Research to Policy Bootcamp

Blogging and Newsletters 101
Our Communications Strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communications Medium</th>
<th>Depth of Research</th>
<th>Size of Audience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media interviews</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blogs, web features, data visualizations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Op-eds and commentaries</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exchange with advocates and practitioners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roundtables and policy convenings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy briefs and fact sheets</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congressional testimony</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peer-reviewed journal articles</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical reports with methodological details</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why should you blog?

- Create digital content that online audiences expect and can use
- Engage audiences and create community on your topic over a long period of time
- Engage and educate a broader audiences including the media, lawmakers, or advocates
Engage the Audience

Write in a way that’s different from a research publication

- Direct
- Personal
- Familiar
- Opinionated (with evidence)
Teach Something

The reader should finish with a new understanding of the issue. It’s preferable to have one point per post.
Make it shareable

Readers should be able to easily summarize your post in one sentence (280 characters) and share it on social media.
Expand on your findings

Say what you hope to study next, or reveal implications in today’s context.
Dive into one finding

HEALTH AND HEALTH POLICY

Why do a larger share of millennials and gen X have past-due medical debt than older Americans?

Lower rates of health insurance coverage and wealth accumulation are making it harder for younger generations to pay off past-due medical bills.

Explain why it matters and make policy recommendations.
Briefly explain multiple findings

Five problems with criminal background checks
Flaws in background checks can mislead employers and create unnecessary barriers to employment for people with criminal records.

For research with lots of recommendations – but keep it simple.
What makes a good blog post?

- **Headline**: Less than 60 characters, around ten words
- **Strong lead**: A few sentences on the post’s context and what you have to offer.
- **Length**: Keep it short, 300-800 words
People read differently on screens (especially on mobile)

- Internet users scan first and read later
- Mobile users will scroll to the bottom and move back to the top
- People scan in an “F” pattern
- Average time on page is a little over two minutes
What makes a good headline?

- **Descriptive search terms**
  - “Why the proficiency-versus-growth debate matters for assessing school performance”

- **A single fact or declarative statement**
  - “Retaining the current price for government mortgages is a good idea.”
What makes a good headline?

- A question the blog post answers
  - “Can Trump make Mexico pay for his wall?”

- A connection between distinct concepts or an explanation of a relationship
  - “When interest rates go up in a healthy economy, history says home prices will rise.”
What makes a good headline?

- Lists and search terms
  - “Five Ways to Solve Crime”
  - “Nine Charts on Wealth Inequality”
  - “Say African American or Black, but first acknowledge the persistence of structural racism.”
  - “Millennial homeownership in three charts”
What makes a good lead?

- A point, finding, or reason for writing/reading within the first three sentences.
- A global or national context and a sense of urgency.
- An explanation of why conventional wisdom is misleading.
What makes a good lead?

- A surprising or compelling new statistic or finding
- A correction, nuance, or explanation in response to a recent event, article, or other research
- A personal narrative on the issue
How should you conclude?

- What prompted you to write the post in the first place?
- Why does this issue matter for people other than those it immediately effects?
- Are there policy implications for the findings?
LinkedIn

- Pros
  - Zero barrier to entry (part of your existing LinkedIn account)
  - Dead-simple user interface
  - Posts are easily shared to LinkedIn Network

- Cons
  - No unique domain
  - No design control
Medium

- Pros
  - Low barrier to entry
  - Dead-simple user interface
  - Robust platform for discovery

- Cons
  - No unique domain
  - No design control
Blogger

- **Pros**
  - Part of Google, so integrates with their tools
  - Can set your own domain name
  - Limited set of design templates to choose from

- **Cons**
  - Not as simple to use
  - User interface and design templates seem dated
WordPress

- **Pros**
  - Very powerful blogging and website creation platform
  - Can set your own domain name
  - Infinite design templates to choose and custom templates

- **Cons**
  - Can be very complicated to work on
  - It’s a ‘57 Chevy when you probably just need a Honda Civic
Why Newsletters

- Drive traffic
- Direct relationships
- “Guaranteed” delivery
- Still shareable
- Great flexibility
How to run a newsletter

- Pick a platform
- Pick a format
- Get writing
- Tell your colleagues
- Stay regular
- Promote, promote, promote
Pick a Platform

- TinyLetter
- MailChimp
- Revue
- Substack
Pick a format (and stick with it)

- “Check out what I **found** on the Internet”
- “Check out what I **wrote** on the Internet”
- “I wrote a blog post, and now I’m emailing it to you.”
- I have thoughts on several things people are talking about, and here they are.”
- … and whatever else you can think of.
Get writing

- Newsletters instill discipline
- The writing style is similar to blog posts
- Think of it as a one-to-one email to a close colleague.
- Don’t miss your deadlines
Tell your colleagues

- Cultivate a list
- Be careful who you send to
- Introduce the newsletter, provide samples, and ask readers to sign up
- Check your stats and think about culling your list
- Don’t be spammy.
Stay regular

- Daily
- Weekly
- Twice a month
- Monthly
- Every other month
- Quarterly…
- Pick one and **STICK WITH IT.**
Promotion

- Forward to a friend
- "Did someone forward this to you? Sign up here."
- Email signature
- Social media
- Presentations at conferences
- Other newsletters
- Your Bio