Influencing policymaking through effective communication: A practical guide

A summary of

How to cite this NCCMT summary:

Categories:
Method, Communication, Policy brief, Policy development

Relevance For Public Health

This resource would be of interest to anyone who wants to learn how to effectively communicate research evidence to influence the policy-making process. Developed by the European Commission within the Framework Programme for Research on Socio-Economic Sciences and Humanities, this method is highly valuable for public health practitioners seeking to inform and create policies that impact public health. For instance, public health practitioners seeking to write a policy brief on the benefits of active transportation to inform urban planning policy decisions may find this guide useful.

Description

This practical guide provides concrete examples of how to communicate evidence to inform policy making. Developed by the European Commission, this workbook describes how to write policy briefs, use a project website to share information on policy issues and create project brochures.

There is an increased need for policy-relevant evidence to inform policy processes. Policy-makers require accurate and timely evidence to assess complex issues and propose policy solutions for these issues. This guide offers practical strategies to effectively communicate evidence to increase its usefulness for policy making.

This method consists of the following sections:

1. The concept
2. The policy brief - Engaging and sustaining interest
3. Some practical means
4. Ten steps towards an effective dissemination strategy
5. Glossary
6. Selected bibliography
7. Annexes

Implementing the Tool

Who is Involved?

Individuals in a variety of roles would be involved in using this resource, including those who have brought together relevant research evidence, decision-makers, policy-makers, individuals working with community stakeholders and those working in communications.

Steps for Using Tool

This method consists of the following sections:
1. The concept (p. 6-16)
- Make research accessible to policy-makers - without current, reliable evidence, policy-makers will use tradition and ideology to guide them.
- Clearly define and communicate policy-relevant issues - involve external stakeholders to ensure the issues are relevant and establish communication links with concerned parties.
- Establish two-way dialogue - involve decision-makers and researchers in the research process, disseminating evidence and policy making.
- Establish a communication and dissemination team - designate one individual to create policy-relevant dissemination materials for the project.
- Identify relevant target groups - involve relevant stakeholders in the project's development and dissemination activities.

2. The policy brief - Engaging and sustaining interest (p. 14-25)
The policy brief highlights a project's policy-relevant findings using professional, rather than technical, language to clearly articulate the policy implications of the work. The policy brief captures the interest of decision-makers and policy-makers by explaining the project's significance in a concise way. This publication is most likely to be read first in policy-making circles. The policy brief consists of these sections:
- **Cover** - the first page of a policy brief presents the project's policy relevance in a condensed form. The cover identifies the project, outlines the main policy problem addressed, introduces key findings and recommends a specific course of action. (1 page)
- **Introduction** - this section succinctly describes the project's main objective and the policy problem, and relates the evidence to the task of addressing it. (1 page)
- **Evidence and analysis** - this section explains the most policy-relevant findings with basic contextual information. This section is the heart of the policy brief. Key steps in writing this section include selecting relevant information, organizing the information, elaborating on limitations of the project and using appropriate graphics. (3-4 pages)
- **Policy implications and recommendations** - This section states the policy implications of the findings and offers recommendations. This involves organizing implications thematically or by stakeholder, and stating policy recommendations using appropriate language. (1-2 pages)
- **Research parameters** - This section describes the project's objectives and methodology. Prioritize information according to its value to policy-makers when reporting on methodology. (1 page)
- **Project identity** - This section provides basic information about the project such as details of the project consortium, project funding, time frame, website, etc. (1-2 pages)

3. Some practical means (p. 26-34)
The resource discusses the following ways to communicate, disseminate and exchange information with stakeholders:
- **Website** - Develop a website's policy communications capacity. A project should have a section of its website dedicated to policy issues, which can include a policy database with downloadable files from the project and links to external sites for legislation, position papers, etc.
- **Promotional flyer** - Create a flyer to capture the attention of target groups and increase awareness of the project. The flyer should explain the rationale behind the project and its objectives.
- **Identity brochure** - The identity brochure provides a detailed overview of the project to stimulate further awareness and interest among target groups. The identity brochure contains more information than the promotional flyer, outlining the project's major activities and their relevance for target audiences.
- **Using the right language** - Policy-makers need new and current insights and solid data to inform solutions for an issue. Express evidence in terms that stakeholders can understand.
- **Attract and maintain appropriate media attention** - Publicity increases awareness of a project among policy-makers and other stakeholders. A straight-forward policy brief could be a good starting point for creating a press release. Include hard data, numbers and diagrams where possible when preparing materials for the press. Monitor news stories related to the project and try connecting evidence to current events. For more information about working with the media, refer to the document, European Research - A Guide to Successful Communication.
- **Policy panels and briefing sessions** - Organize face-to-face dialogue between policy-makers, researchers and stakeholders through dialogue panels and briefing sessions. These events can be timed with key points in the policy cycle and targeted to individuals who would most benefit from them.
- **Final conference** - Organize a final conference to share the project's main findings and implications for policy decisions. Prepare a press release in conjunction with the final conference.

4. Ten steps toward an effective dissemination strategy (p.35)

5. Glossary (p.36)
6. Selected bibliography (p.37)

7. Annexes (p.39-56)

Includes examples of how to prepare a policy brief; guidelines for creating a project website, project flyer and project brochure; and guidelines for planning a final conference.

Evaluation and Measurement Characteristics

Evaluation
Has not been evaluated

Validity
Not applicable

Reliability
Not applicable

Methodological Rating
N/A Not applicable

Tool Development

Developers
European Commission
Website: http://ec.europa.eu/research/research-eu

Method of Development

This workbook was developed to foster interaction between researchers and policy-makers to ensure that research being conducted within the European Union Framework Programmes informs policy development on socio-economic issues. This workbook, along with other resources from the European Union, can be ordered from the European Union Bookshop (EU Bookshop).

Release Date
2011

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## Resources

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<tr>
<th><strong>Title of Primary Resource</strong></th>
<th>Communicating research for evidence-based policymaking: A practical guide for researchers in socio-economic sciences and humanities.</th>
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