some examples.
- How can we work proactively and strategically with policy development at the local level?

- Is there any area in which we need to develop our policy?
What area is that, and how can we best do so in practice?
- How can our members actively participate in these initiatives or projects?
- How can we otherwise increase rank-and-file participation in practical terms?
In meetings, in internal conferences and in dialogue with local society?



Working with the community

For a political party, internal policy development is central for the party to be able to function, to act, and to be relevant. But parties do not exist in a vacuum. A successful party has the courage to develop its policy in close collaboration with the citizens and the community at large.

In order to be relevant, a party must be based on the needs and ideas of ordinary people about the future. In order to be able to channel these into policy, the party has to listen and regularly be out and about, meeting and talking to citizens about the society's development.

It is also important to share information and maintain contacts with other important stakeholders such as interest groups and researchers, experts, and popular movements. They have deep knowledge in their spheres of activity, their own resources and they often have their own suggestions for policy solutions.

Parties cannot be closed, elitist bubbles. They need to know about and follow how public opinion and thought is developing in different layers of the community. In short, a living and relevant party must maintain an active dialogue with the outside world. There are lots of analyses, ideas, visions and concrete proposals out there that can enrich the party's policy platform and offer policy in areas where the party needs input from other actors.

More and more parties are also developing open and participatory models of policy development. For specific issues or broad policy areas. One explanation for this trend is that political parties have been perceived at times as centrally controlled, closed shops, and difficult to influence. Another explanation is that many parties today are finding it more difficult to engage large groups of members, and are turning outwards into the community

to get input, ideas and broad-based democratic support. A third explanation is that an inclusive model will generate policies that are more robust and realistic and have been thought through in detail.

Participatory policy development is not a specific method. As we will see in this chapter, there are lots of examples of methods that can be used to interact with the surrounding society. Rather, it is an approach, an overarching goal that a party can and should have in order to keep on being a living force in society. This also helps to maintain a living democracy through increased accountability, transparency and more active citizenship.

Policy development with citizens

In order to be seen as open, relevant and in tune with the society the party has to find ways of including citizens when formulating problems and developing its policy. There are at least two reasons for this.

First, the electorate usually votes with a view to the future. The party that most credibly presents solutions to the problems perceived by the voters wins the election. The best way to understand and channel the voter's perceptions is to include them in the policy making process.

Second, in many parts of the world, political parties are having difficulty recruiting new members. The internal organisations of parties are thinning out and are not always representative of broader population groups. Under these circumstances, the need to include groups outside the parties becomes greater.

With digital technologies, there are almost endless possibilities for reaching out and generating discussion and they can be combined with other forms of meeting. However, more traditional methods are also important, and often provide more direct answers to questions about policy issues and priorities. Here are some examples of methods that parties can use, particularly in the local branch:

Hold open meetings

Being out and meeting people and arranging outreach meetings is a key aspect of being visible, getting your message out, and building relationships. The aim is to make a big splash among participants and in the media, as well as to mobilise the party organisation and its sympathisers. Invite interested citizens to open local meetings where current issues are discussed. Ensure that leading political representatives or experts are also on site. These meetings are sometimes referred to as Town Hall meetings – an expression that originates mainly from North America and is a way for local and national politicians to regularly meet their constituents. Either to consult them on topics of interest to them, or to discuss specific future legislation or regulations.

Canvassing

In order to develop and build relationships and gain in-depth knowledge of how citizens are thinking and how they are living in the immediate area, we need to be present and visible in people's everyday lives. It is therefore essential to have ongoing conversations with these groups in a structured and systematic way where we know that we can find them. Canvassing is an effective method of doing this. The reasons for this are several:

- 1 You can have quality conversations in a structured and systematic way over time – focusing on target groups instead of being steered by those who approach the party's representatives at various external events.
- 2 You can go back to the target groups again and again and the method can be combined with digital direct mail, digital advertising or distribution of material.
- 3 You can effectively build relationships, determine the mood of the electorate, and increase knowledge of your target groups and recruit members.

4 You can combine canvassing with active policy development – where you are out and about before, during and after policy submissions in your immediate area, for example, what is decided will be based on what came to light in the policy development process. (See the example from the city of Örebro below.)

5 The method thus gives many of the members an important role in the party's activities.

Use party members and elected representatives to knock on doors and ask citizens what they think. The questions can be open-ended ("what is important to you living in this area/having children in school/working in the care sector, etc.) or more concrete: What do you think about this issue? What do you think the Social Democrats should do? Be sure to gather knowledge and opinions and return to tell them what has happened since the last time you met.

Launch digital networks and online groups

Digital networks and groups on the Internet, tasked with discussing issues where the party wants to develop its policies can spark interesting debate and lead to new knowledge and new input. Often, such groups already exist, outside the sphere of influence and knowledge of the parties. Social media are great for generating debate on political issues, including policy. Those who are active in the party could join existing groups in order to sound out the mood.

The party can also set up its own groups, for example for those interested in schools and education policy, and this kind of group ought to direct itself to groups who work in or have children in schools, or in other areas. The communication can then be tailored and targeted to a greater extent with regard to what online groups are created, what posts are published, what e-mails are sent and who represents the party in these groups. This also allows you to work with deeper engagement in your consultations with citizens on various issues.

A conscious plan and persistent and consistent structured work are required to include citizens and voters and build relationships with them. In a similar way to internal party conferences for consultation purposes, it is important that the parties are able to channel the political engagement that emerges from outreach activities back into actual proposals and policies. If citizens feel that this dialogue is just for show, it will backlash negatively on the party. It will also undermine the legitimacy of both the party and the democratic system.

DIALOGUE AND FEEDBACK – LOCAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT WITH THE CITIZENS IN THE CITY OF ÖREBRO

In the Swedish city of Örebro, for many years the local Social Democratic party has worked actively with citizen dialogue, in particular through canvassing in the residential areas of the city. And not only during campaigns and to win votes in elections, but also to develop its policy.

The contact and relationships created and strengthened during these conversations, as well as the input they give to the party's local policy development, have led to increased confidence and more relevant policy for the municipality and for the areas where the party has done these activities. They began from the idea that:

- We can't know everything: What are the current issues?
- The method is the message. We want the people of the city to see us as a party that listens and a party you can talk to.
- We must create our own independent channels to voters.
- Voters, citizens, sympathisers – very few of them are coming to us.
- We don't need to know everything. We need to be there to listen.

Dialogue → Feedback → Promise

This method involves first having a dialogue, being out and about and making contact in order to listen. It's about conversing, either through canvassing or by telephone calls, but also through open meetings and other outreach activities in people's everyday lives. Canvassing is a particularly effective method because

you can have quality conversations in a structured and systematic way – focusing on talking to the party's target groups who are rarely heard in politics, instead of being steered by those who approach the party's representatives at various external events.

Each residential area was prepared for the dialogue by the party advertising or sharing information about visiting the area. The party has often prepared the dialogue by producing targeted surveys containing concrete questions about issues that are currently relevant in these areas. Examples include traffic issues, schools policy, or children's pre-schools in the area. The party does not provide any ready-made answers before the dialogue.

After the dialogue phase, the party takes on board the input, thoughts and suggestions that have been received. The goal is to be able to give concrete form to these in the party's policy and communications. The answers that come in are not always directly transferable to practical policy. Part of the party's task was to take in and interpret what the citizens were saying. In other cases, it is easier because the citizens' suggestions and demands are more straightforward.

Then party representatives got back to the people they had talked to by knocking on their doors again and sharing information about what had been done with their responses and comments, and how these had influenced the party's policy and policy platform. This step is crucial – partly for feedback to citizens and to demonstrate that the dialogue was serious and thereby increase trust in the party and its policies. It is also during this step that the promise is made to pursue these issues in the next elections or in the local parliament.

What comes out during these dialogue activities and campaigns is also often the basis for opinion pieces in the local newspaper, contributions in the local parliament and, of course, concrete policies and decisions when the party is in government.

Through these activities, the party also built in a different internal attitude to what it is to be a politician. Step by step, all elected representatives have become more aware that they do not always know best. Another effect was that the party has changed its priorities. It has started to talk more about what people in the municipality have cited as important or are interested in changing.



CONSULTATION WITH CITIZENS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND CANADA

Many parties find it difficult to find ways of including citizens, and parties in power often find it difficult to reform their policies. They get locked in the administration of the state apparatus or the local public administration and find neither the time nor the energy to initiate new policy processes that include broad groups in the community. The British Labour Party realised this in 2003, when they had been in power for six years and won two consecutive elections. The party then launched a national dialogue with its citizens which it called the Big Conversation.

A 77-page document which focused on 13 broad policy themes was made available to citizens, regardless of the party they be-

longed to or had voted for in the last elections. Everyone was allowed to participate. Around the country, meetings were held where people could respond to the document, or raise other policy issues with representatives of the Labour Party. There was also the possibility of submitting written responses. The Conservative Party of Canada launched a similar project in 2010 using similar approaches. That project concerned the national budget. The financial crisis a couple of years earlier had made savings necessary and the Conservative Party organised a series of Town Hall meetings across the country to gather people's views on what areas of expenditure could be cut and what could be done to help Canada emerge from the global crisis. ■

Collaboration with other stakeholders

There are always organisations and groups with more or less close ties to the party, in terms of their overall goals and visions and on policy issues. A party capable of collaborating in a respectful and reciprocal way with these groups will reap enormous rewards. The party's network is enlarged, support in the wider community will be more solid and policy will be better.

At the same time, there has to be a balance. The party is still the party, and interest groups must never have a VIP pathway to influence. Having said that, there are almost only advantages to having an inclusive process that can gain important inputs from stakeholders in the broad strata of the society.

Trade unions and political cooperation with trade unions

In many countries in the world, there is strong and well-established cooperation between social democratic parties and trade unions. In Sweden, the link between the Social Democratic Party and the trade union movement has a long tradition. The early trade union movement was active in the formation of the Social Democratic Party in Sweden since a number of trade union federations founded the Party. The reason was a realisation that there was a need for political organisation and a political wing for the trade union movement that could represent ordinary employees and their circumstances in elected assemblies. This need to balance other more financially strong interest groups in politics remains to this day. It is still important to the Social Democratic Party to be well informed about and have representatives in its ranks from its main voter group. For its fundamental *raison d'être*. From the Social Democratic Party's perspective, the trade union movement is the other leg of social democracy as it is organised in Sweden. Consequently, there is a special trade union and political cooperation, and that is why this particular collaboration historically has not been seen as a case of a special interest group.

This collaboration often serves several purposes. Through the trade union organisations, parties gain contact with broad voter and employee groups with concrete experiences of the workplace and conditions in the society. Their needs and their thoughts and ideas on societal development can thus, through the trade unions' own active membership work and democratic processes, contribute to the development of social democratic policy.

Trade unions often have their own investigators and experts who are employed to analyse the conditions for employees and the union's members. These conditions include economic conditions, working life issues, wage



TRADE UNION AND POLITICAL COLLABORATION IN THE SWEDISH LABOUR MOVEMENT

The party organisation needs strong support from the local labour movement to reach out to trade union members and diverse workplaces. This connection makes communication with trade union members easy and regular.

In the Swedish Social Democratic party-trade union leaders are to be appointed at all levels – local, regional and national. They are in contact with the trade unions at the same level. At the local level, the party also often has social democratic clubs in workplaces, called social democratic trade union clubs.

The trade union leader in the local branch of the party is responsible for and organises contacts with the local trade union organisations that are members of the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), and to establish and maintain good contact with them in the municipality. LO is an umbrella organisation for trade unions linked to the labour movement in Sweden.

The local trade union leader, in consultation with the party district's trade union leaders, and in cooperation with LO locally, develops a plan for the local trade union's political activities, and as part of the local branch executive of the party.

The social democratic trade unions have the same status as other social democratic clubs and associations. The members have the right to submit motions and to vote and make their voices heard in the party's processes. By virtue of their very size, large trade unions often exert great influence on the policies and policy development of the local branch of the party.

The trade union leader in the party district is responsible for contacts with the regional trade union organisations and organises contacts with the local trade union leaders. Together with the trade union committee, which the party district appoints, they make a plan defining the objectives and content of the party district's trade union political activities. The trade union leader is generally the best person for the position of chair of the trade union committee and should also be on the District Executive.

In view of the fact that the largest trade union confederation also has its chair in the Executive Committee of the Social Democratic Party, the trade union movement also has a formal influence over the party at the national level. At the regional level, trade union organisations also often post their own candidates for political roles, which enable them to influence the party's policy development. During election campaigns, the party and trade unions cooperate closely, even though trade unions now run their own election campaigns. ■

formation, the work environment, and much more. This work often generates knowledge and concrete policies that social democracy can benefit greatly from in its own decision-making process.

How close can cooperation between trade unions and a party be before trade union organisations lose their independent status and position? How much can the Social Democrats 'listen to the trade unions' without it appearing that the party is only an offshoot of the trade union movement? It is beneficial to both parties of course to in fact be independent partners in a collaboration. There is no clear answer. This is due to historical circumstances and contemporary lines of conflict and societal development in general. Trade union organisations must decide on their priorities and political questions independently, and by cooperating with a social democratic party that shares the same fundamental view of society, these proposals can gain entry into the parliamentary system and turn into concrete policy decisions. If the members of the trade union organisations assess that cooperation does not bring any benefits, they may decide to halt it. In the same way, the Social Democrats can choose to listen to a greater or lesser extent to proposals that come from unions. A social democratic party must ultimately allow its own members to determine the path that the party takes.

So without the close ties that exist in Sweden, how can a party develop good relations with the trade union movement if the party and the trade unions desire this? Here are some examples:

- Actively seek out trade union representatives and ask them to be candidates for political roles, both within the party and in local, regional and national parliaments.
- Start trade union social democratic clubs in the work-places.

- Conduct joint courses or to coordinate joint political manoeuvres in areas that are important to both parties, to write op-eds together, to hold political gatherings and conduct tours of the country with outreach activities.

There are many similar examples, which are all fundamentally about maintaining a lively dialogue.

Popular movements and civil society

Social democracy is traditionally part of the big, broad popular movement known as the labour movement. Historically, there are few examples of a popular movement as strong and successful as the labour movement. Many new popular movements have seen the light of day since then, such as the peace movement, the women's movement and the environmental movement. However, even large interest groups representing pensioners, the disabled, tenants and the like are big and significant movements with many members today.

And if these movements are where people choose to invest their time and energy instead of becoming members of political parties, then the political parties have to accept this situation and establish a dialogue with them. In addition, those who are involved in these movements often know a great deal about the issues they are passionate about. A knowledge that political parties can benefit from. A party that wants to reach these groups must therefore identify structures and conversations that can make this possible. Often people are involved in these groups at the local level, or at the local, regional and national levels, which creates great opportunities for the political party at all these levels.



One method could be to establish specific advisory groups that the party leadership can consult to develop its own policies, or perhaps just to learn more about a specific issue. Local branches of the party can hold joint themed meetings with organisations that are specifically involved in an issue or area. Or if the party itself holds these meetings, they can invite representatives from other organisations to attend and invite them to contribute ideas, arguments and suggestions.

A party representative could be a guest at a meeting of the organisation in question, to make a speech or to participate in a debate, or just be there to accept comments and ideas from the organisation's members.

Let contacts be tied to the particular subject area or issue. If the party is intending to decide on an important environmental issue at the local level or develop a local environmental policy platform – invite the local environmental groups, ask them to present their positions and start a dialogue. If the issue concerns care of the elderly, invite those organisations that are active on issues to do with the elderly or carer associations.

Even when the party has won the elections and is in power, it's a good idea to put feelers out and listen to what organisations and those active in civil society are saying about the state of the society and political issues.

Researchers and academics

Research should be independent of any party-political considerations. This is an important principle in a democratic society. Research that is politically controlled will be less interesting, more predictable, and will rarely contribute new knowledge that policies need in order to develop. However, this does not prevent political parties benefiting greatly from research and researchers in the process of developing their own policies, and to provide decision support, facts and background to the party's policy positions. Research offers models for describing and explaining reality, which in turn enables politicians to better understand and govern the society. If research has been involved in developing the party's policies, this will also increase their legitimacy.

Research may also help to solve conflicts. Facts and evidence can help to neutralise part of the tension in political debate. Facts and evidence at least help to avoid disagreement over the reality of the situation and the debate can focus on political determinations.

For example, a social democratic party can benefit greatly from research on working life, the work environment, pay and conditions, or, for that matter, research on the design and effects of welfare systems.

But isn't this knowledge already out there? Should a party do anything special to collaborate with universities and researchers, or is it enough that its representatives and members keep themselves up-to-date with the research in the party's priority areas? This is, of course, a first step.

However, a party can also benefit greatly from closer ties with research.

Some examples of how this can be done are:

- 1 Hold seminars on specific policy issues and invite researchers as lecturers and participants in panel discussions. These kinds of seminars can also be organised locally. If, for example, a local branch wants to develop its policies on local town planning, public transport or the local schools policy, it should ensure that researchers active in the field are invited and get the opportunity to share their knowledge and participate in the discussions. If there is a university in the town or city, it may be worthwhile identifying the areas of expertise of the researchers at this university. They may be able to provide a picture of how the issue has been handled in other parts of the country or at the national level or even provide concrete input on what can be done locally.
- 2 Engage researchers for specific tasks. It is not always the case that the knowledge a party needs to be able to argue well for its position or to develop new policies has been produced or compiled in a way that is suitable for that purpose. If the party has the resources to hire his own investigators, it might be money well spent to put together this kind of knowledge.
- 3 Let researchers be part of the party's platform groups and consultation groups with the aim of developing their own policies. Researchers are not always interested in presenting concrete policy proposals. Their mission is to reflect reality, not necessarily to change it. However, researchers often have ideas and knowledge that are needed in a party that wants to develop its policies. Let research be a part of that process.
- 4 Keep up an ongoing dialogue with the research community. By making researchers part of the party's wider network of contacts, the party can also provide input and opinions that help develop the research. Researchers must be independent, but they do not always know about how parties and decision-makers think, and in parties and among politicians there is often a practical knowledge of reality that research can benefit from. Let it be a mutual exchange.

A question that often arises in these kinds of collaborations is whether the researchers invited in by the party must be members of the party or not? Or share the party's values. Here, individual parties have different views on this matter. For most, it is important not to demand proof of membership. It's the researchers knowledge that you want to get access to, not necessarily their values or opinions. But it's also important to point out that politics is primarily a question of values. You might be a great expert in economics, but you cannot give a better answer than anyone

else to the question of whether it's good or bad to have big pay gaps. However, research can contribute answers to the question of how. If the party wants to remedy big pay gaps, what decisions must be made on the way to achieving that goal? Can taxes play a role and, if so, what effects will they have? Can trade unions contribute, and if so, what should we do to strengthen them?

And don't forget: Try to recruit researchers as party members! It's never a bad thing for the local branch to have a mix of experiences, personalities and groups. It is, of course, a clear advantage and a great resource if someone who has a researcher's knowledge in a subject area becomes actively engaged in the party.

Business and industry

Faced with an agenda item saying that social democracy should collaborate more with business and industry, some orthodox Social Democrats might cancel their membership. Should we really collaborate with them? Aren't they on the opposite side in the struggle between labour and capital?

On one level, of course, they are. Companies have an interest in making profits and making money that is not always in keeping with social democracy's interest in justice, equality and better conditions for the vast majority.

But companies are also dependent on a society that functions well, and all parties are dependent on the existence of companies that employ people, generate growth and contribute to the prosperity of the society. All over the world, social democracy has a long and strong tradition of meaningful dialogue and interaction with the business world – to create prosperity and to arrive at consensus on ways of distributing it. This is particularly true at the local level, where the local branch often talks and works together with, for example, the local Chamber of Commerce, business associations and business leaders.

As important actors in the society, companies have an important voice. They have knowledge of processes, flows and fields that social democracy often needs input about from the outside. They often know what would be required for the business community in a local community to flourish and thrive. They know what traffic solutions and communications are needed to increase retail trade.

Like other groups in the community, business and industry should be seen as just another actor. There should be no VIP tracks to party-political influence, and there must always be a clear boundary against corruption.

So what can a party do to create a respectful and productive dialogue with business and industry? The answer is actually the same as in the previous sections here. Ask them to come to meetings. Develop relationships with them and listen. Conduct study visits. Learn more about their circumstances and opinions. Allow them to be part of working parties and to respond to referrals the comment. Or why not recruit more entrepreneurs as party members? This group is also needed in social democracy, of course.

HOW SHOULD THE PARTY RELATE TO LOBBYISTS?

While it is important for the party to have its feelers out the community at large in order to sense the mood and identify new and interesting policies, it is important to be aware of the risks posed by contacts with lobbyists.

What is lobbying? In short, it is attempts by various political and economic interests to influence the political agenda and concrete policy decisions. Influencing the policy positions of a political party may be part of that work. Especially if the party is in power or has a good chance of winning government.

Many associate the word lobbyist with men dressed in suits representing large companies or powerful economic interests. However, even activists in organisations for women's rights that try to influence a party are lobbyists, and those who are active in environmental organisations.

All associations, organisations and businesses are lobbyists if they try to influence the party's policy platform and concrete policies. As we have already concluded, all parties need to have these kinds of contacts. They make the party's own policy development better.

But there are risks with lobbying. It is precisely for this reason that the party and its representatives need to be able to distinguish between lobbying by lobbyists representing real societal interests and those who want to gain influence for their own benefit.

Companies and organisations with a lot of money will always be able to afford to employ more lobbyists than not-for-profit organisations. They will be put more energy into getting the party to pick up their own proposals.

For a party looking for new policy in any area, it may be tempting to make use of these proposals and the evidence presented by these lobbyists and there are plenty of examples of parties doing so.

In this situation, a democratic party must keep a cool head and carefully evaluate the proposals, and their consignor. What is the actual purpose of the proposal? Is it in line with the party's ideology and policy platform? What do other parts of the party's network think? In many countries, by law lobbyists who hope to influence politicians in a parliament must be registered as lobbyists and must declare which parties and politicians they are talking to and trying to influence.

For a political party, it is always a good idea to be as open and transparent as possible when it comes to the stakeholders the party meets and allows itself to be influenced by. Otherwise, questions may arise about the independence of the party and there may also be accusations of corruption.

It is also important that the party does not take a proposal from a lobbyist, regardless of who the lobbyist represents or its purpose, as is and make that proposal its own policy. The party organisation must always have the last word and formulate policy that its members can support.

Think tanks

In an increasing number of countries in the world, think-tanks have come to play a role in public debate and in the development of new policies by parties. A think tank or a policy institute is an institution specialising in research and investigations, which in turn lead to proposals in policy areas and advocacy for them. A think tank is often tied to one of the bigger organisations in civil society or the business community (which also pays for its activities), or to political parties. However, there are also policy institutes that are not tied to big interest groups or even those that are financed by public funds or private donations.

A think tank may be more or less focused on particular concrete areas of policy. It may be specialised in industry and trade policy, environmental issues or education, for example. But there are also policy institutes that take a broader approach, working on the basis of a clear ideological policy platform with a number of issues that fit their agenda. Just as there are think tanks that have a clearer focus on research and think tanks that have a more ideological mission, without a clear focus on research.

Parties can cooperate with think tanks in a variety of ways.

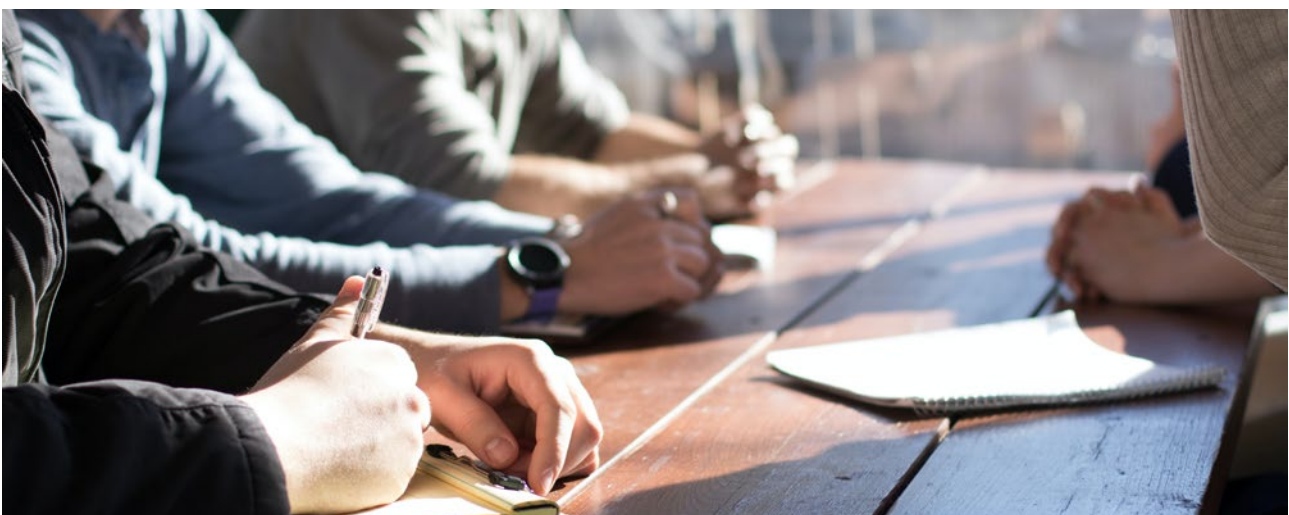
- 1 Many parties feel a need to approach the academic world and to use more research in the development of new policy. But there are plenty of researchers who have worked with data analyses without – in their role as researchers at a university – being able to take things one step further and formulate policy on the basis of their research and conclusions from that research. A think tank offers a meeting place for both of these needs.
- 2 A think tank also provides the opportunity to connect with other parts of the community that the party would like to interact with. In a think tank, the party can be exposed to intellectuals, writers, international

organisations, and other parts of civil society without these groups having to feel that they are taking a party-political stand through that interaction.

- 3 A think tank can also provide a platform for these organisations' own members to think about and speak on issues without having to consider whether what they say or write should be put to a vote or recorded in the minutes of a meeting or not. The conversation can be unprejudiced and lead to a softening of hard positions in an internal conflict or expand the picture of reality among the party's active members. In a party, there are always active members who can write reports and conduct investigations themselves. In the context of a think-tank, they can meet with other intellectuals and learn more in a particular area, which in the long run leads to a better policy process within the party.

But what can be done locally in a party? At first sight, this might be difficult to see. Think tanks are often located in the capital city, or at least in one of the country's larger cities. But the knowledge available in a think tank can also be used in local branches. The reports and studies produced in think tanks can be used in study circles, for themed meetings, and in consultation groups. Those who are active in a think tank can be invited in as lecturers or participants in panel discussions.

You can also start your own think tank. In the second largest city in Sweden, the labour movement as a whole – the Social Democratic Party and the LO unions – has started a think tank called Think tank for the labour movement in Gothenburg. It produces reports and background information for discussion on both broad ideological issues and local policy areas that the party has chosen to discuss in more detail. The think tank, which is mainly run on a voluntary basis by people who have other jobs, includes academics from the University of Gothenburg, union representatives, interested party members and other activists.





DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Why is active collaboration with the wider community important for parties and their policy development?
- How can it help strengthen parties and their policies?
- How can it contribute to a living, breathing democracy and accountability, transparency, and active citizenship?
- How does this work in our party? Do we work with and offer open and participatory models of policy development in our own party? If yes, what are they? If not, why not?

- With which groups can we collaborate and have this kind of dialogue?
- How can local policy development be implemented in practice by us together with the citizens in our community? Give some examples.
- In what area would we start, and what resources do we have to use in this implementation?
- What role can our members play in these activities and projects?

- What other important stakeholders are there that can be important to policy development in the party?
- Where do we draw the line between interest groups being given a VIP lane to influence over the party and an inclusive process where the broad strata of society can provide valuable input to the party?
- Why is it that trade unions have rarely, or not fully, been seen as a special interest group by social democratic parties?
- How should the party best relate to lobbyists?

- What does local collaboration look like in our party? What does our collaboration with trade unions look like?
- What other exchanges and contacts do we have? With universities and colleges, popular movements and associations, companies and business organisations, or other interest groups?
- In what areas can we see opportunities to access valuable external skills, resources, and networks?
- How can we implement this kind of collaboration in practice locally? Give some examples.

Photo:

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In this third module, we look at how important it is for political parties to have the capacity to respond to developments in society, and to formulate and reformulate their policies on the basis of these developments and thus remain relevant and able to lead. We go through the process of developing policy in a party and highlight different methods that parties can use, in particular at the local branch level, in order to develop their policy.

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