

# POLICY BRIEFS

Writing for Impact  
in Policy and  
Practice

November 8 2022



# AGENDA

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At the end of today's workshop, our goal is that you...

- Have a broad understanding of different types of briefs and what they are intended to accomplish
- Have a new or renewed appreciation for the importance of knowledge mobilization for influencing policy
- Have practiced mapping key audiences for briefs and writing key policy brief messages for those different audiences



# GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER



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Please go to Mentimeter:

[www.menti.com](https://www.menti.com) – use code 6625 9949

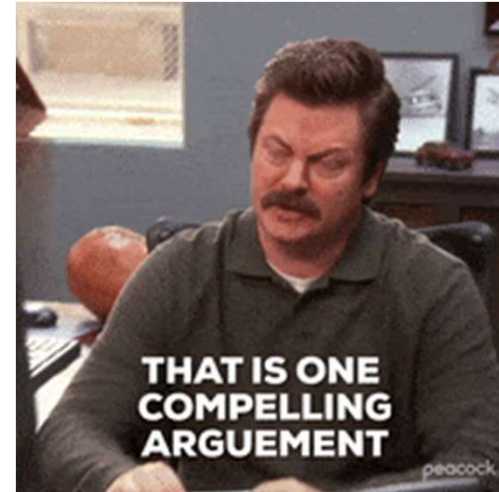
# WHAT IS POLICY?



## We talk about policy all the time. What do we mean?

- Policy is anything that governments do or do not do in order to ensure the social order – the coordination of individuals, groups, and institutions within reasonably table normative systems – so that basic needs can be met, groups, crises managed, and the future survival of society is enhanced (Reimer & Bollman, 209, p. 10; see also Dye (1987)
- Purposive course of action or inaction undertaken by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern (Anderson, 1994, p. 5)
- Policy is not random but purposive and goal oriented; public policy is made by public authorities; public policy consists of patterns of actions taken over time; public policy is a product of demand, a government-directed course of action in response to pressure about some perceived problem; public policy can be positive (a deliberately purposive action) or negative (a deliberately purposive decision not to take action) (p 3.) (Smith & Larimer, 2017)
- Public policy has distinct purposes: resolving conflict over scarce resources, regulating behaviour, motivating collective action, protecting rights, and directing benefits toward the public interest” (Theodoulou (1995) in Smith & Larrimer, p. 3).

POLICY BRIEFS – NOV 2022 – WEEDEN & RICH



# POLICY MATTERS

It is not the size of the population, the level of the natural resources or the geographic location of a country that determines its long-run economic performance. Rather, it is primarily the quality of a country's institutions and policies that determine, over time, its economic fortunes (Kerr & Seymour, 2010, p. 5).



# POLICY MATTERS FOR SPORT

The renewal of Sport Policy in 2023 comes on the heels on the safe sport crisis, showing just how important policy matters to sport and recreation.

Sport operates in a complex environment of multi-level governance, which requires clear and direct evidence-informed knowledge mobilization across researchers, practitioners, and decision-makers.



# DIFFERENT TYPES OF BRIEFS

## Use different tools for different tasks

- Policy Brief – **what we're tackling today!**
  - Advocacy Brief
  - Objective Brief
- Briefing note
- Internal/External facing
- Targets specific, usually non-specialist audience



# WHAT IS A POLICY BRIEF?

## The “currency” of policy development!

- A concise summary of an issue
- Written to inform those who influence policy decisions – **note that these may or may not be elected officials. Many different (and unexpected) actors influence policy!**
- Convinces the reader that there is a problem that is important and must be addressed with some urgency
- Has a clear purpose and audience and provides material for action
- Can be an effective tool for translating research/knowledge into action
- Should be designed to improve decision making by aligning evidence to implementation – an exercise in pragmatic persuasion
- Can be used to advocate or raise awareness about a particular issue, including identifying and proposing alternative forms of action/recommendations based on evidence provided
- Written by think tanks, academics, political advisors, policy advocates, public servants – many different actors





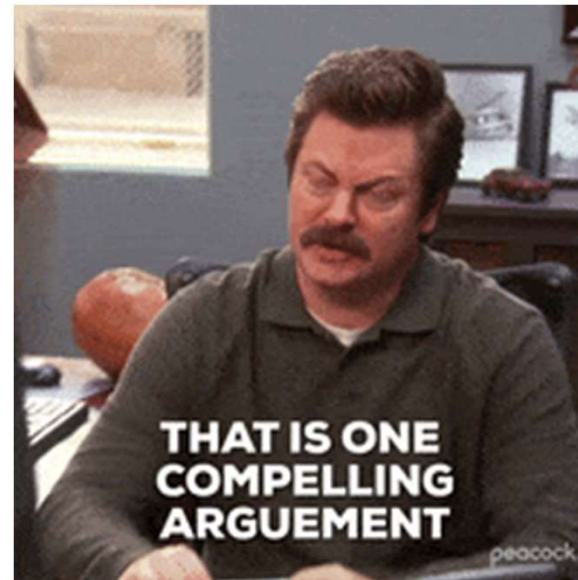
# EXAMPLES

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## Connecting Rural Canada

## Parks and Recreation as an Essential Service

(These are in the GoogleDrive folder)



# DIFFERENT FORMATS OF BRIEFS

**There is no set format and lots of room for creative presentation.**

- Traditional: 3-5 page written document (Examples just reviewed)
- High-Level: “placemat” or one-pager (see SWIFT one pager in Google Drive)
- Innovative: digital tools (Instagram and TikTok increasingly popular) (example: “oncanadaproject” on [Instagram](#))

**What matters is reaching & impacting your target audience!**

- How will the brief be shared/disseminated?
- Who is your audience? What do they like/need?
- Triangulate with using multiple formats!



# COMPONENTS OF A POLICY BRIEF

You have a lot of room to be creative in format, but the key components must still be present:

INTRODUCTION	BODY	RECOMMENDATIONS	OTHER CONSIDERATIONS
<p>What is the problem?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What evidence do we have?</li> <li>• What is the history of this problem?</li> <li>• Why is it relevant now?</li> <li>• What contextual factors need to be considered?</li> <li>• What are the causes?</li> <li>• What are the outcomes?</li> <li>• What are the implications of inaction?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the key elements of the problem that need to be considered?</li> <li>• What evidence do we have about them?</li> <li>• What are the policy implications?</li> <li>• What interventions have been tried elsewhere?</li> <li>• What are examples of successful change?</li> <li>• What are examples of failure?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be integrated into the body or in a stand-alone section.</li> <li>• Short, realistic, and easy to locate.</li> <li>• What are possible solutions?</li> <li>• What alternatives could be pursued?</li> <li>• What are the strengths and weaknesses of these alternatives?</li> <li>• What are the considerations for policy makers?</li> <li>• What are the resource implications?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make the brief look nice – use programs like Canva, PowerPoint, Publisher....</li> <li>• Tables, graphics and images can convey a lot of information in a small space</li> <li>• Titles should be short and sweet</li> <li>• Paragraph should be concise and focused</li> <li>• Use headings</li> </ul>

# HOW TO GET STARTED

## There are six key steps to preparing a policy brief:

- Zoom out to the big picture: why does this matter?
- Know your audience: why should they care?
- Distill your message: what is the most important thing your audience needs to remember after seeing your brief?
- Plan your brief: gather your evidence, your recommendations, and all contextual and implementation information you need
- Write your text: put it all together!
- Design your format: based on your content, what is going to best communicate your message and achieve your goals?



# EXERCISE SCENARIO

## Practicing Preparing a Brief

- Practicing the process of drafting a brief helps you think about how you might apply this to your own work: it is a practice and skill that comes by 'doing'
- Often in your career, you may be asked to prepare a brief on something you know little about. Being able to quickly review evidence and think about how it will be received is an important skill. Think of this exercise as less about the content and more about the process.
- Today, we will use an example and somewhat fictitious (but reality-inspired) scenario to practice crafting three of the most critical parts of preparing briefs: mapping your audience, crafting key messages, and preparing potential recommendations.
- All of the material can be accessed in the following GoogleDrive: [https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1\\_5D6V1tJ-MSB6xXqzNTpTV2zex7I7b9V?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1_5D6V1tJ-MSB6xXqzNTpTV2zex7I7b9V?usp=sharing) (also shared in the chat)




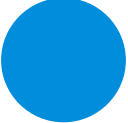
# EXERCISE SCENARIO



Rogers Communications, the Toronto Blue Jays, and many baseball fans and business leaders have been advocating for a major replacement of the Rogers Centre (or what many people know from its previous name as the SkyDome). Several powerful voices are lobbying to get public funding allocated to the renovation – some are going so far as to threaten to build in new location in the GTA or to leave the city entirely. However, research demonstrates that the costs of renovating or building new sports stadiums far outweigh any economic development that proponents promise they will bring. This is counter-intuitive to most elected officials, sports fans, and the broader public, but sports facilities do not increase tourism, do not stimulate new spending, and do not attract significant industry or employment (economic development). Instead, most economic gain from a new stadium accrues to the sports franchise, not the community.

Rogers Communications and its partners are requesting that half of the bill for renovating the former SkyDome should be paid from public money to a total of \$200 million of public investment in the renovation from various orders of government. They are proposing investments of \$100 million from each the provincial and federal governments and \$50 million from the City of Toronto.

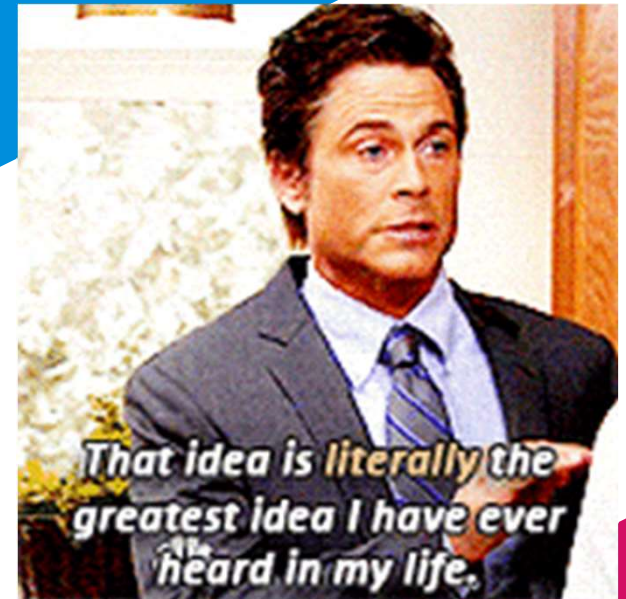
As researchers and practitioners, you know that this is delicate issue that balances big money and public sentiment against evidence that does not support public investment in a new or renovated facility. Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to convince policy makers to make a potentially unpopular decision to not spend public dollars on this project.



# EXERCISE SCENARIO

## Who is your audience?

- What are the different types of audiences?
- Create an “archetype” or “persona” – an amalgam of key characteristics of each type of audience: who are they? What matters to them? What are their pain points? Who are they’re key partners/enemies? What do they need help with/what do they not want to discuss? What will help them succeed in their role?
- Use the worksheet provided in the Google Drive folder to help guide you in creating an overview of your assigned audience
  - Group 1: Federal – Minister St-Onge
  - Group 2: Provincial – Minister MacLeod
  - Group 3: Municipal – Mayor John Tory
  - Group 4: Media/Broader Public



# EXERCISE SCENARIO

## Mapping Your Audience

- Create an “archetype” or “persona” – an amalgam of key characteristics of each type of audience: who are they? What matters to them? What are their pain points? Who are they’re key partners/enemies? What do they need help with/what do they not want to discuss? What will help them succeed in their role?
- Use the worksheet provided in the Google Drive folder to help guide you in creating an overview of your assigned audience
  - Group 1: Federal – Minister St-Onge
  - Group 2: Provincial – Minister MacLeod
  - Group 3: Municipal – Mayor John Tory
  - Group 4: Media/Broader Public
- You have 10 minutes.
- Put your final group summary into JamBoard:  
[https://jamboard.google.com/d/1jYbVcXaVmv9b5ihDWUgeh-4kPxb7pHXD\\_D\\_rq\\_cets/edit?usp=sharing](https://jamboard.google.com/d/1jYbVcXaVmv9b5ihDWUgeh-4kPxb7pHXD_D_rq_cets/edit?usp=sharing) (also shared in chat)





# DEBRIEF



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Each group: Share the most important insight about your assigned audience.

Let's briefly discuss!

# EXERCISE SCENARIO

## Practicing Preparing a Brief

- Two of the most important parts of a policy brief are the key messages and recommendations
  - Key Messages: What do you want your reader to **REMEMBER** after they've read your brief? When they are talking to their peers or driving home after work, what should they be thinking about?
  - Recommendations: What do you want them to **DO** after reading your brief? Only include things you actually want to see happen – never give recommendations that are not your ideal outcome.
- Use the worksheet provided in the Google Drive folder to help guide you in crafting some draft key messages and potential recommendations for your assigned audience:
  - Group 1: Federal – Minister St-Onge
  - Group 2: Provincial – Minister MacLeod
  - Group 3: Municipal – Mayor John Tory
  - Group 4: Media/Broader Public
- You have 20 minutes.
- Put your final group summary into JamBoard:  
[https://jamboard.google.com/d/1jYbVcXaVmv9b5ihDWUgeh-4kPxb7pHXd\\_D\\_rq\\_cets/edit?usp=sharing](https://jamboard.google.com/d/1jYbVcXaVmv9b5ihDWUgeh-4kPxb7pHXd_D_rq_cets/edit?usp=sharing) (also shared in chat)



# DEBRIEF



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Each group: Share your top key message and top recommendation.

Let's briefly discuss!

# REFLECTION



Please go to Mentimeter to check in with the reflection questions:

[www.menti.com](https://www.menti.com) – use code 6625 9949

**THANK YOU!**



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# SOURCES



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