

Researching, Writing, and Presenting a Policy Brief Transferable Skills in Action in a Community-Engaged Writing Project

You will work with a small group of classmates to write a comprehensive policy brief in partnership with a nonprofit organization that partners with the city of Reading's administration; its housing, redevelopment and parking authorities; and the Downtown Improvement District to find nontraditional ways to grow the city's economy. Our main partners are a staff member from the nonprofit, a city councilman, and an outreach manager for the city of Reading.

There are many resources on policy briefs; I find the Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations description and resource guide to be useful, and in particular, its definition of a policy brief:

A policy brief is a concise summary of a particular issue, the policy options to deal with it, and some recommendations on the best option. It is aimed at government policymakers and others who are interested in formulating or influencing policy.

<http://www.fao.org/docrep/014/i2195e/i2195e03.pdf>

The assignment is designed so that your policy brief does real work: our community partners plan to use your policy briefs to convince Reading's City Council to adopt your recommended policies to enhance citizen participation and representation in local governance.

Background

The policy briefs are integrally related to Reading's participation in The STAR Community Rating System® (STAR), the nation's leading sustainability framework and certification program (<http://www.starcommunities.org/rating-system/framework/>). Reading became the first municipality in the state of STATE to achieve STAR certification with a score of 234.1, which qualifies the city as a 3-STAR Community in sustainability. STAR provides a clear, data-driven approach to assessing communities' sustainability efforts and to track and guide their efforts.

Sustainability is also a major strategic aim of Penn State University. Sustainability, as defined by PSU, is "the simultaneous pursuit of human health and happiness, environmental quality, and economic well-being for current and future generations" (<http://sustainability.psu.edu/fieldguide/what-is-sustainability/>).

How Does STAR Work? This information comes from the STAR Technical Guide.

STAR includes seven Sustainability Goals:

1. Built Environment: Quality, Choice & Access Where We Live, Work, & Play
2. Climate & Energy: Increase Efficiency, Reduce Impact
3. Economy and Jobs: Quality Jobs, Shared Prosperity
4. Education, Arts & Community: Vibrant, Connected & Diverse Culture
5. Equity & Empowerment: Inclusion & Access for All Community Members
6. Health and Safety: Strong, Resilient, & Safe
7. Natural Systems: Protect & Restore the Resources of Life

Within each of the above Sustainability Goals, there are between 5-7 Objectives. These 44 objectives are the core areas that contain evaluation measures and metrics.

Each of the Objectives above contains two types of evaluation measures: Community Level Outcomes and Local Actions.

Community Level Outcomes are measurable, condition-level indicators that show community progress on a STAR Community Rating System Objective.

Local Actions are the things you do to move toward the Community Level Outcomes – the range of decisions, investments, programs, plans, and codes that a local community puts in place.

Your Work in this Class

The city of Reading performed poorly in the Goal, Equity and Empowerment” (EE) and received zero credit for Objective 1, Civic Engagement. Your policy briefs are intended to guide the city to take important actions in this area to enhance citizen participation and representation in local governance.

Group A

Goal: Equity and Empowerment (EE)

Objective 1 (Civic Engagement)

Local Action 1: “Adopt a policy to encourage diversity in local government appointments to advisory boards and commissions”

Group B

Goal: Equity and Empowerment (EE)

Objective 1: Civic Engagement

Local Action 2: “Adopt guidelines to instruct local government agencies or departments about how to successfully engage residents.”

This information will become clearer when you read the relevant parts of the Technical Guide and listen to and converse with our partners.

Learning Objectives

Research, synthesize, organize, and present information in a content area new to most of you. Write in a new genre as you learn a new genre (“on the fly”). Collaborate with your peers, professor, and community partners.

Graded Components

1. Policy Brief (1st draft will be reviewed by a community partner, and you will revise it based on his feedback) (15 points)
2. Oral presentation to community partners (10 points)

3. Full Research Document –This document includes and organizes the substantial amount of research your group undertakes and collects before writing the policy brief. Our partners will refer to this source for information not on the policy brief itself. (10 points)

Timeline

The outline below is a general guideline. You will need to pay close attention to my post-class period email summaries of what you are expected to complete for homework. Remember, we are all learning as we progress through the project.

Week 1: Policy Briefs

Week 2: Research

Week 3: Draft Policy Brief

Week 4: Presentation