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THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT HOW TO INFLUENCE POLICY WITH RESEARCH



Around the world, we are facing enormous challenges. Poverty, conflict, migration, disease and natural disasters are just some of the reasons why many people don't have access to quality basic services and opportunities.

Public policies that seek to address these challenges will only work if the choices made by decision-makers, technical or political, are informed by the best available evidence.

This is why research is essential. It can produce good evidence to inform local, national and international policy that, in turn, has the potential to transform lives for the better.

But influencing policy is neither easy nor automatic – you need to want to do it. To be successful, you need to be open to different ways of working.

Here are 10 things you need to know if you want to use research to influence policy.

01

KNOW WHAT YOU WANT TO INFLUENCE

Being clear about the policy issue, theme or process you want to change is the first step to effective policy influencing. Are you looking to influence legislation, or a change in government policy? You might want to encourage greater investment in a certain programme or approach, or a change in practice. You might want to influence perceptions or attitudes, or the language people use around an issue.¹



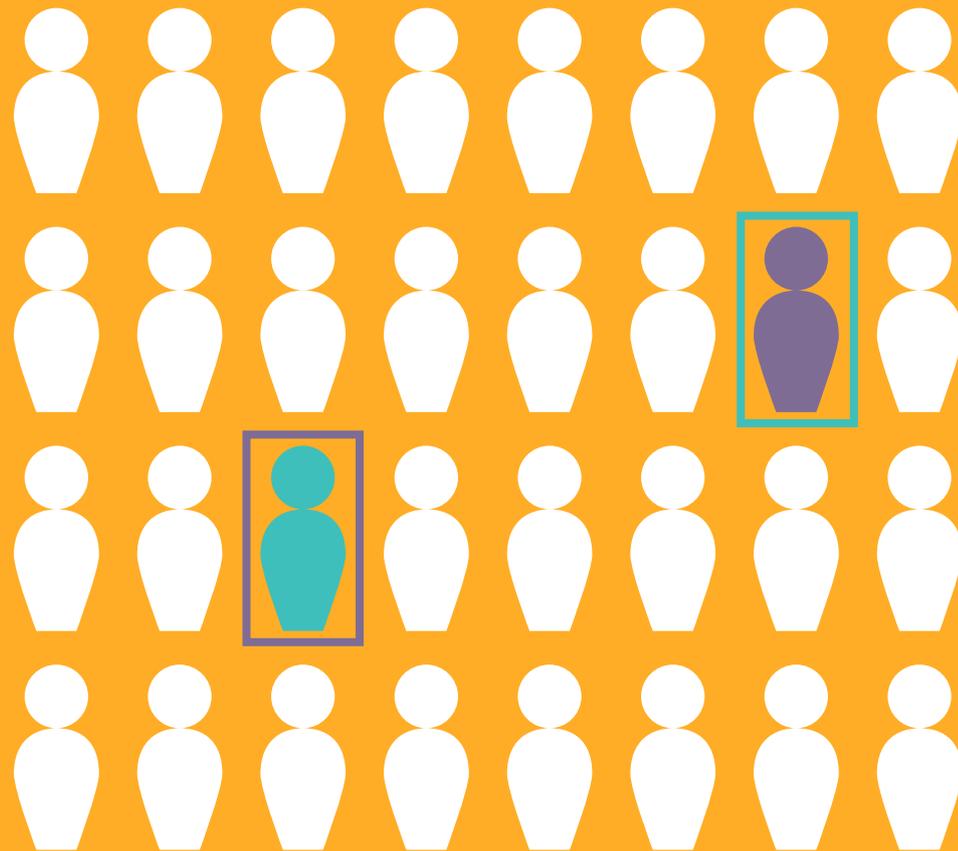
02

KNOW WHO YOU WANT TO INFLUENCE

Who has the power to enact a change in a policy process or change the debate on an issue? Is it a senior government official, a parliamentarian, a government minister or a head of state? You need to be clear about who you want to influence.

It's also useful to identify who can indirectly influence your target audience – an adviser, a respected commentator, a media outlet, a well-known academic? Know the routes to the people and organisations you need to influence and build relationships with them. And remember that you might not always be the best messenger.

An audience mapping tool can be useful here.²

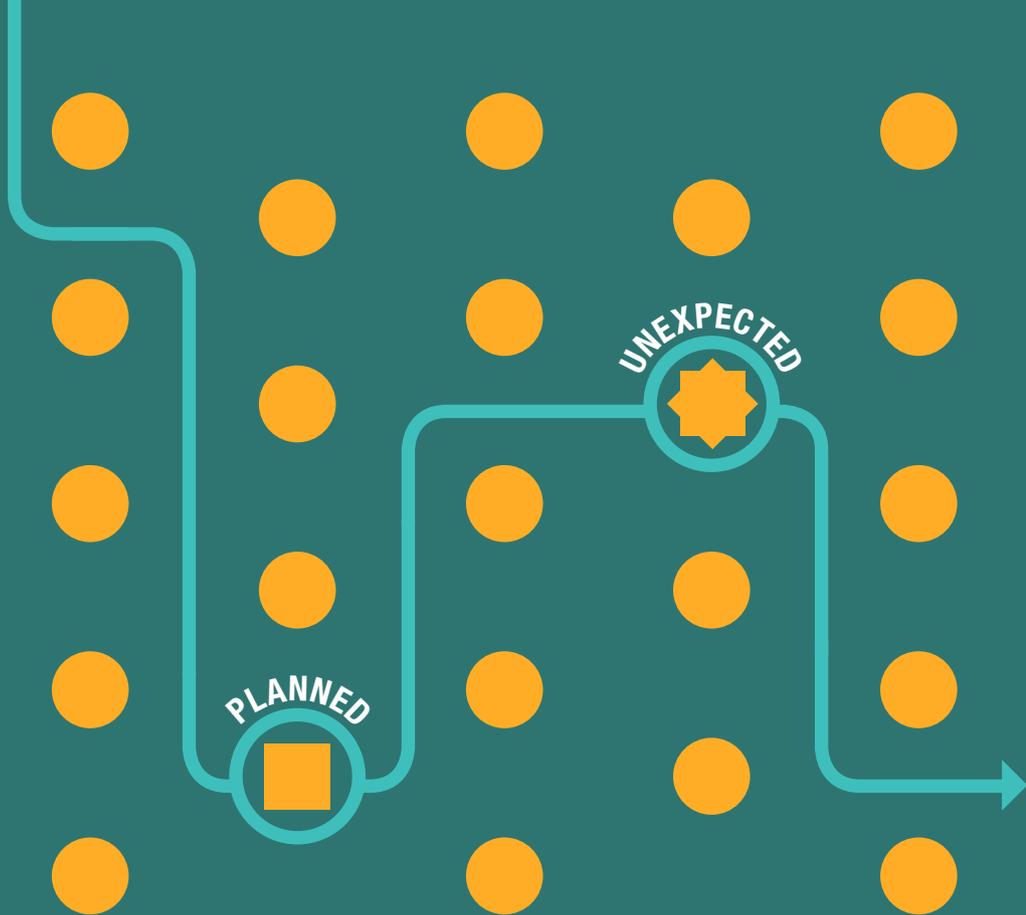


03

KNOW WHEN TO INFLUENCE

Your research needs to reach your target audience at a moment when they can take action. For example, this could be in the lead-up to an election, during a budget cycle, as part of a government consultation, ahead of an international decision-making summit, or at a key meeting.

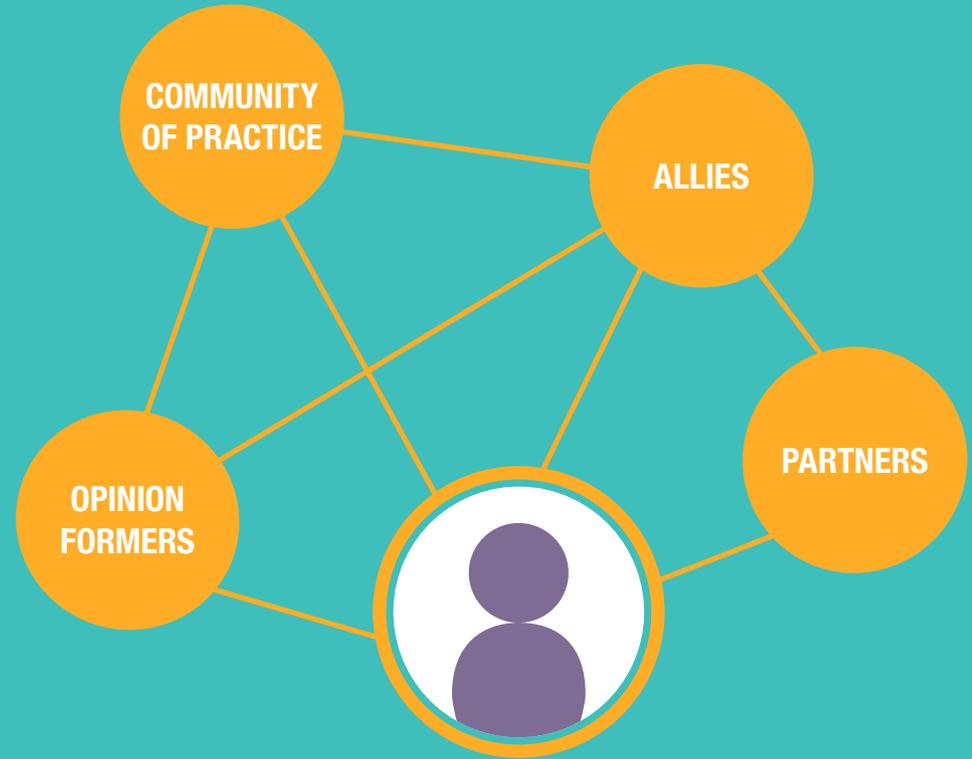
Unexpected opportunities will also emerge. So having the flexibility to react and adapt your plans as you go is important. If you can quickly spot policy opportunities as they arise, you may be able to have greater impact. Think 'strategic opportunism'.



04

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND NETWORKS

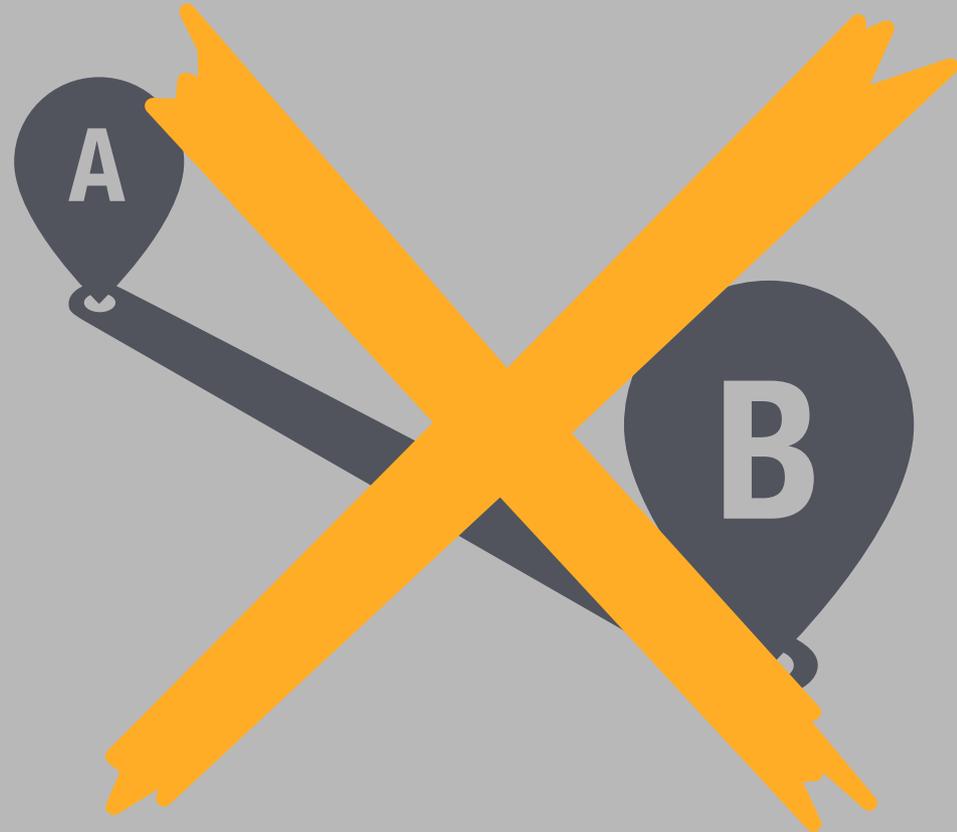
You can't change policy by yourself, no matter how ground-breaking your research is. You should find and work with other people and organisations who share your policy influencing objective – your allies and collaborators. Working together, building trust and developing a joint plan will increase your impact.



05

POLICY DEVELOPMENT IS NOT A LINEAR PROCESS

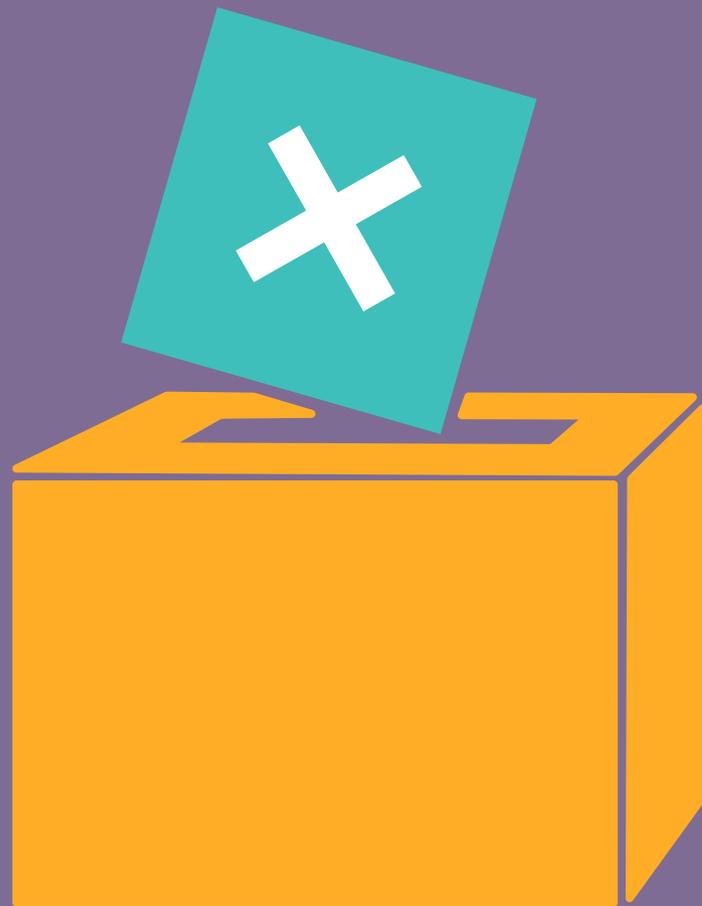
It is tempting to think that policy processes are linear: you identify a problem, gather evidence and implement a policy. But they aren't. Policy-making is complex, dynamic and involves a lot of different people and moving parts. Nonetheless, policy formulation does have its own formal and informal rhythms. If you understand these, you'll know where your evidence will be most useful and have greatest impact.



06

POLICY-MAKING IS INHERENTLY POLITICAL

Policy-making is often a very political process. Alongside research, policy-makers' own values, experience and expertise play an important role in influencing how they make decisions. For example, in the lead-up to a general election it's not uncommon to see the same research being used by competing political parties to argue different points. You should factor this into your plans and develop a political strategy.



07

PLAN YOUR ENGAGEMENT

You need to think carefully about how to communicate your research. Policy-makers are busy so won't always have time to read a long report. A short, sharp executive summary or policy brief can be a powerful tool. Focus on clear messages and avoid overly technical language. Infographics can also help to make your data accessible.

Consider other outreach activities too, such as press releases, public events, bilateral meetings, presentations or side events at summits and conferences.³



Engagement checklist

- Short, sharp executive summary
- Clear, concise messages
- Avoid overly technical language
- Accessible infographics/figures
- Other outreach activities

08

FOCUS ON IDEAS AND BE PROPOSITIONAL

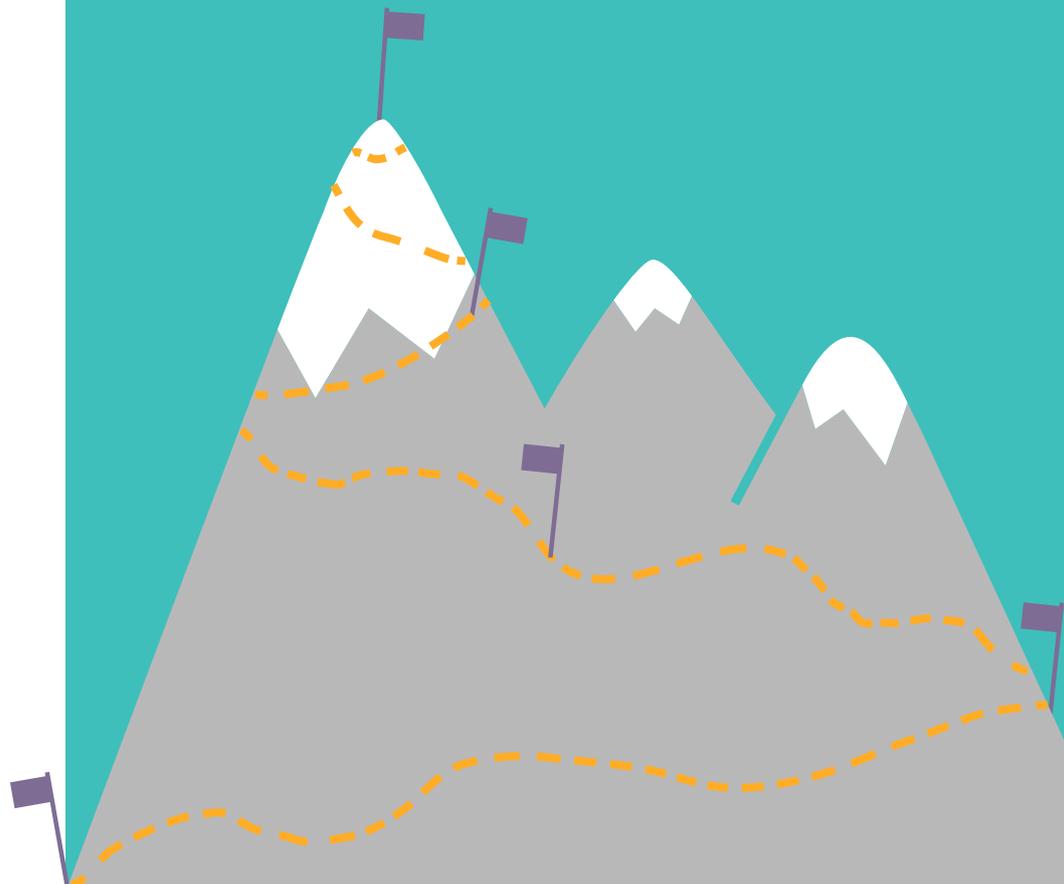
Policy-makers don't need to be told the problem; they need constructive ideas, so be propositional. Based on your research, tell them what should happen, who could take action, when and how. It's also important to frame your recommendations within the realms of what is possible, both technically and politically. Be ambitious, but realistic.



09

IT TAKES TIME, STICK AT IT

Influencing policy takes time and commitment. Make a plan, break it down, and be realistic about what you can do. Often it can be a slow process with no obvious impact in the short term. But stick with it, recognise that policy influencing is usually a marathon not a sprint, and be sure to set milestones and capture the small successes as you go. Continue to engage with your target audience and always keep up-to-date on the decision-making process.



10

MONITOR, LEARN AND ADJUST ALONG THE WAY

External factors will affect your plans along the way so it's important to remain flexible and adapt to new contexts and opportunities. You should also seek feedback from allies, partners, and even your target audience. Ask them what they need and when, as well as what format they prefer and adjust your plans accordingly.

If you find an approach is not working, you should stop, assess and try something new. Continuously review, and capture your learning as you go so you can apply it to future influencing plans. And, be willing to share your learning with key partners.⁴



REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

This publication draws on over 15 years of work by the ODI's Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) team to understand how to foster sustainable policy change.

In 2014, ODI published the *RAPID Outcome Mapping Approach (ROMA): a guide to policy engagement and policy influence*. The online guide provides practical tools and advice to help researchers and project teams to navigate the complexities of policy engagement. The full guide is available at www.roma.odi.org

1. ROMA includes tools to identify your policy influence objective. Available at http://roma.odi.org/identify_your_policy_influence_objective.html
2. The Alignment, Interest, Influence Matrix (AIIM) is a useful stakeholder mapping tool. Available at http://roma.odi.org/defining_the_problem.html
3. ROMA, Chapter 2: Developing an engagement strategy to influence policy. Available at www.roma.odi.org/developing_an_engagement_strategy.html
4. ROMA, Chapter 3: From M&E to monitoring and learning. Available at www.roma.odi.org/from_ME_to_monitoring_and_learning.html

