

Author Guidelines for NCFR Policy Brief Submissions

Please prepare your policy brief for the National Council on Family Relations in accordance with the following guidelines. You will be asked to revise the brief before review if the brief does not adhere to these guidelines. All briefs will undergo a double-blind review.

Policy brief definition: A policy brief is a summary of high-quality peer-reviewed research on a specific topic where the preponderance of research points to clear and conclusive policy implications.

Elements to Include in the Policy Brief (total length: 4-or 8-pages, single-spaced)

1. **Title:** must be engaging and brief (8-12 words), descriptive, and informative; it should explain why the brief should be read. The title is what captures a reader's attention and entices the reader to read the rest of the brief.
2. **An Abstract:** Succinctly provide the aim, problem, summary of research, and policy implications / recommendations; 100 words. The reader should understand the aim, problem, and implications / recommendations within the first minute of reading the brief. Persuade the reader to continue reading. *Implications are what could happen whereas recommendations are what should happen; implications are less direct but may be more persuasive in some situations.*
3. **Body of Brief**
 - a. **Aim:** The purpose of the brief; 1-2 sentences; included in the first paragraph—not as a separate section; all aspects of brief should be related to the aim.
 - b. **Problem:** Describe the topic's context, causes and magnitude of the problem, and the topic's importance to the reader. Convince the reader that change is needed. Include only the most relevant facts the reader needs to know. The reader should understand the aim, problem, and what will be learned in the first paragraph. It is not necessary to identify this information as a "Problem" section or with the word "Problem" in the header.
 - c. **Research Findings:** Synthesized current, high-quality, objective research without partisan views. Briefs are to be educational and informative, and from a family perspective. Ensure information is easy to understand as most readers will not be research experts. Provide brief information regarding generalizability of findings (e.g., study population). It is not necessary to include technical research methodology and statistical analysis. Be careful not to provide too much or too little information as both can distract and weaken the argument.

If analyzing the impact policies or policy options have on families, consider using the Family Impact Checklist (Family Impact Institute; <https://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/family-impact/>) to assist in articulating the family perspective. Please see page five below for additional details.

- d. **Conclusion/Discussion:** Briefly highlight main takeaway messages.

e. Policy Implications (or recommendations): Provide policy implications / recommendations that logically flow from previously stated research in bulleted format. All implications / recommendations must be concrete, specific and could include who would implement the suggestions. Do not include a statement indicating which policy, policy option, or recommendation should be chosen. Ensure implications / recommendations are audience appropriate.

4. References: Include all references at the end of the brief.

5. Suggest Talking Points: Provide possible quotes, statistics, highlights, main takeaways, etc. that could be emphasized in a sidebar. Suggested items include information the intended audience could use as talking points about the research or implications / recommendations, if the individual read nothing else in the brief. The suggested points also could be additional information to hook the reader. Talking points are not included in the brief page count. Ten or fewer talking points may be suggested.

6. Author Information and Biography: Please include a short author bio illustrating author's expertise in field. The bio does not count toward page limit.

When writing:

1. Briefs should be based on high-quality, objective research, evidence-based, educational, non-partisan, and reflect the current state of the research from a family perspective.
2. Consider adding an international or practitioner perspective or demographic trends when appropriate. This information could be added within the text and/or as talking points.
3. Know the audience. The brief should be written with the intended audience (e.g., federal policymakers and their staff) in mind. Understand the reader's knowledge, political constraints, concerns, interests, awareness of issue and questions that need answering, and willingness and motivation to change. Use language with which the intended audience is familiar. *While the briefs are intended for federal policymakers, briefs may be circulated elsewhere.*
4. Be focused, clear, concise, and succinct. Use smaller rather than larger, more difficult to understand words.
5. Make every word count. The reader has limited time and attention and may only skim the brief. Stay on topic. Provide more information with fewer words.
6. Use declarative statements instead of complex sentences. Use shorter words where possible. Briefs should be easy to read and non-academic. No specialized knowledge or additional readings should be required to understand the brief.
7. Use proper spelling, grammar, and punctuation.
8. Use an active voice. For example, "Congress should create new bills that employ a developmental perspective to decrease delinquency" is active while "New legislation should be created employing a developmental perspective to decrease delinquency" is passive.
9. Avoid the use of jargon and acronyms unless certain the intended audience is aware of the term.
10. Talking points should be obvious for easy inclusion in policymakers' 5-minute speeches.
11. Write the abstract after the main brief has been written.
12. Be simple, consistent, and personal (to the intended audience)
13. Write timely topics. Policymakers will pay more attention to briefs regarding topics of current interest and value to them.

Formatting

1. Limit the brief to a single topic. If multiple topics are present, perhaps multiple briefs need to be written.

2. Use sub-headers, spacing, and bullets to guide the reader easily through the brief. Sub-headers should be concise and convey critical messages yet catch the reader's attention. The brief should be aesthetically appealing. Avoid overcrowding.
3. Use bulleted lists to convey information. Bulleted lists should contain 5 – 7 completed thoughts (avoid 1- or 2-word items).
4. Use single-spaced text, left justified
5. Number pages beginning with the title page in the upper-right-hand corner.
6. Use 12-point font Times New Roman. Different fonts will be applied during production to highlight key points.
7. Use figures or infographics to convey data in an easy-to-read format. Data need to be understandable to non-academics. Use simple labels written horizontally while also explaining content. In general, use graphs to demonstrate patterns. Tables are less likely to convey the intended message to non-academic individuals. Avoid duplicating data between the text and tables.
8. Format your references in accordance with the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA), 6th edition. Number the references and use numerical superscripts in text to identify references.
9. Prepare your brief for anonymous peer review by removing authors' names and affiliations. The briefs will undergo a double-blind review process.
10. Save your file as a Microsoft Word document.

Sources of Information. Additional information and sources can be provided online so that the intended audience has additional helpful information as needed.

Additional Possibility. Authors writing a policy brief may have the option of writing a practitioner brief to accompany the research brief.

Analyzing the Impact Policies have on Families

Additional Guidance if Using the Family Impact Checklist

If analyzing the impact policies or policy options have on families, consider using the Family Impact Checklist (Family Impact Institute; <https://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/family-impact/>) to assist in articulating the family perspective.* The checklist includes five principles which can be used to examine the intended and unintended consequences policies have on families. Several questions are provided within each principle to guide the analysis. Not all principles or questions may be relevant to the analysis. Apply appropriate principles and questions as needed. Conflicting information may surface through examination of the brief topic using the impact checklist. Include in the analysis the option of not changing the policy or not having a policy addressing the issue. Describe the history of policies when it is germane to the current brief. It may be appropriate to include a cost analysis of implications or recommendations.

Competing implications may emerge through the family impact checklist review. An effective policy brief will examine the intended and unintended consequences of each implication.

The Family Impact Checklist described above is the main checklist. Specific policy checklists are available in the following general areas: child and family services, child care centers, and the school setting at www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/family-impact/.

*Review *The Family Impact Rationale: An Evidence Base for the Family Impact Lens* (Bogenschneider, Little, Ooms, Benning, & Cadigan, 2012) and *The Family Impact Handbook: How to View Policy and Practice through the Family Impact Lens* for more information on the Family Impact Checklist and viewing policy from a family perspective (<https://www.purdue.edu/hhs/hdfs/fii/family-impact/>).