

F1000

How to influence policy with your research

Top six tips for enhancing your policy impact

Introduction

Research is indispensable to policymaking. Thorough and cutting-edge research can produce strong evidence and inform local, national, and international policy that, in turn, has the potential to transform lives for the better.

The world we live in is facing enormous challenges around social mobility, poverty, public health, climate change, and social and regional disparities. Public policies that seek to address these challenges can only work if the choices made by decision-makers are informed by the best available evidence.

The total number of published research outputs is growing tremendously every year on a global scale, with close to 7 million articles published in 2022 alone.

In this guide, you'll uncover how to make your research stand out and influence public policy.

In a nutshell, achieving policy impact means using your knowledge and research to influence the development and implementation of public policy by politicians and civil servants.



The University of Nottingham

#1 Choose a subject that policy can actually address

First things first, **consider the real-world application of your research** from the outset. It may sound obvious, but start by choosing a subject that policy can actually address. Even though almost all disciplines can have a policy impact, there are some approaches to research that present a greater likelihood of impacting policy than others. For example, research that approaches a topic from a theoretical or philosophical angle is less likely to have real policy impact than a paper that examines practical implications.

Moreover, you should always check the existing policies in your subject area. For instance, if you work in archeology, you might be looking at existing cultural heritage and preservation policies. In any case, you need to know what policy governs the subject you're researching and reference that policy (or, even better, a gap in that policy) in your study.

Plus, as policy and policymakers may work differently in different parts of the world, you need to be both specific and practical in your approach, and ensure you are reaching the right policymakers for your geography. For instance, getting your research into the European Parliament might require a different process than the UK parliament, but more on this later.

The screenshot displays the Open Research Europe interface. At the top, there's a search bar and navigation links. The main content area features the article title 'A policy response to workplace innovation for the rail sector [version 2; peer review: 2 approved]' by GARAZI GARRANZA, Oihane De la Rúa, and Begoña Sanchez. Below the title, it states 'This article is included in Economics and Business gateway'. The abstract begins with 'The rail sector is a sector with a significant impact on European industry and it is therefore important that it follows the current innovative trends. We live in an increasingly digitised society but, until now, digitisation has not been a priority issue for the sector as the rules that apply to the entire value chain have hindered the digitisation process. Even so, technologies are not enough, and innovation must be implemented in companies at the organisational and employee level. The RailActivation project has experimented with workplace innovation to foster innovation capabilities in the railway sector, providing elements for companies to remain as innovative and competitive as possible, as well as to have additional tools to adapt to these challenges. In order to help in this process, this article proposes a series of recommendations based on the lessons learnt during the implementation of the project. These recommendations establish a link between policy and workplace innovation practices and could be a reference framework for further research and policy. The suggested policy recommendations are focused on companies and policy makers and are based on the results obtained from the different consultations with the stakeholders involved in this research.'

On the right side, there's a 'Open Peer Review' section showing the approval status. It includes a table with two columns for reviewers and two rows for versions. Reviewer 1 (Vassil Kirov) approved Version 2 (08 Nov 21) and Version 1 (14 Sep 21). Reviewer 2 (José Antonio Casado) also approved both versions. Below the table, the reviewers' names and affiliations are listed. There's also a 'Comments on this article' section with a 'Sign in to comment' button and a 'Sign up for content alerts' form.

For example, this **Method Article** published on Open Research Europe has a narrow area of focus suggesting a new approach to governing and training in the railway sector in Europe.

#1: Choose a subject that policy can actually address

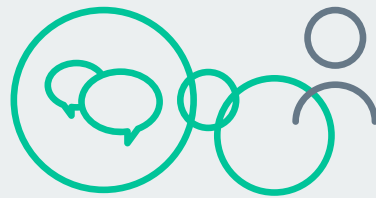
Once you have chosen a subject, you also need to think about the ways in which you want to interact with policymakers. The most effective way to do this is to integrate strategies for interaction into your project design from the offset. **Here are four strategies to consider:**



Establish yourself as an expert commentator

Expert commentators are subject specialists that convey key research takeaways to policymakers. This approach focuses on making the evidence easy to understand.

- 1-way communication
- Relaying evidence in an understandable way



Plan to facilitate knowledge exchange

This approach supports a two-way communication by allowing you to involve local (or even policy) groups in your research. In knowledge exchange, interaction often takes the form of focus groups, interviews, or surveys.

- 2-way communication
- Focus groups, interviews



Support capacity building

You can also get involved in capacity building which means providing policymakers the necessary resources, tools, or training to directly access your research.

- Providing training and resources so policymakers can assess evidence directly



Engage in co-production with policymakers

Another way to integrate your impact strategy into your project design is co-production. This way you can involve and engage with stakeholders, including policymakers, from the outset in the design and execution of your research.

- Engagement and interaction
- Involving policymakers and stakeholders in research

#2 Produce excellent research to the highest standard

So, you have chosen a topic that can impact policy and have integrated your impact strategy into your project design. The next step is to ensure that your research is of the highest standard, trustworthy, and reproducible.

The importance of transparent and reproducible research in policymaking is undeniable. Yet, [52% of researchers](#) believe there is a reproducibility crisis in science. Policymakers cannot build policies in the face of conflicting or inaccessible research. As such, producing transparent and reproducible research can provide greater clarity and credibility to evidence that can be used to inform policy.

To avoid contributing to the current reproducibility crisis, there are some key steps you can take. One essential aspect of producing reproducible research is ensuring your methods are robust and well-documented.



#2: Produce excellent research to the highest standard

Publishing your intended project design and methods before your research begins is an excellent way to gather feedback on the appropriateness of your methods and identify problems that can be fixed early on. Method Articles and Study Protocols are two examples of article types offered by F1000 that support reproducibility and enhance trust in the validity and impact of your research.

Method Articles describe a new experimental or computational method, test, or procedure. Providing comprehensive and sufficient methodological details facilitates reuse and reproducibility from other researchers.

Study Protocols describe in detail any study design, including the experimental design of basic and applied research, systematic reviews, or protocols defining research questions and empirical methods before observing the outcomes of your research. This, in turn, helps identify any flaws in your study design that could impede reproducibility.

Download our free guide for a wealth of strategies to improve the reproducibility of your research.

Method Articles

PLANNING

- Can be used to present new methods or modifications of existing methods.
- Methods support robust, reproducible research, and research training while ensuring those who developed the method are given credit.
- Can be updated as the method is refined.

Study Protocols

PLANNING

- Allows researchers to present their rationale and proposed methods for their study and get these peer reviewed.

Research Articles

ANALYSIS

Writing a Research Article at the analysis stage of a research project is now really easy:

- 1 Published Reviews, Study Protocols and Methods are citable.
- 2 Data, relevant code, and software is already available and can be linked and cited.

#3 Write for an audience of intelligent, non-expert speakers

To maximize the possibility of your work receiving attention from policymakers, you need to write up your research in a way that is digestible for people who are not as familiar with your subject as you are.

Style: (almost) as important as substance

What's more important—what you say or how you say it? When it comes to influencing policymakers, the answer is both. Develop a writing style that is specific and concise. Shorter articles are much easier for policymakers to absorb. Use active language and definitive statements, and choose an interesting and brief title that clearly describes your research. Moreover, avoid jargon and academic buzzwords that can easily cause confusion. You should also spell out any acronyms—especially in your title—so your research is easy to understand and discover.

If your article topic is particularly complex, you can consider adding a plain language summary. Plain language summaries are clear, short, standalone documents that summarize the contents of scientific and medical research for non-specialist audiences.

To bring your research to life, you can also employ storytelling techniques. Following a narrative structure or including case studies about individuals impacted by policy issues can appeal to your audience's emotion and support identification and engagement with your research.



#3: Write for an audience of intelligent, non-expert speakers

Format: bring your impact to the forefront

A Research Article often constitutes the most appropriate format for policymaking impact. Yet, you can consider using a different article type to make your research more accessible for policymaking audiences, such as a Case Study, Brief Report, or Policy Brief.

Policy Briefs are short, clear, and concise articles suitable for non-specialist audiences. This article type can help bridge the gap between policymakers and researchers. Policy Briefs bring important research, evidence of policy-related issues and proposed solutions to the attention of local authorities, policymakers, or governments.

No matter the article type you choose, you should always explain the background, context of your project, and provide detailed qualitative or quantitative evidence. Plus, you should give readers clear signposts to follow as you would in a traditional research article. For example, you can include Introduction, Methods, Results, Conclusion, and add a section with specific, actionable Policy Recommendations.

When sharing your research with a policymaker, it's always a good idea to prepare a one-page executive summary highlighting your work's key points and recommendations in addition to a longer version of your article.



A one-page summary, with key findings/ recommendations & top-line research context is ideal for initial comms. Pitch your comms at an intelligent, non-specialist audience. Lose the jargon, & use bullet points, headings & charts to make it accessible & digestible. Think about the hook of your research, and practise talking about it with non-specialists. That way, if you bump into your local MP one afternoon in the supermarket, you'll be ready for action!



Knowledge Exchange Unit
at UK Parliament



#4 Make sure your research is accessible and discoverable

Open access ensures that readers, including lobbyists, civil servants, campaigners, activists, legislators, and the public can view your work without a paywall. So, always check with your research funder, institution's librarian, or your publisher for information on the open access options available to you.

Benefit from open peer review

Open peer review can help increase the transparency of your work and your readers' confidence in your study. There are many variations of open peer review, but generally speaking, most models publish the peer review reports and/or reviewer identities openly making the whole process fully transparent. As everything is openly available to all, this type of peer review reduces the possibility of bias or conflicts of interest.

Choose relevant keywords

When you are writing your article, you want to choose accurate keywords and incorporate them in your title and abstract. To identify your keywords, go through your article, highlight key terms and phrases, and make a short list. You can test keywords by searching them online and see if the results that come up are relevant to your article. To determine whether your list of keywords is the most appropriate, use your judgment.

Over the last few years, we've seen inspiring examples of how publishing openly helps to accelerate the real-world benefits of medical research. A great demonstration being Marie Curie funded research, which provided evidence for the Make End of Life Care Fair campaign that secured the provision of palliative care in every part of England as a legal requirement via the Health and Care Act.

Dr Catriona Manville
Director of Research Policy,
Association of Medical
Research Charities (AMRC)

#4: Make sure your research is accessible and discoverable

Register for an ORCID ID

You can also register for an [ORCID ID](#), the persistent digital identifier that distinguishes you from every other researcher and makes it easier for others to find your work. An ORCID ID is free and takes only a few seconds to create. Plus, to ensure you get credit for your research, make sure to connect your ORCID ID when submitting your article to a publisher.

Share your research data openly

We advocate for making research data openly available and FAIR (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) so that others can access, re-use, and share it. To achieve this, you should deposit your data into an online data repository, provide contextual information known as metadata, and apply an open license. Plus, there is evidence to suggest that sharing data openly in repositories is associated with up to 25% more citations to the research paper.

The F1000 publishing model



F1000's open research publishing model encompasses open access, open data, and open peer review.

#5 Engage with policymakers proactively and constructively

Research can provide evidence and suggest a direction, but it's only policymakers who can translate all findings into effective legislation. Therefore, to help drive policy change, identifying the relevant stakeholders, their interests, and how to get hold of them is essential.

Once you have identified the most relevant policymakers in your field, make sure to reach out and communicate your work. Along with your research, you should always include the essentials, including your credentials, contact information, and executive summary.

Plus, as change can be incremental you should aim for smaller, actionable, and more achievable policy improvements. For example, the full implementation of policies that change eligibility criteria for services covered by existing policies will take less time to realize than those that will enact or require new programs.

Once you get to know a policymaker in your field of expertise, nurture this relationship by touching base on a regular basis. Always demonstrate that you are an expert commentator, can exchange knowledge, help build capacity, or design projects through co-production.

I've interacted with Parliament in a variety of ways throughout my (short) scientific career. I submitted written evidence to an Environmental Audit Committee (EAC) inquiry, which successfully resulted in policy change. It was encouraging to see how my research contribution could positively impact national policy for the greater good. This motivated me to contact the EAC researcher to discuss my work further, which helped me understand what policymakers need from researchers to inform decisions.

Dr Stephanie Wright

Medical Research Council (MRC)
Centre for Environment and Health,
Imperial College London

#5: Engage with policymakers proactively and constructively

Potential routes of access

Policy is often localized so you need to ensure you are reaching the right policymakers for your location. For example, Select Committees, the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, the House of Commons Library, or the House of Lords Library could serve as valuable routes to reach UK Parliament policymakers.

In a similar manner, Committee hearings, MEP initiatives, the European Parliamentary Research Service (EPRS), Intergroups, or European Commission proposals are structures and services you could engage with to get your research into the European Parliament.

If you are based in the United States, one way to engage in the legislative process is to focus your research on actions of broad relevance to science within the U.S. House of Representatives' and the Senate's Committees and Subcommittees.

Sometimes, the first contact with a policymaker can be the biggest challenge. You need to think outside the (in)box and engage in face-to-face interactions by attending public hearings and events, or inviting policymakers and lobbyists to your own events.

I also participated in Set for Britain, a poster competition held in Parliament. This face-to-face interaction with MPs gave me the opportunity to explain my research, and why it matters, to the people who can make informed change. Providing evidence for policymaking is an important part of my role as a researcher – this is when evidence really matters. I look forward to doing more of this and would encourage other researchers, especially those early on in their career, to get involved too.

Dr Stephanie Wright

Medical Research Council (MRC)
Centre for Environment and Health,
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#6 Use social media and public relations to your advantage

How to promote your research on social media

Social media platforms are a great tool to promote your research and share it with a wider audience. While most researchers know that social media platforms are an excellent way to draw attention to their work, many are still not using these channels to their full potential. Specifically, Twitter serves as a great platform to promote your work as many academic and research institutions have their own accounts where they actively share content and engage with the wider community.



Here, we offer some useful tips on how to promote your article using social media.

- 1 Announce your publication with a link to your article and an 'elevator pitch' summary of its significance.
- 2 Tag your co-authors, journal, publisher (e.g., @F1000Research), funder, and institution. Don't forget to repost/retweet your co-authors' announcements.
- 3 Research and include hashtags that your audience are using, including lobbyists, thinktanks and policymakers in your field.
- 4 Include an engaging and relevant image, gif, or video. Different types of visual content are more digestible and can help attract and engage with audiences more effectively than textual posts—always keep in mind that people remember 80% of what they see but only 20% of what they read.
- 5 Reply to your initial post with relevant policy news or updates on your article's impact.

#6: Use social media and public relations to your advantage

Crafting a public relations story to impact policy

There is a tight link between public relations and policy, so engaging with the media can be hugely influential. The more discoverable your research is the more likely you are to impact policymaking.

You can always reach out to your institution's communication and PR department for support, but here are three essentials to consider whether you are working on your own PR or in a collaboration with an expert.

Think audience, think message

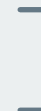
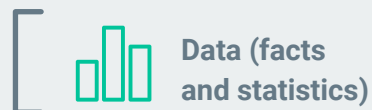
Apart from identifying who is the key audience you want to influence, you should also determine the one key message you want them to connect with. When dealing with the media or policymakers, your message needs to be at the forefront as journalists will likely skim your work for the relevant takeaways. Supporting evidence and additional details can follow at a later stage, if necessary.

Stay TRUE to your research: Timely, Relevant, Unique, Engaging

Once you've thought about your message, you want to stay true to that message. This includes deciding when the right time is to engage with the press and communicate your pitch. Your pitch needs to be relevant and adapted to your chosen media outlet's audience. You must also determine what makes your study unique and why the audience will engage with the findings.

Tell a Head and Heart story

The next step is to tell your research story and back it up with statistics and a case study; statistics typically resonate with your rationale (head) while a case study can speak to your emotions (heart). These two aspects together with some key insights, takeaways, or recommendations can make up a great head and heart story that will interest editors, journalists, and policymakers.





Researchers are under increasing pressure to show the impact of their work, whilst policymakers require evidence to inform their policies and demonstrate they're making data-driven decisions. Research matters to policy, and policymaking influences research. Therefore, to move forward a mutual and nurturing relationship between researchers and policymakers is vital.

In this guide, we outlined six essential steps researchers can take to bridge the gap with policymakers and achieve real policy impact with their work.

Ready to start influencing policy?

Publish a Policy Brief with F1000 today.

GET STARTED

