10 Rules for Policy Brokerage

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Policy-making

- It is about making **choices**
  - between different options,
  - which affect different stakeholders in different ways,
  - with different consequences,
  - many of which are not certain
- Virtually all policy making carries **complexity, risk and uncertainty**
  - But perceptions of complexity, risk, cost and benefit vary between stakeholders
- The political perspectives of stakeholder effects, interests, electoral positioning and electoral risk are always present
Questions that the policy audience will always have:

• Why do we have to do something now?
• Why is it a priority?
• Have we got the option that meets our broader needs?
  ▪ Who will it benefit, who won’t it benefit?
  ▪ Does it benefit priority stakeholders?
  ▪ What are the risks and to whom?
  ▪ What is the political risk of doing or not doing?
• What will it cost?
Purposes of evidence in informing policy

• To provide explanation of complex (open) systems so options can be explored
• To define options for action to achieve a particular outcome(s) and explore implications of each option

• To address a particular implementation issue or scientific question
• Emergencies/crises

• To define and plan an intervention
• To evaluate the impact and effect of the intervention

• To identify a problem
• Horizon scanning
Lesson 1: Solicited vs unsolicited reports, understand the policy process

• **Always have an interested customer** – Reports that do not have an agreed customer who is actively seeking the information are unlikely to be impactful on the policy process

• If necessary **create the customer**

• **It is critical to understand the policy process and key players** in the particular entity of interest – One can then create the customer.

• **Decide on the nature of the output** (s) – it is a comprehensive report, a policy brief, or some other format.

• **Decide the process** – agree that preemptively with the customer
Lesson 2: Defining the problem is critical

- Too often the question the customer (i.e., the policy-maker) wants answered is not the same as the question in the mind of the academic.

- Alignment of intent is critical.

- Reports can have multiple purposes and the authors must be clear what is the intent:
  - Is it to explain a system?
  - To provide options?
  - To address a particular problem?
Lesson 3: Timing is everything

- Policy makers have limited bandwidth
- They lurch to problems as they arise
- The policy cycle is often messy, complex
- Externalities can shift priorities rapidly and change the potential for impact
Lesson 4: Remember all of the stakeholders

- Don’t underestimate the value of stakeholder analysis
- Understand the impact on each stakeholder and their influence
- Recognize the inevitable cognitive biases including your own
- Recognize the differing perceptions of risk and precaution, cost and benefit
Lesson 5: Provide practical and scalable options/ways ahead/solutions

• Policy makers will generally not pick up a problem unless there is a solution.

• It is rare for a problem definition alone to change policy.

• Solutions must be practical; affordable, policy and politically acceptable and, where appropriate, scalable.

• In general this means incremental versus disruptive change.

• But this does not mean sacrificing intellectual integrity
Lesson 6: Remember who you are writing for

- Many academic reports never get read
- Too many are written for the benefit of the writers, not for the benefit of the audience
- Consider that most reports will need to have multiple audiences
- Style matters, and graphics can matter a lot
- Think about the power of narrative
- Clarity and avoidance of jargon is critical
Lesson 7: Be inclusive of scientific disciplines

- Policy makers need to look at policy issues in a multidimensional way.
- Nothing is purely technical
- Policy makers look at issues through more than one angle
- There is always a values-based and political lens
- Consider the spillover effects: both positive and negative
Lesson 8: Acknowledge the uncertainties

• Admitting to evidence gaps is not a sign of weakness
• Acknowledge where the evidence is less robust
• Policy makers are used to dealing with uncertainty
Lesson 9: Prepare the key audience

- If there is a key policy maker (analyst, or decision maker, or politician), don’t surprise them.
- Keep connected, keep them informed of preliminary direction of any report or project
- Keep checking alignment and understandings between supplier and customer
- Think of the other questions the policy maker will have
Lesson 10: Writing a report is not impact

Once the report has been submitted there are issues of:

- ensuring the key audience understands (follow up)
- Do other stakeholders understand?
- Is there a need for PR?
- Is there a need for further actions, report, evaluation?
Lesson 11: Rules don’t always work
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