

IOWA

School of Planning
and Public Affairs



THE UNIVERSITY OF IOWA
IOWA INITIATIVE
FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

DISCUSSION QUESTION

You (a public servant) have identified a solution that helps address an issue in your community, now what? What path or tools do you currently employ to implement that solution?



FOLLOW-UP QUESTION

Who is your audience?

ACTIVITY 1:

Write a 2-sentence ISSUE STATEMENT that concisely describes a challenge you'd like to solve in your own community.

Examples

Lack of affordable housing

Police reform

Lack of citizen engagement

"Brain Drain"

Water quality in schools

City budget deficits

Street quality

Lack of public transportation

Neighborhood segregation

Rates of violent crime



PRESENTATION

What is a Policy Memo?

POLICY MEMO BASICS

From

To

Organization President	.....	Board of Directors
City Manager	.....	Mayor
Principal of School	.....	Superintendent of District
Subject-Matter Expert	.....	City Council President
City Council Member	.....	City Council
Mayor	.....	Governor
Governor	.....	President

etc.

Concision

- Short
- Tight
- Concrete

Assume the leader you're writing to (governor, mayor, president, school board, etc.) do not have a lot of time.

Language

- No Jargon
- Accessibility

This is not a research paper. Nor can you assume your audience knows anything about the subject. Only give them as much detail as is absolutely necessary.

Actionable

- Action Verbs
- Instructions

Don't tell the leader how to feel or think -- tell them what to DO. Remember to position them for success -- keep in mind what their powers are.

Facts. Not Opinion.

- Facts
- No "I" Voice

This is not your opportunity to write a manifesto. This is a data-driven analysis of a problem and proposed solution(s).

ACTIVITY 1:

Write a 2-sentence ISSUE STATEMENT that concisely describes a challenge you'd like to solve in your own community.

Share Out

POLICY MEMO

Your memo must include...

Context

What is the necessary background of this issue?

Is there a history of this issue that's necessary to understand?

What is the status of this issue TODAY?

Data

What are the quantifiable facts about this issue?

Are there costs associated?

What proportion of people are impacted by this issue?

Urgency

Why should your leader pay attention this issue NOW?

What's "at stake" if they do/do not solve this problem?

ACTIVITY 2:

Using your own issue statement, write down a few words about each of the Policy Memo categories that relate to your issue.

Context



Data



Urgency





Date:
To:
From:
Cc:
Re:
Appendix:

SUMMARY

Begin with your issue statement, which is no more than one paragraph, succinctly describing the issue itself. The first sentence of the issue statement should be a “hook.”

BACKGROUND

This should be no more than three paragraphs, and includes: a (very) brief history and/or evolution of the issue, context for the current state of the issue, and the importance of the issue. Think of this as answering the questions: “What’s at stake if we don’t solve this challenge?” This is your opportunity to use data to quantify the challenge.

STAKEHOLDERS

This is a bulleted list of 2-3 specific people or groups who have stake in this issue, and their position(s) on the issue. Do not choose only stakeholders on the same side of the issue. Also, remember that coalitions of stakeholders are often the most powerful “voice.”

BEST PRACTICES

This is a bulleted list of 2-3 examples of how other geographies are tackling this same issue. The most useful best practices usually come from geographies of similar size and scope. Each best practice should have one paragraph of detailed description: how they tackled (and, ideally, solved) the same issue.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This is a bulleted list of 2-3 specific, concrete recommendations that you are making to the leader of choice. Remember that recommendations should ideally be data-driven (i.e.: what will this cost? What impact will it have? How many people will it affect?) Each policy recommendation should have one paragraph of detailed description.

NEXT STEPS

This is a bulleted list of 2-3 very specific, very urgent actions that the leader you are writing to should take. Think about meetings that need to take place, committees that could be formed, stakeholders that need to be called.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

How do you feel about PowerPoints? What drives you bananas about them? (This is your chance to vent).



Be Concise

Do not write a novel and break it into slides. We can read your slides OR we can listen to you. We cannot do both.

Don't Just Read

Otherwise, what's the point of the presentation? Why not just print the slides and email them to us?

Use Visual Interest

Humans are visual creatures. Add visuals to slides to help us remember the points and break up the text.

Make Your Life Easier

Use a tool like Canva or Slides Carnival. They have great slide templates and make life much easier.

A modern, minimalist interior space, likely a bathroom or living area. The room features a white bathtub in the background, a large window with light-colored curtains on the left, and a wooden partition wall in the center. The floor is made of light-colored wood. The overall atmosphere is clean and bright.

PRESENTATIONS

Examples

How Did We Get Here?



The housing stock of Waterloo does not reflect the diverse needs of its growing population



The most salient challenges low-income homeowners face are issues of affordability and upkeep



The current landscape of homeownership is the result of the lack of early interventions and support to sustain homeownership

CURRENT STATE



LANDLORD RENTAL FEES BY CITY:



Waterloo



Cedar Rapids




Council Bluffs



Sioux City

DISCUSSION

A modern, minimalist interior space. In the foreground, a bed with a white, textured coverlet is partially visible. The room features light-colored wood-look flooring and white walls. In the background, a glass-enclosed bathroom area contains a white freestanding bathtub. To the right, there is a wooden cabinet or wall unit. The overall atmosphere is clean and bright, with recessed ceiling lights providing illumination. The word "DISCUSSION" is overlaid in a large, bold, black serif font in the center of the image.