

Research to Policy Boot Camp: A Communications Toolkit for Researchers

MARCH 6, 2019 | 7:30 A.M. - 2:30 P.M. | WATERWAY 7

Presented by the Urban Institute for Policies for Action, a signature research program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

Policies for Action

Policy and Law Research to Build a Culture of Health

Agenda

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| 7:30 - 8:30 a.m. | BREAKFAST |
| 8:30 - 8:35 a.m. | Welcome
<i>Lisa Dubay, codirector, Policies for Action national coordinating center</i> |
| 8:35 - 9:00 a.m. | Overview: Why Reaching Policymakers and the Public Matters
<i>Bridget Lowell, chief communications officer</i> |
| 9:00 - 9:30 a.m. | Developing a Digital Communications Strategy
<i>Dave Connell, senior director of digital communications</i> |
| 9:30 - 10:00 a.m. | Core Principles of Data Visualization
<i>Ben Chartoff, director of data visualization</i> |
| 10:00 - 10:15 a.m. | BREAK |

- 10:15 – 10:30 a.m. **Developing an Audience Outreach Strategy**
Amy Peake, director of government affairs
- 10:30 – 11:30 a.m. **Insider's View: Policymaker Panel**
Moderated by Lisa Dubai, codirector, Policies for Action national coordinating center
- Tracy Wareing Evans, president and chief executive officer, American Public Human Services Association
 - Sherry Glied, dean, New York University – Wagner Graduate School of Public Service
 - Joe Carlos Madden, chief of staff, Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo
 - Elena Marks, president and chief executive officer, Episcopal Health Foundation
- 11:30 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. **Creating a Successful Policy Impact Plan**
Kate Villarreal, director of strategic communications
- 12:00 – 1:00 p.m. **WORKING LUNCH**
- Insider's View: Media Panel**
Moderated by Bridget Lowell, chief communications officer
- Lomi Kriel, immigration reporter, Houston Chronicle
 - Lucia Navarro, freelance (previously of CNN en Espanol, Telemundo, Univision)
 - Sophie Novack, public health reporter, Texas Observer
- 1:00 – 1:45 p.m. **Breakout Session #1**
Assignments and locations can be found in your packet.
- 1:45 – 2:30 p.m. **Breakout Session #2**
Assignments and locations can be found in your packet.
- 2:30 p.m. **ADJOURN**
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- 2:45 – 4:00 p.m. **RWJF Signature Research Program Networking Reception**
Opening remarks by Alonzo Plough, chief science officer and vice president, Research-Evaluation-Learning, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
- Details about the reception can be found in your packet
- Location: Waterway 8**

Background

To make a difference in today's policy ecosystem, scholars must think beyond the academic journal. With funding often contingent on real-world influence, many academics and organizations know they must modernize but don't know how.

The Urban Institute is pioneering new ways to communicate and share what we've learned in a research to policy boot camp. Known for our world-class scholarship in social and economic policy, Urban does more than build knowledge. We translate it, share it, and apply our fact-based insights in the real world, from neighborhoods to state capitals and the halls of Congress.

This workshop teaches researchers how to navigate the fragmented media and policy landscape by making their insights accessible to diverse audiences, forming a narrative, developing an outreach plan, and putting it into action. Each session of the workshop focuses on a different communication strategy: social media, blog writing, data visualization, interacting with reporters, and developing a stakeholder outreach strategy. Speakers—each of whom is an expert in his or her field—share their strategies to help attendees gain the skills and tools they need to communicate in modern, sophisticated ways.

Many researchers and scholars resist the idea of developing a communication strategy, thinking either that it doesn't matter, that someone else will do it, or that their work will be naturally discovered. Developing a communication strategy—and implementing that strategy—recognizes the importance of making research accessible to wider audiences, decisionmakers, and policymakers. In this workshop, researchers will learn practical strategies and skills that will enable them to communicate their work to their desired audiences.

Breakout Sessions

Participants will attend two different sessions in the afternoon. The small-group format (max of 5-7 people) will allow for in-depth coaching and tailored discussions among the researchers and Urban experts. Assignments for the two sessions can be found in your packets.

Media 101

Location: Spring

In this session, we'll work on shaping your findings into key takeaways to prepare for a media interview. Then we'll practice how to deliver an impactful, memorable quote in lay terms and talk through your questions about how to have a productive, empowering experience when engaging with reporters.

Social Media 101

Location: Grogan's Mill

New to social media? Not sure how you and your work could benefit from social media? In this session, we'll go over why social media matters, why Twitter usually offers the best return, and how to get started.

Blogging & Newsletters 101

Location: Indian Springs

Even in the age of social media, blog posts, newsletters, and other long-form content remain vital ways to communicate with key audiences. In this session, we'll outline what makes an effective blog post, discuss strategy for maintaining a blog, and reveal why newsletters remain one of the best ways to connect with your audience.

Data Visualization 101

Location: Waterway 7

In this session, we'll discuss specific strategies, tools, and approaches to visualizing your data. Participants should bring a dataset, an idea, or just some questions to talk through.

Audience Development 101

Location: Panther Creek

All audiences are not the same; they have different levels of expertise and need different information to help them do their jobs better and find insights. In this session, we'll help participants identify key stakeholders and develop tailored outreach strategies to reach them.

Staff

Ben Chartoff is the director of data visualization at the Urban Institute and has spent his career analyzing and visualizing a wide range of datasets, working as a software developer, and advocating for open-source software and open data. He worked at the DC-based Sunlight Foundation and received a Knight-Mozilla OpenNews fellowship to work at the Washington Post. Chartoff earned his BS in creative writing, geology, and integrated science from Northwestern University and his MS in library and information science from Syracuse University.

David Connell is the senior director of digital communications at the Urban Institute. His team is responsible for all aspects of the organization's digital outreach strategy. This includes: providing strategic direction for websites and applications; creating content for sites and applications; and crafting distribution strategies through email newsletters, social media, and advertising. Before joining the Urban Institute, Connell worked in various digital communications roles for The Nature Conservancy, the Ocean Conservancy, and the American Society of Landscape Architects.

Nicole Levins is the senior digital communications manager at the Urban Institute, focused on elevating the organization's profile among online audiences. She oversees and supports content strategy for Urban's social media accounts, *Urban Wire*, Urban.org, newsletters, and online advertising. Before joining Urban, she held positions on The Nature Conservancy's media relations team and completed several internships in entertainment media. She majored in professional writing/journalism at The College of New Jersey and has a master's degree in digital communication from the Johns Hopkins University.



Bridget Lowell is the chief communications officer and vice president for strategic communications and outreach. She joined the Urban Institute in 2012, bringing with her more than 15 years of experience across the nonprofit and private sectors, Capitol Hill, and the media industry. Before joining Urban, Lowell served as director of strategic communications at Change.org, the world's fastest-growing digital platform for social change. She held the same position at The Nature Conservancy, the world's leading environmental conservation organization. In this capacity, she was known for her work in media relations, reputation management, and strengthening organizational brand identity. Lowell also worked for nearly five years on Capitol Hill as communications director for a senior member of Congress from North Carolina; during that time, she completed stints for local and national political campaigns. She began her career as an on-air television news reporter, working first at a cable network in New York's Hudson Valley and later at the ABC affiliate in Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

Amy Peake is the director for government affairs at the Urban Institute. She works with Urban's experts to facilitate conversations and connections with policymakers, including Capitol Hill, the federal executive branch, and state and local government leaders. Before joining Urban, Peake worked as congressional staff for nearly eight years in policy and communications positions. Most recently, she worked for the US House Committee on Education and the Workforce following positions in a district office and a congressional DC office. Peake started her career working in a city manager's office in Northern California and studied at the University of California, Davis.

Katie Smith is a media relations manager at the Urban Institute. She joined Urban after five years in communications at the Kaiser Family Foundation, where she worked with health care policy researchers on messaging and media. Before joining Kaiser, Smith reported on health care for Politico and worked in the membership program at the Museum of Modern Art. Smith holds a bachelor's degree in English and American studies from the College of William and Mary and a master's degree from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism.

Kate Villarreal is the director of strategic communications for the Urban Institute. She works in close partnership with research and communications staff to lead and execute strategies that raise the visibility of research, engage critical audiences, and help drive smart evidence-based policy. Villarreal joined Urban after serving two years in the Obama administration as public and media affairs staff for former US Trade Representative Ron Kirk. Before this, she pursued graduate study in political communication while managing communications for a nonprofit organization in the Texas Hill Country, where she wrote a weekly news column for the local paper. From 2003 to 2007, Villarreal was a community organizer in Seattle and earned citywide recognition for leading an effort to preserve public housing at Yesler Terrace.