

COMMUNICATION: THE WHO, WHAT AND WHY OF WRITING A POLICY BRIEF

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Communication: The Who, What and Why of Writing A Policy Brief

What

- A short, to the point, jargon-free document written for non-specialists.
- Makes research findings easily digestible for time-poor individuals and increases the chance of research findings being acted upon.
- Highlights the relevance of the specific research to policy and makes clear, evidence-based recommendations for change.
- Realistic, feasible and cost-effective solutions, based on the current political environment.

Who

- Identify specific aims of the policy brief, intended level of application: (sub)national, regional, international.

Why

- A business card for researchers.
- The preferred form of communication favoured by 79% of policymakers in developed/ developing country contexts alike (Jones and Walsh, 2008).

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Step One: Planning and Understanding Your Audience

- Should pass the ‘breakfast test’;
- Identify the aim and the audience;
- Appreciate political realities and any competing policy narratives.
- Set your findings within the wider body of evidence (competing narratives);
- Clearly laid-out, evidence-informed solutions to problems;
- Establish credibility, timeliness, and legitimacy;
- Demonstrate an understanding of the policy context, knowledge landscape, networks, and links;
- Demonstrate an understanding of obstacles and barriers to implementation.

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Step Two: Writing A Policy Brief

- Ensure that everything the reader really wants to know is on the front page;
- No more than 4 pages and format should be logical and easy to follow;
- Distinguish between opinion and evidence;
- Possible structure:
 - ❖ Title;
 - ❖ Executive summary: emphasising relevance of research to policy;
 - ❖ Summary of the problem: situate in context;
 - ❖ Methods, approaches, and results: obvious robustness, corroborated by others;
 - ❖ Conclusions or evidence-based recommendations: reinforce the key message; do not just repeat executive summary; have a maximum of three bulleted recommendations;
 - ❖ Key references and suggested sources: do not include too many sources;
 - ❖ Acknowledgements, contact point, disclaimers (incl. funding source).
- Use active, not passive language;
- Short, sharp sentences;
- Highlight key benefits of your recommendations and try to anticipate any questions that the reader may have.

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Step Three: How to Get Your Policy Brief Out There

- Send it in paper, as well as email form, to a named person;
- Send it to middle-level officials or infomediaries rather than very senior officials;
- Follow-up in person;
- Consider a public seminar to reinforce the message;
- Identify policy windows to promote it further;
- Do not forget to inform the (scientific) media;
- Do not forget social media: Twitter, blogs, etc. to help you build a web presence around the issue;
- Build partnerships and strategic alliances to promote further and learn from successful actors;
- Use your stakeholder analysis results to identify allies, champions, blockers, key influencers, etc.

Writing A Policy Brief

Further resources

- [Writing policy briefs: a guide to translating science and engaging stakeholders](#), The Women's and Children's Health Policy Center;
- [Preparing policy briefs](#), The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations;
- [How to write a policy brief](#), International Development Research Centre;
- [How to plan, write and communicate an effective policy brief: three steps to success](#), Research to Action;
- [How to communicate research for policy influence, toolkit 2: policy brief](#), Centro de Implementación de Políticas Públicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento (CIPPEC)