

ARCHER FELLOWSHIP PROGRAM POLICY MEMO GUIDANCE

Tips for Applicants to Write
an Effective Policy Memo

Understanding the Purpose of your Policy Memo

Overall, your policy memo serves to inform and convince a federal policymaker to take a specific approach to solving a policy challenge.

It is also an opportunity for you to share important information about yourself with your Archer selection committee readers:

- What policy area motivates you and why
- How you approach and analyze a complex challenge
- How you convey information and articulate an argument

Researching Your Policy

A careful approach to researching your policy challenge will help you develop an effective memo. We recommend you consider these questions as you do so:

- What policy challenge inspires me and what about it do I find most important?
- How can I assess the importance of the policy challenge (e.g., impact on human health or the environment)?
- Who is currently impacted by the issue and in which ways?
- To what extent have others attempted to address this policy challenge?
- What policy could the federal government implement to realistically and meaningfully address the challenge?
- What are the merits and potential drawbacks of these recommendations?
- Which federal decision-makers (such as federal elected officials, political appointees, government agency leaders) are in the best position to enact my policy recommendations on this issue?

As you explore policy areas, the research produced by the many think tanks in D.C. can be a guide. [This resource from Georgetown University](#) helpfully organizes leading think tanks by their policy focus.

Organizing Your Policy Memo

We recommend that you use this simple and clear structure for your policy memo:

1. Header (including To, From, Date, Subject)
2. Summary of the memo (including your key message)
3. Background of the situation or problem (with supporting evidence)
4. Proposed recommendations
5. Conclusion with a clear call-to-action

Writing Effectively

Your policy memo aims to convince a decision-maker to implement your policy recommendations. To support this goal, we advise concise, clear, persuasive writing.

Write concisely. Decision-makers do not have a lot of time. An effective memo is direct and efficient, avoiding unnecessary information or elaborate language.

Write clearly. A decision-maker may not know the technical or academic terms related to your policy issue. An effective memo uses accessible language to convey the essential information.

Write persuasively. Decision-makers often have multiple, competing challenges to address. An effective memo goes beyond description and analysis, convincing the reader to take a specific policy action.

Supporting Your Policy Recommendations

To be effective, your policy paper must also incorporate and cite supporting evidence. It is the quality and effectiveness of your evidence, rather than the quantity, that matters.

For instance, you might cite a recent report by a think tank that demonstrates the importance of addressing a policy challenge, or a research study that examines the effectiveness of a policy intervention.

You must correctly format your citations using a citation style such as MLA, APA, or Chicago.

If you have questions about citing evidence, please reach out to your academic supervisor or research librarian at your university for help.

Your citations are not included in the 500-word limit for the policy paper. You may include your citations on an additional page.

Revising Your Policy Memo

Policy memos are typically reviewed and revised numerous times, often by multiple people. Reserve time in your writing process to critically reflect on, receive feedback about, and revise your memo.

As you review your memo, ask yourself:

- How persuasively do I identify the policy challenge, explain its importance, and deliver my recommendations?
- How effectively do I organize my memo to convey essential information and use language to persuade my reader?
- How relevant and compelling is my supporting evidence?
- How thoughtfully have I responded to feedback (from trusted friends, family, teachers, advisors, Archer Fellow alumni, and others)?

CONTACT US

Questions about the Archer Fellowship Program application can be directed to Archer Admissions.

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