

## How to Write a Policy Brief

A policy brief is a 1–2-page summary of relevant information on a topic to guide non-environmental health specialists in policymaking. It is an alternative to the long policy reports made for environmental health experts. You can use them to provide data, recommend next steps, and suggest legislation to decision-makers, politicians, and nongovernmental organization advocates. Refer to our How to Communicate with Decision-Makers fact sheet and comic for guidance.

Before considering writing a policy brief, contact your policy staff if you have them. They can provide the best guidance for your organization and situation.

### Tips to Write a REALLY GOOD Policy Brief

- Make it **SHORT**. Your audience is busy. Keep briefs shorter than 4 pages.
- Make it **SIMPLE**. Avoid jargon or include definitions if necessary. Use simple, whole number statistics and provide an easy to follow argument. Be professional, not academic.
- Make it **SPECIFIC**. Keep it relevant and focused to your policymakers and their goals. You only have 4 pages.
- Make it **ENGAGING**. Include at least one relevant image, simple table, or graph. Organize your text so it is easy to read. Use subheadings, sidebars, and boxes to separate your ideas. Ask yourself if your message is apparent without reading the text.

### Steps to Build an Effective Brief

1. Design a **branded masthead**
  - a. The masthead goes at the top of the first page with the title, issue number and date, and your organization's logo
  - b. Include the same branding on all your organization's briefs
2. Start with a **communicative title**
  - a. Think "short, catchy, and descriptive." Your title should quickly outline your point and draw the reader in.
  - b. Example: Combatting Climate Change at the State Level or Foodborne Illness in Iowa: What can be done?
3. Summarize with an **abstract**
  - a. Like a research paper, begin with a short 1-2 paragraph (or bullet point) summary of your message.

- b. Ask yourself which main points your reader should know if they only read the abstract.
  - c. Include the specific problem being addressed, the main policy failures, and the focus of your recommendations.
4. Describe the **problem**
- a. What issues are your suggestions trying to fix? Why is there a need for change?
  - b. Clearly define the current policy and its shortcomings
  - c. Explain the impact of the issue on the policymaker and their constituents.
    - i. Use impactful statistics
    - ii. Connect to local, community level issues affected by the policy
5. Discuss **policy alternatives**
- a. Pick up to three recommended alternatives
  - b. Back up your recommendations with evidence and research
  - c. Include the implications of this policy change and how it will benefit the community
6. Develop a **plan of action**
- a. Provide an evidence-based, realistic, and specific proposal for how to implement the policy alternatives you suggested
  - b. State what resources and funding are needed
7. Cite your **sources**
- a. You do not need to cite all sources; include a couple where readers can find more relevant information
  - b. Acknowledge funders, organizations, and individuals that contributed to the brief
  - c. Include a web link where readers can find more information
  - d. Include your contact information

