



Recommendations for improving science-policy communication for individuals

The brief in brief

In this brief we suggest recommendations¹ for how to improve science-policy communication for individuals interested in or connected with science-policy interfaces (both in research and policy departments and agencies).

Why look at the individual-level?

The actions and commitments of individuals across the science and policy sectors are undeniably essential for improving science-policy communication. It is true that any individual's ideas, actions and opportunities are shaped and constrained by factors beyond his or her control, such as their employers' priorities and career structures. However, no communication can occur without the interest and input of individuals across various organisations and sectors that contribute to research, policy design and implementation.

Overview of recommendations for individuals

Recommendations for researchers

Learning the basic principles of good communication is a good start for any individual wishing to improve their ability to communicate with policy-makers (and, of course, this should also aid communication with other audiences). Therefore, it is useful for early-career researchers (PhDs and postdocs) to proactively seek out learning opportunities (training courses and feedback). Thinking about science-policy interaction issues should begin early in

careers, but should not later be forgotten: training should be continued throughout careers, especially because senior scientists may find new opportunities to communicate that were hitherto unavailable to them. The other area which scientists need to learn about is policy processes relevant to their topic area. There is rarely any such thing as a single 'decision-maker'. Instead, policies are crafted in incremental processes involving teams of individuals and interests. For scientists who wish to proactively communicate knowledge, simply recognising the complexity and process nature of "policy-making" and "policy implementation" can be an important first step to making policy appear more approachable. Understanding the different stages in the policy cycle and the individuals' role involved, can help to understand policy-makers' requests and pinpoint likely interests in knowledge. Furthermore, getting to know policy departments and processes hopefully leads to a natural understanding that individuals working in policy have different roles and views. It may also be helpful to differentiate between policy-making and policy-implementation. Within the environmental sector it can often be the case that the policymaker has a personal interest or qualification(s) in environmental issues. This helps to emphasise that communication must, where possible, be tailored and contextualised to different individuals and interests. Because policy makers are a diverse bunch, and often working under tight time constraints, using a variety of different communication tools can help to promote and reinforce a message. For example, these can include: policy briefs; press-releases; printed user guides; DVD or online best practice guides; attending relevant meetings; maps; social media. However, whoever the audience and whatever the message, there are some basic principles, such as introducing topics with simple points and using visual materials, which can help make messages salient.

¹ The information in the brief is based on interviews carried out with science and policy actors in three case studies: the UK NEA, the implementation of the WFD, and deer management in Scotland. This information was complemented by discussions in a workshop held in June 2012. For more information on each of these case studies, please see other SPIRAL briefs.

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| Science research | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Look for training courses or opportunities to learn about policy processes. ○ Recognise that 'policymakers' are diverse and have diverse views. Some have science backgrounds. ○ Use visual materials. ○ Use different communication tools, e.g. scenarios, user guides, DVD or online best practice guides, maps, social media (e.g. twitter, blogs). ○ Be prepared to adapt approaches according to your audience. ○ Plan to publish reviews. These are helpful to non-researchers, and can fit with academic motivations. ○ Contextualise the presentation of research or specific findings. |
| Both science | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seek out events where other disciplines and sectors will attend. ○ Explore job-shadowing, i.e. scientists and policy-makers observing the day-to-day job of the other. ○ Cultivate personal contacts but recognise that everyone is under time pressures. ○ Look for training courses and opportunities to improve communication and networking skills. |
| Policy & science | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Subscribe to news feeds about relevant news and policy brief sites. ○ Recognise that many researchers are personally motivated to see their research used and valued. ○ Recognise that 'scientists' are diverse and do not have knowledge of all issues relating to biodiversity and ecosystem services. ○ Seek out opportunities to learn how science works in general, as well as to learn about specific job-related topics. |

Recommendations for those working in policy and public agencies

Communication is a two-way process. No matter what techniques researchers use to package information and communicate knowledge, commitment to communication is also required from those in policy-making and implementation roles. This, of course, requires time. There are some tools available that can help to manage information and highlight relevant bodies of knowledge: subscribing to news feeds can help spot new articles and updates on policy-brief sites. However, it is also helpful to build and value relationships with individual researchers, many of whom are personally motivated to see their research understood and used. Building relationships is mutually beneficial, allowing each 'side' to better understand and trust the other, and encouraging more meaningful conversations, and more successful communication of knowledge. However, it is important to recognise that just as policy roles vary, so are scientists diverse in their interests and expertise. An individual cannot know a great deal about every particular topic (there are a vast number of disciplines and specialist topics within the general field of ecosystem services and biodiversity), although they may be able to suggest better colleagues to speak to. A better general understanding of the process of science can help policy-makers to identify what kinds of knowledge might be available from science.

Recommendations applying across science and policy

Individuals in science and policy should make time to seek opportunities to build personal relationships and identify communication opportunities. Therefore, attending events involving both scientists and policy makers, and seeking opportunities for job-shadowing can be particularly useful, although training courses can also help to improve specific communication and networking skills.

Looking for more information on science-policy interfaces?

For more SPIRAL results, see companion SPIRAL briefs at <http://www.spiral-project.eu/content/documents>

This brief is a result of research and interactions within and around the SPIRAL project. This brief was written by Kerry Waylen (JHI) and Juliette Young (CEH).

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