

10 Tips for Academics Who Want to Engage with Policymakers

There are many ways for academics to engage with policymakers. Here are some rules of thumb which we hope will be useful for your next projects.

1. Focus on what the science means for policy



→ Many scientists talk too much about science and too little about what it means for policy. As a consequence, scientists often fail to address questions which are of interest to policymakers. Think hard about which aspects of scientific methodology and background are relevant for the issue at hand and which are not - and leave these for the end.

2. Summarise your recommendations for policymakers at the very beginning



→ By saving your conclusions for the end, you might lose your audience along the way. Policymakers receive hundreds of papers to read and are regularly bombarded with information. In order to get your message across, you need to deliver your main points clearly and concisely right away.

3. Keep your brief to 1-2 pages



→ Avoid providing too much information. You need to be the one distilling and summarising the most important information for your listeners/readers - not the other way around. You can always provide references to more in-depth content for those who are interested.

4. Use easy-to-understand terms and avoid words with double meanings



→ Avoid using academic jargon that only experts can understand. Finding the right words is important. However, easy terms don't mean sloppy terms. On another note: sometimes captivating stories are more convincing than mere facts.

5. Engage with people outside of your own bubble



→ Avoid preaching to the choir and only addressing the people already convinced by your message. This will force you to get creative with your communication strategy, learn from other perspectives and reach the people who probably need to hear your message.

6. Think about the policy impact of your research early on



→ If you are looking to get your message out, don't jump straight into your project without a strategy. Think about the policy impact of your research early. Then work backwards to find the best way to deliver your message.

7. Invest time and energy into trust-building and expanding networks



→ So you've pitched your ideas. But don't leave it at that. Focus on building relationships and networks in the long term; listen to your audience and learn from them. Always consider the larger context of your topic.

8. Know your timing



→ Academic and political clocks move at different speeds: sometimes you need to act fast and at the right time. If you are too late or too early, your hard work might have been for nothing. Keep up to date with the policy agenda and current political developments.

9. Contextualise scientific uncertainty properly



→ Improperly contextualising scientific uncertainty by ‘faking’ certainty is problematic as it can undermine scientific credibility in the long term. Differentiate between degrees of uncertainty and don't be afraid to say ‘I don't know’ if you don't know (ideally, you can refer to a colleague of yours who does know).

10. Be willing to take a back seat



→ As a scientist, you should not expect public praise for your work as a policy advisor. Sometimes, it can be more effective to take a back seat when advising politicians. Sure, you don't get any public recognition when your advice helps craft good policies, but there is an upside to this, too: You can't be publicly blamed for bad political decisions, either.

The bottom line is that policymaking is complex and involves so much more than scientific evidence. Even when your message gets heard, your name and credentials can sometimes go forgotten in the process. Whatever the outcome, try to learn from it and move on. Keep up to date with current policy goals, key players in the field, and how and where decisions are made. It is a good idea to develop several channels of influence and communication and to invest in building networks and long-term relationships based on trust.

Do you want to sharpen your skills in this area? Join the [Franxini-Project!](#)

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- edX course: Tools for Academic Engagement in Public Policy
- European Commission: How to achieve Impact on Policy: 10 tips for researchers

Authors:
Anna Krebs & Servan Grüninger