

# Guide to Writing a Policy Proposal

*Read this individually and then go through the discussion questions as a group.*

**1. Executive Summary** - The summary should briefly discuss the situation you are concerned about, why it is important and urgent, and the various policy options under discussion. You should state your preferred solution and an abbreviated summary of your rationale and path to implementation. Your summary should state clearly how your policy contributes to a strong, resilient economy in La Plata County (5 points).

*How do I do this?* - You wait until everything else is done and then pick the most essential, specific facts about your issue and your proposed solution. You will have everything in your paper. You just need to summarize in a compelling way. This will be your elevator pitch next time a city councilor or county commissioner sits down next you at Carvers. (1/2 to a full page)

## **2. Overview**

A.) Background - A policy proposal begins with the relevant background on the situation your are trying to address. The situation doesn't have to be a problem. It could be that things are going well, and this proves the community is ready to implement a more ambitious policy. The overview answers the basic questions: what is the situation, who is involved, where it is taking place, and for how long has the situation been going on. It should include a short history of how we arrived at the current situation. (10 points)

B.) Current Situation - The background section gives an overview of the policy currently governing the situation (if there is one). It explains who decided upon and implemented this policy, how it is supposed to work, and the perceptions of the policy among stakeholders. (10 points)

C) Rationale - The overview must also explain why a change is needed now. The need for the change could stem from a change in current conditions within city, state, nation, or world. (5 points)

*How do I do this?* - You do research. But this isn't the kind of academic research you are doing for your senior project. This research is more journalistic. You follow leads. You get different sides of an issue. You decide what the real story is. You do this by talking to individuals and organizations involved in the issue, by looking for government reports on the topic, by finding newspaper articles that will help you make sense of things. Sources to search include the Durango Herald, Durango Telegraph, and High Country News. The best proposals will put the situation in a larger context by comparing our area to the state or nation as a whole. This broader context can inform the rationale and provide justification for taking action. (2 to 4 pages)

### **3. Discussion of Alternatives**

A) You must give at least two policy options to address the current situation. For each option you must include a thorough description of the option being used within another setting. You have to give the results, and the reasons for those results, for each option. The options don't have to be the same as your recommended solution. Your own solution could be an innovative combination of the different options you present. (10 points)

B) You must provide the strengths and shortcomings of each option, what their impact would be and unanticipated side effects, if any. You should contrast the options with one another and the current policy. (10 points)

*How do I do this?* - You brainstorm how you would approach the problem and then search for reports or articles that discuss your solution. For example, if you think inclusionary zoning is a solution to affordable housing in Durango, you search for reports or articles that discuss the pros and cons. Your own ideas are important. Your own beliefs about economics will color your ideas. This is all right. Just be aware of your bias and be open to changing your mind if the facts suggest a new way to look at things.

At the same time, you are looking at all the potential solutions people are trying to address your issue. Which of these solutions would work in our community? You might talk to our elected officials or members of the various city or county commissions to get their opinion.

Finally, you are talking to other students and me about what you are finding, continually. You are testing out ideas, thinking of problems with potential solutions. Playing the "what if..." game. Out of this you'll have more than enough material to write intelligently about different policy options (2 to 4 pages)

### **4. Recommendation**

You must clearly articulate and explain your proposed policy solution--how it works (inducements, rules, facts, etc.), who will be in charge of implementing it, who it will impact, and over what period of time. You must present a convincing rationale for your choice supported by a cost-benefit analysis of your recommendation. This can be either quantitative or qualitative but should consider both short-term and long-term impacts and a description of the fiscal impact on city and county budgets. (20 points)

*How do I do this?* - You sort through all the pros and cons you've accumulated putting together the previous section. Then you try to capture as many pros and address as many cons as you can. This is creative work. You are crafting policy and if your solution works, it could become a national model that will have an impact far beyond our borders. You need to run your recommendation past several people to see if they can shoot holes in it. If so, keep refining. Don't start over. No policy is going to be perfect and be 100% effective. But a policy can improve the lives of people in the community and the resilience of our economy.

For the cost and benefit part of this section, list the costs and benefits. Some of these will lend themselves to a dollar figure; others will not. Decide if it's possible to assign dollar values to both sides of your list. If your solution will require more local revenue, suggest where the city or county can find those funds. *(1 to 2 pages)*

## **5. Implementation**

You will then plot a path for the approval and implementation of your policy. This includes identifying obstacles that the policy will encounter, including opposition from specific groups, and a strategy to secure passage. Implementation should address the necessary roles of different groups in gaining approval. It should also include plans for evaluation of the policy over time. (10 points)

*How do I do this?* - You try it out. Here is where sitting down with current or former government officials might help. Think about contacting members of the two political parties to get their take on your idea. Go back and talk to organizations and individuals with experience working on your issue to see what they say. Make a short list: if this policy is successful, this is what we'll see. Use this list as the basis for your evaluation. *(1 to 2 pages)*