

Policy Development Fellowship - Open Society Fund, BiH

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE POLICY BRIEF¹

The following short description provides an overview of the type of the **second** type of policy paper that you are expected to produce on the basis of your research in the policy fellowship programme:

- **What is the purpose, target audience and focus of the policy brief?**

The policy brief is a document that is produced to support an advocacy campaign and as such, provides a focused rationale for choosing a particular policy alternative. As any policy debate is a market-place of competing ideas, the purpose of the policy brief is to convince the target audience of the urgency of the current problem and the need to adopt the preferred alternative or course of action outlined and therefore, serve as a motivation for action.

As with all good marketing and advocacy tools, the key to success is targeting the particular audience with your message. The common target group for a policy brief is a non-expert, but informed audience that commonly includes decision-makers, journalists, NGO people, public officials and opinion leaders of all kinds.

In constructing a policy brief that can effectively serve its intended purpose, it is common for a brief to be:

- **Focused** – all aspects of the policy brief need to be strategically focused on achieving the intended goal of convincing the target audience. As such, the focus of the writer must be to appeal to the audience by:
 - clearly connecting their argument to the current policy debate (their current understanding of the issue);
 - showing the 'striking facts' that their research has produced (the specific data that clearly illustrates the urgency of the problem or need to choose a certain solution);
 - providing the correct balance of incentive and threat (carrot and stick) in the argument so as to move the audience to action, and;
 - choosing to include evidence that will clearly provide the rationale for the action proposed.
- All of these choices must be based on a clear understanding of the values, interests and current ideas of the target audience(s).
- **Professional, not academic** – The audience for the policy brief is not normally interested in the research/analysis procedures conducted to produce the evidence, but are very interested to know the writer's perspective on the problem and potential solutions based on the new evidence produced.
- **Succinct** – The type of audiences targeted commonly do not have the time or inclination to read an in-depth 20 page argument on a policy problem. Therefore, it is common that policy briefs do not exceed 6 – 8 pages in length.
- **Limited** – to provide an adequately comprehensive but targeted argument within such a space, the focus of the brief needs to be limited to a particular problem or area of a problem. For the policy researcher, this commonly means choosing to build an argument around a small area of the research covered or only using a small amount of the actual data produced.
- **Understandable** – This not only refers to using clear and simple language (i.e. not the jargon and concepts of an academic discipline) but also to providing a well-explained and easy to follow argument targeting a broad but knowledgeable audience.
- **Accessible** – the writer of the policy brief should facilitate the ease of use of the document by the target audience and therefore, should subdivide the text using clear descriptive titles to guide the reader and consider highlighting the key messages from the text.

¹ This description was developed by Eóin Young & Lisa Quinn and is based on LGI/OSI policy writing guidebook: Young, Eóin & Lisa Quinn (2002) *Writing Effective Public Policy Papers*. Budapest: Local Government Initiative/Open Society Institute. [Available to download on the internet: http://lgi.osi.hu/publications_datasheet.php?id=112]

- **Promotional** – the policy brief should catch the eye of the potential audience in order to create a favourable impression (e.g. professional, innovative etc) In this way many brief writers many of the features of the promotional leaflet (use of colour, use of logos, photographs, slogans, illustrative quotes etc).
- **Practical and feasible** – the policy brief is an action-oriented tool targeting policy practitioners. As such the brief must provide arguments based on what is actually happening in practice with a particular policy and propose recommendations that seem realistic to the target audience.

- **What are the structural elements of the policy brief?**

The policy brief should contain the following elements:

- **Title of the paper**
- **Abstract**
No more than 100 words that grab the attention of the reader and convince them to read further.
- **Context and importance of the problem**
 - A clear statement of the problem or issue in focus;
 - The key cause-effect relationships developed through the research and current impact of the problem;
 - The implications of the problem identified which clearly establishes the type of policy change needed.
- **Critique of policy option(s)**
 - An argument illustrating why and how certain options (maybe also including the current approach) will fail to address the problem and therefore, the best one to choose.
- **Policy recommendations**
 - A breakdown of the specific practical steps or measures that need to be implemented
 - Sometimes also includes a closing paragraph re-emphasising the importance of action.
- **Sources consulted or recommended**
Key sources (no more than 4 or 5) which support your position and also a reference to your longer policy study.

- **Isn't the policy brief just a summary of the policy study?**

This is a common perception, but in fact it is a mistake. The starting point for a brief is not the idea of presenting your research in a shortened format. The key questions you need to first ask yourself in preparing a brief are:

- Who are the target audiences for the brief?
- What are you trying to achieve in your advocacy approach to them?
- What is their current position in relation to your issue?
- What evidence/arguments would convince them to adopt your interpretation or policy recommendations?

This will produce a significantly different argument than the summary approach. This does not, however, mean that we do not stay true to the focus and analysis of the research; but rather than presenting an overview of our work, we build the best possible argument to get our positions noticed and discussed. If our briefs are good and targeted, they will produce many more opportunities to have more in-depth and influential discussions of the full research. So we can see here how the brief, in contrast to the study, is a focused advocacy tool.

- **Specific advice from the experience of former fellows:**

Conducting research is the key difference – so sell it - One of the most important selling points for any fellowship project is the fact that you conducted actual research to support your positions. Many commentators and people involved in a policy discussion will be making their

comments based more on their own informed opinions and not on the basis of any empirical evidence. This is especially true of transition contexts where there is a severe shortage of policy research. So you should stress this in your brief by highlighting the voices of the people you interviewed and/or the results of the quantitative analysis you conducted.

Make sure you include a clear link to your policy study - As the research is one of your key selling points, make sure that there is a clear link to your policy study included in the brief. Not only is this important for credibility, but also there may be people who read the brief that are interested in going further to see the in-depth research results. One easy way to do this is to include a box or a footnote on the first page. The following example is taken from a policy brief² and appears at the bottom of the first page:

This policy brief is based on the PREM Working Papers, 'Pastureland degradation and poverty within herder communities in Mongolia: data analysis and game estimation' by Wietze Lise, Sebastiaan Hess and Byamba Purev, and 'Carrying capacity dynamics, livestock commercialisation and land degradation in Mongolia's free market era' by Ton Dietz, Enkh-Amgalan, Tumor Erdenechuluun and Sebastiaan Hess. The full reports are available online at: www.prem-online.org

Make the main message or points easy to access and memorable - Readers need to be able to see the main points of your message by simply skimming through the brief. Also it's important that they remember these points. There are many ways to do this but some common approaches are:

- Make sure the most important data or 'striking facts' visually stand out, e.g. in graphs, pie charts, maps, boxes and/or photos;
- Public policy is about people, not statistics. So tell the stories of the people affected;
- Use Memorable or 'sticky' titles. For example, "An equal chance for local self government" rather than "An analysis of the effects of fiscal equalisation formula on public service delivery at municipal level in BiH". While this second title maybe suitable for a policy study, it focuses on reporting the research, not communicating your message.

- **What are the length and format requirements for the policy study?**

Length: 1,000-2,000 words (This word limit comes to between 4 to 8 double-spaced A4 pages – but this is NOT the format in which it should be submitted).

Format: As the policy brief is an advocacy tool you need to be creative in trying to attract the attention of the audience. Two examples of policy briefs are referenced in the footnote to see how 2 different organisations present their briefs³. You should consider a suitable approach for your context and audience.

Citation style: APA in-text citation style (For an overview of this style, see Appendix B, p.102 of policy writing guidebook - full reference in the footnote 1)

- **What is the timeline for submission of the first draft and the final policy brief?**

First draft submission date: ???

Completed policy study submission date: ????

² Poverty Reduction and Environmental Management (2005) *Herder Communities in Mongolia's Free Market Era*. Available on the World Wide Web. URL: <http://www.prem-online.org/archive/2/doc/uitgave9.pdf> [4 July, 2006].

³ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (2002) *Democratic Mirage in the Middle East*. Available on the World Wide Web. URL: <http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/Policybrief20.pdf> [2 May 2007].

American Chamber of Commerce in Hungary (2004). *Logistics as a pillar of Hungarian National Competitiveness*. Available on the World Wide Web. URL: http://www.amcham.hu/uploads/LogisticsPositionBrief_HUN_ENG.pdf [16 June 2006].