GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A POLICY PAPER

1. <u>WHAT IS A POLICY PAPER?</u>

A policy paper is a research piece focusing on a specific policy issue that provides clear recommendations. A policy paper defines an important issue (or problem), provides an up-to-date analysis of the issue and submits to the policymakers, such recommendations that are designed to fix the problem. Ideally, a policy paper is akin to a decision memorandum. It is separated from a theory-relevant research paper by its tense (present or future vice past) and the practicality of its "bottom line".

For the participants of Mid-Career Management Course (MCMC) at National Institutes of Management, a policy paper would practically mean a 'public' policy paper.

2. <u>PURPOSE OF A POLICY PAPER</u>

A policy paper fully informs the policymakers, giving them the information they need to resolve a particular problem. It synthesizes and summarizes information in clear and insightful ways and makes recommendations that are relatively comprehensive and bring the best, most current information to bear on the topic.

Please remember that a policy paper is **<u>NOT</u>** a**:**

• Technical paper. A Policy Paper concisely and clearly gives the non-technical reader a sufficient understanding of the technical aspects of the issue involved, without going into detail.

• Legal brief – A policy paper is not intended to verify a predetermined conclusion.

• History paper –A policy paper does not include endless historical references and background. It addresses only the information necessary for a reader to understand how we arrived at the current problems and situation.

• Journalistic account – A policy paper does not rely primarily on anecdotes, personal experiences, anonymous sources, or newspaper accounts.

3. DIFFERENCE BETWEEN RESEARCH PAPER AND POLICY PAPER

Policy papers are different from the standard research papers in several respects as explained below.

- Policy papers are usually addressed at a non-academic audience, such as a particular official agency or organization.
- Policy papers are more action-oriented as compared to research papers which are generally theory-oriented. As such, they often focus on prescriptive (narrow) questions.
- They may begin by diagnosing a particular issue or situation, and typically argue for a solution that will address that issue or situation. Often, policy papers are focused on being convincing to the target audience.
- For policy papers, evidence in support of a position is crucial. Although, this is also important for research papers, it tends to be absolutely critical in case of policy papers.
- Policy papers are generally less lengthy than research papers.

4. SELECTION OF ISSUE/PROBLEM FOR WRITING A POLICY PAPER

For the MCMC participants who write a policy paper, it is important to select an issue that meets the following criteria:

- The issue addressed should be a legitimate contemporary policy issue within which the current policy is clearly discernible (if there is a current policy).
- There should be clear alternatives to the current policy (either already in existence or proposed).
- There must be sufficient data present to provide the target audience (i.e. the decision-maker/s) with information to make a decision on the policy proposal.

The author of a policy paper should keep in mind the following factors while selecting a topic for his/her research.

- An historical analysis is *never* an appropriate topic for a policy paper. A policy paper must focus on a *current* policy issue. For example, an analysis of what Pakistan government

should or should not have done during the Cold War would work well as a research paper, but it would not be acceptable as a policy paper.

- Comparative or case studies normally fit better as research papers than policy papers. For example, a comparative study of conflict resolution in South Africa and Northern Ireland, although certainly providing an analysis with contemporary relevance, would work far better as a research rather than a policy paper.

- An analysis of how something works should be the focus of a research paper. For example, a study of the political economy of the Balochistan province would not work as a policy paper. Similarly, an analysis of development efforts in Balochistan would not in itself be a policy paper, although one could make a policy paper on a similar topic by analyzing how the policy of Pakistan's federal government's policy toward the provinces might impact development in Balochistan.

5. <u>STRUCTURE OF A POLICY PAPER</u>

A policy paper must be thoroughly researched and properly accompanied by citations, references and bibliography. For the purpose of research planning, design, methodology, writing and presentation, the participants of MCMC would follow the instructions given in the NSPP Research Guide (Third Edition, February 2023) as well as the directions issued by the Chief Instructor and the concerned faculty advisors. The word count for the policy paper submitted by the MCMC participants would be between 3500 and 4000 excluding references and annexures.

The final draft of the policy paper should include the following sections.

- Preliminary Pages
- Introduction
- Research Methodology
- Analysis and Findings
- Recommendations
- References
- Annexures

A brief description of each of the above-mentioned sections is given below.

i.   Preliminary Pages

This section would include executive summary, dedication (optional), table of contents, list of abbreviations/acronyms, tables/figures. The executive summary (300-400 words) should be written after you have completed the policy paper and it should answer the following questions. What is the issue/problem? How did we get here? Why has the issue not been addressed, or if it has, what were the failures? Where should we go from here? How will things be better under your recommendations?

ii.   Introduction

This section would define the issue/problem that will be addressed in the paper. The purpose is to give the reader an immediate indication of what you are going to be talking about and why it is significant. Please imagine that your audience is a group of lawmakers and/or regulators who have the responsibility to create public policies (either legislation or regulations) that will address the issue you have defined.

This section should address the following questions.

What is the key driving force of this issue? For example, what scientific or technological changes led to this issue? How many people are affected by this issue? Who are the stakeholders? Does this issue have severe economic, environmental, or social consequences? If the issue is not dealt with, will it cause irreversible damage? Has the issue generated significant public reaction or concern?

iii.   Research Methodology

This section should contain information on the type of research you conducted and how that research will contribute to the understanding and solution of the problem. Be specific in what type of research you conducted (qualitative or quantitative). Please also discuss how you collected data. Did you use a specific instrument like a survey or conducted interviews? If you got data from a research database, that should also be discussed in this section of the paper. Anything related to the research you conducted and how you analyzed it should be discussed here. Don't forget to tie your research into the specific problem you identified.

iv.   Analysis and Findings

This section would provide the background information that a reader will need to understand why you think something is an issue/problem to be resolved/fixed. It should also describe the key

technological and historical aspects of the issue (without resorting to a historical chronology) and the reasons why we have arrived at the current situation.

This section would focus on the following questions.

When did the issue arise? Which participants in the system (interest groups, political leaders, etc.) brought the issue to public attention? What were the interest and values at stake; e.g., economic growth vs. environmental protection. When and how did the government respond? Which levels of government were viewed to be responsible? What is the legal and regulatory framework that allowed this situation? For example, describe the policies, laws and regulations enacted, the agencies responsible for administering these laws, etc. How have government policies affected the issue to date?

v. Recommendations

This is the most important section of a policy paper. It will discuss different policy options to resolve the issue at hand. This would provide some choices to the decision-maker. Each option would be analysed while taking into account social, economic, political and environmental factors. Each recommendation is evaluated to describe the expected impact on the issue.In the light of this analysis, best option is identified by recapitulating why it is the best. Please mention both intended and unintended consequences of each option and emphasize how can the benefits of the selected solution be optimized while accounting for possible unintended consequences.

Finally, a reality check is applied to examine if the selected recommendation is actionable and solves the problem. Ideally, this recommendation should be a stand-alone solution, which do not require another iteration of the process to figure out how to implement it. A good recommendation is never a suicide pact.

Please remember that a policy recommendation is a written policy advice prepared for some group or person that has the authority to make or to influence policy decisions, whether that is a minister, a member of parliament, parliamentary committee, public sector organization or a local authority. Although getting a recommendation approved by policymakers involves several factors, a recommendation which is evidence-based, cost-effective and takes into account international best practice, has a better chance of being accepted and influencing policy debates.

vi. References

vii. Annexures

SUGGESTED READINGS