10 Ideas Writing Guide

Roosevelt Network | 2019-2020

Overview

Since 2008, the Roosevelt Network's 10 Ideas program has elevated the ideas of young people seeking not only to rewrite the rules for their communities, but also to change who writes them.

Each year, students research, write, and advocate for ideas originating from the program's trainings and workshops. 10 Ideas policy proposals demonstrate our commitment to equity and inclusion and reinforce our mission to strengthen public goods and public power. Across our six issue areas—education, economy, human rights, democratic access, health care, and energy & environment—Roosevelters are moving the country toward a new economic and political system: one built by many for the good of all.

In the fall of each year, undergraduate students from across the country submit their policy proposals with the hopes of being published in print or online. After a competitive evaluation process, the top 10 policy submissions are published each year in our *10 Ideas journal*, and an unrestricted amount of outstanding ideas are published online.

How to use this guide

Whether you're co-authoring a submission, having chapter members workshop your ideas, or attending trainings, you shouldn't go through the 10 Ideas process by yourself. Use your chapter and your chapter members as resources. You can also co-author with folks from other schools!

Use this writing guide, along with the rubric, to ensure you are including all the necessary points in your policy memo. In addition to this, make sure your final 10 Ideas memo meets all formatting requirements:

- Submit a Word.docx file
- Do not add a title page
- **Do not add any author's name to your memo.** Authors should remain anonymous on the Word document that you submit.
- Do not add graphics or images; these will not be published.
- Make sure your memo contains all required sections and adheres to word counts (listed below).
- Your citations should follow the Chicago Manual of Style and should include endnotes.

Past *10 Ideas* journals are also available on our website for examples of published work.

For any additional questions not covered in this guide, reach out to Jade Wilenchik.

Roosevelt Network's Theory of Change

We are looking for ideas that align with our theory of change, which is embedded throughout the rubric. Our theory of change is built on these core values, which should be represented in the proposed idea and throughout the memo:

Local: We believe change happens at the local level (e.g., campus, town, county, city), as it is where students have the most agency.

We are not looking for policy changes that can only be made at the national/federal level.

As authors, you should be thinking globally, but acting locally. Considering the problems that are present across the country, how do you see these problems manifesting in your community? How can you address them locally?

Scalable/replicable: While we focus our ideas at the local level, we want to keep in mind how they might be scaled up or replicated elsewhere in the future. This allows us to build momentum with local action and maximize our impact over time. For example, explain the ways that piloting an idea at the town level would give it viability to scale up to the county level, or how a policy on your campus might spark similar action at other campuses.

Structural change: Your idea should propose structural, long-term change of rules, laws, or policies, *rather than* short-term programs with limited reach. Think about how you might extend access to all in an equitable way.

For instance, instead of thinking about how you can pay off all student debt for the class of 2020, consider the ways you might restructure your college's funding systems to remedy debt burdens for all future classes (e.g., by lowering tuition).

Feasibility: We believe that ideas should be bold, but implementable. That means you identify the level of governance that has the ability, authority and/or jurisdiction to make your idea a reality.

In your background and policy analysis, you should demonstrate to graders why the institution you've chosen for change (e.g., campus, city government, etc.) is the best fit for your policy idea.

For instance, if you are offering a state-level proposal: Why must this problem be addressed at the state level? What bodies of government does an idea have to go through in order to become a policy?

Required 10 Ideas Sections

Title (4–12 words)
Include a succinct description of your policy solution.

> **TIP!** Creativity is welcome, but shouldn't come at the cost of clarity. Authors are not awarded extra marks for great titles, but can miss the mark with confusing/offensive ones.

Examples:
- *Democratizing Green Energy: Expanding Community Shared Solar in New York State*
- *A Split-Rate Property Tax to Increase Affordable Housing in Chapel Hill*

Thesis Statement (20–40 words)

This section should provide a one-to-two sentence summary of your problem and solution. This section should **clearly:** 1) state the problem you are seeking to address, 2) note relevant stakeholders (e.g., who is affected and which entity can remedy the problem), and 3) provide a brief description of your policy solution. **Brevity is key here; please stick within the word limit.**

> **TIP!** It's often helpful to write this section last, after you've done all the work and collected your thoughts in writing.

> **Examples:**
> - "The severe lack of clean, functional public restrooms in New York City limits the access of homeless and other people to sanitary restrooms and leads to rampant public urination and defecation. To combat this problem, New York City should pay local businesses a monthly stipend for allowing the public to use their restrooms for free."
> - "To address the significant lack of racial diversity in the specialized schools in Boston, the Boston Public Schools system should redesign the admissions process by changing from the optional Independent School Entrance Examination (ISSE), given on a Saturday, to the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS), an exam that all students take in the 5th grade."

Background Analysis (175–230 words)

The Background Analysis section should provide a baseline introduction to the problem you have identified. Demonstrating you have done your research on the problem sets the stage for everything that follows, allowing you to present stronger arguments in the policy analysis section. This section should <u>not</u> introduce your solution yet!

Your background analysis should:

Clearly define the problem, in one to two sentences. Problems may be defined as a lack, a disparity (in access, opportunity, or outcome), an inequality, implicit or explicit discrimination, or a limitation in the existing rule structure. Think about your Thesis Statement section as a summary of a great problem statement in this section.

> **Examples:**
> - A <u>lack</u> might refer to the ways that domestic workers do not have essential workplace rights and protections
> - A <u>disparity in outcomes</u> might refer to higher student debt levels for Black families than for white families
> - An <u>inequality</u> could be identifying the fact that Latinx women on average make significantly less than their white male counterparts
> - <u>Discrimination</u> could include legalized subminimum wages for some people with disabilities
> - A <u>limitation</u> might highlight the ways that state laws exclude sexual orientation and gender identity from workplace discrimination protection

Identify the cause(s) of the problem. You can explain how a current rule, law, or policy (or lack thereof) actively causes the identified problem.

Are there systemic breakdowns that led to this issue? What are the factors that contribute to this problem arising? Were there active decisions made that led to the problem? If you're having a hard time identifying the root cause of a problem, try using a cause & effect/fishbone diagram (many templates are available online)!

> **Example:** If your piece is about domestic workers' rights, you could consider how the Fair Labor Standards Act and other labor laws have excluded domestic workers and contributed to the erosion of their worker power.

Include the historical context of the problem's causes. Explain how the causes of this problem—and the problem itself—developed over time. How has this issue been addressed in the past, if at all? Are you looking to solve a new issue that is not addressed (or is insufficiently addressed) by the existing set of rules? Who has been involved in addressing this issue in the past, and who has been excluded?

> **Example:** While the Fair Labor Standards Act greatly expanded labor protections for white workers, the law "continued the New Deal's legacy of excluding Blacks by excluding agricultural and domestic workers. As a result, racial exclusion was built into the foundation for the white middle class that emerged in the 1940s and 1950s."

Identify key stakeholders in this issue. Stakeholders should include the groups of people who are impacted by the policy, as well as those who have vested interests in upholding the status quo. Who would benefit if this rule changed? Who would prefer that it stays the same? Why?

In your stakeholder identification, you should try to apply some intersectional analysis, by noting how particular identities may be disproportionately impacted by the issue you've identified.

> **Example:** "Raising wages and offering key protections for these [domestic] workers would dramatically improve the standard of living for the mostly Black and brown women who work in this occupation—a group greatly disadvantaged in our economy and society more broadly."

Create a sense of urgency around the issue. As you explain the problem, make sure you are clear about the reasons why immediate action is needed. What is at stake if we do not act now? Are there statistics or demographic changes that point to important trends? Are there key dates for action coming up?

> **Example**: "The global community has just 11 years to cut emissions by 45 percent and must achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 to prevent temperatures from rising more than 1.5°C, according to climate scientists."

The Policy Idea (70–90 words)

This is where you introduce your policy idea (i.e., the solution to the problem you've outlined in the previous section). Your proposals should align with our theory of change—promoting increased public power—and should be both **progressive** and **innovative.**

Public power refers to equipping the government with a set of tools to shape markets and our society. By meeting individual needs—including affordable medicine, accessible banking, and more equitable education—or by making vital investments—in expanded infrastructure, clean energy, or emerging industries—public power can serve all of us. Also, it refers to the power the people have to make the government serve ALL the communities it is meant to serve.

Although we acknowledge the ways in which the government has often failed to provide the goods we need and effectively protect its most vulnerable communities, at Roosevelt we believe the government has the capacity to do good and act in the interests of the public.

Government has a crucial role in providing and/or regulating the delivery of these goods because 1) these are goods that are central to enable human success and well-being, and 2) providing these goods gives its supplier power over the citizen that must be held democratically accountable.

Progressive (in provision): Your solution should promote using public power to address your identified problem.

Is this solution being implemented through government or a governing body, like a school? Does it increase oversight or improve transparency for an institution that serves the public? Does the idea try to combat privatization or curb corporate power?

Progressive (in access): Your solution should provide increased access to communities who have historically been denied political, economic, or social power—now and in the future.

Ask yourself: Does your solution expand access to an existing public good? Are you thinking about how future generations will be able to access what you are proposing? What are the barriers that exist in accessing this public good? How has lack of *access* to this public good impacted your target group(s)?

Innovation: The policy solution is innovative. This means you either: (1) address a new problem, (2) present a new solution to an established problem, or (3) implement an existing idea in a new way—by changing the level of government, location, etc.

Policy Analysis (200–250 words)

The Policy Analysis section is where you will attempt to sell the value and importance of your policy idea to a neutral observer. Arguments in this section should connect to the problem statement laid out in the Background Analysis and should clearly explain why your policy proposal is the best solution to the identified problem. To achieve this, compare and contrast other policies through cost-benefit analysis, budget projections, target audience size and impact, multiplier effects, consequences of inaction, case studies, and more.

Your analysis should be:

Interdisciplinary: Thinking about the full cost and impact of your policy, how will it intersect with other issue areas? For instance: What might the health implications of an environmental policy be? Could stronger environmental protections also lead to stronger health outcomes?

Intersectional: You should explain how this idea addresses the particular communities/identities you identified in your Background Analysis section. Have you

thought about and addressed how the proposal might impact communities differently (i.e., addressed the underlineddisparate impact)? Are there people who would benefit more from this? Are previously excluded people gaining access to something? Are there multiple identities at play that need to be taken into consideration?

Evidence-based arguments: You should provide at least one main argument to support your policy idea, and every claim you make in that argument should be supported by relevant evidence—and therefore, cited! This means adding citations at the end of claims, not just at the end of sentences. Evidence can include relevant facts, figures, and other statistically relevant data points to convince your audience.

Whenever and wherever you cite, be sure that your phrasing accurately captures the substance of your source. This is not a place to editorialize or offer opinion.

>   **TIP!** Some of your Key Facts and Talking Points should come from this section.

Opposing arguments: Your policy analysis should identify at least one opposing argument (i.e., a perspective from a group that would be resistant to the change you're proposing). Why might they hold this opinion? How can you provide evidence to counter it? Why hasn't this idea been proposed in the past? If it has, why is it more feasible now?

>   **Example:** By raising the minimum wage, some people may lose their jobs.
>   If you are writing about promoting better wages for Uber drivers, you could think about how some workers would argue that this would raise costs for riders and they would lose customers. You could counter this by demonstrating that a similar change in another location did not result in lower ridership.
>
>   **TIP!** Look back to your Stakeholder Analysis section; you should be able to find and cite opinions or perspectives that directly address your issue area.

Sources: Your memo should cite at least 10 recent and credible sources. Don't know if your source is credible or not? Consult this guide:
https://sites.umuc.edu/library/libhow/credibility.cfm

Talking Points (75–100 words)

Talking points provide the three key underlinednarrative messages of your campaign for anyone that would like to advocate for your idea. Think of this section as a "mini executive summary"—a collection of the central arguments that summarize your problem, proposed solution, and urgency for action. Think about providing two points about your problem (summarizing the background and urgency of action, for example), and one about the solution.

>   **Examples:** "Testing students on material that isn't taught in the public school curriculum caters to private school students and those who have the financial means to enroll in exam prep classes."
>
>   "By implementing early-intervention strategies that offer individualized assistance for students struggling to achieve reading proficiency, schools in Michigan can ensure that they are not forced to retain students in the 3rd grade."

Key Facts (75–100 words)

While talking points identify the key <u>narrative</u> arguments in support of your policy, key facts provide <u>hard data</u> to back up your claims.

Key facts should be three short, bullet-point phrases that provide the reader with simple, thought-provoking pieces of **quantitative data points** (with citations) that are essential to the policy solution and its potential impact. They should illustrate the depth of the problem you have identified, as well as the potential impact your solution could have. Key facts can include things like: statistics, key dates, trend changes, etc.

> **Examples:** "As of 2016, it cost $29,000 for the corrections system to house each prisoner every year, resulting in Virginia taxpayers spending $850 million annually."
>
> "In Chapel Hill, only 25 percent of housing units are affordable to households making less than 80 percent of the area median income."
>
> **TIP!** Your key facts can (and should) overlap with things you've already noted in the body of your memo. Because the Key Facts section is also a summary of the main arguments made throughout the piece, they should not come as a surprise to the reader. Again, think about what illustrates the gravity of the problem, its urgency, and how the solution would "quantitatively" impact the problem.

Implementation Plan (100–150 words)

In this section, you should briefly overview what is necessary for your idea to become implemented. This should include any formal processes, key decision-makers, and advocacy processes. This section should:

Identify the institution responsible for the change you're prescribing (i.e., if it is a campus-level policy, identifying what level of the administration will be able to implement the policy. Does it need to be voted on by the board of trustees? Can the dean of a school administer it?)

Work with key allies in the research, writing, and advocacy process (i.e., does this idea require a strong and diverse coalition? Do you need particular leaders to endorse your idea? If so, why, and how will that help get the idea implemented?)

Identify key targets for supporting your policy's implementation. Are there specific legislators or decision makers who will be critical in implementing your idea? What do you need them to do? How will they be influenced?

Action Plan Snapshot (150–400 words)

Your Action Plan Snapshot should relate to your Implementation Plan. Where the Implementation Plan explains <u>the formal processes that need to happen for the idea to be implemented</u>, your Action Plan Snapshot explains **how you, as authors,** <u>will take specific action to implement those plans</u>.

For instance: in your **Implementation Plan** you may note how a particular legislator will need to introduce a bill for your idea to be implemented. In your **Action Plan Snapshot**, you will explain how you will build and use your power to actually get that legislator to introduce that bill. Will you write a one-pager and send to their staff? Lobby them with other stakeholders/allies?

Although this section is not published, it is an important place to begin planning how you will take action on your idea. It also helps to give graders a sense of your plans for stakeholder engagement, and the processes you'll use to make it happen. It should include the following components:

Clear note of how you will engage stakeholders in your advocacy: Your plan should be explicit about how you foresee working with stakeholders in your base-building or coalition efforts. Outlining how you plan to work with others also helps demonstrate feasibility to readers. Try to provide a list of key partners/groups you want to have meetings with to organize around your idea.

Provide a plan for how you are going to promote your policy idea and do outreach on campus and in your community. Also include the tactics you are going to employ to retain supporters and keep them engaged.

A timeline: You should have a clear timeline (i.e., 6-12 months) for the actions you mention. What do you hope to accomplish over the course of that timeline? How do your actions build off one another to make your campaign stronger? What is realistic for that time frame? Are there important dates you are going to plan around (i.e., legislative calendars, academic calendars, budget deadlines, etc.).

Explanation of your process & tools for advocacy: Show readers how you will effectively use tools and planning to create an effective campaign. How will you strategize? Will you use tools like power mapping? Will you use any Roosevelt trainings? Will you lobby or participate in public forums? Plan events to raise awareness?

Sources & Style
Your 10 Ideas submission must include an **endnotes** section, and they must follow Chicago Style citation guidelines.

You can refer to the following links for Chicago Style citation guidance.
*   http://www.citationmachine.net/chicago
*   http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html

> **TIP!** Free online tools like Zotero (www.zotero.org) can be very helpful in organizing and citing your research.

Be sure to write clearly—in full sentences—and to use an appropriate, professional tone.