

# ACEAS Training Workshop

## How to write an objective policy briefing note

### A policy brief should:

#### *Have a clear and specific purpose or focus*

A policy brief should have a particular audience in mind. This could be the person making the decision, an advocacy group, or the media. It is important to keep this audience in mind when evaluating what information needs to be included in the brief. What do they know about the issue already? What new information would provide insight to the issue? The brief should be limited to one issue or problem.

#### *Be practical and based on evidence*

A policy brief aims to be persuasive and a big part of convincing the target audience of your key message is supporting your ideas with evidence. Evidence should be used to indicate that there is an issue with existing policy (if there is one) and to make recommendations. A policy brief is a practical tool that has real world implications.

#### *Be accessible and succinct*

A policy brief uses language that is familiar to the target audience in a clear and simple manner. It should also be logical and easy to follow. The assumption should be made that the target audience does not have time to read a lot of text, so the brief should be formatted clearly with descriptive headings.

#### *Include a list of references or acknowledged sources*

This is so information or statistics can be found and followed up, if necessary.

### Component paragraphs:

#### *Executive summary*

This section of the brief, also known as the overview, aims to provide a short summary of the brief and makes its significance (the 'why') clear. It should include a description of the issue being addressed, a key message stating why the current policy needs to be revised or a new one developed, and any recommendations. The executive summary should be one or two paragraphs maximum.

### ***Purpose***

This section aims to convince the target audience of the importance of the issue being addressed and why it requires action. It usually will include a brief description of the issue, a short overview of the causes, and a clear statement of the implications as it relates to current policy or why a new policy is required. The length of this section will depend on knowledge of the target audience and complexity of the issue.

### ***Critical analysis***

This section provides a discussion of the current policy being implemented, emphasising its strengths and limitations. This is where you make your case. It should be made clear what aspects of the policy needs to be changed. Include a short overview of the policy being critiqued and illustrate why this policy is inadequate. If there is no current policy, an explanation of why will be important. You will also need to provide the same level of critical analysis to argue your case for addressing this oversight/gap. Address how different stakeholders are implicated in the issue. This will typically be the longest section since this is where the bulk of your analysis occurs.

### ***Recommendations***

This section is where you detail what changes need to be made to existing policy in light of the limitations you outlined in the analysis, or the form of a new policy. It will usually contain a list of practical steps or actions that need to be taken, and by whom, to address the issue. This might contain a concluding statement that reiterates the key message and suggests the significance of the proposed recommendations.

### **General tips:**

- Use a catchy title;
- State your key message at the start and end with why it is important;
- Avoid using any academic or discipline-specific jargon – remember, this is most likely for a non-specialist audience;
- Use headings and sub-headings to break up large blocks of text and ensure clarity; and
- Use figures, charts or diagrams to help illustrate main points or key message.