

## An Intro to Communication tools: POLICY BRIEF

- **Focused** – all aspects of the policy brief (from the message to the layout) need to be strategically focused on achieving the intended goal of convincing the target audience. For example, the argument provided must build on what they do know about the problem, provide insight about what they don't know about the problem and be presented in language that reflects their values, i.e. using ideas, evidence and language that will convince them.
- **Professional**, not academic – The common audience for a policy brief is not 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.
- **Evidence-based** – The policy brief is a communication tool produced by policy analysts and therefore all potential audiences not only expect a rational argument but will only be convinced by argumentation supported by evidence that the problem exists and the consequences of adopting particular alternatives.
- **Limited** – to provide an adequately comprehensive but targeted argument within a limited space, the focus of the brief needs to be limited to a particular problem or area of a problem.
- **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 (i.e. usually not longer than 3,000 words).
- **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 wide 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.
- **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 use 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 which seem realistic to the target audience.

The policy brief is usually said to be the most common and effective written communication tool in a policy campaign. However, in balancing all of the criteria above, many analysts also find the brief the most difficult policy tool to write. (Source: [www.aarp.org/research/](http://www.aarp.org/research/))