

Policy Brief Instructions: The Pathway to a Focused, Jargon-Free & Visual Document

The policy brief is a concisely written document that summarizes the results of policy relevant research and explains the key implications this research has for policy creation and implementation. The policy implications of the research are what policy-makers are most interested in, so the conclusions should be clearly stated up front. Because policy-makers often make decisions under time constraints, the brief should provide only the most relevant information. Keep in mind that policy-makers are unlikely to be specialists on the issue. They therefore are more likely to read a brief that is visually appealing, interesting, relevant, concise—in other words, easy to read. A good policy brief provides adequate context and background for the issue without overwhelming the audience with detail. The brief should be based on either peer-reviewed and/or publicly accessible analysis.

I. Characteristics of a Good Policy Brief

- **CONCISE AND FOCUSED**– At approximately two pages, the brief should be short and to the point. Keep paragraphs focused on a single idea.
- **EMPHASIZE IMPLICATIONS** – Focus on the meaning of the research, not the methods.
- **UNDERSTANDABLE** – Language should be simple and easily understood by those outside the academic field. Replace academic jargon with explanations of concepts. Don’t use acronyms/abbreviations in the first reference. Spell out groups/terms fully, followed by the acronym in (). Then use the acronym in subsequent references.
- **VISUALLY APPEALING** –Use design elements such as photographs, graphs, and charts. Use visuals that amplify the written content, and that are themselves clear and understandable.
- **PRACTICAL AND FEASIBLE** – Although the brief might use very specific evidence, it is ideal to draw conclusions that are broadly applicable, linked to the current policy landscape, and focused on informing better energy and environmental decision-making.
- **ACCURATE** – While published work that has undergone the peer-review process is preferred, research that is still in-progress can be the subject of a brief, provided that it has a publicly accessible interim report for readers to reference.

II. Template Format

Please save your brief as a Word document entitled FirstAuthor’sLastName_MonthYear.

Title, Logo, and Contact Information

- The title should be short, informative, catchy and to the point
- Insert the logo of the organization that sponsored the research and your contact information at the top

Issue

- Convince the audience that the brief is worth a thorough read
- Describe the issue as concisely and clearly as possible

Policy Implications

- This is the most important part of the brief
- Emphasize what policy-makers need to know; make sure the implications are clear

Research (or Forum) Findings

- Summarize the research by focusing on the main outcomes
- Give just the key information needed to help the audience understand the research and implications
- Use the most effective method to convey the data (text, bar/line graph, pie chart, graph, etc.)

Further Reading

- Reference the full scholarly article or report.
- Ideally, also give an additional source or two for gaining a better understanding of the issue and similar research

Research Advisor Approval - If the brief preparer is a student or postdoc, please have the research advisor (PI, major advisor, etc.) for the project on which the brief is based sign off on the Brief Approval Form