

Writing a research brief

A brief is a basic set of specifications about what a particular research project is hoping to achieve and what questions the research seeks to answer.

Key questions you need to answer before writing a brief

- Who are your internal and external stakeholders? Have you discussed the project needs with the people who will use the findings or be interested in the outcomes? If the project is funded externally, does this funder have specific evaluation criteria?
- Why are you conducting the research? What are you looking to understand? What are you looking for the research to 'do' or achieve? Be as specific about this as you can.
- Who are you looking to understand better? Who do you think you need to speak to answer your research questions?
- How will the findings be used?
- When do you need the findings?
- Are there any key opportunities to collect data that should be noted? E.g. events that bring relevant audiences together
- Have you agreed on a budget? Or a range?

How to structure a briefing document:

- Background Information
 - Your organisation and what you do / stand for
 - A brief summary of the project/activity you wish to evaluate or gather insight in to
 - Details of the activity, product or service where relevant
- Aims and Objectives
 - What is the outcome for the research - e.g. to test a new type of engagement? To understand the views of a new audience? To evaluate the extent to which an activity met its funding conditions?
- Research Question(s)

- These are the questions the research needs to *answer* for your organisation, not the questions that you expect to ask the audience.
- The agency should help formulate these once the project begins, but having a sense of what you want to know is important
- Issues / Risks
 - Are there any audiences that need to be considered (e.g. young or vulnerable audiences)?
 - Is the subject matter sensitive?
 - Does the research need to take place in areas that have access issues (e.g. physical access – a National Park) or in areas that might need safeguarding considerations (e.g. high-crime areas, research at night, etc.)
- Methodology
 - Feel free to ask for suggestions, but if the activity will limit the approach, then this should be mentioned. For instance, an online-only engagement will be difficult to understand fully using face-to-face approaches.
- Timing and Outputs
 - When do you need results by? What is driving this? Would you accept interim findings for that date if taking a bit longer got a better result overall?
 - What type of outputs do you want? A presentation? A report? Or just raw data?
- Staffing (not always relevant)
 - What staffing time, if any, can you provide? What skills do these people have? (e.g. could some volunteers undertake some surveys at events? Does your team specifically want to be involved in co-creation sessions?)
- Stakeholders & Project Management
 - Funders / external stakeholders - what level of input do they want/need?
 - Internal stakeholders - what level of input do they want/need?
 - Project management responsibility
 - Who is going to liaise with any external research agencies?
 - Who is going to manage any volunteers / internal resources?
- Budgets

- What budget is available? And, if it matters, where is this coming from (e.g. evaluation budget within a funded project, or internal department budget)? Does this impact the need for outputs?
- Do we need to factor in costs for incentives?
- Is there room for a stretch budget if significant added value can be demonstrated?

Get in touch with your brief:

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