

5 tips for trade bodies on writing public policy manifestos



Mike Spicer, Managing Director

“ Policy manifestos are core to the public affairs work of industry groups. They do treble duty and this is what makes them so difficult to write. They must be sharp enough to communicate member priorities to lawmakers. Be flexible enough to account for the messiness of policymaking when used retrospectively as a scorecard of real-world impact. And they must promote the brand through the focus of its message... ”

Last updated: December 2020

1

Don't miss out with lawmakers: plan to meet their cut-off dates

They must make their biggest splash with lawmakers in the period immediately before policy commitments are made. Know when this will be for the political event you are planning for and work to it.

2

Structure it around problems, solutions and opportunities

The sections must make narrative sense *and* work as standalone collateral. First establish your credibility. Then your member ambitions for the future. Show how these will benefit wider society and the policy reforms required.

3

Design content to engage, not overwhelm readers

Materials should prioritise core messages, not the supporting detail. Back these points with stories and case studies that humanise them. Use data with visuals to clarify the impact of choices and costs of inaction.

4

Plan for a brigade of materials not a single tome

Single format, lengthy tomes don't cut it. You need the full range of communication approaches to hit the spot with your audiences. They will have different expectations of scope, detail and how to receive the content.

5

The golden rule for consultation is: 'no surprises'

Resources and timing will determine how far you can go beyond testing ideas informally with bellwether audiences and stakeholders. But so will the anticipated extent of any departure from pre-existing policy priorities.

Did you know?

[Research suggests](#) that growth in information and cultural output is reducing the span of our collective attention. And across all domains of shareable content - online and offline. Policy manifestos need to work harder and faster than ever before to make a lasting impression.

Useful links

Sheila McKechnie Foundation (UK): [Resources for Social Changemakers](#)

Desera Crow, Michael D Jones (LSE Blog): [Mastering the Art of the Narrative - Using Stories to Shape Public Policy](#)

Involve (UK): [Digital Tools for Stakeholder Engagement](#)

Institute for Government (UK): [Manifesto Tracker](#)

For more information, please visit www.policydepartment.com

The research, analysis and strategic advice to grow stronger business sectors, clusters and local economies

