

Making Research on Race Policy Relevant

Best Practices from the Institute for Research on Race & Public Policy's
Policy Practica, 2011-2013

- 1. Clearly identify the public policy your research addresses by asking:**
 - a. What are the rules and procedures that govern the phenomenon under study?
 - b. What are the formal and informal practices used by those who implement policy?
 - c. How does policy support or undermine whatever phenomenon is being studied?
 - d. What problems do those policies or practices create that your research can help address?
 - e. What do practitioners need to know to be able to achieve their goals?
 - f. How should policy change according to what the research tells us about what works?
 - g. What solutions or alternatives to policies does your research offer?

- 2. Consider what “level” of policy you want to influence by asking:**
 - a. Is the phenomenon in question governed by federal, state, and/or local policies?
 - b. What “scope” of change will best address the problem you are trying to solve?
 - c. What constraints and opportunities exist at each level of governance might make policy changes more effective or far-reaching?

- 3. When research examines individual behavior, rather than state policy, consider how the state acts as a mediator of individual interactions, for example, through professional accreditation or through the regulation of professional behavior.**

- 4. Identify the decision makers you want to reach, including those who:**
 - a. Develop policy options (e.g. advocacy organizations, legislative staff);
 - b. Lead public discussion of policy options (e.g. journalists, bloggers, civic organizations);
 - c. Care about or are affected by the decision (e.g. community members, voters);
 - d. Make policy decisions (e.g. appointed and elected public officials; institutional leaders);
 - e. Implement and enforce policy (e.g. institutional leaders, practitioners).

- 5. Build decision makers’ investment in (and the quality of) your research by:**
 - a. Asking for their perspective before, during, and after you conduct research;
 - b. Sharing your knowledge of the literature and initial findings early in the process;
 - c. Identifying together what explicit campaigns and ends the work might be used for.

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6. Consider what kind of information decision makers respond to, such as:

- a. Data on intervention outcomes;
- b. Stories that humanize;
- c. Numbers that generalize.

7. Frame the policy problem in ways that illuminate the links between the policy and racial/ethnic discrimination or unequal outcomes.

- a. Be explicit about the theoretical/conceptual frameworks underlying the research process;
- b. Explain how your work challenges “master narratives” that pathologize racialized groups;
- c. Without framing, research is left to the reader’s interpretation and they may use it counter to your intended purposes, e.g., to stigmatize the population in question.

8. Frame the policy problem and research findings in ways that foreground race and ethnicity and draw out in-group nuances and differences.

- a. Explain how your research uniquely positions your participants for policy action;
- b. Describe the cultural particularities that should be raised to inform policy;
- c. Racialize all subgroups in your study, not just people of color;
- d. Complicate the black/white binary through framing (white vs. nonwhite) and intersectional analysis;
- e. To minimize stereotyping, frame the research as investigating the culture of the institutions rather than the culture of groups of color who interact with the institutions;
- f. Without nuance, readers may use your research to essentialize racialized subjects.

9. Consider using alternatives approaches to deficit-model policy making

- a. Look at the resilience, agency, and success of research participants;
- b. Ask research participants how and which policies can positively impact their lives;
- c. Center the voices of your research participants.

10. Write about your research findings for audiences outside of academic circles

- a. Consider how can you use different parts of your research to address different policies and inform different audiences;
- b. Consider alternative publications such as journals read in policy circles, op-eds, policy memos and briefs, and local publications with a broad reach, such as *Catalyst* and *The Chicago Reporter*.

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11. When communicating with decision makers, address the politics behind the decision-making process by:

- a. Analyzing the political context in which the policy problem exists;
- b. Identifying the stage of the policy process that decision makers are facing, and;
- c. Identifying opportunities for that will make the achievement of your policy recommendations more feasible and beneficial for the policymaker.