
Briefing summary

- **Who:** For people working on health care improvement projects who want to involve policy makers to help spread the word about their work.
- **Why:** Spreading successful ideas across the NHS is an essential part of improving health care quality and efficiency. If you have successes to share, people in policy roles can help you to scale up your ideas, or to address barriers to implementing them.
- **What:** An overview of the main health care policy audiences and some practical tips to consider in reaching them.

What role can policy audiences play in improvement work?

People working in health care policy roles help to set a course or define a principle that governs how an organisation acts. They may have a direct role in making policy for the NHS, or be focused on influencing the policy making of others. They can operate at a local, regional, national or international level.

By involving people in policy roles as you communicate your improvement work, you can:

- reach others who could benefit from and/or apply your ideas
- receive recognition for your work, which can provide you with credibility externally as well as helping you sustain commitment internally
- influence how policy is developed in a subject area where you have some knowledge, experience or evidence to share.

Policy audiences fall into many categories. They include:

- Policy makers working in the health care system: staff and civil servants in the Department of Health and devolved nations governments, arm's length bodies (eg NHS England, Healthcare Improvement Scotland, 1000 Lives Wales), local government.
- Politicians and their advisers: peers, MPs, MSPs and Assembly Members and their researchers, health ministers and their special advisers, opposition spokespeople on health, all party groups on health, members of parliamentary select committees.
- Policy representatives in professional and membership bodies: Royal Colleges, specialty-based medical societies, unions and quality improvement networks such as the patient safety fellows, NHS Quest, Haelo and AQuA.
- Policy staff in third sector organisations: health care charities with a strong focus on patients with certain conditions, eg Macmillan Cancer Support, and consumer groups, eg Health Watch.
- Academic and research organisations with an interest in health care policy: university departments, Academic Health Science Networks (AHSNs), think tanks, eg in the UK the Health Foundation, Nuffield Trust, The King's Fund, Nesta, and Picker Institute; and in the US, the Institute for Healthcare Improvement.

Each of the above groups will have different needs and interests. For example, civil servants tend to work in the same position for a number of years and are likely to have in-depth knowledge in specific areas, whereas parliamentarians are generalists who tend to focus only on a handful of issues they have a particular interest in.

Which policy audiences do you focus on?

When seeking to engage policy makers and policy influencers, ask yourself:

- 1 What are you trying to achieve and, therefore, what is your message? For example, is there a specific bit of policy causing problems that you need to change? Why is this important? You will need to be able to sum this up in a few sentences.
- 2 Who is interested in the same subject matter and/or who has the power to influence the relevant policy area? Focus on the people with whom you have a clear connection of interests.

Identifying the people you need to engage may involve:

- Tapping into the networks and contacts of your existing champions and partners. Who do they know in policy making organisations who might be interested in your work?
- Researching the interests and activity of policy makers and influencers online so you can gather answers to the following questions before approaching them: What problems are they trying to solve? What policy agendas are they already pushing? What subjects are they commenting on? How does your work link with theirs?

How to reach policy audiences

Once you know which policy audiences might take an interest in your work, consider using the practical tips below when reaching out to them:

- 1 Influential policy makers are inundated with requests. When writing to them, it is important to keep background briefing materials concise and to make it clear in the first paragraph that you are aware of their previous interest in your subject matter.
- 2 Approach them via the project representative that they are likely to be most interested in. For example, when approaching the Royal College of Nursing, your senior nurse might take the lead. You might be more likely to secure a meeting with your local MP if you have a patient group on board with the work, and if you approach them jointly.
- 3 Wherever possible, build relationships face-to-face. Meet them at a place that is most convenient for them. However, if there is real interest, invite them to see the work for themselves.
- 4 Policy makers are often keen to show that their vision or aspirations can be made real. They value examples that can help make their ideas more tangible. Provide them with a summary of what your work has achieved in relation to their goals, and give them a story that they can pass on to others.
- 5 Finally, by raising the profile of your work through the media they read and the events they attend, you may find that policy audiences may approach you.



INFLUENCING A POLICY AUDIENCE: a guide



Resources

Information on setting up a meeting with policy makers.

<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/plan-it/who-engage-with/policymakers>

Guides to NHS policy making structures in England.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-health-and-care-system-explained>

<http://www.kingsfund.org.uk/projects/nhs-65/alternative-guide-new-nhs-england>

Guide to NHS policy making structures in Wales.

<http://www.wales.nhs.uk/nhswalesaboutus/structure>

Guide to policy making in Northern Ireland.

<http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk/practical-guide-policy-making.pdf>

Healthcare Improvement Scotland quality improvement strategy.

http://www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org/previous_resources/policy_and_strategy/our_strategy_2014-2020.aspx