

COMMUNICATING RESEARCH TO POLICYMAKERS

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Meeting Prep :

- <https://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/1730.pdf>

TODAY'S TOPICS

- Goals
- Methods
- Messages
- Working with Partners
- Context and timing

ONE PERSPECTIVE: RESEARCHERS AS POLICY ENTREPRENEURS

"Helping researchers become policy entrepreneurs How to develop engagement strategies for evidence-based policy-making," Overseas Development Institute, September 2009.

Six key lessons essential to any researcher or organization wanting to generate evidence-based policy change

1. Policy processes are complex and rarely linear or logical.
2. Many policy processes are only weakly informed by research-based evidence.
3. Research-based evidence can contribute to policies that have a dramatic impact on lives.
4. Policy entrepreneurs need a holistic understanding of the context in which they are working.
5. Policy entrepreneurs need additional skills to influence policy.
6. Policy entrepreneurs need clear intent – they need to really want to contribute.



GOALS



SET YOUR GOALS:

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO ACCOMPLISH IN COMMUNICATING WITH POLICYMAKERS

- How are the findings relevant to policy? What impact might the findings have on policy?
- What policymakers have a decision-making role in the pertinent area of policy?
- What's the best time and way to reach these policymakers?
- What's the best way to share the research?

COMMUNICATIONS METHODS

- Individual (one-on-one) briefing (in person or by phone)
- Public / stakeholder briefings (conferences, webinars)
- Testimony to legislative body
- Written submission to agency
- Prerecorded video (shareable on websites, through social media)
- Broad dissemination: news release, op-ed, social media, newsletters

MARKERS OF SUCCESS

WHAT ARE YOUR COMMUNICATING GOALS

Your role, when corresponding or meeting with policymakers is to:

- **Educate.** Present information
- **Identify.** Define and articulate relevance to policy, describe a new or existing problem and why it's important
- **Analyze.** Bring your analysis skills to an issue
- **Motivate.** Spark interest in policymaker to consider your findings in future policies

GOLD STANDARD: POLICY BRIEFING

1. Determine audience (legislative, administrative, budget, etc)
2. Identify the right time to meet – during decision-making window and/or less busy times
3. Prepare
 - Craft elevator speech – this is the essence of what you have to say / top line points in less than 2 minutes.
 - Highlight 1-3 key facts/stats
 - Use them and tell a story
 - Help connect the dots
 - Develop talking points (to guide your remarks, also good for media interview)
 - Prepare a one-page leave behind, consistent with talking points

ANTICIPATE AND PREPARE FOR TOUGH QUESTIONS

- Think about your work. What are some questions policymakers might have? Prepare answers for anything tricky ahead of time.
- What should be done to respond to findings? What do you propose we do?
- Are these findings relevant to children and families in my jurisdiction, if so how?
- Are there cost implications associated with policy-related action?

DURING THE POLICY BRIEFING

1. Establish relevancy
 - Make the connection to policy
 - Share key findings
 - Share a prepared anecdote to help contextualize the findings / tell a story
 - Note any disagreement with findings
2. Engage the audience. Have one or more prepared questions
3. Keep the meeting brief. Be prepared to share your key messages in 30 min or less
4. Make recommendations, as appropriate
 - “Based on the research, we believe activity Z yields the best opportunities for young children.”
 - Don’t say, we need more research as your only recommendation. This is what policymakers most often hear from researchers.
5. Offer to be a resource – you’ve established your expertise; invite the policy maker to contact you
6. Relax. You are the expert, and policymakers want to hear from you.

AFTER THE BRIEFING

- Follow up in writing to share additional materials and to provide your contact information
- Offer to be a resource
 - Emerging themes



EMERGING THEMES

Alignment



Emerging theme: Alignment - Early Learning Network

What does alignment mean in the context of early learning? Alignment relates to the distance between the programs children are exposed to in pre-K and those they are exposed to in elementary school. In other words, it indicates how well an...

[Read more](#)

earlylearningnetwork.unl.edu

EXAMPLE:
SHARE
FINDINGS AS
YOU GO

EXAMPLE: SHARE FINDINGS AS YOU GO

WHAT WE'RE STUDYING

Early Learning Network teams at the [University of California, Irvine](#) and the [University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill](#) are examining how much alignment exists among various factors across and within grades, across and within classrooms, and among individual children in those classrooms.

This knowledge will help us understand the extent to which alignment influences children's success as they move from pre-K to third grade.

Alignment factors include:

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Aligned programs and policies send teachers, parents and students the same messages and avoid contradictions that could disrupt learning.

“In education, alignment helps establish goals about what students should know and be able to do, and then coordinate other programs and policies to line up with these goals,” said Cohen-Vogel.

By using data to better understand how much alignment exists, the early childhood education field will be better positioned to test how any misalignment may contribute to the so-called pre-K fadeout effect.

“Fadeout refers to the initial positive impacts high-quality pre-K programs have on child outcomes — impacts that do not reliably persist into elementary school,” said Cohen-Vogel. “It’s possible that certain levels of misalignment may help explain why these impacts fade as a child moves into elementary school and beyond.”

Greater alignment has the potential to close achievement gaps and improve learning opportunities for all children.

“Children come to the classroom with different constellations of language, literacy, math and social-behavioral skills,” said Carol Connor, principal investigator, UCI team. “People often think about classroom alignment — but we are looking within classrooms to understand how alignment supports learning for individual children.”



WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

- More gains in literacy and math skills are achieved when instruction is aligned to individual children's skills rather than taught in a large class setting (UCI).
- Educators perceive that the degree of alignment among standards, curricula and assessments is stronger *within* pre-K and kindergarten than it is *between* them (UNC).
- Reported reasons for weak alignment between pre-K and kindergarten include a debate over the purposes of early childhood education, institutional silos and procedures that disrupt data sharing and school transition practices (UNC).
- Greater instructional alignment may promote greater gains in vocabulary across pre-K and kindergarten (MDRC).

“Our research with students in kindergarten through third grade shows that learning opportunities aligned with children's unique set of skills are more effective in improving literacy and math outcomes than typical whole-class instruction,” said Connor. “At UCI, we are now examining how alignment works for pre-K.”



MESSAGES



KEY ELEMENTS OF THE TALKING POINTS



How does the research tie-in to policy? What's the problem/challenge and who does it affect?



What research was done and implications?



What are options for addressing the problem/challenge?



Supplement with one-pager describing aim, problem, summary of research, and implications

TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY, STUDIES SUGGEST THESE STRATEGIES

- Minimize cognitive load and the amount of material
- Create conditions for transfer to long term memory
 - Use multiple coding (such as words and pictures)
- Present materials multiple times
- Maintain consistent messages
- Minimize irrelevant information
- Tell stories & give examples
- Ask for feedback
- Provide time for processing and
- Pay attention to energy and fatigue



WORKING WITH PARTNERS



FINDING PARTNERS TO SHARE RESEARCH

- Thought partner
 - Help identify who and when to share research findings with
 - Advise on political landscape and offer input on framing
- Conference presentations
- Getting the word out through newsletters and social media
- Co-host policy briefing

WORKING WITH PARTNERS

- Advocacy organizations (ZEROTOTHREE, Children's Defense Fund, Alliance for Early Success Network)
- Think Tanks (Brookings Institution, AEI, Center on Policy and Budget Priorities)
- Professional membership organizations (National Head Start Association, Child Care Aware of America)
- Policymaker membership organizations (National Conference of State Legislatures, National Governors Association, National League of Cities, Conference of Mayors, Congressional Black Caucus, Congressional Baby Caucus, etc.)
- Academic leaders



CONTEXT AND OPPORTUNITIES



GRADATIONS OF GOOD TIMING

Keeping in mind: what's in focus and why

- Partners are driven by opportunities on policy landscape; some years conference focuses on Head Start, sometimes on WIC, and so forth
- Policy and Reauthorization opportunities (Ex. Every 5 years, Head Start is reauthorized)
- Budget opportunities are annual
- State level – governor priorities, State of the States
- Varying Administration priorities (Fatherhood, Teen pregnancy prevention)
- National issues on the agenda (Migration, Opioid issues)
- Emergencies (Natural Disasters)



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GOVERNORS SHOW SUPPORT FOR YOUNG CHILDREN IN THEIR STATE-OF-THE-STATE ADDRESSES AND BUDGETS

The Alliance for Early Success believes that protecting or making progress in early childhood investments depends largely on state leadership. Governors have a lot of discretion over how to allocate, maximize or misuse resources. And their policies will either support or harm young children; and either help or prevent their families from becoming independent, successful and secure.

In November 2018 voters cast ballots to elect governors in 36 states. We supported our partners to get candidates on record and hold them accountable for effective early childhood policies and increased resources. Early childhood advocates and leaders went into high gear to educate, inform and shape policy platforms. With assistance from staff at the National Governors Association who have been collecting information on what governors have been saying on education since last summer, we took a look at what governors said about early childhood in their State of the State addresses and budget documents.[i]

NATIONAL
GOVERNORS
ASSOCIATION
AND THE
ALLIANCE FOR
EARLY SUCCESS



POLL

THANKS!



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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- How to communicate research for policy influence
<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08a15ed915d622c00055b/Guia-02-serie-3-ingles.pdf>
- <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/advocacy/advocacy-research/influence-policy/main>
- Knezovich, J. (2012). Should think tanks write policy briefs? What an RCT can tell us? Available at: www.onthinktanks.org
- International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP) (2010). Information Literacy for Policy Makers and Influencers. Available at: <http://www.inasp.info>