

CRAFTING POLICY BRIEFS

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WHAT IS POLICY?

: a set of guidelines or rules that determine a course of action

~Merriam- Webster

Policies are found in both the public & private spheres. Policies govern procedures and decisions big and small.

Policies are:

- Written
- Imperfect
- Subject to change

WHY SHOULD ACADEMICS CARE ABOUT POLICY?

Policies impact:

- Tenure
- Funding
- Workload
- Research
- Practical relevance of findings
- Lived experiences & outcomes

POLICYMAKERS & INFLUENCERS

Policymakers

- Elected officials
- Appointed officials
- Corporate boards
- Academic boards
- Civic boards
- Executives & trustees

Policy Influencers

- Lobbyists
- Funders
- Public opinion
- Technology
- Advocates
- Protestors
- Media
- Economics

WHAT IS A POLICY BRIEF?

: a tightly crafted presentation of an issue intended to help a decisionmaker solve a problem.

As the author, you are providing something **USEFUL**, **TIMELY**, and **ACTIONABLE** to policymakers and stakeholders

A policy brief:

- Encourages change and presents new courses of action
- Is written for a specific audience with whom the author must be familiar
- Is short (2-4 pages)

COMPONENTS OF A POLICY BRIEF

POLICY BRIEF ROADMAP

- Title
- Abstract
- Problem description
- Problem significance
- Simple critique of current policy or climate
- Recommendations guided by your research findings

CONTEXT & CULTURE

Before you begin writing your brief, think about ways to infuse context and culture.

Contextualize the problem you seek to address:

- Widespread or isolated?
- Who is impacted?
- Are impacts on affected people distributed equally?

As a scholar (of color) researching issues impacting women of color in computing, your knowledge and insight is rare and specific. This is a value add. Be sure to highlight the cultural relevance of your research, findings, and recommendations.

TITLE

Think headline

*Your title should NOT contain a colon.

- Engage your audience
- Hint at the problem and magnitude
- Share your research finding
- Consult newspaper articles for inspiration

ABSTRACT

- Succinctly summarizes your policy brief
- Logically flows from one point to the next
- **Give it away!** The problem and solution/recommendation are given upfront. Do not make the reader scan your brief for the fix. The reader will review your piece in detail if the headline grabs their attention, the problem is clear, and the recommendation seems viable.

PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

- Focus on a single issue
- Be precise
- Quantify
- Qualify
- Provide evidence

SIGNIFICANCE

- Express why the problem deserves attention
- Who is impacted and to what degree?
- Why should those not directly impacted care?
- Explain consequences of doing nothing or maintaining current course
- Discuss what could happen if we do things differently

CRITIQUE

Keep the critique simple

- Tell what has been the result of ineffectiveness or inaction
- What strategies for addressing the problem have not worked?
- What are we getting wrong in our conceptualization of the problem?

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Derived from your findings
- Provides context in which they are most likely to be successful
- Practical.

Practicality assumes you have some basic knowledge of the policy climate. For example, has K-12 spending been drastically reduced in the specific district in which you are encouraging change? If so, will reduced funding prevent policy implementation, limit policy implementation (and if so, to what degree), or have no impact on policy implementation in the immediate future? Are there parts of the recommendation that could be implemented now, some later, while maintaining fidelity?

ADDITIONAL KEY ELEMENTS

- Sidebars

 - Bonus information
 - Interesting
 - Compelling

- Callouts

 - Short statements that make key points

- Visuals

 - Charts & graphs

STAY ON MESSAGE

- Policy briefs are succinct
- Policy briefs are factual, not objective
- Policy briefs are crafted to lead to specific recommendations
- Practice turning your brief into a 30 second elevator pitch

CONTACT & LINKS

- Establish your credibility by adding your name, title, credentials & affiliation
- Embed your professional contact information in the header or footer
- Include relevant social media handles
- Include limited links to additional, strictly relevant research, your expanded findings, or document containing plans for next phase of research/steps to scalability
- Use hyperlinks and ensure they are functioning

BEFORE YOU CIRCULATE YOUR BRIEF

- Proof read, include date, check data for accuracy, & ensure hyperlinks work
- Ask a friend unfamiliar with your topic to review and identify 3 primary takeaways
- Revise as needed to ensure your main points are in focus
- Be sure contact information is up-to-date
- Create a circulation spreadsheet to track the following:
 - Name, title, affiliation, and address of whom you sent brief
 - Date sent
 - Date of first and subsequent follow-up or communication
 - Outcome of communication & next steps
 - Preliminary goals & expectations