Approaches to informing and engaging stakeholders

1. Ways to inform stakeholders

Stakeholders can be informed about a policy brief by disseminating the policy brief, posting information on a website, making announcements, tailoring information derived from the policy brief, issuing press releases, and by holding press conferences and presentations. All these approaches can also be used when consulting stakeholders (for example, when asking for feedback or responses to drafts of the policy brief or parts of the policy brief) or in conjunction with methods to engage stakeholders in deliberations.

Disseminating the policy brief

SURE policy briefs are designed to inform the deliberations of policymakers and key stakeholders. A graded entry format is used in policy briefs to facilitate access: they include a single page of key messages, an executive summary, the full report, and appendices. The minimum expected requirement is that the SURE policy briefs will be posted on the SURE/EVIPNet website. Briefs can be made more accessible by:
- Posting them directly onto other relevant websites or providing relevant links to them
- Sending electronic or hard copies of part or all of the policy brief to selected stakeholders
- Announcing where and how to access the policy brief
- Posting or sending only the key messages or executive summary, with information about how to access the full policy brief

Advantages: Minimal additional work; low cost
Disadvantages: May not be the optimal format for all target audiences; may exclude relevant disadvantaged populations; information tailored to specific target audiences may be more effective

A website

Using or setting up a website offers a number of additional opportunities beyond simply posting the policy brief. These include:
- Being able to add links to additional material or other websites with relevant information
- Publishing additional material to improve understanding (such as a glossary, additional relevant explanations, meta-information about policy briefs, systematic reviews, and details about the contributors and sponsors, etc.)
- Publishing additional material to make the information more appealing and accessible (e.g. by using pictures and stories to illustrate relevant aspects of the policy brief)
- Publishing information tailored for specific audiences
- Facilitating (online) responses to the policy brief and the use of structured responses or input

From the SURE Guides for Preparing and Using Evidence-Based Policy Briefs. Version 2.1 [updated November 2011] Available from www.evipnet.org/sure

1

Advantages: Potential to improve access and understanding
Disadvantages: May exclude relevant disadvantaged populations; requires access to technical expertise and resources to design and prepare the website and to keep it up-to-date

Tailored information

It may be necessary to tailor website content to ensure that the information is accessible and understandable to targeted audiences by, for example:
- Focusing on specific content
- Using language that is more easily understood and avoids jargon
- Incorporating additional explanations or background information
- Including figures or images to help convey key information
- Including stories or anecdotes to illustrate and clarify messages
- Translating the content
- Presenting alternative spoken or visual forms (e.g. radio broadcasts)
- Addressing the policy issue or aspects of the policy issue from a specific perspective

Advantages: Potential to improve access and understanding
Disadvantages: Requires expertise and resources to prepare

Press releases

Well-designed press releases for a policy brief might improve and promote reports in the mass media. These could help to address constraints that may limit the ability of journalists to report accurately on health systems problems and solutions. Journalists may lack time and knowledge or not have sufficient space in their publication at the time, or have difficulties in understanding and reporting jargon.[1, 2]

A structured press release could help to ensure that journalists are given – and are therefore more likely to report – key information related to a policy brief. [3]
A structure for a press release might, for example, include:
- **A short title** that will capture the interest of relevant audiences
- **A new message** – Journalists need material that draws the audience in and makes the story immediately relevant. Succinct answers to questions could help to capture the interest of journalists and help them to capture the interest of their audiences. Examples of useful questions include: What is the message? What makes the policy brief relevant now? What has changed? Who is interested and why? Why should they be interested in *this* story right now?
- **What are the key messages?** – Stories in the mass media typically put the most important and interesting information first (sometimes referred to as the 'lead' or 'intro') – supporting information then follows in an order of diminishing importance. This form is effectively an 'inverted pyramid' of information enabling readers to stop reading at any point but still be able to come away with the essence of a story. It also allows people to explore a topic up to the level of detail that is of interest to them without being encumbered by details or discussions that they might regard as irrelevant or uninteresting. The pyramid structure also allows the information to be made available to others who may be more interested. It also enables the length of the articles to be trimmed according to the available space.

From the SURE Guides for Preparing and Using Evidence-Based Policy Briefs. Version 2.1 [updated November 2011] Available from www.evipnet.org/sure

2

- **What is the problem?** – Additional information about what brought the problem to attention at this particular moment, and the magnitude of the problem and its causes. This content is similar to what might have been included already in the executive summary and focuses on information likely to be of interest to a general audience and to specifically targeted audiences
- **What are the options for addressing the problem?** – Brief descriptions of the options that can be understood easily by someone who is not familiar with the policy issue
- **Will those options work***?* – Brief summaries of what is known about the benefits, harms and costs of each option. This might be similar to the bullet points summarising the contents of the summary of findings table, described in SURE Guide 4. Deciding and Describing Options. 'Fact boxes' might also be included in this section: these could give a brief description of the contents of particularly relevant summary of findings tables.[4, 5]
- **What is this information based on?** – This might be a concise summary of how the policy brief was prepared, including who prepared it and sponsored it, any conflicts of interest, and how to get further information.

Advantages: Potential to reach broader segments of the public through the mass media; may potentially encourage public debate and influence key stakeholders to use the policy brief; may encourage and improve reports in the mass media
Disadvantages: May exclude relevant disadvantaged populations if not targeted at the forms of media to which they have access (e.g. radio); compete for press space and the time and attention of the relevant audiences

Press conferences

Providing opportunities to question those involved in the preparation of the policy brief, deliberations and decisions may offer added value to journalists and further encourage and improve reports in the mass media. The effectiveness of press conferences can be maximised by: planning ahead (two to three weeks if possible), timing the conference so that it achieves maximum coverage (e.g. holding it in the morning and for a suitable length of time while ensuring that the conference does not clash with other events), issuing invitations well in advance with all the relevant facts included, ensuring easy access to the press conference, preparing a press kit (including a structured press release, fact boxes, relevant background material, and suitable illustrations), and ensuring that the presentations are appropriately simple and have clear messages.[6]

Advantages: Potential to reach broader segments of the public through the mass media; may potentially encourage public debate and influence key stakeholders to use the policy brief; may be more effective than only using press releases
Disadvantages: May exclude relevant disadvantaged populations if not targeted at the types of media they have access to (e.g. radio); compete for press space, and the time and attention of relevant audiences; requires more time and effort than only relying on press releases

From the SURE Guides for Preparing and Using Evidence-Based Policy Briefs. Version 2.1 [updated November 2011] Available from www.evipnet.org/sure

3

Presentations

Presentations of the policy brief may facilitate informing specific targeted audiences. Presentations will generally include opportunities for the audience to ask questions and for information to be clarified. They also offer opportunities for the presenters to ask the audience questions and to get audience responses. Exchanges like this can be used as a consultation strategy in themselves and as a useful strategy for informing stakeholders. Different options include:
- Arranging presentations at times and venues that are convenient to the key stakeholder groups
- Publicising and holding public meetings which are open to anyone with an interest in the policy issue
- Holding an open house session where key information can be displayed, presented, and made available as handouts. The authors of the policy brief or others can answer questions and clarify details in a setting that is more relaxed than a formal presentation

Advantages: Targeted, interactive communication
Disadvantages: Only likely to reach a limited number of people; may exclude relevant disadvantaged populations if they are not targeted explicitly

2. Ways to consult stakeholders

Written comments

Written comments about a draft policy brief (or parts of it) can be requested at anytime during its preparation and use. These may relate to the:
- Prioritising topics for policy briefs
- Clarification of the problems
- Identification of the policy options and relevant evidence
- Descriptions of the options
- Barriers to implementing the options
- Strategies to address the identified barriers
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Full policy brief drafts
- Deliberations based on the policy brief, including related values and views

A number of strategies can be used to contact stakeholders to elicit their written comments, including:
- Inviting stakeholders to register their interest
- Sending out press releases
- Placing requests for comments on websites
- Contacting relevant organisations

Advantages: Requests for comments require little effort
Disadvantages: If many comments are received or if it is important to document all the responses to the comments, this can become a time consuming process; even more active (and time consuming) efforts may be required to obtain comments from certain population segments, particularly from relevant disadvantaged populations

From the SURE Guides for Preparing and Using Evidence-Based Policy Briefs. Version 2.1 [updated November 2011] Available from www.evipnet.org/sure

4

Interactive media

Interactive information and communication technologies (ICTs) – including websites, blogs, and social networking sites – are becoming increasingly accessible and important in low- and middle-income countries. However, a lack of Internet access in some communities may still limit access to these. Infrastructural and cultural contexts may vary and therefore require different approaches to ICT use. In addition, although the Internet is an important and increasingly popular source of information, policymakers face the challenge (similar to those in other forms of mass media) of competing with vast amounts of conflicting information, some of which is neither accurate nor complete.[7, 8] The following strategies can help to guide the use of online consultations [9]:

- Start planning early
- Demonstrate a commitment to the online consultation process and communicate this clearly
- Guarantee personal data protection
- Tailor your approach to fit your target group
- Integrate the online consultation with more traditional methods
- Test and adapt the tools used (e.g. software, questionnaires)
- Promote your online consultation actively
- Ensure that sufficient time, resources and expertise are available so that the analysis of the input received during the online consultation is thorough
- Publish the results of the online consultation as soon as possible and inform participants of the next steps in the policymaking process. Ensure that participants are informed about how the results were used in reaching decisions
- Evaluate the consultation process and its impacts

Advantages: May be a potentially efficient way to collect various types of input; can facilitate the structured collection of input as well the actual analysis of the information that is collected
Disadvantages: Active efforts are likely to be needed to elicit comments (e.g. sending announcements to key stakeholder groups and inviting them to respond to questions); relevant disadvantaged populations may be excluded

Question and answer sessions

These could be held as part of the presentations given to key stakeholder groups, at a public meeting, or during an open house session (see above). Typically these would begin with a presentation

Advantages: Targeted, interactive communication
Disadvantages: Only likely to reach a limited number of people; may exclude relevant disadvantaged populations if they are not targeted

Open phone lines

Open phone lines can potentially provide an impersonal opportunity for the public to provide feedback or other types of input. The phone could be answered by a staff

member who will discuss the issue directly with the caller. Or callers may be given the opportunity to leave their comments after listening to a recorded message

Advantages: Wide accessibility
Disadvantages: Only likely to be useful for brief messages and limited types of feedback or input; requires resources and time to process the responses

Interviews, focus groups and surveys

Standard methods of collecting qualitative or quantitative data may be used when consulting stakeholders about, for example, their priorities, concerns, views or values that relate to topics such as the trade-offs between the pros and cons of specific options.

Advantages: Can potentially be used to reliably collect specific types of information that are needed to inform deliberations or decisions about which there is important uncertainty or controversy.
Disadvantages: Requires time and resources and may not be feasible

Public hearings

Open meetings at which a policy brief can be discussed. Public hearings can be advertised widely and open to anyone who may want to participate. Alternatively, invitations could be sent only to particular stakeholders only. Discussions at public hearings are open unlike those in many policy dialogues (see SURE Guide 7. Organising and running policy dialogues for further information on organising and running policy dialogues). Participants are free to identify other participants and attribute comments, and journalists may also be invited. Public hearings can potentially have a small number of actual participants with a larger audience (possibly combined with a question and answer session). Alternatively, they may be open to participation from a large audience, inviting comments in a structured way (such as inviting comments on each section of a policy brief in turn).

Advantages: Can be conducted in conjunction with deliberative processes that allow for consultation with a wider variety of stakeholders, and allow both open and closed discussions
Disadvantages: Take time and resources to organise; may attract biased samples of the public (e.g. people with vested interests and strong views); may exclude relevant disadvantaged populations if they are not targeted in ways that are specifically designed to help them participate

From the SURE Guides for Preparing and Using Evidence-Based Policy Briefs. Version 2.1 [updated November 2011] Available from www.evipnet.org/sure

6

3. Ways to involve stakeholders

Workshops

These are meetings where participants can interact with each other and with the organisers. Can include interactive presentations that provide information from the policy brief, and may also include deliberation

Advantages: Can involve specific stakeholders in ways that potentially require relatively little effort; may be useful for brainstorming about a range of issues such as the causes of a problem, potential options for addressing a problem, and the barriers to implementing options
Disadvantages: Only useful when involving a limited number of stakeholders

Working groups

Establishing one or more working groups to assist the team with the preparation of a policy brief or to follow-up on specific issues arising from the policy brief or a policy dialogue may be helpful. It may also be useful to have an extended group, in addition to the core group preparing a policy brief, which includes key stakeholders who can discuss material from the early drafts of each section of the policy brief.

Advantages: A potentially efficient strategy for involving small groups of stakeholders in developing a policy brief and for following up on issues arising from the policy brief or dialogue
Disadvantages: Only a small number of individuals can be involved

A policy dialogue or other deliberative processes

The organisation and the running of policy dialogues are described in detail in SURE Guide 7. Other deliberative processes include:
- Targeted briefings or dialogues designed to reach specific audiences who may benefit from private and tailored discussions. These may help to reach disadvantaged groups which might otherwise have difficulties participating in a dialogue with all the other key stakeholders
- Bilateral meetings where public officials meet with a key stakeholder may be valuable if there is conflict surrounding the policy brief
- Study 'circles' of between 8 and 12 people who meet regularly over a period of weeks or months. This option may be useful if, for example, a problem needs to be clarified, and when options need to be generated and selected, or values defined
- Electronic processes using different types of software may help to accommodate large or widely-dispersed participant groups. These may also facilitate informal online exchanges allowing for greater anonymity (and more openness) and be more convenient for participants. However, the use and effectiveness of this method will depend on whether participants feel comfortable with it. [10] It may also be difficult to recruit participants. This option also requires technical support and facilities and may exclude disadvantaged groups who lack online access

From the SURE Guides for Preparing and Using Evidence-Based Policy Briefs. Version 2.1 [updated November 2011] Available from www.evipnet.org/sure

7

- Citizens' juries consisting of a small panel of non-specialists. These are modelled on the format of a traditional jury and members are required to examine an issue carefully before delivering their 'verdict'.[10]

Advantages: Holding discussions where issues can be carefully considered before decisions are made is generally desirable for health policy decisions. These can support the decision-making of policymakers and give voice to the stakeholders
Disadvantages: Requires careful planning, time and resources; most deliberative processes can only accommodate a limited number of people

4. Ways to collaborate with stakeholders

Advisory groups and task forces

Groups are typically selected to represent a cross-section of interest, and participants may be asked to contribute and support each stage in the preparation and use of a policy brief. Advisory groups tend to be longer-term options whereas a task force will typically have a shorter time horizon.

Advantages: Collaboration with a small group of stakeholders when developing a policy brief and supporting its use can help to ensure that stakeholder views are taken into consideration. This helps to ensure that the policy brief is fit for purpose and is used effectively
Disadvantages: Can only involve a small number of individuals; may consume considerable time and resources; may create problems with the way in which disagreements are managed. Some stakeholders may feel excluded, for example, if the selection of members is insufficiently transparent or not adequately justified

Consensus processes

Although reaching a consensus may be an objective of a deliberative processes (or may emerge spontaneously) this does not occur often. A wide range of methods to achieve consensus can be used, including:
- The Delphi method – in which participants never meet directly but respond to questionnaires, usually using a Likert scale, and approach consensus through iteration
- The nominal group technique – in which ideas are collected from each participant and then systematic played back to the group by a facilitator. This ensures that all the ideas are openly addressed
- A consensus development conference – in which a selected group (of approximately ten people) is brought together to reach a consensus about an issue. Various interest groups or experts who are not members of the decision-making group can make presentations during an open meeting that may last several days. The decision-making group will then retire to consider the questions in light of the evidence and the information contained in the presentations, and will attempt to reach consensus

Formal consensus processes are only likely to be helpful when a decision requires agreement amongst all key stakeholders. Policymakers will also need to be prepared to accept whatever decisions are made.

From the SURE Guides for Preparing and Using Evidence-Based Policy Briefs. Version 2.1 [updated November 2011] Available from www.evipnet.org/sure

8

Advantages: Formal consensus methods can help to ensure that the processes are not dominated by people simply because of their position, their status, or how forcefully they're able to communicate. Achieving a consensus amongst key stakeholders may be useful when decisions being considered are controversial or when buy-in is essential
Disadvantages: Formal processes may inhibit open discussion and alienate certain stakeholders

5. Ways to delegate to stakeholders

Delegation of authority

Authority for preparing elements (or all) of a policy brief may sometimes be delegated to others, such as when a policy brief is commissioned. Similarly, policymakers may elect to delegate specific decisions or types of decisions, such as those related to the coverage decisions for drugs or other health technologies.

Advantages: Delegation of some activities and decisions may improve efficiency and be more systematic and transparent than normal political processes
Disadvantages: Delegating authority may increase, decrease, or have no effect on informing and engaging stakeholders

From the SURE Guides for Preparing and Using Evidence-Based Policy Briefs. Version 2.1 [updated November 2011] Available from www.evipnet.org/sure

9

References

1. Larsson A, Oxman AD, Carling C, Herrin J. Medical messages in the media--barriers and solutions to improving medical journalism. Health Expect 2003; 6:323-31.

2. Oxman AD, Lewin S, Lavis JN, Fretheim A. SUPPORT Tools for evidence-informed health Policymaking (STP). 15. Engaging the public in evidence-informed policymaking. Health Res Policy Syst. 2009; 7(Suppl 1):S15.

3. Woloshin S, Schwartz LM: Press releases: translating research into news. JAMA 2002, 287:2856-8.

4. Schwartz LM, Woloshin S, Welch HG: Using a drug facts box to communicate drug benefits and harms: two randomized trials. Ann Intern Med 2009, 150:516-27.

5. Schwartz LM, Woloshin S, Welch HG: The drug facts box: providing consumers with simple tabular data on drug benefit and harm. Med Decis Making 2007, 27:655-62.

6. European Commission: Research. Guide to successful communications. http://ec.europa.eu/research/science-society/science-communication/mediarelations_en.htm

7. Glenton C, Paulsen EJ, Oxman AD. Portals to Wonderland: health portals lead to confusing information about the effects of health care. BMC Med Inform Decis Mak 2005; 5:7.

8. Eysenbach G, Powell J, Kuss O, Sa ER. Empirical studies assessing the quality of health information for consumers on the world wide web: a systematic review. JAMA 2002; 287:2691-700.

9. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD): Promises and Problems of E-Democracy: Challenges of online citizen engagement. OECD. 2003. www.oecd.org/dataoecd/9/11/35176328.pdf

10. Involve. People & Participation: How to put citizens at the heart of decision-making. London: Involve, 2005. www.involve.org.uk/?s=people+and+participation

From the SURE Guides for Preparing and Using Evidence-Based Policy Briefs. Version 2.1 [updated November 2011] Available from www.evipnet.org/sure

10