



Carter Hall, Policy and Strategic Projects, City of Knoxville | Chall@Knoxvilletn.gov

UT Howard Baker Center, City of Knoxville Policy Paper Proposals

The following are suggested topics for a 4-5 page policy briefs to be presented to the City of Knoxville policy staff for consideration of implementation or general in general policy making. The student may be asked to work with a specific department member, however Carter Hall will serve as the initial point of contact for all students working on policy briefs. More direction, resources, or general questions can be addressed by Carter. Topics proposals for relevant city issues can also be reviewed for consideration by Carter and Baker Center faculty.

Topics for Consideration:

- **Open Data.** What have other cities done around open data accessibility? Students should examine 2-3 cities and discuss what kind of data is made available, how that data is presented, and how open data availability has been used in various cases. The student can also evaluate Knoxville's current open data availability and provide insights on suggestions for the City to provide a more robust open data program.
- **Greening Vacant Lots.** What would a possible Vacant Lot Greening Program such as The Pennsylvania Horticulture Society LandCare Program involve in Knoxville? Address considerations such as number of vacant, city owned lots, floodplanes, estimated greening-prices, sustainability considerations. The final brief would include all considerations that Knoxville would want to take into account for a vacant lot greening program.
- **Community Engagement Strategies.** Explore and explain unique and innovative community engagement strategies of 3-4 other mid-sized cities. Ideally describe how these cities have leveraged tools like social media and technology to increase efficient and effective engagement with the public. How are these tools used to increase not just the administration disseminating

information to the public, but collect feedback as well? How can technology help administrations better measure their levels of public engagement?

- **Public Broadband.** Explore public broadband options that have been implemented in 2-3 cities across the US. Explore how these public broadband programs work and the impact they have had on their communities. What challenges have these cities faced in implementation? Is public broadband sustainable in many of these cities? Who are organizations/companies that have been impactful on a city's implementation of public broadband?
- **Role of local food policy councils.** The Knoxville-Knox County Food Policy Council is one of the oldest, if not the oldest, food policy councils in the U.S. That being said, our food landscape has changed over the last 40 years and especially in the last ten years with the creation of farmers markets, non-profits focused on food, and greater awareness about nutrition and food access. The policy question being posed is that given that most public policy around food systems is controlled at the federal level (with some issues at the state level), what is the role of a local food policy council in today's world and looking forward?
- **Food deserts vs. food swamps.** Food access has largely been considered in relation to food deserts, as defined by the USDA as census tracts with low access to full-service grocery stores and low income populations. However, in recent years, some research has indicated that food swamps (the density of fast food restaurants) have more of an impact on healthy food choices. What are ways communities are addressing food swamps through local or state policy decisions? And how relevant is the term "food desert" in a world with at-home delivery and Amazon?
- **Local food access.** What is the current state of research and some examples of successes in addressing food access? What are some policy recommendations on improving access to healthy food – whether that access is economic, geographic, or cultural? For example, many communities have addressed food access by encouraging the location of grocery stores in areas of low access. Where have there been successes and failures? What do these models look like and what are their pros and cons? What is the role for local government to play in food access?
- **Community and school gardens.** Community and school gardens have been pushed in waves – in the 1960s, the 1980s, and again in recent years as a way to address food access and nutrition education. However, communities and schools have found it challenging to sustain these efforts which largely rely on volunteers. Do these gardens impact food access? Where are some examples where these efforts have been successful (or not) and what are some new alternatives that could be considered locally in regard to agriculture?

**HOWARD H. BAKER JR. CENTER FOR PUBLIC POLICY
POLICY BRIEFS – COMMUNITY ISSUES
TEMPLATE AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES**

General Parameters

Length: 1,500 – 2,000 words /3-5 pages including figures
Format: single-space, 1” margins, Arial, 11 pt. font
Style: Chicago (<http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/home.html>)

Outline

Community-based Topic Area of Interest (select one):

- Open Data
- Greening Vacant Lots
- Community Engagement Strategies
- Public Broadband
- Role of Local Food Policy Councils
- Food Deserts vs. Food Swamps
- Local Food Access
- Community and School Gardens

At a glance

- 3-5 bullets of key facts/takeaways

What is the policy issue (e.g. nature and scope)?

- Should include:
 - Statement of the issue
 - Measures of the issue
 - Comparison to other southeastern cities

What is/are the most common solution(s)?

- Should include:
 - Brief description of the most common solutions
 - Context: why have these solutions become dominant?

What are the issues?

- Should include:
 - Potential points for debate
 - Areas of misunderstanding/confusion

What is/are the potential tradeoffs/alternatives?

- Should include:
 - Potential problems/points of contention/critiques of most common solutions
 - Discussion of tradeoffs different policies represent
 - Alternative solutions that have been piloted in other locations, and their outcomes

Additional Resources

- Non-partisan sources of additional information (3-5)

Infographic/Figure/Graph (1-2)

- Canva (www.canva.com)—easy to use and free online design website

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Community Issue Policy Briefs are meant to examine existing issues identified as critical by Knoxville and Knox County agencies. Briefs should address a **specific issue** or problem within one of these categories. **Communication and consultation with community members who have direct knowledge of this issue is strongly encouraged.**

Policy briefs should be submitted as a .doc or .docx file by the deadline to dfolz@utk.edu. The subject heading on the email should read: Author Last Name, Title, Semester Year (i.e, Smith, The Opioid Crisis, Fall 2018). The email should include a brief statement regarding the reason a particular topic was selected by the author and why it is an important issue for Knoxville and/or the East Tennessee region.

Following the deadline, the editorial team consisting of the Imagine Tennessee Program Coordinator and MPPA scholarship/fellowship holders will review submissions. Reviewers will read each brief carefully and make revision recommendations. The reviewer may also recommend that two or more authors collaborate on a joint-brief on the same topic.

The editorial team will discuss their recommendations as a group and develop a list of top choices that represent the highest quality work and a breadth of topics. The editorial team will share their reviews, recommendations, and selection with a committee of faculty and community representatives. Selected briefs will be formatted and delivered to community organizations and local government agencies.

The authors who have a brief that is accepted will work with the assigned editor to make edits to the brief. The author should submit the final version as a .doc or docx file to dfolz@utk.edu prior to the deadline. The subject heading on the email should read: Author Last Name, Title, Semester Year Final (i.e, Smith, The Opioid Crisis, Fall 2018 Final)

Questions? Contact:

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HOW TO WRITE A POLICY BRIEF*

What is a policy brief?

A policy brief is a focused discussion of an action to achieve an intentional and purposeful outcome. A policy brief puts front and center the problem to be addressed by policy, then presents relevant evidence to support or analyze a proposed solution.

How long is a policy brief?

A policy brief should be brief, communicating the most comprehensive information in the most direct and concise way possible. A brief should be an interesting and attractive communication tool. The strength of a policy brief lies in brevity— do not include more information than necessary, regardless of how interesting more information may seem.

Briefs will vary by style and length depending on the purpose, complexity of the issue, and the audience. When policymakers are the audience, the most relevant data and framing is the impact of a policy problem and/or solution on their constituency (e.g., the population they were elected to represent).

What are the steps to writing a policy brief?

1. **Define the problem.** What is the issue or the problem? Why is it important? Why now? Who is impacted and who cares?
2. **State the policy.** Identify one to three policy actions that may address the problem. Limit the menu of potential actions to target a policy approach of interest.
3. **Make the case.** Display and describe relevant data using figures or tables; declare potential bias based on the data sources; refer to other related policies not discussed; provide additional resources.
4. **Discuss the impact.** What are the implications of action/inaction? How might the pros/cons be estimated? Are there unintended consequences? What are opposing arguments, controversies, and/or issues?

What are some tips?

1. Title the brief with a name that refers to the problem and/or policy.
2. State conclusion at the beginning. Be bold and clear with your key points.
3. Use images, figures, or anecdotes etc. to bring the data/problem to life.
4. Remain objective rather than impassioned. This is not an opinion piece.
5. Restate your key message to start and end with impact.

*Information summarized from: Wong et. Al. 2017. "How to Write a Health Policy Brief" *Families, Systems, & Health Journal* 35(1):21-24.