How to Write a Policy Memo

What is a policy memo?
Succinct presentation of a problem, its context, and recommended action.

- 1-2 pages
- Easy to understand
- Goal is to inform a specific audience

Who are you writing for?
- Colleagues
- Supervisors
- Legislators

What does your audience need?
- Basic information
- Clear explanation of a core dilemma
- Strong choice from a variety of alternatives
- New strategy or solution

What is the format?
Most policy memos include the following sections:
- Informative & Engaging Title
- Introduction. Summarize the conclusion/recommendations at the beginning.
- Background. Why should the audience care? Define the scope of the problem.
- Policy Alternatives. Describe current and proposed policy options.
- Policy Recommendations. Explain what steps must be taken.

How is it organized?
- Start with your conclusions
- Keep a logical, coherent flow
- Give visual cues (Headings, bullet points, highlight key points, white space)

Want to learn more?
- Check out this University of Michigan Infographic overview on policy writing.
- Read The Craft of Memo Writing by Harvard Kennedy School’s Prof. Behn.
- Learn how to assess different policy solutions with Stanford’s Guide to policy memos.
- Look at example memos and briefs compiled by NYU Wagner.