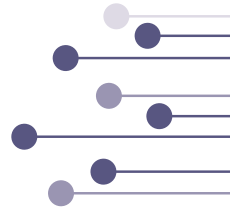## Learning Objectives

After finishing this chapter, you should be able to:

13.1  Define policy-relevant research, and contrast it with research that is not policy relevant.

13.2  Summarize the policy process, and describe each stage. Identify which stages enable researchers to influence policy makers.

13.3  Identify who policy makers are and why they are important in conducting policy-relevant research.

13.4  Evaluate the parts of a policy brief, and compare and contrast a journal article and a policy brief.

13.5  Identify and summarize the competing sources of influence on policy makers, and describe why researchers need to understand this.

13.6  Describe and explain the activities a researcher wishing to conduct policy-relevant research should engage in.

## Introduction

Featured researchers Rod Brunson, Rachel Boba Santos, Chris Melde, Heather Zaykowski, Mary Dodge, and Carlos Cuevas conduct research because their findings will matter and will be used to build knowledge, as well as to make the world a better place. Research can matter in many ways that have been described in this book. First, research can make a difference by adding to our general knowledge and our understanding of the world. Santos and colleague's research increased our understanding about the effect of intensive policing (Santos & Santos, 2016). Brunson and colleague's work offers insight into how police interactions differ for White and Black youth living in similar communities (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009). Dodge and colleagues' work provides a greater understanding about how female officers deal with being an undercover prostitute, their views of the works, the participants, danger, and even the effectiveness of these stings (Dodge, Starr-Gimeno, & Williams, 2005). As this book has shown, the findings from exploratory and descriptive research provide understanding about crime, incarceration, reentry, victimization, police discretion, use of force by police, and an infinite number of criminal justice topics.

Explanatory research makes a difference as well in that it allows for us to better understand connections between those topics as well as the role that gender, years in prison, age, times victimized, race, and education play on some criminal justice outcome. Zaykowski's (2014) research provides insight into the important role that reporting victimization to the police plays in whether the victim seeks assistance. This work shows that reporting to the police increases the odds of accessing victim services by three times. In addition, given Zaykowski's research, we know that police reporting increases the odds of accessing victim services by more than four times for those attacked by an intimate partner compared with a stranger.

A second important way research matters is that it provides valuable information about programs. As Chapter 11 showed, evaluation research allows for researchers to ascertain whether policies and their associated programs are operating as intended, policies or programs should be expanded

or discontinued, and policies and programs are cost effective (to name a few goals of evaluation research). A third way research can matter or make a difference is by producing research that is policy relevant. That is, our research can be used to shape policy. Historically, researchers have done a great job of conducting solid research and publishing those results; nevertheless, researchers have not conducted as much research that is policy relevant. Santos, in a video interview conducted for this book, stated that she believes this is in large part because making your research relevant is challenging. It is not enough to say, "My research is relevant"; we must offer clear reasons how it is relevant. Therefore, this chapter discusses ways to make your research relevant. It defines policy, policy makers, and describes the policy process. In addition, it presents the challenges with getting your research findings to policy makers, and it offers tips as to how you as a researcher can maximize the chances that your research will be policy relevant.

Congress is one body in the United States that establishes policy. We elect policy makers to go to Washington, D.C., to produce policy to improve our lives. If you want to produce policy relevant research, would it benefit you to know who in congress is dealing with certain policies? How do you propose they learn about your research if you don't even know who they are?

## Why Conduct Policy-Relevant Research?

Policies directly influence all of our lives in many ways on a daily basis. For example, policies reflected in speed limits affect how fast we each drive (at least when we do not think a police officer is around). Policies determine at what age we can drink alcohol, serve in the military, and marry. Policies dictate not only when we can marry but who we can and cannot marry. Policies affect student loan availability and repayment schedules.

The late 1960s saw an alarming increase in crime. In response, the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA; the precursor to the Office of Justice Programs; see Chapter 9) was established in part to advance the criminal justice discipline. A part of this included funding research to influence criminal justice policy. Today, as a result of this work, you are likely familiar with many criminal justice policies. Some controversial policies include the three-strikes policies in effect in 28 states that require a person who is found guilty of committing a violent felony after having been convicted of two previous crimes to be imprisoned for life. Also widely known are sex offender registry policies. Although the specific policy differs by jurisdiction, sex offender policies require convicted sex offenders to register with their local law enforcement agencies. The amount of information they must provide differs, but the purpose of the registries is to allow law enforcement to better monitor these individuals, as well as to allow the public to be aware of potential risks who may live near them.

Another widely known criminal justice policy concerns mandatory arrest resulting from a domestic violence incident. Mandatory arrest policies require the arrest of a person when the law enforcement officer has probable cause that an individual committed a violent act against a domestic partner. In these instances, the officer does not need a warrant, and the officer did not need to witness the violence.

It seems reasonable to expect that policies we all live with such as three-strikes, sex offender registries, and mandatory arrest were designed and implemented based on findings from a body of well-conducted research. Although that is reasonable, it does not always happen. Not many of us would be comfortable to learn that our lives are affected by policies crafted based on a single piece of research (no research is perfect, so using a body of research findings is important), a policy maker's whims, political or other ideology, or random chance. Most of us hope or assume that decisions about what policies to implement, and the shape

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**Mandatory arrest policies adopted widely mandate officers to make an arrest with probable cause, but no warrant in domestic violence cases, even if the violence was not witnessed. Are these policies based on well-conducted research? What might explain the adoption of the consequential policies?**

**Policy-relevant research: Research that directly influences the development of and implementation of the principles, rules, and laws that guide a government, an organization, or people by informing and influencing policy makers.**

of those policies, were based on our understanding about what is best for the public and those involved given a body of research findings.

It almost seems silly to state clearly that we want our policy to be based on a body of good research. Nevertheless, it has to be stated because in reality, policy design and implementation is guided by more than good research. In the past, it has been guided by a single imperfect piece of research, political or religious ideology, and other seemingly random factors. This means that policies that affect your life are not always influenced by the best research available. This can lead to unnecessary suffering, expensive approaches to social issues that do not work, and a failure to ameliorate a problem of interest. In sum, we want research to be policy relevant because we want to solve problems and make the world a better place. We want to live under policies that improve the world and not worsen it for anyone.

## What Is Policy-Relevant Research?

**Policy-relevant research** is research that directly influences policy makers or agency personnel who are developing and implementing policy. Policy-relevant research can be used to provide an understanding about what societal problems exist and why those problems are important to solve, what policies are needed, how policies should be shaped, how policies should be implemented, how existing policies should be adjusted, and what policies are not beneficial to the group they are designed to assist (to name a few purposes). Policy-relevant research can be used by policy makers to inform and address policy needs in two ways. First, policy-relevant research can be used by policy makers to identify and develop needed policies focused on important issues. Second, policy-relevant research can be used by policy makers to improve and enhance existing policies. Policy-relevant research is not research on a policy but research that directly affects or influences policy.
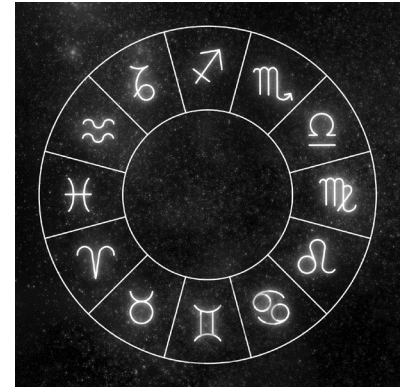
To be clear, no single piece of research can (or should) change the direction of policy. Rather, a body of research should inform policy design and implementation. Producing policy-relevant research means generating research that adds to a body of literature that influences policy makers and that influences small policy changes on the margin.

## What Is Policy?

Before further discussing policy-relevant research, it is useful to clearly identify what we mean by policy. As is the case with complex topics, there is no one widely agreed upon definition of policy. Policy is multifaceted, making it difficult to define. Here are several common definitions:

- "A definite course or method of action selected from among alternatives and in light of given conditions to guide and determine present and future decisions." (Merriam Webster Dictionary Online, n.d.)

- "A definite course of action adopted for the sake of expediency, facility, etc." (Dictionary.com, n.d.)

- An "action or procedure conforming to or considered with reference to prudence or expediency." (Dictionary.com, n.d.)

- "Prudence or wisdom in the management of affairs." (Merriam Webster Dictionary Online, n.d.)

- "Management or procedure based primarily on material interest." (Merriam Webster Dictionary Online, n.d.)

- "A high-level overall plan embracing the general goals and acceptable procedures especially of a governmental body." (Merriam Webster Dictionary Online, n.d.)

- "The basic principles by which a government is guided." (Business Dictionary Online, n.d.)

- "The declared objectives that a government or party seeks to achieve and preserve in the interest of national community." (Business Dictionary Online, n.d.)

- "A course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organization or individual." (Oxford Dictionary Online, n.d.)

By blending elements of these commonly available definitions, we offer a simple definition of **policy** as the principles, rules, and laws that guide a government, an organization, or people. Examples of criminal justice policies, as described earlier, include three-strikes policies, sex-offender policies, and mandatory arrest policies. Policy is broad and includes actions or the adoption of principles, rules and laws in governments, nonprofits, quasi-governmental agencies, and the private sector. A more specific type of policy is public policy. **Public policy** refers to policy designed and implemented by governmental agencies specifically. Policy expert Paul Cairney (n.d.) defines public policy as the "the sum total of government actions, from signals of intent, to the final outcomes." It too is broad, but it is limited to policy actions in a government. Given this information about policy, we can expand our earlier definition of policy-relevant research to be research that influences the design and implementation of principles, rules, and laws that guide a government, an organization, or people.

When thinking about policy, you may hear a variety of terms such as policies, procedures, and guidelines. This section offers some insight into what each of these terms means, although they bleed together. In some ways, they all refer to policies but with different levels of specificity. As noted, policies are the principles, rules, and laws that guide a government, an organization, or people. In general, we think of policies as being broad statements containing little detail that are formally adopted by the appropriate board or authorizing group. At times, however, a policy is produced that is very detailed that gives almost no discretion to the regulatory agency in promulgating regulations. On the other hand, policy makers have also at other times written legislation and policies that are very brief (e.g., a page long) that leave nearly all of the nuance and discretion to the agency responsible for the policy. In general, **procedures** are more detailed protocols, standard operating procedures, or the step-by-step processes that should be followed to accomplish the spirit of the policy. Although policies are formally adopted by a body given the power to do so, procedures are generally crafted by a different group of individuals. Finally, a **regulation, rule,** or **guideline** offers recommendations about how to accomplish the step-by-step procedures. Regulations, rules, and guidelines outline the expected behavior and actions one should take in following the procedures. Regulations, rules, and guidelines frequently provide examples of how to deal with specific instances an individual may encounter. Unlike policies and procedures, rules, regulations, and guidelines are not compulsory, but they are suggestions or best practices.

**What do you want influencing policy? Would you be okay to learn that horoscopes influenced the design and implementation of policy? Would you prefer policy be based on well-conducted research? What can you do to ensure the later happens more than the former?**

**Policy:** Principles, rules, and laws that guide a government, an organization, or people.

**Public policy:** Policy designed and implemented by governmental agencies specifically.
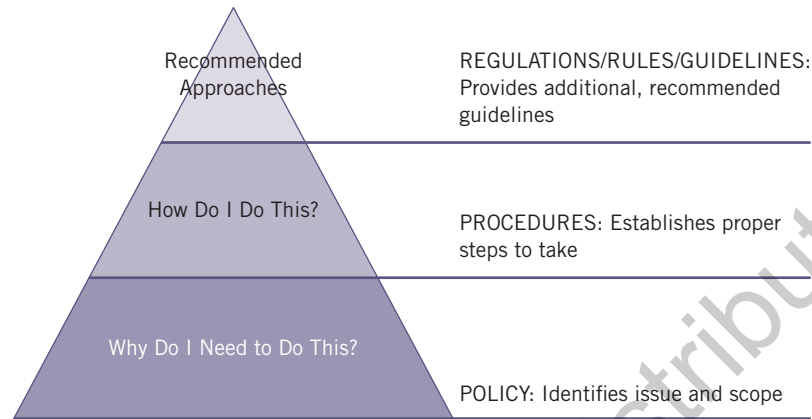
**Procedures:** Step-by-step or standard operating procedures, that should be followed to accomplish the policy.

**Regulations:** Recommendations about the expected behavior during the course of following procedures, with examples of how to deal with specific instances one may encounter.

Figure 13.1   Relationship Between Policy, Procedures, and Guidelines

Recommended Approaches

REGULATIONS/RULES/GUIDELINES: Provides additional, recommended guidelines

How Do I Do This?

PROCEDURES: Establishes proper steps to take

Why Do I Need to Do This?

POLICY: Identifies issue and scope

## Who Are Policy Makers?

For your research to influence policy makers, you know who the policy makers are. Most broadly, **policy makers** are individuals in a position with the authority to decide the principles, rules, and laws that guide a government, organization, or people. For much of Santos's (Santos & Santos, 2016), Brunson's (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009), and Dodge's (Dodge et al. 2005) research, police chiefs are the policy makers. For much of Melde's research (Melde, Taylor, & Esbensen, 2009), policy makers are school superintendents. And is Cuevas's (Sabina, Cuevas, & Cotignola-Pickens, 2016) and Zaykowski's (2014), policy makers are generally those at the state and the federal level who can change policies related to victimization. For example, Cuevas and colleagues' published research (Sabina et al., 2016) focused on sexual violence assault against Latina women was used in congressional briefing documents. Zaykowski's continued relationship with those in the Department of Justice who focus on victimization means her work (Zaykowski, 2014) will be influential in policy going forward. Many of our featured authors engage in evaluation research, which by definition is relevant. By using the findings from this work, programs or policies are influenced. Policy is so complex that it cannot be managed by only a handful of people. This means that policy makers can be found in a multitude of places. Policy makers exist at the local, state, and federal levels. Policy makers can be elected officials, bureaucrats, civil servants, or individuals appointed to important roles in the community. Policy makers are found at the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), the U.S. Senate, county commissioner offices, and university presidential suites. Policy makers may also be individuals who work closely with those just named. Policy makers can lead agencies in the executive, legislative, and court branches of government, and they can be found in think tanks, lobbying groups, professional organizations, or other organizations. Brunson argues that we all have the potential to be policy makers. Are you a community leader? Do you work in a place that has influence over others? Are you a member of a social club or religious organization? A policy maker, Brunson notes, is just a person who is positioned politically, or socially, to have his or her directives and recommendations put into practice. That may be you.

Who a policy maker is depends on the particular issue or research of interest. Consider the research conducted by Santos and Santos (2016) that focuses on intensive policing. Who

**Rules:** Recommendations about the expected behavior during the course of following procedures, with examples of how to deal with specific instances one may encounter.

**Guidelines:** Recommendations about the expected behavior during the course of following procedures, with examples of how to deal with specific instances one may encounter.

**Policy makers:** Individuals in a position who create the principles, rules, and laws that guide a government, an organization, or people that are carried out by a government or business groups.

would the appropriate policy maker be in this case? It would not be someone in the courts. And it would not be someone working at a think tank who focuses on energy issues. Rather, for Santos and colleague's work on intensive policing, local police chiefs are the policy makers they would want to work with, educate, and influence. Think of the work by Melde and his colleagues (2009) on the protective function of gang membership among adolescents. Consider a body of research that finds that one program minimizes risk of violence to students. Which policy maker would need to learn about this? Obvious policy makers would be school district superintendents and members of school boards. For others, policy makers may be city council members, mayors, Homeland Security directors, U.S. senators, influential think tanks, or governors. At the federal level, policy makers include members of the House, Senate, and many individuals leading departments and bureaus in the executive, legislative, and judicial branches. In regard to criminal justice policy, the attorney general is one policy maker. In addition, there are other policy makers leading bureaus in the Office of Justice Programs. Those crafting prison and jail policy would also be of interest for some research. Policy makers and those who support them are critical in making policy-relevant research in that they can support your research throughout the policy process.



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**Policy makers can be found everywhere. In this image, environmental policy maker Ivonne A-Baki, secretary of state for Yasuni-ITT Initiative, Republic of Ecuador, gives a lecture at the The Issam Fares Institute's Climate Change and Environment in the Arab World Program in 2016.**
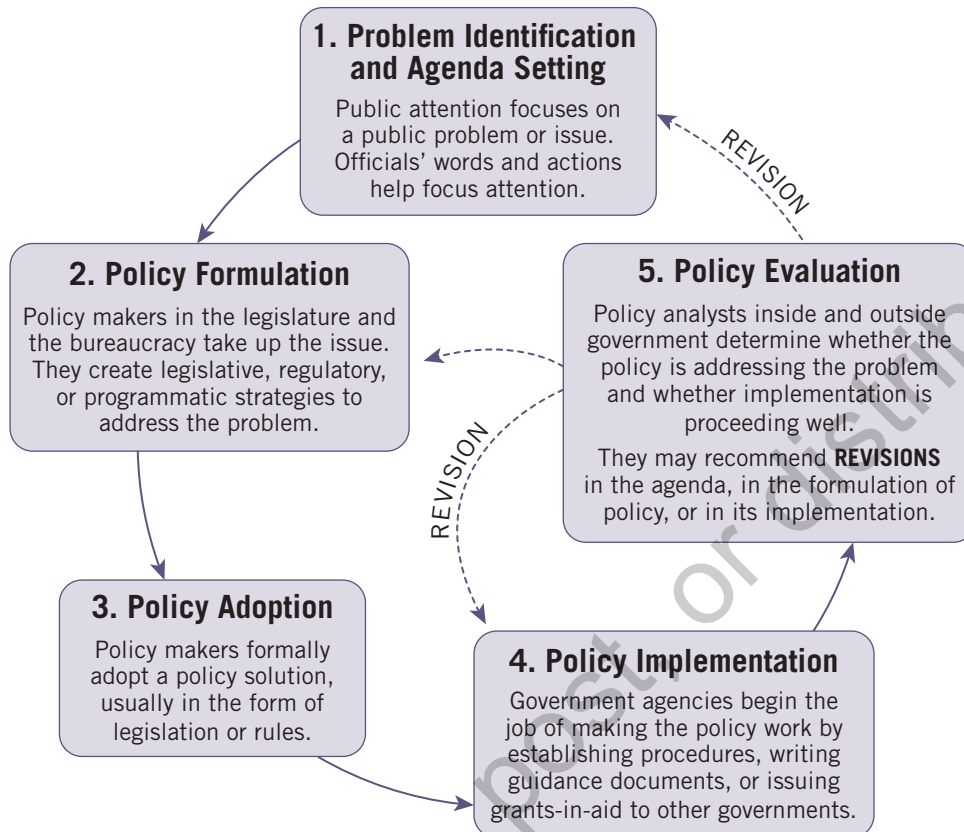
## The Policy Process

Earlier in the chapter we noted that researchers have not been as successful at using their research to influence policy as they have been at generating general knowledge and at evaluating existing programs. There are many reasons for this lack of success. Understanding the reasons, and avoiding them, is important to maximize the chances that your research will be policy relevant. A reason for some lack of success is the failure of many researchers to understand the stages of the policy process and where in that process researchers can exert some influence. For example, during the agenda setting stage, a researcher can conduct a needs assessment. During the policy formulation stage, a literature review or meta-analysis is valuable. During the policy implementation stage, a formative evaluation is influential. And finally during the policy evaluation stage, a summative evaluation provides essential evaluative information. The policy process was introduced in Chapter 11 given its connection with evaluation research. In this chapter, we revisit it and provide greater detail.

The policy process, also known as the policy cycle, is a simplified representation of the stages of policy making and implementation. An illustrated version of the policy cycle is useful as a learning tool, but it is important to recognize that policy is not created in the real world in this way (see Figure 13.2). Nonetheless, a consideration of this tidy representation of the policy process is instructive. As Cairney (n.d.) notes, the policy process is unrealistic and useful at once. This presentation of the policy process is based on five major stages: problem identification/agenda setting, policy formation, policy adoption, policy implementation, and policy evaluation. Although Figure 13.2 illustrates the five discrete stages, in fact, these stages overlap and influence one another. In addition, the policy process is a continuous loop in which each stage informs the others, but it also goes backward and forward among all the stages. As we learn more about a particular policy at one stage, we can make adjustments at other stages of the policy process to improve attention to the issue of interest.

Figure 13.2  Policy Making and Implementation

**1. Problem Identification and Agenda Setting**

Public attention focuses on a public problem or issue. Officials' words and actions help focus attention.

**2. Policy Formulation**

Policy makers in the legislature and the bureaucracy take up the issue. They create legislative, regulatory, or programmatic strategies to address the problem.

**5. Policy Evaluation**

Policy analysts inside and outside government determine whether the policy is addressing the problem and whether implementation is proceeding well.

They may recommend **REVISIONS** in the agenda, in the formulation of policy, or in its implementation.

**3. Policy Adoption**

Policy makers formally adopt a policy solution, usually in the form of legislation or rules.

**4. Policy Implementation**

Government agencies begin the job of making the policy work by establishing procedures, writing guidance documents, or issuing grants-in-aid to other governments.

REVISION

REVISION

*Source:* Reprinted with permission from Texas Politics Project at the University of Texas at Austin.

## Problem Identification/Agenda Setting

**Problem identification/ agenda setting: First stage of the policy process that occurs when the public brings an issue to the attention of policy makers and demands something be done to address this issue.**

**Focusing event: Event that captures the attention of policy makers, the public, and the media simultaneously like a major disaster or other crises.**

The first stage in the policy process is problem identification/agenda setting. **Problem identification/agenda setting** occurs when an issue is brought to the attention of policy makers with demands, or evidence (e.g., 9/11 terrorist attack) that something be done to address the issue. In plain language, this stage involves the identification of the problem to be solved and the advocating that it be placed on the policy makers' agenda for further consideration. Many individuals or groups can bring something to the attention of a policy maker including members of the researchers, public, elites, the media, advocacy groups, interest groups, think tanks, university groups, or a focusing event among others. A **focusing event** is an event that captures policy makers, public attention, and media attention simultaneously like a major disaster or other crises. The Patriot Act and 9/11 is an example of a focusing event.

Think of the many criminal justice issues that you believe demand policy attention but are not getting adequate attention. Perhaps you are thinking about intensive policing. Or maybe you are focused on policing strategies especially as they relate to the role that race may play in that. Rather, your issue of great interest may center on youth joining gangs and how that affects their risk of being violently victimized. You may want to see policies that

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implement programs in schools to help adolescents. Maybe you are most concerned about victims failing to get the assistance they needed, or maybe you are most concerned about college student victimization and campus safety. If these are important issues, then bringing them to the attention of a policy maker, and emphasizing the importance of adding the issue to the agenda for more consideration, is the first stage.

This initial stage of policy identification and agenda setting is one in which researchers and their research can be influential if heard among other voices bringing issues to the attention of policy makers. It is at this stage that policy makers can be informed and educated about what research findings and recommendations indicate about an issue. Nevertheless, bringing an issue to the attention of a policy maker is only one part of the problem identification and agenda setting stage. The policy maker must sift through all the competing issues to decide which ones to move forward in the policy process. Think back to the issues just described. If you were a policy maker, which of these issues would you focus on given your limited time, expertise, and space on an agenda. Which would you pay less (or no) attention to? What would lead you to focus on one issue over another? Researchers and their research are only one of a competing sea of voices trying to get the attention of policy makers about a myriad of issues.

## Policy Formulation

Should a policy issue be taken up by a policy maker and placed on an agenda for further consideration, the next stage in the policy process is policy formation. **Policy formation** is the second stage in the policy process, and it includes the design of multiple approaches, policies, programs, or formal ways to address the problem of interest. After several formal policy options are designed, the policy makers then identify and select what they see as the best policy solution of the group. This stage in the policy process requires compromise among policy makers and other parties to select the final policy that will be either adopted or rejected by the appropriate governing body. Policy formulation has a tangible goal of a bill or policy that goes before the policy making authority for formal adoption.

Let's imagine that policy makers in the state in which you live have decided to develop a policy to deal with the increasing opioid crisis. The opioid crisis affects the criminal justice system as law enforcement officers respond to calls about overdoses, robberies, violence, and burglaries caused by the drug. Judges deal with the opioid crisis in that they face those who have been arrested for using or dealing this drug. The correctional system then faces an onslaught of those convicted of these crimes, as well as those who are in jail because they cannot post bail (or were not offered bail). Finally, victims of crimes committed as a result of those seeking resources for more drugs are clearly affected by this crisis. What types of policies would you recommend be considered to address this issue? Given this issue goes beyond the criminal justice system (e.g., child maltreatment, foster care, public health, etc.), what sorts of policies would you design if you were a policy maker? How would you choose which one to ultimately consider for adoption?

Researchers and their research can be influential during the policy formation stage. Researchers can offer substantive expertise about what research indicates will and will not be effective as a policy. Researchers can educate policy makers about the various policies before them for consideration.

## Policy Adoption

Once the best policy option has been identified, adoption by the appropriate governing body is required. **Policy adoption** is the third stage in the policy process, and it refers to the formal adoption or passage of the policy, which legitimizes the policy. Policies are often

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adopted in the form of a law. Even if one bill manages to be adopted by one policy-making body, it may need to be passed or adopted by another. It may be that any policy will have to be successfully adopted by multiple groups before it is formally adopted. Researchers who have a dialogue with policy makers could influence and educate policy maker's votes on policy adoption. These researchers can also find themselves at the table of stakeholders who work toward policy adoption. Their dialogue, based on research, can include what benefits and limitations the policy offers.

## Policy Implementation

**Policy implementation** is the fourth stage of the policy process in which agencies (generally not the bodies that formulated or adopted the policies) operationalize the adopted policy. Adopted policies are not detailed about *how* the policy is to be implemented. Thus, policy implementation includes the drafting of specific procedures, regulations, rules, and guidance to be used by those tasked with carrying out the adopted policy. The policy implementation stage is yet another place that researchers and their research can be influential. Policy-relevant research can provide guidance about specific procedures, regulations, and guidelines considered to lead toward the best way to implement the policy. Policy implementation often involves research that analyzes the cause-and-effect relationships between the problem (i.e., prison riots) and the solution (i.e., solitary confinement) to understand what works and what does not work to solve problems.

## Policy Evaluation

The fifth stage in the policy process is policy evaluation. **Policy evaluation** includes activities designed to determine whether a policy and its associated programs are addressing the problems they were intended to address, if the policy as implemented is cost effective, the presence of any negative unintended consequences, and whether the implementation occurred as it was designed. The findings from policy evaluation are useful for adjusting all stages of the policy process. The evaluation may identify problems such as parts of the problem that are not being addressed. The evaluation may provide feedback by identifying a new problem and altering the policy agenda. Policy evaluation may highlight issues with policy formation as noted by negative unintended consequences. And policy evaluation can identify whether the policy implementation needs adjustment as well. The findings from a policy evaluation provide the feedback needed that results in policy improvement over time. As demonstrated in Chapter 11, policy evaluation is a place in which researchers can be influential.

# Challenges of Getting Research to Policy Makers

The policy process reveals many places that a researcher can introduce policy-relevant research findings to influence policy design and implementation. Simply understanding the

stages of the policy process, and the stages where influence by research is an option, however, is not enough. A researcher must also understand the additional challenges that make getting policy-relevant research—research that actually influences policy—to the policy makers. This section identifies many of those challenges.

## Relationship and Communication Barriers

A common error that researchers make with regard to getting policy-relevant research to policy makers is that researchers frequently have no communication or relationship with policy makers. For many reasons, **communication** between researchers and policy makers is frequently lacking. First, researchers and policy makers exist in different, too frequently disconnected, worlds, and both researchers and policy makers have failed to bridge that gap. If you as a researcher want your work to be policy relevant, you must develop and maintain relationships with policy makers. Of course, this requires that the researcher know who the policy makers are, and many researchers do not know them. A researcher must know the individuals and groups who are policy makers on the topic of interest in order to share their research and expertise.

A good way to start a relationship with a policy maker is to pick up the phone and schedule a meeting to meet with him or her. Share your research and how that information can benefit the policy maker. In any meeting with a policy maker, you must be concise and clear, and you must verbally convey your information in plain English in a condensed document. A policy brief is a great example of this and will be discussed later in the chapter.

Another related way to develop and nurture relationships with policy makers is through networking. **Networking** is linking with, interacting with, and developing relationships with others to exchange information to achieve a goal. Networking may lead you to individuals you did not realize were influential, but they are. A great way to network is to attend policy-related events. Attend legislative functions that governmental agencies host. Attend events by think tanks and other interest groups. Attend or host university events that bring individuals interested in the topic as well as policy makers. Plus, networking is great for future career opportunities. Offer to present your research at these events.

The failure to communicate between researchers and policy makers goes both ways. If policy makers want to develop and implement policies informed by a body of well-conducted research, they must reach out to those who can share what the research says as well. That is usually people who have conducted that research. Nevertheless, policy makers may not even know that there is relevant research or researchers studying the topic of interest. Most researchers are more than happy to share their expertise about a topic if asked. Make knowing who is researching the policy-relevant topics easy for them to find. Most university websites have faculty and student pages that highlight research being conducted and research expertise. Calls to the deans of relevant schools and departments can identify students and faculty working on particular topics. Policy makers can also gain insight about subject matter experts by reading university communications (websites, newsletters, etc.) that highlight relevant ongoing research and areas of interest. One limitation to the idea that policy makers will reach out is simply that it rarely happens. As a result, it is your responsibility as a researcher to let the policy makers know you exist. Make sure you have a page highlighting your research. Make sure the university is sharing your research in its communications. Send an e-mail with a brief description of your research to policy makers. You can include your résumé with that e-mail, but don't only send your vita or résumé. Provide a brief description about why the policy maker needs you, and then follow up with a request for a meeting. This relationship, if nurtured, will be valuable in your quest for making your research policy relevant.

## Nonaccessible Presentation of Research

Another common communication-related error that prevents research from being policy relevant is the failure to present your research findings in an accessible way for policy makers and others. Handing over a research paper or a journal article for policy makers to read all but guarantees it will be tossed out as soon as you leave. Research must be translated and formatted in easy-to-access and understandable ways for nonacademic audiences.

Three characteristics of effective communication are useful to keep in mind. First, make the message of your policy brief clear. State it early, state it often, and state it clearly. If the reader remembers one thing about your research, make sure it is this message. Second, think about the audience. Write the research for that audience. Avoid jargon and overly technical details. Many refer to the "mom test." That is, if your mom can read and understand it, then you have accomplished your goal.* Clearly, many moms can read technical, complex documents, but the point is that the writing must be easily accessible. Write it with the intended audience in mind. Finally, ensure that the document is attractive and inviting. Make a reader want to pick it up and begin reading. Make the reader want to continue reading once they begin.

As a researcher, you cannot sit back and passively hope that policy makers will find your amazing research and findings and understand how it can benefit them. That is not going to happen. Why? Because as a new researcher, your research is likely seen by no one aside from your professor. Of if you are working with a professor, your research might be published in a peer-reviewed journal. Policy makers most likely won't find your research in a journal. Journal access requires costly subscriptions. While you are in college you may have access, but once you have graduated and moved on, that access to journals is usually severed because of the high cost. This is the case for the general population as well who generally does not have access to journals or who is unwilling to pay for them.

This is problematic, but as noted, even if journals were widely available to policy makers and the public, it is unlikely they will wade through the 1,000s of journals available to find your nuggets of wisdom. How often do you as a student do this for your classes? Do you really expect a busy policy maker to do it? If you want to produce policy-relevant research, you must package that information for easy consumption by others. This does not include providing copies of your papers or articles to the policy maker. More must be done to translate the work for their consumption.

An excellent way to follow the three characteristics of effective communication and make your research easily accessible and easily understandable to policy makers and others is by writing a policy brief. A policy brief is an attractive, two- to four-page document of about 1,500 words. In this space, a researcher presents, in plain English, his or her research to a nonacademic audience. Policy briefs must be free of jargon, and they must simplify, clarify, and make understanding the research, findings, and policy implications easy. The policy brief must clearly state what the problem you addressed is, what current knowledge exists, and what gap you addressed. Findings and policy recommendations must be stated prominently and clearly so the policy maker can easily find them. Providing useful photos and graphs to make your point is a plus and encourages further reading. Figures are especially useful as the adage notes, "A picture is worth a thousand words." If technical information must be included, it should be included in an appendix. Policy briefs are critical. They must be written. The other voices competing for the attention of policy makers are writing them, so you must do the same to hope to be heard.

Remember, policy makers are busy people, and as the policy process highlights, you and your research are competing with other issues and voices. No one, including policy

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*While many refer to the "mom test" this is not to suggest that moms are dumb. It refers to the possibility that your mom will not be an expert in the substantive area of your research only. She is however an expert in many other ways and must explain that information to you using the "kid test."

makers, wants to read walls of text filled with jargon to figure out what your research offers them. The key is to communicate with policy makers in a way that accessing and understanding your research is easy, uncomplicated, and has clear policy implications spelled out. Sharing policy briefs at meetings and networking events will maximize the chances that your work as a researcher will be read. The "Making a Policy Brief" box provided later in this chapter offers additional information about constructing a policy brief.

*"I want you to draft the bill with all your usual precision and flair. Explain its purposes, justify its expenditures, emphasize how it fits the broad aims of democratic progress. And one other thing: Can you make it sound like a tax cut?"*

## Competing Sources of Influence

Another challenge making it difficult to get policy-relevant research to policy makers mentioned in this chapter is that researchers are only one voice in a sea of competing voices faced by a policy maker. Therefore, research is often kept from influencing policy because it is not heard by a policy maker who is bombarded with other powerful, overlapping sources of influence, including the media, fear, ill-informed perceptions, advocacy groups, ideology, and budgets that influence personal opinions. This section addresses each of these topics in greater detail.

**In the case of producing policy relevant research, avoid jargon. The goal when sharing research findings is for the public to be able to understand you.**

### Media

The media is a major voice being heard by policy makers. The influence of the media can keep policy-relevant research from affecting policy. In the United States, we made a policy decision to not have publicly supported media (with a few exceptions such as NPR or PBS), so our media must make profits to remain in business. This means advertising is important to them. As a result, the purpose of the **media** is to deliver viewers to its advertisers (contrary to what any media outlet tells you). This is most effectively done by showing viewers things that keep them coming back to watch more. Crime, violence, and mayhem are extremely effective at getting viewers to return to a media source repeatedly. For this reason, media outlets, including news outlets and non-news shows, are dominated by stories of crime and violence.

**Media:** Competing voice heard by policy makers that has the goal of delivering viewers to their advertisers.

Unfortunately, this immersion in crime, gore, and violence in the media leads to a gross misunderstanding of the actual nature of crime, victimization, and the criminal justice system. As a result, the public develops misperceptions about and a warped sense of important criminal justice issues. The public then takes these issues to policy makers (who themselves are influenced by the media) and demands policies to address them. Unfortunately, these demands are often based on poor information, raw emotion, and little fact.

**Looping:** Tactic used by the media where a particular crime or violent event is repeated over and over again.

### Fear

Related to the media's portrayal of crime and violence is fear. Fear is something that can keep policy-relevant research from affecting policy. Research shows that the criminal justice information portrayed in the media is associated with heightened fear among the public. Melde reminds us that a certain amount of fear of violence and crime is healthy. He noted in his video interview for this book, "Would we find it problematic if people were not afraid of secondhand smoke? No. Being fearful of that is important." What is unhealthy is that many parts of the public have a disproportionate amount of fear of crime in relation to their risk of victimization. When the public consults the media and sees violence committed all over the world, and sees the same violent incidents played over and over again (**looping**), members of the public come to believe that crime is worse than it really is. In this way, fear often drives what the public thinks policy makers should be focused on.

Furthermore, this saturation in viewing violence also tends to make the public feel that violence and crime are worse than they have ever been. This is the source of demands for policies that will return us to the "good old days." Ironically, the good old days had substantially higher rates of violence and property crime than we experience today. By using FBI Uniform Crime Reporting System data, as well as the National Crime Victimization Survey data, we can see that there is no question that rates of property and violent crime have declined drastically since the early 1990s. Regardless, the public seems to believe that crime is out of control and our society less safe than it has ever been. The public fails to recognize that given technology, they are now immersed in violent media portrayals of the world that was not accessible so easily in the good old days. Policy makers are themselves often unclear about the current and former rates of violence and property, and many of them fall prey to this same fear. In addition, some willingly take advantage of this fear and promise "tough-on-crime" policies should they be elected to an official position. The result is that both the public and policy makers clamor for tough-on-crime policies even when the available body of research shows the many of the demanded policies are unneeded, ineffective, or, worse, destructive and costly.

## Advocacy and Interest Groups

A third important influence that can keep policy-relevant research from affecting policy are advocacy groups, also known as interest groups, that operate with the goal of affecting policy makers and ultimately policy. An advocacy or interest group is an organization of individuals who seek to influence public opinion, policy makers, and policy. Advocacy and interest groups lobby policy makers and the public to persuade them that particular criminal justice issues require immediate attention and policy solutions. An example of an innovative nonprofit advocacy group is Breaking Silence. With offices in Colorado and California (see www.breakingsilenceco.org), Breaking Silence has a mission that "engages and inspires communities to take action and recognize their responsibility for the impact interpersonal violence (IPV) has on our culture. The organization is committed to promoting empathy,



Figure 13.3   U.S. Violent Crime Rate vs. Americans' Perception of Crime Rate vs. a Year Ago
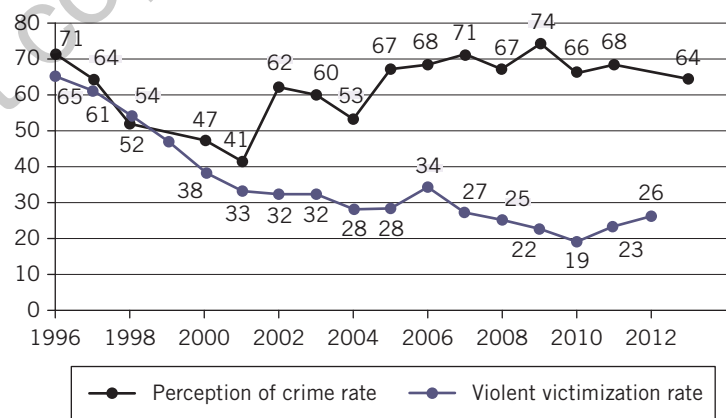
*Source:* Adapted from "Most Americans Still See Crime Up Over Last Year," Justin McCarthy, *Gallup News*, November 21, 2014.

healing and open dialogue through a traveling interactive exhibit in which the stories of survivors are brought to life with chilling realism."

A well-known advocacy group affecting criminal justice policy is the National Rifle Association (NRA). The NRA was founded in 1871 to "promote and encourage rifle shooting on a scientific basis" (NRA, n.d., para. 1). Even though the NRA continues to be a force dedicated to firearm education, it has expanded its influence to include other activities including lobbying. The NRA began direct lobbying in 1975 with the formation of the Institute for Legislative Action (ILA). The ILA lobbies policy makers to implement assorted policies in response to what it perceives as ongoing attacks on the Second Amendment.



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Today, the NRA views itself as the oldest operational civil rights organization, and it is a major political force when it comes to firearm policy in the United States. For example, the NRA successfully lobbied policy makers in Congress who then required that "none of the funds made available for injury prevention and control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention may be used to advocate or promote gun control" (Luo, 2011, para. 11; NRA-ILA, 2001). This example shows how some advocacy and interest groups can influence policy by drowning out the voices of some researchers, and can even prevent research from being conducted although it might inform important criminal justice policies.

Researchers compete with advocacy and interest groups to influence policy makers and, ultimately, policy. Although there is competition with these groups for the attention of policy makers, it is not necessarily the case that researchers and advocacy and interest groups are at odds with one another. In fact, many researchers and advocacy groups have interests that align, which could suggest a collaborative opportunity.

> The NRA successfully lobbied policy makers in Congress who enacted policies requiring "none of the funds made available for injury prevention and control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention may be used to advocate or promote gun control." How might this affect policy on gun violence in the United States?

## Ideology

Ideology, whether religious, economic or political, is another powerful influence on policy makers that can keep policy-relevant research from affecting policy. **Ideology** is a set of ideas that creates one's economic, political, or social view of the world. Ideology is powerful and can blind someone to contrary evidence found in research. It can prompt members of the public and other groups to lobby policy makers for wanted policy. Ideology can cause a policy maker to even doubt whether research is valuable at all. It is challenging to make your research policy relevant when policy makers themselves do not believe in research and research findings or that it can offer valuable policy implications. Consider the role of political ideology on incarceration policy. Most liberals believe that the criminal justice system should focus on rehabilitation, which means policies promoting less incarceration. Conservatives generally opt for a punitive approach requiring longer, and tougher, prison terms be given to those convicted of crimes. What is your viewpoint? Should we focus on rehabilitation, or should we focus on a harsher imprisonment? Why do you think that? Is it your ideology, or are you aware of what research has to say about this topic? When ideology guides your decision making, it may do so in a way that is contrary to the findings of a large, rich body of research on the same topic. As a result, ideology can influence policy in ways that may worsen versus ameliorate an important social issue.

> **Ideology:** Set of ideas and ideals that form one's economic, political, or social views of the world.

## Budget Constraints

Budget constraints are something that can keep policy-relevant research from affecting policy. We live in a world with finite financial resources. This means that even when the best
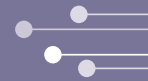
## Research in Action
### Type of Attorney and Bail Decisions

Although defendants are entitled to effective assistance of counsel, research by Williams (2017) suggests appointed counsel in particular often fail to provide effective assistance, and negative case outcomes (e.g., conviction, longer sentences) result. The purpose of this research is to investigate whether the types of counsel—public defender versus retained—influences bail decisions. The following three hypotheses were addressed in this research:

1. There is no relationship between type of counsel and whether or not defendants are denied bail.

2. Defendants with public defenders are less likely to be released prior to case outcome than are defendants with retained counsel.

3. Defendants with public defenders will be assigned higher bail amounts than will defendants with retained counsel.

To conduct this research, Williams (2017) used the 1990 to 2004 State Court Processing Statistics data set collected by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Statistics. These secondary data were downloaded from ICPSR and include felony defendant data from the nation's 75 most populated counties. For the purposes of this study, the researchers focused on counties in Florida because it allows for indigent defendants who may be facing incarceration the right to appointed counsel at bail hearings.

Analytic techniques include first describing the data (using descriptives) followed by a series of regressions to address the hypotheses. An examination of whether the type of attorney influences whether bailed was denied showed that the odds of bail being denied was 1.8 times higher for defendants with public defenders compared with those with retained counsel. This finding does not offer support for Hypothesis 1. The second regression investigated whether attorney type influences whether a defendant was released. The findings show that defendants with public defenders were less likely to be released prior to case outcome than were defendants with retained counsel. This finding supports the second hypothesis. And finally, regression output indicated that defendants with public defenders had lower bail amounts than had defendants with retained counsel, which does not support Hypothesis 3.

This research has important policy implications. First, the difference between appointed and retained counsel is vital in the earlier stages of a case when decisions are made regarding a defendant's fate. Although most attention considers case outcome, this research highlights the need to be alert to disadvantages throughout the process. Yet, the news reported here is not all bad. Even though defendants with public defenders were more likely to be denied bail and less likely to be released, they also benefited from lower bail amounts and from nonfinancial release options. All defendants deserve equal representation regardless of the stage of the process and the type of attorney representing them.

Williams, M. R. (2017). The effect of attorney type on bail decisions, *Criminal Justice Policy Review, 28*(1), 3–17.

**Budgets: Provide information about how much money and other resources can be spent on an items. Policies are subject to budget constraints.**

body of research points to a particular policy that would produce excellent outcomes, it may be too expensive to implement. **Budgets** provide information about how much money and other resources can be spent in any given period. Budgets are important considerations when it comes to policy design and implementation. Consider a policy that offers free housing, education, and job training to those convicted of a crime after the are released from prison

in order to greatly reduce recidivism. Although research may show that this type of intensive intervention leads to far better outcomes, funding such an approach may be prohibitive. This is just one example of budgets and limited funds getting in the way of research findings influencing policy.

# Maximizing Chances of Producing Policy-Relevant Research

So far, we have identified all those things that make getting policy-relevant research to policy makers challenging. This section take a more positive view and offers actions that you as a researcher can do to maximize the chance that your research will gain the attention of the policy maker and ultimately influence policy.

## Plan to Be Policy Relevant From the Start

One way you can maximize the probability that your research will be policy relevant is by thinking of policy relevance early when the research project is being designed. A common error that researchers make in regard to producing policy-relevant research is not considering policy relevance until the research is complete. A researcher must think about the policy relevance of their research at the earliest stages of planning the research. Waiting until research is complete may be too late, or at best, it will minimize the chances that the research will be policy relevant. You as a researcher must understand existing policy and policy gaps that require research attention to produce policy-relevant research. You as a researcher must formulate research questions that are useful to policy makers. You as a researcher must have a relationship with policy makers before research has begun. In some cases, including a policy maker on the research team is beneficial for all parties. The researchers gain a great deal of understanding of what is important to policy makers. And policy makers as research partners feel some ownership of the research. This relationship means the researcher and the research has the assistance in getting the attention needed to influence the policy process. By thinking about policy relevance in the planning stages of research, you can maximize the chances that your work will be useful in the design and implementation of policy.

## Relationship

Another "must do" to maximize the chance of producing policy-relevant research is to develop and maintain a relationship with policy makers relevant to your research interests. First, you must learn who the policy makers relevant to your area of research are. You must learn where they are. Then you must reach out and make contact with those policy makers. This may happen on a one-on-one basis or at a networking event. Should you get some one-on-one time with the policy maker, be prepared to share, in plain English, what your research is about, how it relates to the policy of interest, and how your research can guide the policy maker. Offer the policy maker policy briefs of your work. And make clear that you are available to the policy maker for her future needs. Access to a policy maker can also be made through his or her associates. Find out who they are as well. Reach out to them and develop a relationship with them. Include them on research projects. Be respectful of the policy maker and his or her staff's time as they are busy and have many competing issues and voices making demands of them. Your goal is to let them know how you can help them and make their lives easier.

### Translating Your Research

And third, translate your research and findings to policy makers to maximize the chances it will be policy relevant. Do not expect policy makers to find you and your research. It is up to you as a researcher to find them and let them know you and your work is available and important to them. One option is for researchers to submit their research that bridges the academic and policy/general audience population at the following website: https://theconversation.com. This website is also used by the media when it is looking for an expert to speak with on a specific topics. A good example of an accessible piece of research is found at https://theconversation.com/what-do-special-educators-need-to-succeed-55559, regarding an education topic.

As a researcher, you must present your results in a way that allows policy makers to use them to make their own arguments convincing to others. Writing in an accessible way and providing an accurate, but compelling, statistic are some ways to accomplish this.

Ideally, you will have an ongoing relationship with policy makers and their associates. You need to provide them information in an easy-to-use format that is jargon free to help policy makers and other audiences see how your research can inform policy. As noted, using policy briefs is ideal. Additional means to communicate policy-relevant research to policy makers exist. One is to attend or host a policy forum or, ideally, a series of forums where policy makers are invited to both attend and to participate on a panel dedicated to a particular topic. Additional, you can produce a regularly published newsletter, or blog, focused on policy issues and related policy findings that is disseminated to policy makers. For example, the Alaska Justice Forum offers a large assortment of policy publications that make connecting with policy makers (and the public) easy (see https://www.uaa.alaska.edu/academics/college-of-health/departments/justice-center/alaska-justice-forum/). Providing clear and concise information about the issue and clear policy recommendations that they can take back and implement maximizes the chances that your research is valuable to policy makers who are busy and thrive on easy to access to, and easily digestible, policy information.

## Common Pitfalls in Producing Policy-Relevant Research

Several common pitfalls associated with attempts at producing policy-relevant research have been emphasized in this chapter but bear repeating here. These include believing all research is policy relevant (it is not), failing to address policy-relevant questions, and waiting too long to consider the policy relevance of your research.

### Producing Research That Is Not Policy Relevant

Researchers often mistakenly believe that all research they conduct is policy relevant. It is not. Every piece of research conducted and published is not useful to policy makers. Cuevas has witnessed some researchers who try to shoehorn everything they do into policy work when it simply does not fit the bill. If you as a researcher have that relationship with relevant policy makers, then they can help in developing research questions that will allow researchers to address policy questions.

To know whether your research is policy relevant, consider these questions. Does your research address a policy need? Which policy? How does it address the need? Have you as a researcher educated yourself about existing policies related to your research topic? What

policy gaps exist? How does your research fill those gaps? What new information does your research offer? If you as a researcher cannot answer these questions, and you cannot identify the policies your work is related to, then you have work to do before you can produce policy-relevant research. Although it may be true that your research may be picked up and used to influence policy, your chances are better if you design your work with an eye toward existing policies and whether your research addresses policy gaps.

## Failing to Recognize How Your Research Is Relevant

Policy-relevant research focuses on specific research questions that produce findings of interest to policy makers. Recall earlier chapters where we discussed several types of research guided by different questions. We described exploratory research as useful when little or nothing is known about a topic. The purpose or goal of exploratory research is to answer questions such as "What is it?" "How is it done?" or "Where is it?" Descriptive research is similar to explanatory research, although it is much more narrowly focused on a topic given knowledge gained from earlier exploratory research. Descriptive research addresses questions such as "What is it?" "What are the characteristics of it?" or "What does it look like?" In contrast, explanatory research provides explanations about a topic to answer questions such as "Why is it?" "How is it?" "What is the effect of it?" "What causes it?" or "What predicts it?" Exploratory and descriptive research offers some insight into what social problems exist. In this way, they can inform the agenda setting part of the policy cycle. Nevertheless, all the rich descriptive and exploratory research in the world cannot inform policy implementation or implications. If your goal is to bring attention to a social problem, descriptive and explanatory research questions are useful, yet this work cannot offer insight into implementation and implications.

In earlier chapters, we described explanatory research as useful for identifying what characteristics are related to a topic, as well as what impacts, causes, or influences a particular outcome or topic of interest. In addition, through explanatory research, you can gain understanding about how to predict outcomes or topics of interest. Explanatory research is ideal for policy-relevant research because it focuses on more or improved understanding of complex causation associated with an issue. For example, explanatory research can provide new ideas about what works and what doesn't work regarding a policy. Explanatory research can offer new information about what works for different people in different circumstances regarding a policy. Research that influences the design implementation and implications is based on more complex research questions, making explanatory approaches ideal. Explanatory research can provide an understanding as to why something is the way it is (which requires an understanding of what causes it) or what predicts something. This type of information is useful in the creation of and implementation of a policy.

## Failure to Know Relevant Policy Makers

Another common pitfall is to not have a relationship with policy makers. If you don't know who policy makers are, you can't take your findings to them. To think that policy makers will find your research is fantasy. You must take the findings to them. This pitfall is related to the fourth pitfall, which is to fail to produce information about the research for more general audiences. Handing someone your journal article to read means it won't be read (try this at a party and see how it goes). Handing a policy maker a journal article ends the same way. One must create policy briefs or develop other means of communication of the research that is easy to access and easy to understand.

### Going Beyond Your Data and Findings

And finally, a pitfall of producing policy-relevant research is to go beyond your data and findings. This is true of all research as well. A researcher must base his or her findings and policy recommendations on the data gathered. And a researcher must base his or her policy recommendation on the findings from those data. A good researcher does not go beyond the evidence and information he or she has systematically gathered and analyzed to develop the conclusions and policy recommendations presented. Other influences such as ideology, intuition, or personal beliefs have no place in a policy discussion. As a researcher, the policy maker relies on you to provide information based on evidence and data. Your expertise is valuable—your unrelated opinions are not.

Another pitfall is that researchers too often assume that science and evidence should and can trump politics. Policy decisions are inherently political decisions, and therefore, the policy makers must consider trade-offs between values, evidence, economics, and so on. Although this may seem frustrating and disappointing, it is a part of the process. It should not mean that you as a researcher should not interface with policy makers, even if it doesn't always translate to the outcomes our research points to.

## Ethics and Conducting Policy-Relevant Research

Being guided by ethics is a constant in all research we conduct. When one is producing and sharing policy-relevant research that does not change. This section offers some ethical considerations to keep in mind when conducting policy-relevant research. First, whether in writing or verbally, you as a researchers must always be clear about the limitations of your research. No research is perfect, including yours. Policy makers may hope that your research offers some important information regarding a policy, and it is up to you to ensure that the policy maker understands exactly what your research can and cannot be used to support. Never go beyond your data and findings regardless of the temptation to do so.

Research, including policy-relevant research, requires replication. A policy should never be established or altered based on a single study. Again, no research is perfect. Only through replication can we gain more confidence in our outcomes. A classic error in establishing policy based on a single study (against the advice of the researcher) is the Minneapolis Domestic Violence Experiment conducted in 1981–1982. This single study was used to support the adoption of mandatory arrest policies throughout the United States. Later replication of this study in five additional locations with the policy in practice demonstrated that mandatory arrest policies are extremely problematic. The findings from the five replications showed some evidence of the benefits of mandatory arrest, yet others found that mandatory arrest is associated with more repeat offending. Yet, most policies that are adopted are difficult to end. The mandatory arrest policy is no different. The point is that replication is the key, and no one research study should be used to implement a policy. Maybe policy makers do not know this. It is up to you as the researcher to make it clear.

Santos points out another ethical issue that one must consider when producing policy-relevant research. That is, researchers must guard against whether the policy advice they are providing is biased by their personal opinions. Or it may be that a researcher feels pressure to produce research that supports a particular group's point of view. Both of these issues indicate a lack of objectivity and straying from the principles of scientific research. This risk means that researchers must continually question whether what they are finding is based

on the evidence or on an opinion. As Brunson stated in his phone interview conducted for this book, if you as a researcher "are helping guide policy, you have to be more diligent and committed to adhering to the rules and expectations of conducting good science." All our case study researchers made this point during their interviews. For example, Dodge stated that "a researcher must make conclusions based on their data and analysis only."

At times, working with nonresearchers such as policy makers can present challenges. Nonresearchers may not understand the process or the importance of research methodology and want you to find the finding they want versus the finding that comes from the data. As a researcher, you must remain ethical and maintain your objectivity. You do not want to become known as a "hired gun" type of researchers who gives policy makers what they want. Nothing is worth your integrity.

## Policy Expert—Katie TePas

Katie TePas never knew what she would do when she grew up, but she was certain it would be working with people in a social justice capacity. She has always been certain that every person has a right to have a life full of joy, happiness, and health like she has had, and she has always wanted to be a part of making that happen. She was raised with the expectation that she would work with people and make the world a better place for others. Little did she know that her path would take her to working with state troopers in Alaska, helping survivors of violence against women across Alaska, and even advising the governor of Alaska on policy-relevant research.

Currently, TePas is consulting and taking time off to travel the world. Before this, however, her path was varied. She graduated from college and worked in Fairbanks at a sexual assault and domestic violence center. After spending time there, she knew she wanted to pursue a master's degree. After completing that, she returned to Alaska and got a job with the state troopers where she managed a Violence Against Women grant and operated as the Alaska state trainer for 11 years. This eventually put her in Governor Sean Parnell's circle where she advised on policy. When Governor Parnell was not reelected, TePas returned to the State Trooper's Association for several years. She now works as a consultant when she isn't traveling to Mongolia or other amazing destinations to develop programs designed to reduce violence against women and offer services to those who have experienced it.

The nexus between policy and research is a critical influence in her work. For example, while working with the State Trooper's Association, TePas recognized she needed concrete data to get the troopers to where she wanted them to be in terms of sexual assault response and investigations. To get the needed data, she turned to Andre Rosay, PhD, a professor and the director of the Justice Center at the University of Alaska Anchorage. Designing the methodology to collect the needed data was easy, but it took years to develop the necessary relationship and trust among all stakeholders to support the collection of these data. Finally, a leader in the State Trooper's Association was confident enough to know the data could show how well they were doing, as well as to point to areas for improvement. With this relationship, the project launched.

The first project included an evaluation of domestic violence and sexual assault cases. This research then spun off onto a study on prosecution rates. In the end, this work provided the evidence to hire village public safety officers, which was especially beneficial in rural areas. People began reporting victimization early and using services more frequently, which led to even more public safety officers being funded. Another part of this partnership was the launching of the first Alaska Victimization Survey. This statewide victimization survey provided the baseline data of violence that resulted in additional funding and in more useful policies, procedures, and practices. The national study led to regional victimization surveys that allowed policy changes at the community level. All of this work, and other research not mentioned, resulted from meaningful dialogue and research that pulled back the curtain of violence in Alaska. With this problem in the open, TePas and her colleagues were able to reduce the amount of violence. Although the domestic violence rates in Alaska continue to be the highest in the nation, she knows that by using policy-relevant research, people's lives have been improved. Some have even been saved.

Today, the Justice Center and TePas continue to have a great relationship with the Alaska legislative body. They testify frequently to help policy makers understand the best policies to serve the population. The researchers are well respected because of their relationship with policy makers and because they can be counted on as an objective third party. Their research continues to be translated into attainable policy implications.

TePas has advice for students today. First, she encourages all students to ask the hard questions when you see a research finding. Where did the data come from? How were concepts measured? What methods were used? She notes the importance of finding and reading the original study because you cannot trust anyone else's depiction of that research. See it for yourself, and make an assessment of the original.

Second, TePas strongly encourages all students to intern and work in the field. It is only through this experience that you can see whether you belong there or whether your skills and passions are better suited elsewhere. For instance, she is now in social work but once thought she'd do clinical work. While working at the domestic violence shelter, however, she found she was frustrated with existing policy. She knew that had to change to make these survivors' lives better. Without that internship and employment at the shelter, she would have never taken the path she is on. Her passion remains the same, but how she used it changed.

Third, TePas implores students to learn early the importance of relationship building. A constant in her success is relationships. She notes that the relationships she built along the way have always proved valuable. Not only have they allowed her to be effective in all of her roles, but they have also led to other great opportunities. She has come to recognize the power of relationships and social networking. It is the key.

Finally, TePas encourages people to embrace the open doors that their relationships offer. Go through that door and see what is on the other side. It may be a chance to work with the governor (or become governor!) and to use research to make policy that matters.

## Chapter Wrap-Up

This text has described many skills associated with research methodology. Something they all have in common are that they are important skills that are demand in the job market. This chapter focuses on yet another very important but frequently overlooked skill—making research relevant. To do so, you must understand research methods and you must be able to translate that information into language that nontechnical and non-research-oriented people can understand. This key skill can get you a job. Not only that, it is a skill that helps to make the world a better place. If research is informing policy, then we all win. Another

# Making a Policy Brief

In this chapter, we discussed the importance of preparing policy briefs to give to and educate policy makers. In this box, we offer more detailed instructions on how to construct a policy brief based largely on the toolbox provided by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

An overarching goal of the policy brief is to educate the busy policy maker in a way that is easy. This is accomplished by using plain English, making it pleasing to the eye, using subtitles so finding information is fast and easy, and including interesting elements that compels the reader to keep reading. The policy brief must do more than convey information. It must make the reader want to keep reading. This is accomplished by using titles with verbs and attractive graphs and photos, as well as by enhancing particularly important points in sidebars or boxes. The Internet has a plethora of policy brief templates that offer ideas on how to make an attractive brief.

In terms of the substance, a policy brief should include five primary sections:

- Executive Summary
- Introduction
- Approach and Results
- Conclusion
- Implications and Recommendations

The **executive summary** should tell busy policy makers the overall purpose and findings of the policy brief. An executive summary should hook the reader and compel them to keep reading. The executive summary should have a front-and-center place in the policy brief such as on the cover or on the top of the first page. The fact of the matter is, many people will read no more than the executive summary, so it needs to be compelling and easy to find and offer the reader a clear, but basic, understanding about the research, findings, and conclusions. Like most summary sections in a paper, the executive summary is written last.

The **introduction section of a policy brief** accomplishes several important tasks including why the reader should care about this topic. This is accomplished by first addressing clearly why this research is important. It is not enough to assume the reader will see why this topic is important. It must be stated clearly in the policy brief. The introduction section of the policy brief must explain the significance or urgency of the issue. This part of the brief should tell the policy maker what will happen if this issue is ignored. It should also identify in plain English the objectives of the research that was conducted. This information must be clear, yet it is ideal if the researcher create a sense of curiosity in the reader to compel him or her to keep reading.

The **approach subsection** and the **results subsection** often fall under one section called "Approach and Results." The subsections are set off using subtitles for ease of reading. In the "approach" subsection, the policy brief needs to describe how the study was conducted. It should describe relevant background information, including the context of the study. By using

*(Continued)*

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**Executive summary:** First section in a policy brief that is generally written last. This section should tell busy policy makers the overall purpose and findings of the policy brief.

**Introduction section of a policy brief:** Second section of a policy brief that tells the reader why he or she should care about the topic of the brief.

**Approach subsection:** Subsection in a policy brief that describes relevant background information including the context of the study. Through the use of nontechnical terms, the approach subsection should identify the research methods used to collect the data.

**Results subsection:** Part of a policy brief usually presented with the approach subsection. The results subsection conveys what was learned from the research and is best accomplished beginning with the broadest statements about the findings, before moving on to more specifics.

(Continued)

nontechnical terms, the approach subsection should identify the research methods used to collect the data. In contrast, the results subsection should convey what was learned from the research. When presenting findings, it is best practice to begin with the broadest statements about the findings and then to move to more specifics. Ideally, the first statement in a paragraph will offer the broadest summary of the details in the paragraph. The use of figures and photos is helpful in conveying results (plus they are attractive to the reader). Both the results and conclusions subsections must be derived from the data gathered. Policy briefs should never offer results or conclusions that go beyond the data from which they came.

The **conclusions section of a journal article** in a policy brief should answer the general question, "What does it all mean?" In the conclusions section, the researcher must interpret the data and offer concrete conclusions. Ideas must be balanced and defensible, as well as expressed strongly.

The final section in a policy brief comprises the **implications subsection** and the **recommendations subsection** that fall under one subsection called "Implications and Recommendations." Information in each subsection must flow from the conclusions, and the statements in each of these subsections must be supported by the data or evidence gathered. The implications subsection should identify what *could* happen. As a result, the implications subsection frequently uses "if–then" statements. The implications subsection is also where the researcher describes what the consequences of this issue are. The recommendations subsection should be more concrete in that it should describe what *should* happen given the findings of the research. The recommendations subsection is best described using precise steps that are relevant, credible, and feasible. Remember that the steps described here are those that should be useful to the policy maker.

key theme in this chapter is the importance of relationships and networking. These too are skills that will benefit you greatly. Don't wait until you are done with your research, start now. Engage policy makers and develop relationships with them so you can partner in your research.

This chapter also spent time covering the policy process or the policy cycle. This is important for you to understand because it demonstrates the many times during the process when research can be informative. Keep in mind, however, that the tidy illustration of the policy process is an oversimplification of the policy process. In reality, there are feedback loops as all stages inform others. It is similar to research. We can offer all the pretty illustrations of research with neat stages, but engaging in research requires nimbleness, creativity, and the ability to solve the real issues that pop up—and they always pop up—when actually engaging in research.

Some of the bumps in the road you should expect when making your research policy relevant are the competing voices. There are interest groups, the media, and even personal opinion that are fighting for the attention of policy makers. Knowing this can better prepare you for this challenge. One way we discussed to be "heard" is using policy briefs. These short, succinct, and clear documents describe research and how it can be useful to policy makers. If done well, policy makers will read them, and your research is more likely to be influential.

We also heard from Katie TePas who works with researchers to produce findings that are useful to policy makers in Alaska. Her work, and her relationships with researchers and policy makers, has allowed her to make real changes in policies affecting people's lives in Alaska for the better. You can do the same in your community.

All of our case study researchers are involved in policy-relevant research. Brunson and Weitzer's (2009) research findings have direct implications for training police officers about how the public perceives and experiences them. Furthermore, by sharing that the perceptions and experiences differ by the race of the civilian, officers can be trained to focus on any unconscious (or conscious) biases they hold and act upon. Santos and Santos's (2016) research has direct implications on how to police high-risk offenders. Guided by theory and experience, Santos and her colleague were able to test whether this approach influenced four different outcomes focused on offenders and hot spots. Although the findings were not what was expected, the research points to the need to continue investigating high-intensity policing capitalizing on what was learned in this research.

Dodge et al.'s (2005) exploratory work provided an almost immediate policy outcome. By better understanding what women officers posing as prostitutes deal with, both as a decoy but also as a female officer, upper management acted. One finding noted that for women officers, working as a prostitution decoy is one of the few ways to gain undercover work to be promoted. Recognizing the imbalance in opportunities, management promoted a detective with this undercover experience to be the first female SWAT commander in the nation.

Melde et al.'s (2009) work on gang members and fear identified the crux of the seemingly contradiction of gang members joining gangs for safety when it is clear that gang members are far more likely to be violently victimized. The research confirms findings that gang membership is associated with higher risk of violent victimization, but it also shows that membership in a gang is associated with a reduced fear of victimization, which appears to serve as an emotional protection of sorts. These findings are useful in designing training and prevention programs, and they indicate an intervention point by focusing on the fear of victimization. Zaykowski's (2014) work is contributing to a body of literature to better understand those things associated with accessing victim services. Her research points to the role of reporting to the police and raises questions about police discretion in sharing these services. Zaykowski's work also indicates the need to ensure that police understand what services are available, and that all victims are deserving of available services. More research is needed to ultimately design training and education around accessing services, as well as to treat victims evenly. Cuevas and colleagues' work (Sabina et al., 2016) contributes to our understanding about Latino teen dating violence. The findings mirror other work focused on other populations, but they still indicate many ways in which training and prevention programs can be adjusted to reflect this work. Among those findings are that the different types of violence can be covered in the same trainings, as well as the need for male and female youth to be involved in trainings as they are both victims of dating violence. Table 13.1 presents some characteristics of each case study related to their policy implications. As you look at these, do you see additional implications that are not mentioned here?

The next chapter—the final chapter—in this text focuses on taking all of these skills and using them to begin your career. You can be as skilled as the best person out there, but if you don't understand what jobs to look for, where to look for jobs, and how to look for jobs, you will not be employable. So although Chapter 14 is not research methods specific, it is invaluable in helping you take your new research skills to the real world.

Table 13.1 Featured Research: Connecting Research to Policy, Policy Makers, and the Public

| Researcher | What Policies Might This Research Affect? | How Research Reached Policy Makers | Policy Brief Available? | Next Steps in Making This Available to Policy Makers |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Rod Brunson (Brunson & Weitzer, 2009) | This research can be useful in training police officers. It can demonstrate that the interactions between them and communities are perceived to be, and experienced, differentially. | Public presentations of this work in the communities in which the research was conducted. Presentation of findings at conferences. Publication in journals. Interviews by the media, especially with the recent events in Ferguson, MO. | No | Sitting with policing agencies to talk about these findings directly. |
| Carlos Cuevas (Sabina et al., 2016) | Policies focused on training and prevention efforts can benefit from this research. In particular, the research shows that prevention efforts that target child maltreatment, conventional crime, and/or peer/sibling victimization may work to prevent dating violence as well. Findings suggest that prevention and intervention can be combined across forms of violence, and that early intervention is best. Males and females should both be included in prevention/ intervention efforts, as both are affected by this violence. Findings show that the family unit is an appropriate point of intervention. | Because these data were collected using federal grant money, the findings are presented to the funding authority (USDOJ) and the public in a non–journal article format. Journal articles and conference presentations were also used. Cuevas and colleagues also engage with media to discuss this research. Because the data are archived at ICPSR, the data are available for others to use to study similar topics. The work was picked up in congressional hearings. | No | Continuing engaging with stakeholders and policy makers on dating violence among Latino youth. |
| Mary Dodge (Dodge et al., 2005) | Policies that affect how women officers are promoted. In general, promotion requires undercover work, but undercover work opportunities are rarer for women compared to men officers. | Research was conducted with individuals at the police departments (i.e., collaborators). Findings were taken to officers and officials in the departments. Conference presentations. Journal article published. | No | No additional steps planned on this specific topic. As a result of this research, a police chief appointed a female officer as the first SWAT commander in the United States. |

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|---|---|---|---|---|
| Chris Melde (Melde et al., 2009) | Reiterates findings that gang membership is associated with higher risk of violent victimization—this can continue to inform educational programs designed to steer people away from gangs. This work also demonstrates how being in a gang is associated with a reduced fear of victimization—an emotional protection of sorts. This too can be used to inform training and prevention programs. The research also offers insight into a possible intervention point which is by focusing on the fear of victimization. This focus may ultimately lead to members disassociating from gangs. | Journal articles. Conference presentations. Continued relationship with and interaction with gang associations (e.g., Eurogang) who can benefit from this work globally. | No | Continuing engaging with stakeholders and policy makers as research on adolescent gangs continues. Continued strong networking with global gang researchers. |
| Rachel Santos (Santos & Santos, 2016) | The way that policing is conducted. | The researchers worked directly with the police department and this relationship ensured the policy makers were aware of the research and findings. In addition, conference presentations and journal articles. | No | Continued attention to this issue through additional research and networking with the police department, and national level policing policy |
| Heather Zaykowski (2014) | This research offers greater information about what influences a victim to seek victim services. Findings show that victims of intimate and family violence are most likely to get assistance, but it cannot address the reasons why. Possible reasons include police perceptions about how to handle views, and police perceptions of "worthy" victims. Policies that can be influenced include police training about sharing victims services information with all victims regardless of personal views. | Journal articles and conference presentations. | No | Additional work to unpack the "why" questions regarding police informing victims of services. A focus on understanding police discretion as a mechanism connecting victims to services can provide additional insight, and has clear policy implications. |

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# Applied Assignments

The materials presented in this chapter can be used in applied ways. This box presents several assignments to help in demonstrating the value of this material by engaging in assignments related to it.

### 1. Homework Applied Assignment: Making a Policy Brief

Select an article from one of our case studies. By using the guide in this chapter, design and write a policy brief that would share these findings with policy makers. Be sure to include all of the sections described, and be sure to use language that is jargon free and easy for the general public to use. In addition, remember that a policy brief should be attractive. Many online policy brief templates can assist with this assignment. On a cover sheet, identify who you believe the local policy makers in your community are that would benefit from this research. Be prepared to discuss your findings in class.

### 2. Group Work in Class Applied Assignment: Field Observation as a Group

You are a member of a policy group at your university. Each of you was appointed to sit on this committee by the provost given your research methods skills. The committee's mission is to identify policies that are not working well and to identify the data and research needed to inform how the policy can be improved. Your task today is to as a group identify a policy that is not working well at the university. Next, identify issues with that policy you believe need to be changed. As a group, you need to identify the methodology used to gather data needed to inform ways to improve the policy. How do you think those data will help? What if the data do not suggest change is needed? Are there other data you should gather then? How will you share your findings and conclusions with your provost who doesn't know anything about research methods or policy? Be prepared to share you findings with the class.

### 3. Internet Applied Assignment: Gathering and Analyzing Online Qualitative Data

Search the Internet for a policy being considered at the state level. Once you find that policy, write a paper summarizing it and noting whether any data were used (that you can find) to influence the policy. Next, identify the type of methodology you think is needed to gather data you think would be useful for this policy and why. Describe the steps you would take to alert the state-level policy makers about the data you'd like to gather. Be prepared to share your findings with the class.

## KEY WORDS AND CONCEPTS

## KEY POINTS

- Research used to influence policy makers when they design and implement policy is policy-relevant research. Historically, researchers have done a great job of conducting solid traditional research and of publishing those results; nevertheless, researchers have not been as successful at producing policy-relevant research.

- Policy comprises the principles, rules, and laws that guide a government, an organization, or people. Public policy refers to policy in the government arena. Policies differ from procedures, regulations, and rules.

- Policy affects all aspects of our lives on a daily basis. As someone living under many policies, it reasonable to want policy to be based on well-conducted research. That is, it is reasonable to hope for criminal justice research to be policy-relevant research.

- The policy process, also known as the policy cycle, is a simplified representation of the stages of policy making and implementation. Although many descriptions of the policy process are available, we focus on a policy process based on five major stages, including problem identification/agenda setting, policy formation, policy adoption, policy implementation, and policy evaluation.

- Researchers must develop and maintain relationships with policy makers to get their research seen by them.

- Researchers must translate their research to make it accessible to policy makers and others. An excellent way to do that is by writing policy briefs.

- A policy brief is a short two- to four-page document of about 1,500 words. In this space, a researcher presents, in plain English, the purpose, findings, and policy implications (among other things) to a nonacademic audience. Policy briefs must be free of jargon, and they must simplify, clarify, and make understanding the research easy.

- A researcher can maximize the probability that his or her research will be policy relevant by thinking about it at the beginning of a research project. This means the researcher can use a suitable research question, be versed in the policy of interest, be aware of policy gaps, and perhaps even include a policy maker on the research team.

- Not all research produced is policy relevant, and policy makers will not find your work. As a researcher, you must reach out and bring your research to policy makers.

## REVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is policy, and how does it differ from public policy? What are examples of policies you like? What are examples of policies you do not like?

2. Who are policy makers you would want to influence with your criminal justice and criminology research?

3. How does policy-relevant research differ from other types of research? Why isn't all research policy relevant?

4. Which research questions are best for policy-relevant research? Why is that?

5. Why is a depiction of the policy process useful but at the same time unrealistic?

6. What are the stages of the policy process, and how can researchers influence policy makers at each stage?

7. What common mistakes do researchers make when it comes to making policy-relevant research? How might they maximize the chances that their research is influential?

8. What is a policy brief, and how does it differ from an academic journal article or even a research paper? What are the characteristics of a well-constructed policy brief?

9. What are ways that researchers can connect with policy makers? Why is this so important?

10. What are common pitfalls that occur when one is trying to conduct policy-relevant research? How might these be avoided?

# CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. A professor shares her most recent journal publication with the class as an assigned reading. She also mentions that she sent it to a local lawmaker since it is related to a policy under consideration. You hear students commenting that the article is full of jargon and that they are not sure how the research describing a proposed policy is policy relevant. If the professor asks, what suggestions would you give her to make it more policy relevant and accessible?

2. You are working as a research assistant with a professor who studies the three-strikes policy in your state. He writes many journal articles on this topic but is frustrated that his excellent research is not being used in policy making. What five specific suggestions would you offer him to help him make his work more policy relevant?

3. You are working on your Honor's thesis that focuses on mandatory arrest policy in your city. You are passionate about producing research that will be policy relevant so you have developed a relationship with a local council member who is also passionate about this topic. You have invited him to be a collaborator on this research. Your research shows that in your city, mandatory arrest has actually reduced repeat arrest by offenders. In other words, it appears to be a beneficial policy in place. The council member does not believe it and pressures you to make changes in your findings. What do you do in a situation like this? How might you change your research?

4. Santos and Santos's (2016) research indicated that intensive policing did not statistically affect their outcome measures. In other words, it did not appear to have much an effect, although the authors noted that the direction of the findings was positive. You have developed a relationship with the local police chief who is aware of your familiarity with this research. She is asking what sort of policy implications come from this work. What suggestions would you provide the chief? Why?

5. Meanwhile, in your hometown, the police chief finds Brunson and Weitzer's (2009) work. The chief is very interested in the topic but is disappointed that he cannot understand some of the research jargon. He pays you to consult with him about this so he can make any needed policy changes. As a consultant, what would you produce and share with this police chief? Why?

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