

ADVOCACY COMMUNICATION TIPS

Based on a brief review of existing toolkits and other sources, an array of different materials was identified as being potentially useful in enhancing your advocacy efforts:

Policy reports

- The longest, most-detailed format/method; 20+ pages in length.
- Reader friendly: clearly delineated sections, brief sentences, concise paragraphs, use of bulleted and enumerated lists, boldface headings.
- Structure depends on purpose, but generally contains:
 - Executive summary:
 - A concise presentation of major findings, conclusion and recommendations.
 - First section of the policy report, usually written last, should be straight to the point, capturing the reader's interest in usually 500 – 750 words.
 - Targeted towards and written for highest-ranking officials in your audience.
 - Purpose to inform the reader of the report's substantive message, educative.
 - 1 or 2 more detailed sections defining the problem, the extent of the problem, its causes and evidence supporting its existence.
 - Evaluation section, evaluating different policy options.
 - Conclusions and recommendations.

Policy brief

- Relatively short document; 2-6 pages, though brevity is essential.
- Usually aimed at decisions makers and people who have interest in or influence over the issue and who need to assimilate information quickly.
- Addressed to specific groups: large, specific yet varied/diverse audience:
 - Eg. elected officials, mental health service providers, expert policy makers, employers.
- Purpose:
 - Transmitting information
 - Updating policy or research developments

- Summarising knowledge to date.
- Should be divided into sections with clear and informative headings.
- Generic outline:
 - 1-2 paragraphs briefly defining and summarising the issue; explaining the problem or challenge and the reasons for taking action.
 - Evidence showing the significance of the issue; consider using a variety of different kinds of evidence; simplify evidence and provide references.
 - Contextual information regarding actions taken to date to remedy situation.
 - Alternative policy responses.
 - Recommended policy options and argumentations to justify the recommendations.

Policy memorandum

- Short: 2 pages long; long memos do not get read/may be ignored.
- Addresses specific people or groups within an association or organisation.
- Generally addresses the most senior person in a group: decision maker/influential person who needs to absorb the content of a memo quickly because s/he:
 - Has little time as busy with several commitments, holds various responsibilities
 - Has a low level of familiarity with the issue.
- Headings should be used in relation to the memo purpose to ease reading and allow for rapid information finding.
- Purpose:
 - Recording an agreement
 - Transmitting information
 - Enabling actions.
- Generic outline (similar to a policy briefing, but even more concise on the matter):
 - 1 - 2 paragraphs briefly defining and summarising the purpose, stating the issue/ problem, topic or objective.
 - Summary of findings including: the background; relevant history that led to current situation; previous actions; problem/issue; current situation; supporting evidence; and policy options.
 - Conclusions with recommendations for action.

Legislative analysis

- Usually no longer than 4 pages.
- Focuses on analysing the effects of particular legislations in detail, as well as the effects of proposals on specific populations, systems, processes or outcomes.
- Written in narrative style, organised by topic with key provisions being described first, often easier to read and understand than actual legislative proposals.
- Advocacy groups can target 2 groups with legislative analyses:
 - The executive and legislature; to express and explain support or opposition to a legislation (more detailed, formal)
 - Generic outline includes:
 - Heading consisting of and citing specific legislation, including name, number, version and authors.
 - Brief statement summary on the intent of the legislation.
 - Legislative history
 - A more detailed description of the legislation.
 - The cost and anticipated effects of legislation on populations or sectors of interest.
 - The entity's position of support/opposition to legislation.
 - The community; to urge concerned parties to contact their elected officials regarding support or opposition to legislation (brief, emphasis on impact on the community):
 - General outline similar to 'formal' legislative analysis, with some changes:
 - Opens with the organisational position on the legislation.
 - Less attention to legislative history and detailed description of legislation. Instead, it highlights cost and anticipated effects on the community or sectors of interest.
 - Ends with practical steps that are needed and/or will be taken and how to get involved.

Opposite the editorial article piece (Op-Ed)

- 750-800 words
- Printed often at the beginning, opposite the editor's section; hence, lots of visibility.

- An Op-Ed aims to be provocative, raise awareness on an issue, calling attention to particular point of views, trying to reach a wide audience, introducing a new perspective, and igniting debate.
- Can be light hearted, satirical, or in other ways less formal; ability to be creative and authentic, put information across with use of different techniques to make/keep interest.
- Quite often timely pieces by writers who are considered experts in that particular subject; often accompanied by a short biography of author, including (a) picture(s).
- No general outline; appears in newspapers. Therefore, should be tailored to the newspaper you are aiming at.

Letter to the editor

- 75-150 words; strict limits set by newspapers; the more succinct and concise it is, the greater the chance of it getting published, and eventually read and remembered.
- Written in direct and timely response to a specific article/issue.
- Can reach a large audience, and is a section often monitored by elected officials and their offices.
- Can present information or knowledge not previously discussed in an article; should not waste space by summing up the article it is responding to, only refer to it briefly.
- Effective letters to the editor include:
 - Analysis of a policy issue
 - Focus on essential issues
 - Use of convincing evidence
 - Presentation of a policy response to a significant social problem.

Press release

- 1-2 pages in length
- Clear purpose: what is *the* message to be transmitted?
- Uses active verbs, try to avoid excessive passive reporting.
- Consider varying the length of the sentences so that longer sentences are placed next to shorter ones.

- Use the in-house style and graphical elements (e.g. logos) if there is one, and keep to it. If not, create one which is clear and appealing.
- Proofread carefully – every word needs to be correct and there should be no typographical errors.
- Title: state the message to transmit in 1 sentence – this is considered the heading.
- First paragraph: provide a longer synopsis of the main message of the press release in one paragraph (3- 4 full sentences).
- Body: 2- 3 short paragraphs on what is being reported, what is new, what is suggested. Include quotations from the report(s) or from senior people in the organisation. Suggest clearly what the recommendations or actions to take should be.
- Final paragraph: provides contact details to follow up with, other essential information.
- If additional information needs to be provided, consider placing it in an annex that can be consulted freely, but does not detract from the clear message and brevity of the press release itself.

Research summary document

- Key findings: Articulate key findings using approximately 3-5 bullet points. More key points may be necessary for a research programme. Each bulleted point can then guide readers to more complete sources of information in a subsequent paragraph or a related fact sheet.
- Fact sheets: For more complex studies, or if you want to provide more detailed information, each key finding can be expanded. Fact sheets are typically half to one full page, preferably with graphical images to illustrate your point.

Things to ensure

Be responsive: Consider your target audiences when deciding on a document type.

Concise: Make it short and to the point; be sure that information is easy to find.

Interesting: Read through all the findings, highlighting those that are new and/or compelling; consider omitting those that are not interesting or deviate from the point.

Highlight key points: Use bulleted lists, with one finding or conclusion per bullet.

Logical: Make sure the points progress in a logical order.

Useful: Write clear conclusions and recommendations; if readers know what to do with the information, they will know-how to apply it.

Attractive: Spend a small portion of your budget on graphic design; attractive materials are more likely to be circulated widely and read. If possible, print documents in colour and distribute to important stakeholders. Alternatively, upload documents to a website and distribute the link widely and wisely.

Scientific Communication	Advocacy Communication
Detailed explanations are useful.	Simplification is preferable.
Extensive qualifications can be necessary for scholarly credibility.	Extensive qualifications can blur your message.
Technical language can add greater clarity and precision.	Technical jargon confuses people.
Several points can be made in a single research paper.	Restricted number of messages is essential.
Be objective and unbiased.	Present a passionate compelling argument based on fact.
Build your case gradually before presenting conclusions.	State your conclusions first, then support them.
Supporting evidence is vital.	Too many facts and figures can overwhelm the audience.
Hastily prepared research and presentations can be discredited.	Quick, but accurate, preparation and action are often necessary to take advantage of opportunities.
The fact that a famous celebrity supports your research may be irrelevant.	The fact that a famous celebrity supports your cause may be of great benefit.
Many in the field believe that scientific truth is objective.	Many in the field believe that political truth is subjective.

Table 1: 10 Differences between Scientific and Advocacy Communication. From: Apfel, F. *Promoting Health: Advocacy Guide for Health Professionals*, by International Council of Nurses, Switzerland 2008. Original source: WHO (1999) *TB Advocacy – A Practical Guide*.

Framing is an important stage in the advocacy process and at the heart of advocacy action. The following table demonstrates how you can make your story news worthy and grab media attention.

Anniversary peg	Can this story be associated with a local, national, or topical historical event?
Breakthrough	What is new or different about this story?
Celebrity	Is there a celebrity already involved with or willing to lend his or her name to the issue?
Controversy	Are there adversaries or other tensions in this story?
Injustice	Are there basic inequalities or unfair circumstances?
Irony	What is ironic, unusual, or inconsistent about this story?
Local peg	Why is this story important or meaningful to local residents?
Milestone	Is this story an important historical marker?
Personal angle	Who is the face of the victim in this story? Who has the authentic voice on this issue?
Seasonal peg	Can this story be attached to a holiday or seasonal event?

Table 2: Framing for News action. From: Apfel, F. *Promoting Health: Advocacy Guide for Health Professionals*, by International Council of Nurses, Switzerland 2008. Original source: Wallack et al. (1993) *Media Advocacy and Public Health: Power for Prevention*.