



Publication Style Guide for Policy Briefs, Information Sheets, Technical Summaries and Event Participation Reports

January 2023

Introduction

DOSI publications communicate important deep-ocean knowledge to the audiences that need it. This style guide offers advice on the appropriate type of publication for different circumstances. It also provides guidelines for how each publication type can achieve the best possible impact.

Deciding On a Communication Tool

The type of publication we use depends on our audience and our goals. Before writing begins, we should always consider who our publication is for and what we hope to achieve by communicating to them. The answers to these questions should usually allow us to choose one of our main publication types: a *Policy Brief*, an *Information Sheet*, a *Technical Summary*, or a *Participation Report*. These different publication types are described in the following pages, along with advice for using them.

A Note on Translation

Most DOSI publications are initially written in English. Volunteers sometimes help translate our documents into other languages, but this is not always an option. To make our publications as accessible as possible, we should make sure they are easily translated by software. Several steps are helpful for this:

- Use short sentences.
- Avoid metaphors and phrases that may not translate well.
- When possible, test online translation before finishing a publication to find any points that should be changed.

Policy Briefs

When to Choose a Policy Brief

Policy briefs are DOSI's most common publication type, and for good reason. These publications are designed to help policymakers and other decision-makers by offering input from deep-ocean experts. When deciding to write a policy brief, the following factors should be true:

1. The issue that DOSI is commenting on is relevant to a **specific policy problem** that decision-makers are either already considering or should consider now.
2. The policy brief has a **primary audience** who can help solve the problem by taking action.
3. The writers plan to offer **recommendations**. This does not mean that we must support specific policies. If we are not recommending policies, we should still recommend that the reader consider specific points that will help them choose how to act.

Writing a DOSI Policy Brief

The policy brief is DOSI's most direct tool for influencing action. Usually, a policy brief **recommends** actions that can help the reader solve a specific problem. Since DOSI avoids advocacy, we may not always be able to make direct policy recommendations. In these circumstances, we should still recommend that the reader consider specific points that will help them choose between the policy options they have. **Keep in mind that our goal is to help the reader solve a problem.** If this isn't made clear, the reader has no reason to be interested in our brief.

When drafting our policy briefs, three questions should guide our writing choices:

1. Who is our policy brief's primary audience?

Knowing who we are writing to will help us answer the other questions below. It will also help us choose how to deliver the policy brief to make sure it is read.

2. What does the audience already know about this subject?

While we should always strive to be clear and concise, understanding our audience's level of knowledge will help us decide how much background information they need to understand our recommendations. If our brief is meant for a group of policymakers, we should include important information that any members of the group may not know.

2. What realistic, specific actions can the audience take to solve the problem?

Any options or recommendations we provide should keep in mind what the intended readers have the power to do. Being specific about this will make our policy briefs more helpful.

Sometimes a policy brief's content can be useful for more than one audience, such as negotiators working at the ISA and negotiators for the BBNJ process. In these cases, we should check to make sure the details of a brief we are reusing work well for each new audience. If any changes or updates are needed, we can submit a version of the brief that has been edited to make it a better match.

Below is an example of effective policy brief structure. **The sections of a DOSI policy brief do not always need to match the sections in the example:** many sections can be changed or combined depending on the situation. The sections listed below are meant to ensure that we think about important communication ideas as we design a policy brief.

With a good understanding of our policy brief's audience and goals, we should be able to simplify our points to fit within **2-3 pages**. **Bullet points** can be very helpful for clarity. **Images and figures** are also useful, and one of these should generally be included on the first page. Any images or figures should be directly relevant to the brief's subject, and should help explain the brief's messages whenever possible. DOSI's Communications Director can help with this graphic design process and will always be available to offer advice on writing and editing.

Policy Brief Structure Example

Title

The title should clearly address the decision at hand without being too long or jargon-filled.

Key Points (or Summary)

Every policy brief should state its most important messages at the beginning. Ideally, the summary should be one paragraph of no more than a few sentences. A policymaker or aide may only read this section. If so, they should still have a good idea of how to approach the problem highlighted in our brief. One way to accomplish this is to write one sentence on the problem's background, one sentence on the decision at hand, and one sentence (likely divided into bullet points) on our recommendations. The details of these statements can be explained in later sections of the brief.

Background

This section contains any background information our audience needs to understand the policy decision our brief deals with. Information that will be obvious to our audience can usually be excluded, and any scientific detail that the audience does not need to know to make a good decision should also be left out.

Current Policy

The goal here is to offer a very short description of how the brief's topic is currently being approached by policies. Depending on the brief, this section may be combined with the Background.

Problems with the Current Policy

A couple of sentences on this are useful if we are offering considerations for changing a policy rather than guidance for developing a new one. Otherwise, we can simply point out the need for a new policy.

Scientific Understanding

In simple terms, briefly state the scientific knowledge or knowledge gaps that lead to our recommendations. Only include points that are needed to help understand why our recommendations are useful.

Recommendations

Here we describe our recommendations from the beginning of the brief in greater detail. If we ever support a specific policy (or recommend an action that will inform future policy), this is where we make our argument. Otherwise, this is where we explain a few key points the reader should consider when deciding how to act. Keep the number of recommendations small, emphasizing the most important ideas.

This policy brief was prepared by:

List the people who helped with the policy brief. Also list any institution or organization each person would like to include next to their name.

How To Cite

Our citation format for policy briefs is: DOSI (year) "Policy Brief Title" Deep Ocean Stewardship Initiative Policy Brief. <https://www.dosi-project.org/wp-content/uploads/policy-brief-title>

References

Keep supporting citations and footnotes to a minimum. Typically only a few key references should be provided. We can also provide links to very relevant documents and policy instruments.

Information Sheets

When to Choose an Information Sheet

Information sheets are a great way to provide helpful background information for future decisions. They can also be good options for explaining deep-ocean topics to audiences other than policymakers. While it was published as a policy brief, DOSI's 2022 publication "[What Does the Deep Ocean Do for You?](#)" is a good example to use when writing an information sheet.

An information sheet may be the best choice of publication when:

1. The information provided is meant to be **background knowledge** for future reference.
2. The information is **relevant to multiple decisions**.
3. We are **not offering recommendations** related to a specific, immediate policy decision.
4. The primary **audience is broader** than a single organization or official.

Writing an Information Sheet

As the purpose of an information sheet is broader than that of a policy brief, design choices and length tend to be more flexible. Still, there are two important points to remember:

1. Identify and explain what the audience needs to know.

What do we want this information sheet to accomplish? What sort of decisions may be informed by it, and who will be making them? The answers to these questions will determine the scope and depth of information to include. Technical details that are not relevant to how the audience may use the information sheet should be left out. Most information sheets should be understandable to at least undergraduate students to maximize our impact (though this can vary depending on our audience).

2. Introduce the importance of the information sheet at the start.

Readers should immediately understand why our information sheet is important. The first paragraph or bullet points should show why our audience should care. Scientific statements should be supported with citations. As with policy briefs, effective and relevant images and figures are especially important to successful communication using information sheets. Many readers appreciate conceptual figures that show complex problems in an easily-understood way.

Naming Contributors:

List the people who helped with the information sheet. Also list any institution or organization each person would like to include next to their name.

How To Cite

Our citation format for information sheets is: DOSI (year) “Information Sheet Title” Deep Ocean Stewardship Initiative Information Sheet.

<https://www.dosi-project.org/wp-content/uploads/information-sheet-title>

References

Keep supporting citations and footnotes to a minimum. Typically only a few key references should be provided. We can also provide links to very relevant documents and policy instruments.

Technical Summaries/Reports

When to Choose a Technical Summary

Except for peer-reviewed papers, the technical summary is the most formal publication style DOSI uses. Faster, less expensive, and more flexible than a paper, a technical summary is very useful for sharing the work or opinions of DOSI experts and Working Groups with our community. An example of a DOSI technical summary is our Fisheries Working Group's "[Review of Impact Assessments for Deep-Sea Fisheries on the High Seas](#)."

A technical summary may be the best choice of publication when:

1. The primary audience is **other academics, expert agencies, industry, and/or ocean professionals**.
2. The information to be shared requires **more detail** than a less formal publication can give.
3. Rapid distribution is needed, as peer review for a paper can take many months.

Writing a Technical Summary

Many of the same strategies used for writing engaging academic papers can also be used for Technical Summaries. A few key points are:

1. **Summarize** our findings, any recommendations, and the significance of the technical summary at the start.
2. Include relevant, helpful graphics where possible.
3. Emphasize how readers can use this information.
4. Support scientific statements with references.

Since space is less of a concern in a technical summary than in any of our other publication types, we can also afford to include an attractive cover page and a list of any important definitions.

Naming Contributors:

List the people who helped with the technical summary. Also list any affiliations each person would like to include next to their name.

How To Cite

Our citation format for technical summaries is: DOSI (year) “Technical Summary Title”
Deep Ocean Stewardship Initiative Technical Summary.
<https://www.dosi-project.org/wp-content/uploads/technical-summary-title>

References

Due to the extra space available, more citations and endnotes can be included than in a policy brief or information sheet. DOSI technical summaries use inline citations.

Participation Reports

When to Choose a Participation Report

A participation report is the easiest type of publication to separate from the others. It is useful when the following applies:

1. A DOSI member or group has recently **attended** a conference or **participated** in another policy process.
2. We **took actions** that our audience should know about.
3. The primary audience is our **peers and/or funders**.

Writing a Participation Report

Participation reports are extremely valuable for sharing how DOSI has supported policy processes. While participation reports are partly meant for our internal reference, they should also be easy for our partners to read so they can learn about our work. The following page shows a suggested structure for participation reports:

Participation Report Structure Example

Title

A title that communicates which event DOSI was participating in. Include the dates of the event.

Overview

This section is an ideal place to describe the event we participated in and what it was meant to accomplish. We should also include our thoughts on the outcomes: Was the event productive? Did our work affect the results? If so, how? Understanding the perspective of members who attended will help us identify our impact and help us choose which events to attend in the future.

Participants

Here, we list the DOSI members who participated in the event.

DOSI Actions

This section summarizes our activities at the event. We can include mentions of the number and subject of any interventions made in meeting plenaries, publications we shared, press conferences and meetings we held, and so on. Importantly, this section should only summarize these aspects: Transcripts and documents should be included in the Annexes.

Annexes

Often the longest part of the report, this section should include the full text of any documents we shared and any interventions or recommendations we made.