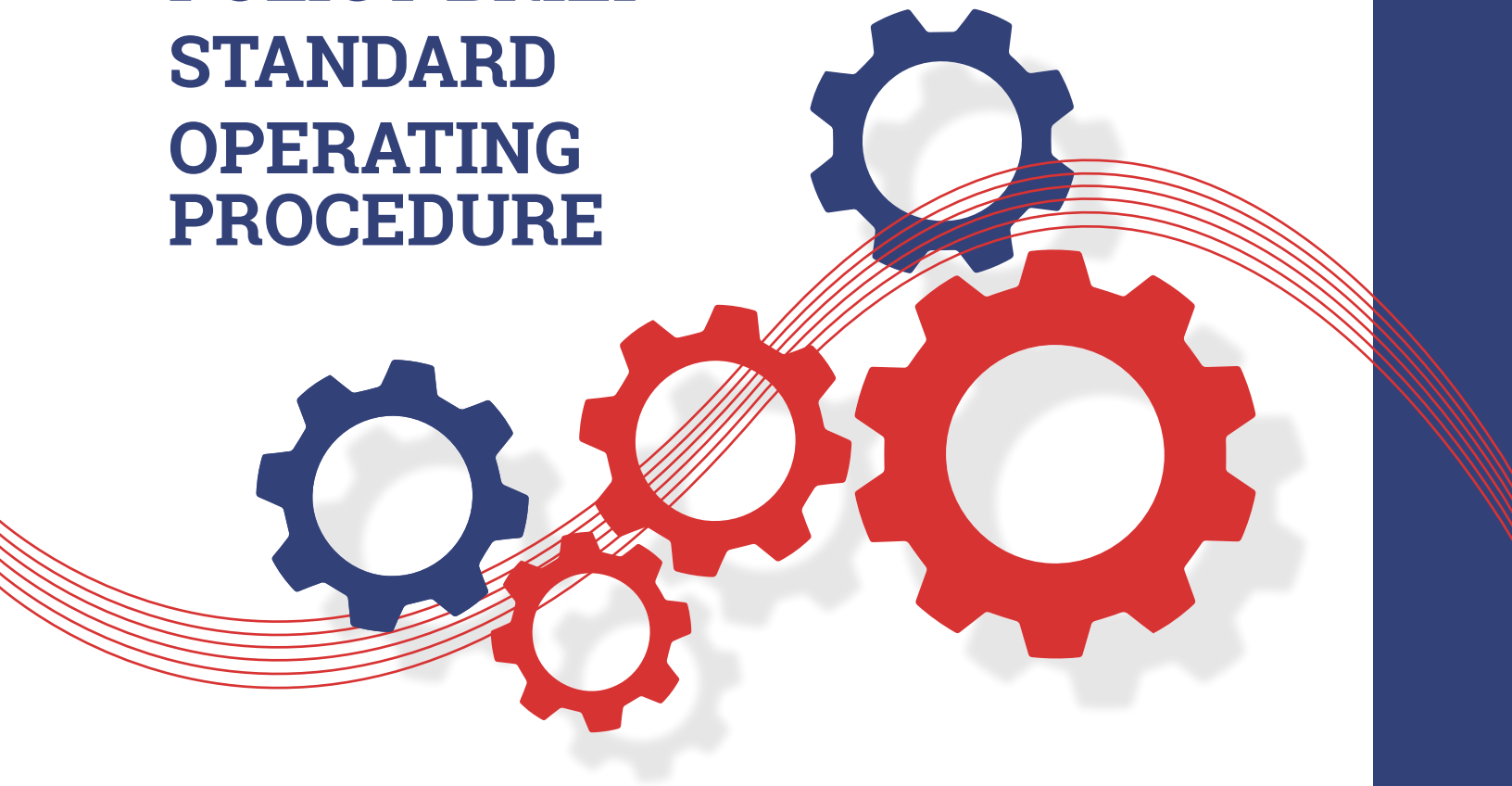# POLICY BRIEF STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

Strathmore University

Centre for Intellectual Property and
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POLICY BRIEF STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE

This guideline is to assist in confirming that the Policy Brief is ready for final review by the Director, Research Manager or Research Fellow (as the case may be). You should consult this guideline before submitting the final version of any Policy Brief. Policy briefs simplify and condense research, providing evidence-based advice for informed decisions.

Objectives of a Policy Brief

A policy brief should aim to achieve the following objectives:

1 Provide enough background for the reader to understand the problem.

2 Convince the reader that the problem must be addressed urgently.

3 Provide information about alternatives.

4 Provide evidence to support one alternative.

5 Stimulate the reader to make a decision.

Elements of a Policy Brief

To achieve its objectives, a policy brief should encompass the following elements:

1. **Conciseness**: It should be clear and directly address a specific problem or concern. Avoid delving into excessive detail and provide enough information for a comprehensive understanding without overwhelming the reader.

2. **Consistent formatting**: The paragraphs should all follow the same style. Font type and font size should, be adhered to.

3. **Consistent grammar**: Tenses and grammar must be paid attention to. Correct grammar is a basic minimum for a final Policy Brief. Pay attention to how you narrate events that have occurred, events that are yet to occur and situations that are continuous.

4. **Robust Evidence**: Rely on solid and extensive evidence, drawing from diverse sources, ideally spanning various areas, rather than relying on isolated or limited experiences.

5. **Emphasis on Significance**: Concentrate on the implications and significance of your findings and recommendations rather than dwelling on the intricacies of your research methodology.

6. **Relate to the big picture**: While your policy brief may stem from context-specific findings, it should draw conclusions that hold broader relevance and applicability beyond the specific context.

Policy Brief Structure

The following are the general guidelines on the structure of the policy brief. Where the Policy Brief has a predetermined format, please adhere to the format provided

1 Title

The title should be concise and engaging. Ideally, it should be under 12 words. If necessary, you can use a title and subtitle. It should capture the reader's interest, include essential keywords, and relate directly to the subject matter. You might also consider using a question as your title, provided it is pertinent to the topic.

2 Summary/Executive Summary

The summary or executive summary should be short and focus on the key takeaways from the policy brief. Think about the main messages you want policymakers to grasp, even if they do not read the entire document.

3 Introduction

The introduction's role is to engage the reader, provide an overview of the topic's significance, and establish the case for taking action. It accomplishes this through several key elements:

| i. **Identifying the Problem**: Clearly define the issue at hand and explain its importance. | ii. **Setting the Context**: Describe the circumstances, locations, and parties involved in the situation. | iii. **Explaining the Reasons**: Examine the reasons behind the current state of affairs, substantiating your claims with evidence or illustrative instances. | iv. **Highlighting the Consequences**: Outline the consequences of the existing situation, supported by evidence or real-life examples. |

4 The Body (the main text)

Organize the main text in a clear and logical structure that makes it easy for the reader to follow. Here are some strategies to achieve this:

i. **Concise Paragraphs**: Keep your paragraphs brief and focused on one main idea. Avoid overloading paragraphs with multiple concepts.

ii. **Effective Headings**: Utilize appropriate headings and subheadings to help readers navigate through the content efficiently.

iii. **Clarity Test**: Review each paragraph and ask yourself, "What is the key takeaway?" If the main point is not readily apparent, consider revising or deleting that paragraph.

5 Policy Recommendations/Implications

The recommendations should be made easily accessible to readers by placing them at the beginning, the end, or strategically within the text. These recommendations must be clear, concise, and realistic, with a limit of approximately five to six to maintain clarity. It is important to ensure that the recommendations are feasible from political, economic, social, and technical perspectives. Additionally, readers often jump straight to the recommendations, so their placement and clarity are crucial for effective communication.

This section focuses on policy options and their implications, encompassing:

i. **Proposed policy revisions:** What are the different options?

ii. **Effects of policy changes:** How will these revisions enhance the situation; this should be supported by evidence or examples, if available.

iii. **Pros and cons of each policy option:** What are the potential advantages and costs? Are there any side effects to consider?

6 Conclusion

In a policy brief, there is typically no need for a separate conclusion section. The Summary, presented at the outset, along with the Recommendations section, usually fulfills the role of summarizing key points and proposing actions. However, if you choose to include a conclusion section, it should be brief – just a single paragraph suffices. This paragraph should emphasize the urgency of the situation or underscore the significance of adopting the policy option you advocate for, effectively wrapping up the document.

7 Final Page

i. **Authors**: include the name of the author or the institution, and contact information for correspondence; the authors ordinarily appear at the beginning of the Policy Brief.

ii. **Acknowledgements:** include the following:

- An acknowledgement of organizations, and sponsors who supported the brief financially or with valuable contributions.

- An address where readers can get additional information.

- The publisher and date.

- Copyright notice

- If necessary, a disclaimer to clarify certain points.

iii. **Publication details**

iv. **References**: provide references to sources where readers can find further information. Footnotes should conform to one style throughout the Policy Brief. Commit to the style.

Additional Elements in a Policy Brief:

While not obligatory, a policy brief may incorporate the following elements to convey information in a more engaging and comprehensible manner:

1 *Boxes and sidebars*: These are useful for sharing different types of information that do not quite fit smoothly into the main text. They can include things like case studies, definitions, additional explanations, lists, or examples to illustrate key points. These boxes should make sense on their own without requiring the reader to go through the main text, so they need clear titles and should be used sparingly.

2 *Cases:* The text can have cases, which can be in the main text or in a separate box. Cases can illustrate a point, set the foundation for the text, or demonstrate that real situations can be more complicated than theories. These cases should be brief (just one or two paragraphs) and easy to understand on their own, even if someone does not read the whole text. Keep the cases related to the main topic, do not add extra details, and make sure they connect to the text's purpose.

3 **Tables:** Tables can be helpful for showing numbers or information in a clear way, but it is important to keep them simple so readers can understand easily. Here are some things to remember:

    i.   Use as few rows and columns as possible.

    ii.   Put columns that you want to compare right next to each other.

    iii.   Arrange rows in a logical order, e.g. by size or alphabetically.

    iv.   Highlight important cells in the table using shading, labels, or bold text.
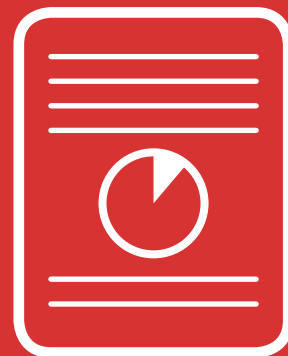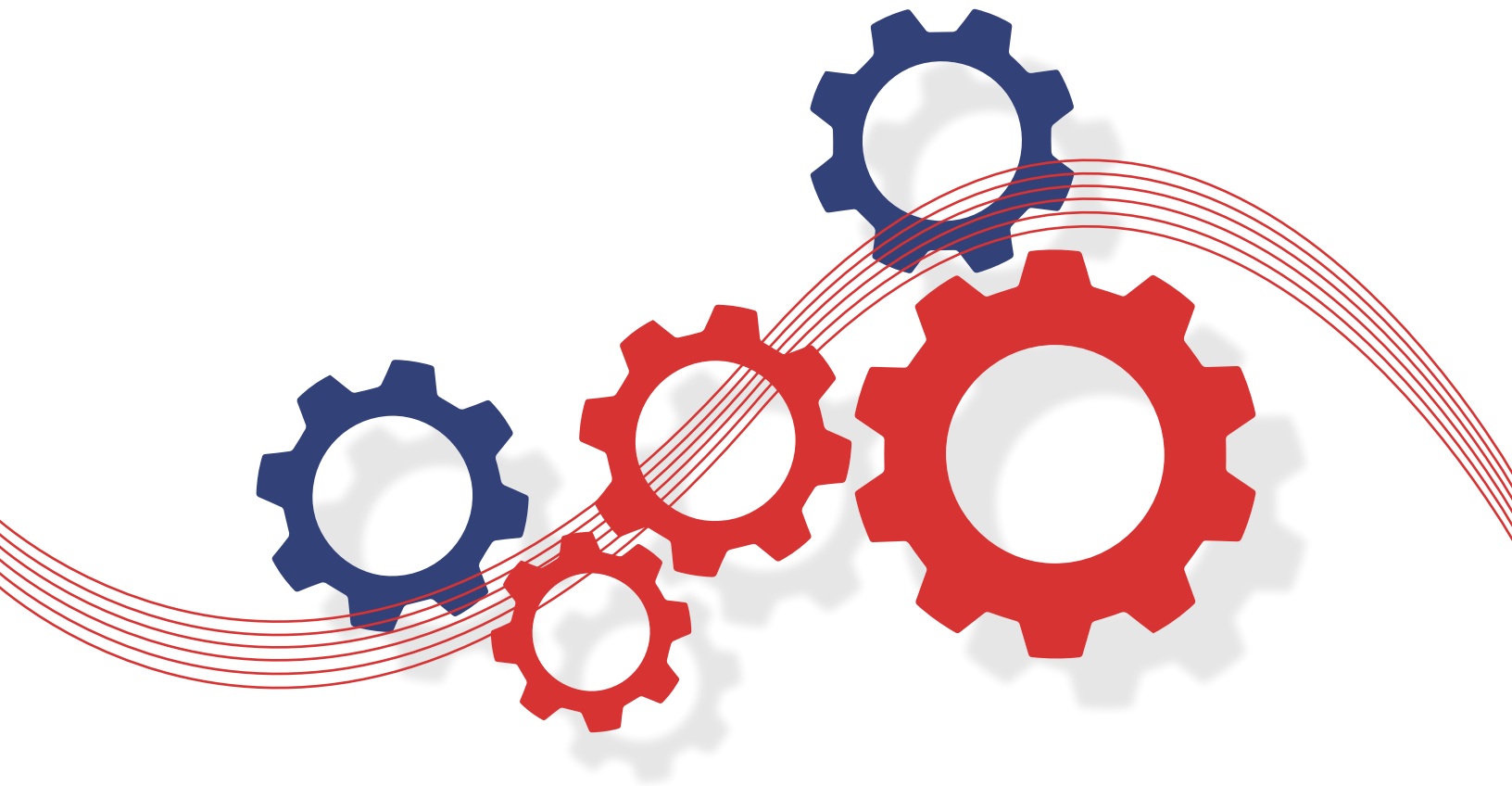
v.   If a table is hard to understand, consider turning it into a graph.

vi.   Do not include complex statistical information that is more suitable for scientific papers.

vii.   Give the table a title that explains what it is about.

viii.   Reference the source of the information.

4 **Graphics**: Using visuals like flowcharts, drawings, graphs, maps, and photos can enhance your policy brief. Here's how to use them effectively:

i.   Make sure your visuals are easy to understand.

ii.   Pick the right type of visual for the information you want to show.

iii.   Use bar charts or pie charts when comparing numbers.

iv.   For showing trends over time, use a line graph with the most important data points.

v.   Ensure labels are easy to read.

vi.   Add a clear title or caption to explain what the visual represents.

vii.   Use colours, patterns, and symbols that are easy to tell apart.

viii.   If using photos, make sure they are high quality, provide a descriptive caption, and get permission from the owner to use them.

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