

Writing an advocacy Policy Brief

An advocacy policy brief is a concise action-orientated document used to facilitate policy making decisions or influence/advocate for specific actions on an issue or problem. The policy brief is a professional genre that is designed to translate synthesised academic information into a more understandable format using various visual aids such as tables, infographics or diagrams. Addressed towards policymakers (who are considered non-academics) they often need to make practical decisions in a certain time frame. Therefore, the brief should provide both scientific evidence and actionable recommendations. A brief is usually 2-3 pages long which allows the policymaker to quickly grasp the essence of the policy brief that has the following sections:

Executive summary: Convinces the policymaker that the brief is worth an in-depth investigation. By quickly scanning through the summary, they can clearly see the relevance and importance of the brief. It is usually written in a single paragraph (100 - 150 words) and contains no references with the target policymaker(s) mentioned.

Background and importance of the problem: This section convinces the policymaker that a current and urgent problem exists which requires action. The context and importance of the problem is both the introductory and first building blocks of the brief. It usually includes the following:

- a) A clear statement of the problem or issue.
- b) A short overview of the magnitude and causes of the problem.
- c) A clear statement of the policy implications of the problem that clearly establishes the current importance and policy relevance of the issue.
- d) Research findings are the backbone of this section (where the synthesised literature comes in)

The length of the problem description may vary from brief to brief. Images or infographics can be added to support describing the importance of the problem. Sub-headings and questions can make the brief more user friendly to the policymaker.

Critique of policy options(s). This section forms part of your background starting with describing current policy options and its shortcomings. It therefore should argue both the need for change and focus of where this change needs to happen.

Policy recommendations: This section provides a detailed and convincing proposal of how the current policy approach needs to change. It includes a breakdown of specific practical steps of measures that need to be implemented by specific role players in a specific time frame that is actionable (SMART) and supported by evidence (where appropriate).

Conclusion: This section can either be on its own or incorporated above that explains the implications of the policy recommendations.

Layout: Ensure that the brief is presentable, consider different column layouts and use of a colour scheme.

References List: The number system or Vancouver style is preferred to avoid distraction from the message.

Author details: Added at the end so that the policy maker can make contact.

Adapted from Guidelines for writing a policy brief. Prepared by the [Community-Based Monitoring System \(CBMS\)](#) Network Coordinating Team. [\[Online\]](#).
Compiled by Taahira Goolam Hoosen, 2024