POVERTY SOLUTIONS

WRITING A POLICY BRIEF WITH POVERTY SOLUTIONS

What is it?

A concise summary of research or analysis that can help readers understand and form opinions about complex policies and social problems. Policy briefs generally target more general readers – like policymakers and journalists – who have a stake in the issue that you're discussing; they focus on the **practical implications** of research to the target audience; and they include a robust discussion of potential solutions. An effective policy brief must propose a solution to a well-defined problem that can be addressed at the level of policy.

Helpful Tips

- Avoid acronyms and academic jargon: If you find yourself using jargon, try to replace it with more direct language that a non-specialist reader would be more likely to understand. When specialized terminology is necessary, explain it quickly and clearly to ensure that your reader doesn't get confused.
- Break it up: Include several headings and short paragraphs in each section
- Consider citations: Try to limit the number of citations to only those critical to include. List citations as endnotes.
- Ask key questions before drafting (i.e., WHO do we want to do WHAT by WHEN?)
    - What is the one data point or graph that would most resonate with a non-academic audience?
    - What is the problem and scope of the problem?
    - Who does the issue affect?
- Research and understand the political appetite for this issue
- Distribute: After it's written make a plan to share with targeted groups

Sources: French-Constant, Laura. Research to Action: Policy Brief Week; University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Policy brief sample layout

Introduction

The introduction can serve as the policy brief in miniature: laying out the problem, describing the scope of the research/analysis in the brief, and identifying key findings.

Set the context around a particular problem. The immediate goal is to anchor the reader in some common set of facts around a particular problem. This could be accomplished in just a few lines, or might take a couple paragraphs.

- Consider summarizing the historical context that has shaped the present-day situation, using race-explicit framing.

***Tell the reader what the brief seeks to do*.** With the reader grounded in the overall context, describe what the brief seeks to do. How is this brief responding to the problem that was just outlined? What additional information will it provide? And, in a sentence or two, describe the research or analysis process.

***Outline key findings*.** Finally, identify the major findings and key takeaways. Our briefs are often accompanied with a "key findings" set of bullets or text box.

Body

The body of the brief copies the same form as the introduction, just with each section expanded for additional details. The key consideration, of course, is how much detail to include. We generally write our briefs for an audience of policy-engaged individuals, who may not be reading academic journals. The audience in mind for our briefs are policymakers, city and state officials, people in the philanthropic community, journalists, etc.

Expand on the problem you are trying to solve. The length depends on how much background the reader needs.

Describe your research methodology and findings. This section will be a substantial piece of the paper, and can be sectioned off however is most appropriate. The key here, however, is to only include those pieces of the research and findings that are policy relevant to the problem you are trying to solve. Briefs do not necessarily call for a detailed methodology section, though there should be some description of the research process.

Policy recommendations/conclusion

Most of our briefs include a substantial discussion of potential policy recommendations. Our goal is to provide action-oriented research that not only identifies problems, but also conducts hard thinking on the promise and pitfalls of potential solutions. The policy recommendations are far more than an "add-on" to the brief, and should be just as evidence-based and thoughtful as the research findings. This section can also include a discussion of the obstacles to implementing certain policies.

We will often end with a conclusion paragraph that delivers a final message we hope the reader will walk away from the brief with.

About the Authors / Acknowledgements

Consider adding a final section that lists the authors' titles and affiliations. This is also a good place to acknowledge partners or funders who supported the project.