



# Science Advocacy and Communications

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## Writing Persuasive Policy Briefs

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# Science for a healthy planet and safer world.

[Union of  
Concerned Scientists]





# { Goals of Workshop

- Learn the key elements of a good policy brief, 1-pager, science research brief
- Highlight considerations that go into the style, tone, and audience of writing a policy memo.
- Where to find resources for understanding the current policy situation
- Practice writing a policy brief
- Learn about opportunities to get involved in science advocacy and campaigns





# { What is advocacy?

**Taking action to defend  
or support an issue  
important to you, with a  
specific target in mind.**







# { Why get active?



Participating in events like the Rally to Stand Up for Science in Boston earlier this month is just one way that scientists can engage on policy issues. ANUBISABYSS/FICKR

## What early-career researchers can do to advocate for science

By Kristy Hentchel | Feb. 27, 2017, 2:15 PM



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# Policymaking Process and Leverage Points



- Elections
- Congressional Oversight
- Legislation
- Regulation
- Accountability
- Public Education & Engagement
- Media
- Social Media





# “Decision-Makers”

## Who Are They and Why Do I Need to Care?

### Know Your Audience

“What needs to change first?”

“Where is that change made?”

“Who can make that change happen?”







# Science Advocacy Entry Points

- Many ways to get involved and influence decisions:
  - Meet w/elected officials or other targets
  - Write and call decision-makers
  - Organize Expert letters and petitions
  - Town Halls
  - Public speaking and public education
  - Media
- A good policy brief is needed in all of the above!

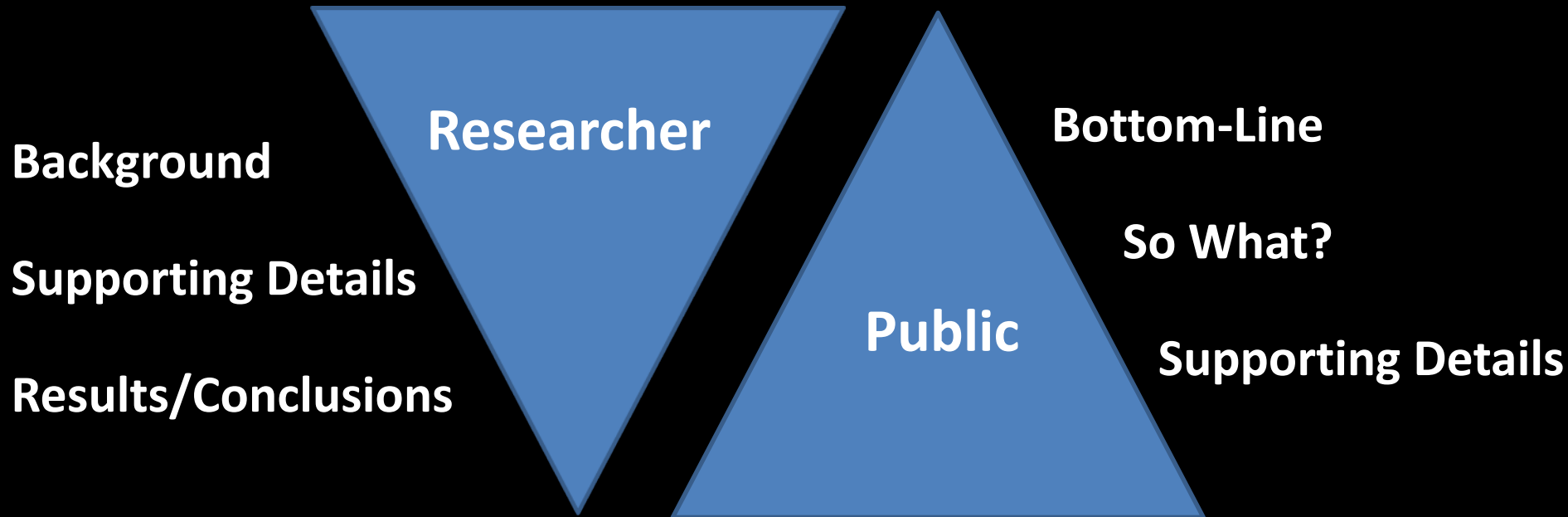
# What is a Policy Memo

- A practical and professionally written document that provides analysis and/or recommendations directed to a predetermined audience regarding a specific situation or topic.
- Well organized and structured in a clear and concise style that assumes the reader possesses limited knowledge of, as well as little time to conduct research about, the issue of concern.

<https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/policymemo>



# Different styles of communication







# Tips for an Efficient Memo

- Provide relevant information to a policymaker who needs to make a quick, well-informed decision on an issue.
- The memo should grab attention and convey pertinent information efficiently.
- Present only the most essential points.
- The memo should convince the policymaker that you have reviewed all the evidence—though you should only present highlights.
- [http://www.bren.ucsb.edu/academics/documents/How\\_to\\_Structure\\_Your\\_Policy\\_Memo\\_2016\\_000.pdf](http://www.bren.ucsb.edu/academics/documents/How_to_Structure_Your_Policy_Memo_2016_000.pdf)

# { Structure of a policy memo

1. Good title
2. Summary of memo
3. Background and context, or problem statement
4. Recommendations & rationale
5. Limitations, barriers, and/or alternatives
6. Conclusion
7. References (optional)
8. Contact information



# Style and Tone

- **Brevity:** The busy reader seeks a concise memo.
- **Clarity:** Memos are written for “uninformed but intelligent” readers, not policy wonks. Be direct, specific, consistent, and avoid jargon or highly academic language.
- **Objectivity:** Although most memos are written to convince a decision-maker to select a certain policy, the author should consider multiple perspectives that address the strengths and weaknesses of all policy options.



# Key questions

- Who is your audience?
- What do they know about the issue?
- What decision-making power do they possess?
- What purpose does the memo serve?
- What problem is the policy addressing?
- Why is it important?
- What population(s) is impacted by the policy?
- What lever(s) do you (or other stakeholders) propose to address the problem?
- What are the benefits and trade-offs of the policy? What alternative policies exist?
- What limitations or barriers exist? Consider implementation costs, resources, timing, and political implications.







# Policy Information Sources

- Bill tracker sites (DukeSciPol, some scientific societies) that will give you a sense of where legislation is.
- Emails from advocacy organizations asking you to take action on an issue are helpful hints that things are moving.
- State legislature sites: In CA LegInfo: tracks bills, votes, has bill language and fact sheets, lists of supporters. Other states have similar websites.
- State agencies, local governments, professional associations, and advocacy organizations all often have information about policies being tracked, policy positions, and/or policy priorities.
- Local and state governments may also provide information about public hearings, town halls, or other opportunities to provide public comment, join advisory committees, etc.



# How to keep informed of policy gaps and needs?

- Talk with legislator staffers
- Professional associations often have policy committees
- Read the newspaper and your newsletters and journals of associations, including the editorial pages.
- Sign up for listservs from key professional associations and advocacy organizations
- See what policies your university or college is involved with (e.g. privacy, scientific integrity, divestment, sustainability, etc)



# Science Network

[Union of  
Concerned Scientists]

[www.ucsusa.org/ScienceNetwork](http://www.ucsusa.org/ScienceNetwork)



@SciNetUCS



# How to deliver your brief to your target?

- Identify the staffer who works on your issue and then build a relationship with them. Be a resource.
- Partner with policy advocacy organizations, join listservs, plug-in to their campaigns
- Join advisory committees or boards of organizations, local governments, state agencies, “science advisory boards.” These committees will often have direct access to policymakers
- Partner with communities and community groups and explore how to make your expertise available to communities that are working to solve specific problems.



# Upcoming Actions



- CARB: Clean Truck Rule
- January: Start of 2020 Legislative session
- Upcoming UCS Science Network trainings
- Science Rising Activities
- California Campaigns:
  - 100% Clean Energy and Turn Down the Gas
  - Transportation bills in CA Legislature
  - Climate impacts – LTEs about fires, electricity grid, resilience



# Resources

- Scientist Advocacy Toolkit
  - [www.ucsusa.org/scientisttoolkit](http://www.ucsusa.org/scientisttoolkit)
- Science Rising
  - [www.sciencerising.org](http://www.sciencerising.org)
- Talking with the Media
  - <https://www.ucsusa.org/take-action/science-network/talking-media>
- Science Communications Portfolio Guide
  - <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/attach/2015/04/Science%20Communication%20Portfolio.pdf>

# Resources

- [http://www.bren.ucsb.edu/academics/documents/How\\_to\\_Structure\\_Your\\_Policy\\_Memo\\_2016\\_000.pdf](http://www.bren.ucsb.edu/academics/documents/How_to_Structure_Your_Policy_Memo_2016_000.pdf)
- <https://libguides.usc.edu/writingguide/policymemo>
- [https://educationalequity.org/sites/default/files/documents/best\\_practices\\_-\\_policy\\_memo.pdf](https://educationalequity.org/sites/default/files/documents/best_practices_-_policy_memo.pdf)
- <http://www.sciencepolicyjournal.org/2019nspnpolicymemocompetition.html>
- How to Avoid Common Pitfalls In Professional Writing. John Holdren
- Erin Heath, AAAS – “Communicating Science Through Policy Briefs” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fd6URnJAbu8&list=PLYZRJuGxleHRjiALEKC0exijOJUJIUCc-&index=2&t=0s>
- Kumar Garg, Schmidt Futures – “Getting Things Done” - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDUgn0mcip0&list=PLYZRJuGxleHRjiALEKC0exijOJUJIUCc-&index=3&t=0s>

# Resources

- Science Communication Portfolio: A guide to creating communication materials that complement your science:
  - <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/attach/2015/04/Science%20Communication%20Portfolio.pdf>
- Science Communication Portfolio: An example portfolio on Sea Level Rise:
  - <https://www.ucsusa.org/sites/default/files/attach/2015/04/Science%20Communication%20Portfolio%20Sample.pdf>



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