

Module #4: Developing a Policy Brief

Objective

- Students will be provided with advocacy experience in developing Policy Briefs

Context



A policy brief is a document that outlines the reasons for choosing a particular policy alternative or course of action in a current policy debate. It is usually developed by organizations to advocate for a particular issue. Because policy debate involves competing ideas, the purpose of the policy brief is to convince the policy maker and others that the current problem is urgent and needs to be changed. Therefore, it serves as a force for action.

Handouts & Resources Needed:

Handout 4.1: Developing Policy Briefs

Handout 4.3A: Evaluation Form-Student

Handout 4.3B: Evaluation Form-Facilitator

Sheet of paper – one for each participant

Pens/pencils

Journals

Computers with access to the Internet

Activity #1: Overview of Developing Policy Briefs (55 min) (For Advanced Students)

Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Provide an overview of Handout 4.1
- Divide students into groups of 5 per group and appoint a recorder.
- Have each group review and discuss Handout 4.1 on Developing Policy Briefs.
- Each group should review and discuss the example provided in the handout.
- Each group should select one controversial topic and begin to develop a policy brief based on the topic
- Once completed each group should present their topic to the larger group for input.
- Debriefing
- As homework students should continue to develop their policy brief by conducting additional research on the topic.

Activity #2: Interaction with Key Decision Makers (55 min) (For Advanced Students)

Part of the public policy process involves interacting with individuals tied to the decision making process. It also includes discussion of policies, programs and funding support (referred to as Organizational Maintenance).

Procedure:

- Icebreaker
- Form the same groups. They can also work as a larger group.
- Have students identify and make a list of key decision makers in public policy in their state. For example, State Senator, Congressman, Superintendent of Schools, Principal, etc.
- Have students finalize their Policy Briefs.
- Have youth share their brief with the larger group for input.
- Submit to the facilitator for review.
- Now have them identify a policy maker to send their Policy paper.
- The facilitator should edit the brief in final form

1. Have youth contact their local Congressional office. They can find their representative by using the internet, such as Thomas.gov

Prior to doing so, they should decide on a specific week with optional dates to meet with their representative

- Call the representatives office and ask to speak to Scheduling Secretary.
- Introduce yourself and your club.
- Explain you are a youth lead club in your state.
- Request a meeting during that week to talk about issues impacting youth and community
- Follow-up with a fax to that office

2. Develop an information folder with their policy brief to be delivered to their member. They may want to include information on ASPIRA history of successful advocacy.

3. Have them practice their presentation. They may only get 10-15 minutes so the presentation should be short and to the point. Identify who will cover what topics.

- Remind them that if they are asked a question that they don't know the answer to, let they representative or the staff member know that they will *check on it and get back to them.*

4. Thank their Policy Makers for his or her time. Send a one page thank you note summarizing the issues discussed and inviting the Policy Maker to keep in touch.

Activity #3: Evaluation (20 min)

Students should be asked to complete the evaluation for this unit.

Handouts:

4.3A: Evaluation Form-Student

4.3B: Evaluation Form-Facilitator

Handout 4.1

Developing A Policy Brief¹

The policy brief is a document that outlines the reasons for choosing a particular policy alternative or course of action in a current policy debate. It is usually developed by organizations to advocate for a particular issue. Because policy debate involves competing ideas, the purpose of the policy brief is to convince the policy maker and others that the current problem is urgent and needs to be changed. Therefore, it serves as a force for action.

The key to success is targeting the particular audience for your message. While usually, the audience is the policy maker or the decision-maker, it is also important to recognize that you will need to target a wider audience in seeking support for your advocacy initiatives. These might include journalists, diplomats, administrators, researchers or other community based groups. Sometimes, the more people hear your message, the more successful you will be

To be effective, the brief should be:

- **Focused** – All parts of the brief should be geared toward convincing the target audience through relevant ideas, evidence and convincing language.
- **Professional, not academic** – Common audiences are not interested in the research used to come up with the evidence for your cause. Instead, they are interested in knowing your perspective on the problem and potential solutions based on new evidence.
- **Evidence-based** – The policy brief is a communication tool. Thus, audiences expect a solid argument supported by evidence that the problem exists and that alternative solutions would have negative consequences.
- **Limited** – The focus of the brief needs to be short and limited to a particular problem or area of a problem.
- **Succinct** – Target audiences usually do not have the time to read long drawn-out arguments, and prefer policy briefs that are no more than 3 pages.
- **Understandable** – Clear and simple language should be used to explain an easy to follow argument that targets a wide but knowledgeable audience.
- **Accessible** – The document should be easy to read, with simple, descriptive titles dividing the text.
- **Promotional** – It should catch the eye of the target audience by being professional and creative with the use of color, logos, photos, slogans, or illustrative quotes.
- **Practical and feasible** – Arguments should be based on what is actually happening with a policy and should propose realistic recommendations.

¹ Adapted from Richards. The Policy Options Brief. (29 Feb. 2004)
www.gse.buffalo.edu/Fas/Jacobson/629/webnotes/policy_brief.htm

Handout 4.1

Common Structural Elements of a Policy Brief:

- **Title of the paper**
 - Should be *descriptive, compelling and relevant* to catch attention of the readers and compel them to read on.
 - For example the Education of our Future Leaders-Reducing the Drop out Rate
- **Executive summary**
 - Used to further convince reader it is worth reading. 1 to 2 paragraphs should include:
 - 1) a description of the problem addressed.
 - 2) a statement on why the current policy needs to be changed.
 - 3) your recommendations for action.
- **Context and importance of the problem**
 - This section is used to convince the target audience that a current and urgent problem exists which requires them to take action. It includes:
 - 1) a clear statement of the problem or issue in focus.
 - 2) a short overview of the root causes of the problem.
 - 3) a clear statement of the policy problems that clearly establishes the importance and relevance of the issue.
- **Critique of policy option(s)**
 - The aim here is to list the problems of the current policy and to illustrate the need for change and where change needs to happen, including:
 - 1) a short overview of the policy options(s).
 - 2) an argument of why and how the current policy is failing.
- **Policy recommendations**
 - This is a detailed and convincing proposal of how the failings of the current policy approach need to change through:
 - 1) a breakdown of specific practical steps of what needs to happen.
 - 2) a closing paragraph summarizing the importance of action.
- **Appendices**
 - Though the brief is short and targeted, *sometimes* further support is needed, so appendices are used only when necessary.
- **Sources consulted or recommended**
 - Often sources are not included because the audience is not academic. However, if you decide to include a short bibliography then place it at the end.

Handout 4.3A: EVALUATION

Evaluation Form Student

Indicate three new things you learned.

How will you use this new knowledge in the future?

Were the handouts useful?

How could this workshop have been improved?

Handout 4.3B: Evaluation Form for Facilitator

1. Did the workshops run smoothly? Why?
2. What aspects of the workshops did not work? What would you change?
3. Was it easy to understand?
4. How would you make it more culturally relevant?
5. What visuals would you add?
6. How would you make it more hands-on for youth?