

Format: Policy Brief

Introduction



Description

What is the format about?

- A policy brief is a written analysis of a policy issue no more than a few pages long.
- Policy briefs usually present both scientific findings and policy recommendations.
- Policy briefs can analyse recent events. Scientists can also write them to synthesise policy-relevant knowledge from journal articles or other lengthy scholarly work.

Function

How does the format work?

Policy briefs are well-structured and easy-to-read publications. They usually comprise six parts: title, summary, introduction of policy issue, presentation of research findings, policy recommendations, sources, and appendix.

Please understand that scientists compete for the attention of policymakers with businesses, lobby organisations, NGOs, and think tanks, whose staff are usually trained and experienced in writing policy briefs.

The first page of the policy brief is the most important. Scientists must understand that many policymakers will only read the first page or paragraph. Therefore, scientists must choose a catchy title reflecting the policy's relevance or key findings. You can find examples of catchy titles below (TBA).

The executive summary comprises the key messages. It should not exceed two paragraphs. Therefore, present your key messages in the summary using visualisation elements like a textbox, thick print, bullet points, or a combination of these elements. Focus on 2-4 key messages. If your topic does not allow focusing on 2-4 key messages, consider publishing two policy briefs instead of one.

The following section introduces the policy issue. Explain clearly and concisely why the issue matters for policymaking. If you need clarification on whether the issue is relevant for policymakers, read our post ([LINK](#)).

The following section will provide your research findings: What will the policymaker know after reading the section that she did not know before? Why are these findings important? This section leads to the policy recommendations, which are supposed to help policymakers draft or executive possible policies. Provide specific recommendations and avoid generalisations ("The government has to increase its efforts to save the environment"). Policy recommendations might be sound, even if policymakers are not likely to take them up shortly.

In many cases, it took scientists decades to see their policy recommendations, resulting in concrete action. Yet, scientists must know their policy recommendations' political, legal, and financial implications. Scientists and policymakers can argue which policy recommendations are politically, financially and legally doable. Scientists should refrain from recommendations that will never be implemented, like "to save electricity, the parliament should make the production and consumption of electricity illegal". In some countries (e.g. Germany), policy briefs focus on analysis rather than providing policy recommendations.

The final section should include the sources or appendices, such as data sets. We recommend publishing data sets, a section on methods, and other lengthy information on your website and providing the URL in the sources section rather than adding pages of appendices to your policy brief.

Regarding style, keep sentences short and easy to understand. Think about your audience: If you want to focus on experts in policymaking institutions, you can apply a rather technical writing style. Avoid jargon and acronyms if you expect generalists to read your policy brief. Always let peers read your paper.

Like in other contexts, timing is critical if scientists want to achieve impact. Our article on timing is available here (LINK TBA).

Task and resources Knowledge exchange managers and research managers (Support Staff)

Knowledge exchange managers can assist scientists in writing policy blogs by informing them about current policy issues. To do so, knowledge exchange officers can follow media coverage, subscribe to policymaking institutions' newsletters, and read official documents like strategy papers or legislation. Knowledge exchange managers can read research articles and use Google or ChatGPT to link research output with current policy debates. Knowledge exchange managers can talk to scientists regarding current policy issues and make suggestions for the structure and content of a policy brief. After reading the scientists' journal articles, press officers often send drafts for press releases to scientists on current research results. The scientist can then comment on the draft press releases. Knowledge exchange officers can work similarly and produce draft policy blogs, which scientists can further develop. Such an approach is a time-saving one for scientists.

Knowledge exchange managers are vital in disseminating policy blogs. They can identify readers by browsing organisation charts or committee members in parliaments. They can communicate the policy briefs via mailing lists, websites, and social media. Suppose they need more reach in terms of social media followers, mailing list recipients, or website visitors. In that case, knowledge exchange managers can identify other research institutions, think tanks, or NGOs with a broad reach and accept external contributions.

Required resources at a glance

	Hours	Days	Weeks	Months
Researchers` time for writing policy briefs	x	x		
Researchers` time for dealing with organisational issues	x			
Knowledge exchange officers` time	x	xx	xxx	

Required funding for activity	Low xx	Medium xx	High
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