

This document is an excerpt and a summary of a Toolkit published by the Public Health Division of the Pacific Community. It provides guidance on how to prepare a policy brief. As a vehicle for providing advice to facilitate policy making, policy briefs should be focused and written in an easy-to-read, objective style. It is critical that policy briefs conclude with evidence-based policy recommendations that do not extend beyond the evidence.

What are policy briefs?

A policy brief includes a succinct summary of a specific issue or problem, policy options/implications to deal with the issue, and a recommendation or recommendations regarding the best option.

Who are policy briefs aimed at?

Government policymakers and other stakeholders who are interested in funding or influencing policy.

Is there a standard format for policy briefs?

Policy briefs can take different formats:

- A typical format is a single A4 sheet with at least 700 words.
- Longer briefs should not exceed 4 to 8 pages in length with a maximum of 3000 words.
- Other formats are possible too.

Types of policy briefs:

There are two basic types of policy briefs:

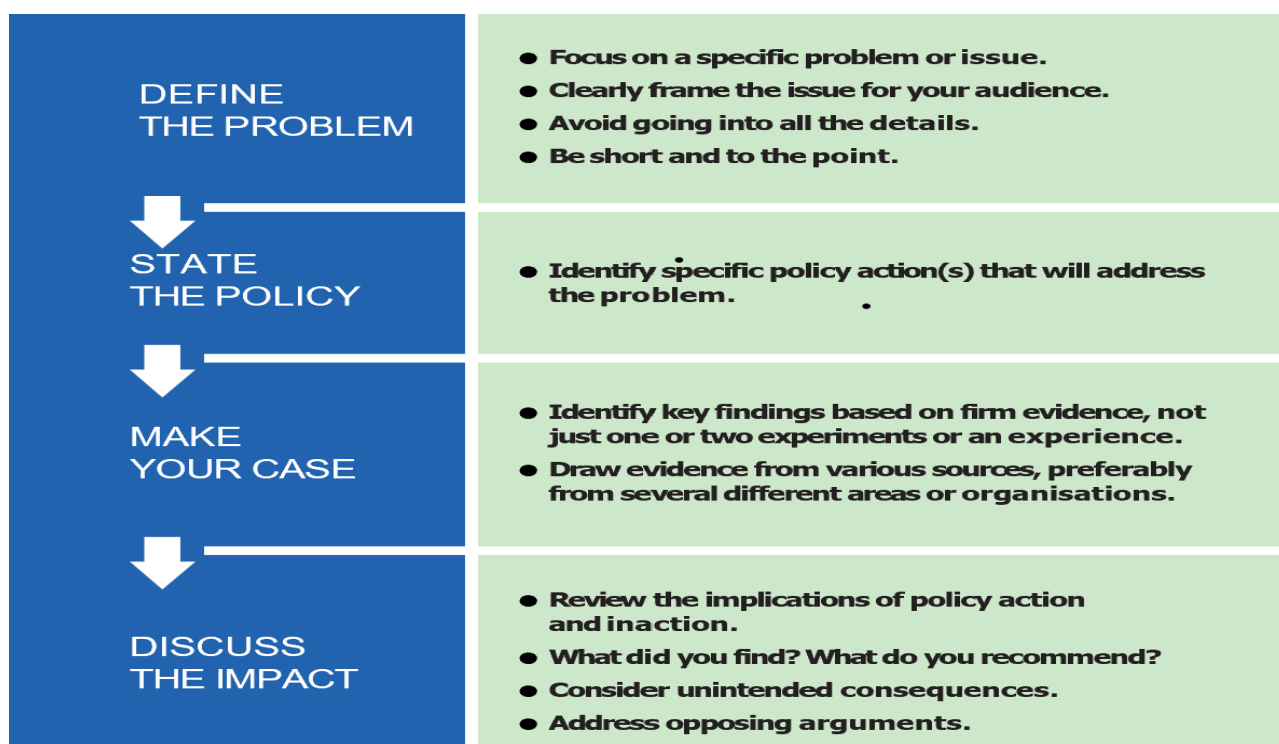
- An advocacy brief argues in favour of a particular course of action.
- An objective brief provides balanced information for policymakers to use to come to a decision.

What should a policy brief do?

A policy brief should:

- provide enough **background** for the reader to understand the problem;
- convince the reader that the problem must be addressed **urgently**;
- provide information about **alternatives** (in an objective brief);
- provide **evidence** to support one alternative (in an advocacy brief); and
- stimulate the reader to make a **decision**.

What should a policy brief contain?



CHECKLIST: 7 KEY STEPS

for developing a compelling policy brief

1 Examine the issue you will be dealing with:

Is the issue general or specific? How general or specific is it?

2 Think of your audience and know your audience:

Policy briefs are audience driven, so think about who your policy audience is. What information do they need to act upon your message? Your brief should be tailored to the needs of your audience. Is your audience an individual (Prime Minister) or an organisation (e.g., the government as a whole)? What aspects are of interest to policymakers? What do you want them to do differently?

3 Relevant actors and their positions on the issue:

Identifying the relevant actors is essential to produce a good assessment of the policy context and the interests at stake. It is important to analyse the relevant actors' interests in order to make policy recommendations that are sensible and viable.

4 Use the right language:

Remember that policymakers come from a wide range of backgrounds. They are a non-specialised audience, so make the language clear, simple and easy to understand. Do not use academic terms or development jargon. Keep the headings short and clear, and paragraphs short. Don't overuse statistics, and check your arguments, proof and persuasion.

5 Think of the big picture:

Identify the problem and what it is you want to address. Think of your relevant actors and your audience. Do they have similar interests or different ones?

6 Recommendations:

Your policy recommendation(s) should reflect specific steps and measures to be taken (and by whom) to realistically and feasibly implement the chosen option. You can close the brief with a call to action.

7 How-to:

How will you 'sell' the policy to help your audience build support to implement the policy you recommend? The choice of tools used to communicate the policy will depend on the type and content of the policy, your available resources and most crucially, on how the audience likes to receive information. It should be visible, clear and actionable