

Policy Briefs in Practice Program

Agricultural Genomics Action Centre (AG-ACt)

Welcome

We are excited to have you join the Policy Briefs in Practice Program. This program is designed for Highly Qualified Personnel (HQP) across the [Climate Smart Agri-Food Systems \(CSAFS\)](#) Network, and beyond, who are interested in strengthening their ability to communicate research to policy audiences in clear, concise, and impactful ways.

Over the course of this program, you will build skills in policy writing, knowledge translation, and evidence-informed communication, all key components of effective knowledge mobilization.

You will select a topic related to your research and develop a policy brief that clearly outlines a problem, synthesizes relevant evidence, and presents actionable insights or recommendations for a policy audience. Throughout the process, you will receive feedback from experienced knowledge mobilization professionals to help refine both your content and approach.

Key Dates & Opportunities:

- Final policy briefs due by end of day on **October 6, 2026**.
- Participants whose submission meets the program criteria will receive a **\$200 honorarium**.
- Final policy briefs will be on display at the Cultivating Resilience Summit (Calgary, Oct. 26, 2026) and will be made available on the AG-ACt or AG-ACt partner websites. AG-ACt will endeavor to utilize the briefs at multiple events and dissemination opportunities when possible.

Program Team

First point of contact for all questions: Michelle Stringer; Project Coordinator, AG-ACt; ebiling@uoguelph.ca

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This briefing was supported by AG-ACt, whose work is funded by the Government of Canada through Genome Canada and Ontario Genomics (OGI-237).

Program Timeline

- Webinar: July 14, 2026
- Program Application Opens: July 14, 2026
- Application Deadline: August 14, 2026
- Notification of Accepted into Program: August 17-21, 2026
- Kick-off Consult (optional): August 24, 2026 – September 4, 2026
- Brief Development: August 17, 2026 – October 5, 2026
- Drop-in Mentorship Hour(s):
 - September 4, 2026 – 1-2pm EST
 - September 17, 2026 – 12:30-1:30pm EST
- Draft One Submission Due: September 7, 2026
 - Clearly shows message, layout, and rough draft of graphic components.
- Draft One Feedback to Participants: September 11, 2026
- Round One Brief Refinement: September 11, 2026 – September 21, 2026
- Draft Two Submission Due: September 21, 2026
 - Integrated feedback into brief, draft is close to final version.
- Draft Two Feedback to Participants: September 25, 2026
- Round Two Brief Refinement: September 25, 2025 – October 5, 2026
- Final Brief Due: October 5, 2026



Submission Criteria

To be eligible for the honorarium at the end of the Policy Briefs in Practice Program, your final submission must meet the following criteria:

Topic Fit

Your policy brief must fall under one of the approved program themes below. The topic should be focused, timely, and grounded in evidence.

- Resilient and Sustainable Food Systems (Local/National Food Systems)
- Net-Zero Carbon Agriculture and Food Systems
- Soil Health & Biological Carbon Sequestration
- Scalable Biology Based Solutions
- Genomics in the Agri-Food System
- Agri-Tech & Digital Innovation
- Crop Innovation & Sustainability

Problem Definition & Context

A compelling policy brief begins with a clearly articulated problem. Your policy brief should clearly convey the problem or policy issue, and highlight why the issue matters, and why it's important for decision makers (think in terms of its broader social, economic, or political context).

Tip: Think '*What is the issue, who does it affect, and why does it matter now?*'

Use of Evidence & Research

Your policy brief should be grounded in credible, high-quality evidence. Integrate relevant data, research findings, and authoritative sources to support your claims, building a persuasive narrative. Do not simply state key findings, synthesize works to link the evidence with proposed solutions.

Tip: Use evidence and research strategically to strengthen your arguments, not overwhelm the reader.



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Policy Analysis & Alignment

It is important to demonstrate policy alignment by articulating how the issue and proposed options connect to existing policy priorities, programs, or strategic initiatives. This helps situate the brief within the current policy landscape and strengthens its relevance for decision-makers.

Demonstrate critical thinking - explore different policy/solution options, evaluate their strengths and limitations, and consider feasibility, trade-offs, and potential impacts.

Recommendations

Conclude with clear, actionable recommendations that are directly supported by the analysis and evidence presented. Recommendations should be realistic, specific, and tailored to the intended audience.

Tip: Think *'What should be done, by whom, and (where appropriate) how implementation could occur?'*

Audience Awareness

Consider the needs, priorities, and perspectives of your intended audience and frame your brief accordingly. The brief should not only inform but also persuade, using tone and emphasis strategically.

Structure, Balance & Flow

A well-organized policy brief uses logical sequencing and clear headings to guide the reader. Information should be structured so that decision-makers can quickly scan and understand key messages. Focus on readability and ensuring your argument unfolds in an understandable manner.

Plain Language & Grammar

Use clear, jargon-free language that is easy to understand for an audience that could be policymakers, industry professionals, practitioners, or community leaders, etc.

When technical terms are necessary, define them briefly and simply. Your policy brief should use plain language, without grammar, spelling, or syntax errors to ensure a smooth reading experience.



Formatting & Accessibility

Policy briefs should follow professional conventions, using headings, bullet points, and clean formatting to improve readability. Visuals may be used strategically to reinforce key messages.

For your submissions, please use the following formatting:

- Suggested length 2-4 pages.
- Please keep a footer space for attributions or acknowledgements (see sample footer used in this document).
- Please submit drafts as Microsoft Word documents (for comments & tracked changes).
- Please submit your final policy brief as a Word Document or PDF.

Prioritize accessibility by using easy-to-read fonts, clear, logical structure, and plain language. Review accessibility guidelines (Appendix 1).

Attribution & Acknowledgement

Be sure to cite any sources and credits, as appropriate, and include the following required funding statement at the bottom.

- *This briefing was supported by AG-ACT, whose work is funded by the Government of Canada through Genome Canada and Ontario Genomics (OGI-237).*

Please also be sure to include any other acknowledgements required by your research project or institution.

Evaluation & Honorarium

Evaluation Rubric

Criteria	Exceeds Expectations	Meets Expectations	Needs Improvement
Topic Fit	Fully aligns with an approved theme. Topic is well focused with appropriate scope.	Generally aligned with an approved theme. Slightly too broad or narrow in scope.	Topic is unclear or not aligned with approved themes. Overly broad or narrow in scope.
Problem Definition & Context	Problem is clearly and compellingly defined with strong context.	Problem is defined with adequate context. Explains why it matters, though	Problem is unclear, unfocused, or buried.



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	Clearly explains who is affected and why it matters now (social, economic, and/or political relevance).	could be more compelling or specific.	Does not explain significance or urgency.
Use of Evidence & Research	Integrates high-quality, credible evidence effectively. Demonstrates strong synthesis of sources to support arguments and solutions.	Uses relevant evidence from credible sources. Synthesis may be limited or more descriptive than analytical.	Limited, weak, or poorly integrated evidence. Relies on unsupported claims or lacks synthesis.
Policy Analysis & Alignment	Demonstrates strong critical analysis of multiple policy options. Clearly aligns issue with existing policies, priorities, or initiatives. Thoughtfully evaluates feasibility, trade-offs, and impacts.	Provides some analysis of policy options. Shows general alignment within current policy context. Adequate discussion of trade-offs or feasibility.	Minimal or unclear analysis of options or does not assess options. Lacks alignment with policy context. Lacks discussion of trade-offs or feasibility.
Recommendations	Recommendations are clear, actionable, realistic, and directly supported by evidence and analysis.	Recommendations are relevant and generally supported by analysis, though may lack specificity or clarity in implementation.	Recommendations are unclear, unrealistic, unsupported, or missing key details (who, what, how).
Audience Awareness	Strongly tailored to the intended audience. Tone, framing, and emphasis are highly effective in informing and persuading.	Demonstrates awareness of audience; generally appropriate tone and framing.	Limited or no consideration of audience; tone or framing is ineffective.
Structure, Balance & Flow	Exceptionally well-organized with logical sequencing and clear headings. Easy to scan and understand;	Well-organized with clear structure. Minor issues with flow or balance.	Poor organization, unclear flow, or difficult to follow.



	argument flows seamlessly.		
Plain Language & Grammar	Language is clear and jargon-free; easily understood by non-experts. No grammatical or syntax errors.	Mostly clear with limited jargon; meaning is mostly accessible. 1 grammatical or syntax errors.	Heavy use of jargon or complex language; difficult for general audience. <1 Grammatical or syntax errors present.
Formatting & Accessibility	Fully adheres to formatting requirements. Uses headings, bullets, and visuals effectively to enhance readability and accessibility (accessible for a wide audience).	Meets most formatting requirements. Layout is readable but could be improved for accessibility (minor accessibility issues).	Does not follow formatting guidelines. Poor readability or limited attention to accessibility (major accessibility issues).
Attribution & Acknowledgement	All sources properly cited. AG-ACT funding acknowledgement in place along with other funding statements as needed.	Most sources cited; minor omissions or formatting inconsistencies. AG-ACT funding acknowledgement in place along with other funding statements as needed.	Missing citations or acknowledgements. Acknowledgements for AG-ACT or other funders missing or incorrect.

Review

Final policy brief submissions will be reviewed by the AG-ACT team and select subject matter experts using the rubric. The honorarium will be granted based on the reviewers' recommendations.



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Honorarium

A \$200 honorarium will be provided to eligible program participants who have submitted a final policy brief that meets or exceeds expectations based on the evaluation rubric.

To facilitate the issuance of honorarium payments, program participants will be required to provide their full name, mailing address, and Social Insurance Number (SIN) to program administrators. This information is necessary because honoraria are considered taxable benefits under Canadian tax law. As such, we are required to issue a T4A slip for tax reporting purposes.

Getting Started

Below is some guidance on how to think about conveying a clear message. For more information on this subject, you can attend or watch the workshop recording that will be made available after July 16, 2026.

1. Test yourself: See if you can provide clear, concise answers to the following questions:
 - The policy issue I want to address is:
 - My key message(s) is:
 - This issue matters because:
 - The purpose of my policy brief is to:
 - My target audience is:



Appendix 1: Resources

Accessibility

- Font Styles: Serif fonts, which feature small lines or strokes (serifs) at the ends of letters, can be difficult to read for individuals with reading disabilities or those learning a new language. Whenever possible, use sans-serif fonts instead.
- Text Sizing: There's no exact minimum font size since different fonts look different on the page. A good rule is to use 12–16 point for body text and avoid anything smaller than 9 point.
- Colour Contrast: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) recommend that at minimum the contrast ratio of 4.5:1 for normal text and 3:1 for larger or bolder text is followed.
 - [WebAim Contrast and Color Accessibility](#)
 - [WebAim Contrast Checker](#)
- Alternative Text: Alt text helps describe images so people using screen readers can understand them. It also provides context if an image doesn't load.
 - [WebAim Alt Text Techniques](#)
- Readability: Keep readability at a Grade 9–10 level, whenever possible, to support broad comprehension. Using web-based tools that provide real-time readability feedback can help ensure content stays clear and accessible.
 - [Hemingway Editor](#)

Policy Brief Training & Guides

- [UMontrealX: Knowledge Translation 2 - Policy Brief](#)
- SF4C Resource
- [International Development Research Centre's How to Write a Policy Brief](#)
- [University of Waterloo Writing Centre – Policy Briefs](#)
- [University of Toronto – From Research to Impact: A Toolkit for Developing Effective Policy Briefs](#)
- [Queen's University – GovTalk Policy Briefs: Introduction and Guidelines](#)



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Appendix 2: Examples

- [International Development Research Centre's Digital Library](#)
- [Soils At Guelph – Issue & Policy Briefs](#)
- [Key considerations for a National Food Security Strategy](#)
- [Simpson Centre for Food and Agriculture Policy – Issue Briefs](#)
- [School Food and Nutrition: The Brief](#)
- [Smart Prosperity Institute – Protecting Northern Peatlands](#)
- Research Brief - [Complementary practices for more feed and better environmental outcomes on high-production dairy farms](#)



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