Guidelines for Policy Briefs
NTRES 4300 - Environmental Policy Processes
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Numerous actors within the policy process use policy briefs as an effective tool for conveying information and proposing courses of action to decision makers. For this course, you will be preparing two such briefs on your selected environmental policy topic: (a) a 1-2 page "advocacy" brief; and (b) a longer brief containing all supporting information and analysis for the short briefs. The long brief should be a maximum of 15 pages of text, plus references and any figures or tables you choose to use which should be appended to the text. The first brief and your oral presentation of it will constitute 15% of your final grade; the longer brief will constitute 45% of your final grade in this course. We will post several examples of environmental policy briefs to the course web site and discuss them in class sessions.

ADVOCACY BRIEFS AND OBJECTIVE BRIEFS

Depending on the mission of an agency or organization, policy briefs are developed to promote a particular point of view about an issue or to provide an "objective" or neutral view of the issue. For example, environmental organizations such as the Natural Resources Defense Council and the National Wildlife Federation seek to effect change in a particular direction or toward a particular goal. Other types of advocacy organizations, such as the National Home Builders Association and the American Coalition for Clean Coal Energy, prepare policy briefs consistent with their mission. The briefs prepared by these organizations are called "advocacy briefs" because they advocate specific policy decisions consonant with their overall mission. That is, they form their arguments to favor a particular course of action.

In contrast, agencies such as the Congressional Research Service prepare briefs for Congress that are intended to be objective, i.e., free of a particular political point of view on a policy issue. They aim to provide balanced information in such a way that a decision maker could make up her/his own mind regarding which policy options they should support.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOUR SHORT BRIEF

In the future, you may find yourself in a job that requires one or the other of these approaches to policy briefs. Hence, you will prepare one of each type of policy brief on your chosen topic for this course. The first is the short advocacy brief. It should be 1-2 pages long and contain:

(a) a concise statement of the issue or problem to be solved,
(b) a short list of the major stakeholders in this issue and their points of view,
(c) a brief summary of the most relevant background or history of the issue,
(d) a short list of the available policy choices or options and their feasibility,
(e) a succinct conclusion consisting of a set of either recommended (advocacy brief) or potential (objective brief) courses of action by the decision maker(s).

Your brief should provide enough background for the reader to understand the problem/issue, and convince them that the problem requires attention and needs to be addressed. It also should contain enough information about alternatives to convince the decision-maker to support your alternative (advocacy brief) as opposed to any other alternative. That is, the entire brief should be presented or argued in such a way that it leads logically to either an advocated course of action (advocacy brief) or, in the case of the longer objective policy brief (below), a neutral list of potential courses of action.

Your short advocacy brief is due **February 17, 2014** by 4:00 p.m. via e-mail to Barbara (blb4@cornell.edu) and Cliff (cek7@cornell.edu).

These briefs will be the focus four spring class sessions during late February and early March, 2014. At these sessions you will present your short policy briefs to a "briefing panel" consisting of the course instructors and other students in this class. We will identify the specific dates of these sessions while we are in Washington, D.C.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR YOUR LONG BRIEF

For the long brief of your policy topic, you will prepare an objective policy brief. Being "objective" or "neutral" is difficult for some people but is an essential skill for most careers. Even if you work for an advocacy group, you will be most effective if you are capable of appreciating, and articulating, all perspectives in a debate. Being able to be "objective" or "neutral" is the mark of a professional, and especially of any scientist, planner, engineer, economist, or resource analyst involved in environmental policy. Maintaining one's credibility in the professional world depends on the "honesty" inherent in being objective in both the acquisition of evidence and in its analysis, if not in one's conclusion.

Your brief should include several components:

1. *Executive summary*. This summary should be no longer than a single page and consist of the most essential information needed to reach a conclusion or set of recommendations.

2. *Issue definition*. This section should tell the reader what the problem or issue is, or what the nature of the conflict creating the issue is. It also should briefly state for whom this issue is a problem and why, and describe the extent of the problem for which portions of the population. In other words, say why a policy maker should care. This section should identify why this is a public problem rather than a private problem, or a common rather than individual problem. Finally, for the purposes of this course, it should state which federal government agencies are currently involved or should be involved in the future.

3. *Policy background*. This section should describe how the issue emerged historically. That is, it should describe how the issue got on the public agenda what action has been taken in the past by the federal government (executive, legislative, or judicial branches) to address the issue, why this action has not been adequate, and what new information or evidence has emerged to indicate that additional federal government action is needed. This section could draw on the interviews you will conduct while in Washington, D.C.

4. *Stakeholder identification*. This section should draw heavily on the interviews you will conduct while you are in Washington, D.C., as well as your own research. It should identify each group of stakeholders, their characteristics, why they care about this issue, what their position is regarding the issue, what strategy they are using to achieve their objectives, and the resources (staff and budget) they have to obtain their objectives. The stakeholders you identify should include groups on all sides of an issue.

5. *Policy options*. In this section, you should identify all feasible policy options, i.e., the actions that the federal government could take to address the issue. You should explain the relative merits (i.e., pros and cons, or costs and benefits) of each policy option that you identify. To the extent that evidence is available to evaluate each option, you should provide it. Your interviews should help you elicit such evidence but you likely will need to follow up with a good deal of additional research.

6. *Recommendations*. State whether the evidence indicates that some options are preferable to others and why. Reasons may include costs, political or social palatability, policy tools available to address the issue, ease of implementation, or other considerations. Again, your interviews should be used to obtain information for this section, as should your research.

7. *References*. A complete list of your sources, consistently and correctly formatted. Use any recognized format and use it consistently. The general principle for all citations is that another reader should be able to readily access that source on the basis of the information provided. For web sites, include date visited and date of last update to the web site.

8. *Persons interviewed*. This list should name the person you interview, their title, the section or division in which they are employed, the agency or organization for which they work, and the date, time, and location of your interview(s). If you conduct any interviews by phone, include all of the information above but indicate that the interview was conducted by telephone. Any written correspondence with the persons interviewed also should be fully documented.

You will be graded on the content of your brief, the quality of your writing, and your adherence to formatting requirements, including references cited.

Your long brief is due by 4:00 p.m. on **April 14, 2014** via e-mail to Barbara (blb4@cornell.edu) and Cliff (cek7@cornell.edu).