

Research Meets Policy: Introducing research communication

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This explainer document is the first in a four part series based on Research Meets Policy at SFU 2021 - a virtual summer institute hosted by the SFU Knowledge Mobilization Hub.

In this explainer, we provide an overview to orient you to research communication in a policy setting. The main goal of research in the policy landscape is to support evidence-informed policy development, that is, to contribute to well-informed decisions to make positive social, economic, and environmental impacts.

What is policy?

Policy is a system of principles used to guide decisions and achieve specific outcomes. Public policy refers to government priorities, strategies, and objectives that are used to inform social, environmental, or economic outcomes. While policy is distinct from politics, the latter often influences the direction of the former.

In Canada, policymaking occurs at federal, provincial, municipal, and Indigenous levels of government. The processes vary widely based on jurisdiction, level of government, and specific organization.

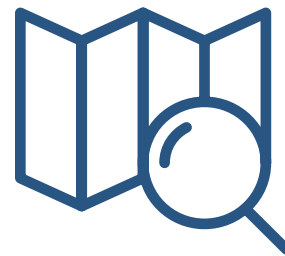
The policy landscape

Each policy issue has an associated landscape – a unique combination of actors, policies, processes, drivers, and opportunities. Defining the policy landscape allows you to identify where your research fits and how to best engage with policy development. Changes in the policy landscape may open or close ‘windows of opportunity’ for policy change.

Map the policy landscape

Map the policy landscape for your research by answering the following questions:

- What issue is your research addressing?
- What is the current policy context? Where are the gaps and opportunities?
- Who might be interested in, benefit from, or be impacted by your research?
- What value and relevance does your research bring to each actor and to the overall landscape?
- Who do you need to reach to drive action? What is the desired impact? What does success look like?



Ways to engage with policy

There are many pathways for researchers to engage with policy. Your challenge is to get the right information to the right people at the right time.

- Education (e.g. community engagement)
- Outreach (e.g. media and social media)
- Technical input (e.g. consultations, technical committees, co-designed research)
- Advocacy (e.g. NGO partnerships)
- Relationships (e.g. elected representatives)

Get ready to communicate your research

Translation of your research for a non-academic audience is **not** about dumbing it down. Begin with identifying your purpose, audience, and format.

1. Purpose: what do I want to accomplish?

Map the policy landscape for your research:

- What issue is your research addressing?
- What is the current policy context?
- Where are the gaps and opportunities?
- What is the desired impact?

2. Audience: who do I want to reach?

Identify and define target decision maker(s) and other stakeholders:

- Who has the power to implement your solution? What level of government are they working at? Are they in a political office, or are they in the public service?
- Who might be interested in, benefit from, or be impacted by your research?
- What value and relevance does your research bring to each actor and to the overall landscape?
- Who are your allies? Who is opposed? Consider creating a [power map](#) to guide you.

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3. Format: what format is going to be most effective?

Based on the purpose and audience, identify relevant methods, approaches, and timing:

- Where does your audience get their information?
- What is your audience's preferred format?
- When is a good time for the information to be actionable for your audience?
- Who is the best voice for this information?

Crafting your message

The format you use for communication shapes your message as much as the information you provide.

Information + format = message

You need clear, specific recommendations that are achievable and supported by a strong evidence base. Keep the audience in mind while crafting your message.

Resources for research communication

Evidence for Democracy (2019): [Evidence in Action](#) and [Eyes on Evidence](#) reports
Evans and Cvitanovic (2019): [Policy engagement for early career researchers](#)
Topp et al (2018): [Knowledge management for policy impact](#)
Hetherington and Phillips (2020): [Guide to engaging in policy \(in the US\)](#)
Oliver, K., & Cairney, P. (2019): [The dos and don'ts of influencing policy: a systematic review of advice to academics.](#)