

Social researchers typically spend months if not years gathering data and developing complex analyses of pressing social problems. Yet elected officials and other public decision-makers, operating within the unique political confines of the public sphere, are often only afforded a fleeting moment to absorb the wealth of information many studies present. This presentation seeks to explore the intersection between social research and public sector decision-making by asking the question “How can social researchers effectively leverage their findings in a way that truly impacts public policy”. In my own professional experiences I have heard State Legislators say, “don’t give me anything more than a page long” and have seen expert witness after expert witness flood State Legislators with piles of information. In this analysis, I draw on reflections, stories and anecdotes I have collected as a Legislative Health Care Research Intern with the Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal Office, correlated with the results of informal interviews and surveys of Vermont State Legislators, Staff, and Local Government administrators, as well as a scan of the literature. Drawing on these various perspectives, I develop an actionable list of recommendations and “tips” that social researchers can keep in mind when trying to effectively impact public policy conversations. By observing the impact of social research on public policy debates first hand and by asking public sector decision-makers what they would most like to see come out of the academy, I seek to bridge the gap that sometimes exists between complex social research and actionable policy recommendations.