WRITING RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE THAT MAKE CHANGE

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"The main purpose of research recommendations is to facilitate the transfer of knowledge from researchers to practitioners, policymakers, or other stakeholders who can benefit from the research findings. Recommendations can help bridge the gap between research and practice by providing specific actions that can be taken based on the research results. By providing clear and actionable recommendations, researchers can help ensure that their findings are put into practice." (Hassan, 2022)

OVERVIEW OF WRITING RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Once you have finished your research, and coded and analyzed your data, you are ready to start disseminating your findings. There are many different venues, audiences, and formats to do this, and in each case, you should ask yourself whether the format best fits the venue and the audience.
2. Your research will have both implications and recommendations. These are often thought of as the same thing, but they are not. Implications state why your research findings are meaningful/important and often call attention to unresolved issues or pose new critical questions. Recommendations are distinct calls to action on ways certain things in the field can be sustained or improved upon in the future based on your results.

> **Key Features of Implications:**
> - State the impact your research makes.
> - Helps us understand why your results are important.
> - Must be evidence-based.
> - Written in the discussion, before recommendations.
> - Can be theoretical, practical, or other (social, political, etc.).
>
> **Key Features of Recommendations:**
> - Statements about what can be done differently in the field based on your findings.
> - Must be evidence-based.
> - Must be realistic and specific.
> - Written after implications and before conclusion.

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3. Your recommendations should be as succinct as possible, and start with an action verb (create, establish, fund, facilitate, coordinate, etc.). Consider using a "SMART" format (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely).
4. Your recommendations should be communicated clearly and effectively, using language that is understandable to the target audience.
5. Be careful not to inflate the importance of your findings. Recommendations must be drawn directly from your results. Even if they are not immediately actionable, recommendations should be straightforward, realistic, and plausible.
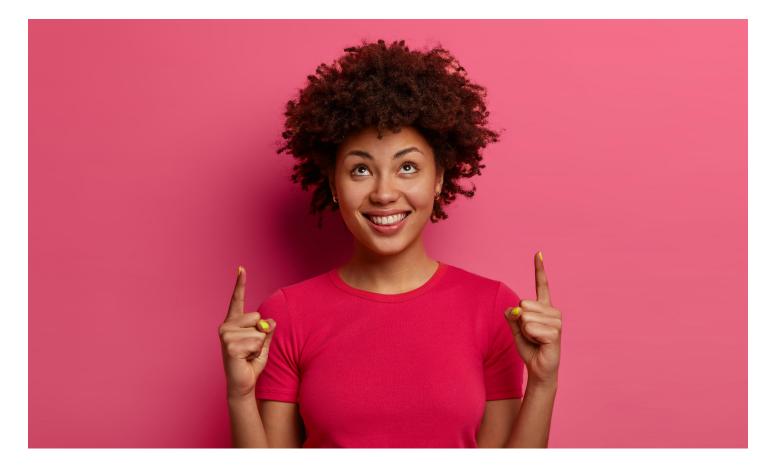
ADVANTAGES OF RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

Research recommendations have several advantages, including:

- **Providing practical guidance:** Research recommendations provide practical guidance on how to apply research findings to real-world problems, helping to bridge the gap between research and practice.
- **Improving decision-making:** Research recommendations help decision-makers make informed decisions based on the findings of research, leading to better outcomes and improved performance.
- **Enhancing accountability:** Research recommendations can help enhance accountability by providing clear guidance on what actions should be taken, and by providing a basis for evaluating progress and outcomes.
- **Informing policy development:** Research recommendations can inform the development of policies that are evidence-based and tailored to the specific needs of a given situation.
- **Enhancing knowledge transfer:** Research recommendations help facilitate the transfer of knowledge from researchers to practitioners, policymakers, or other stakeholders who can benefit from the research findings.
- **Encouraging further research:** Research recommendations can help identify gaps in knowledge and areas for further research, encouraging continued exploration and discovery.
- **Promoting innovation:** Research recommendations can help identify innovative solutions to complex problems, leading to new ideas and approaches.

HOW TO MAKE RECOMMENDATIONS ACTIONABLE: [1]

- The word actionable suggests that your recommendations should be active. Try using language that is active rather than passive. Words such as use, engage, incorporate etc.
- Ensure that you have identified your target audience beforehand. Understanding who your audience is and what their job entails is crucial. What is their sphere of influence and what change can they implement? Tailor your recommendations to different stakeholder groups.
- Be clear about what the current policy/status is that you want to change is, including what you have identified as systemic roots of a problem.
- Set the scene: Identify the shortfalls of the current policy. Where is this policy failing, why and how can your recommendations improve the status quo?
- If you are suggesting change, ask yourself: What specifically needs to be changed? How will this change come about? What resources will be needed? Where will these resources come from? What is the overall benefit to both the policy maker and society in general? If your recommendations include these components, they are much more likely to garner the required change.
- Ask yourself, is my recommendation viable? Does the recommendation seem feasible?
- Make sure your research supports your recommendations. Where you are providing an opinion, not supported by research, make this clear.

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1. Adapted From: How to Write Actionable Policy Recommendations

DIFFERENT WAYS TO ORGANIZE YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **By priority.** What needs to be done ASAP and what can wait? In addition, some recommendations cannot occur until others have been implemented first. For example:

   Provide first year law students from underserved backgrounds and whose college GPA is less than a 3.0 with a suite of additional resources and wraparound supports. For example, students could: 1) take a one-week summer bridge program 2) meet once a month as a cohort; and/or 3) be assigned a dedicated mentor. If these interventions do not result in students receiving passing grades their first semester, they should be offered a free mini course during their second semester that emphasizes writing skills, study skills, critical analysis, and time management.

2. **By stakeholder group.** Cluster recommendations around the stakeholder group that will be most interested/impacted. For example:

   For law school faculty: If you see a first-year student struggling to pass your class, you should immediately recommend them for academic counseling services and follow-up within one week to make sure they made and kept their appointment.

   For student services personnel: Make sure you are up to date on current research and statistics about student achievement for first generation and low-income law students, and that you are utilizing best practices from this literature.

   For students on probation: At the start of the semester, set-up a regular weekly check-in with your professor and academic support services to ensure that you do not fall too far behind to catch up.

3. **Most feasible to least feasible:** Sometimes you have multiple recommendations concerning the same issue. It is ok to list them all, but you need to be clear which one is most likely to succeed and why. For example:

   First year law students identified as "at-risk," should have the opportunity to participate in a free, on-campus summer bridge program. If such a program does not already exist, is too costly to offer for free, or students cannot take time off to travel to the law school over the summer, students should be given an on-line option, given access to OER that could support their academic progress, and/or paired with a second year student from a similar background who can serve as a near-peer mentor.

ONCE YOU HAVE DRAFTED YOUR RECOMMENDATIONS, ASK YOURSELF:

- Do they fill an evidenced-based existing gap or need? Will they remove a critical barrier or accelerate an opportunity to achieve an outcome of interest?
- Are they feasible?
- What is the impact? Might it be misused or generate an unintended consequence?
- Are resources available to implement (individuals, expertise, funding)? If not, how can these resources be obtained?
- Do they require systemic, institutional change or a policy reform? If so, is there political will, or potential opposition to implementing them?
- What is the estimated time to implement the recommendations so that they have the intended impact?

WRITING RECOMMENDATIONS WORKSHEET

Summarize the main findings from your study. What are the implications? Note: Be sure these are evidence-based findings, not conjecture.

Example:

Finding #1	*In an anonymous survey of 200 second year law students of color who are also on probation, 65% stated that the primary reason they were struggling was imposter syndrome and 72% noted that they did not feel a genuine sense of belonging in the law school culture.*
Finding #2	*In an anonymous survey, 85% of low-income students on probation stated that the primary reason was having to work full time while taking courses.*
Finding #3	*In interviews and focus groups with second-year law students of color, most students could identify and give a concrete example of when they felt they were discriminated against by a professor due to their race.*

Finding #1	
Finding #2	
Finding #3	
Finding #4	

List the different stakeholder groups interested in these implications and include a one-sentence description of why next to each stakeholder group.

Example:

Stakeholder Group	Why Interested?
Law Professors	*They want all students to excel academically, care about issues of educational equity, and are bound by non-discrimination laws.*
Law School Students of Color on Probation	*They are seeking support systems and resources that will improve their academic performance and feelings of belonging and inclusion.*
Low-income Law School Students on Probation	*They are actively seeking support systems and resources that will allow them to reduce the number of hours they have to do paid work and will be better able to concentrate more on their academic work.*
Financial Aid Personnel	*They need to know whether available financial aid packages and student stipends are enough for students who come from low-income backgrounds.*

Stakeholder Group	Why Interested?

What are some actionable recommendations you might include in reports and presentations on your research? Remember to use active language. Next to each recommendation list the stakeholder group(s) that would play a role in implementing each recommendation.

Example:

Recommendation	Stakeholder Group(s) Needed to Implement
Create a (voluntary) cohort model for first year law students of color to increase feelings of support, inclusion, and community.	*Law School Admissions Staff* *Law School Professors* *Incoming Students*
Require professors to attend mandatory trainings on racial discrimination and implicit bias.	*Law School DEI Staff* *Law School Deans* *Law School Faculty*
Increase yearly stipends for incoming students who make less than $# a year.	*Law School Deans* *Budget and Financial Aid Staff* *Law School Admissions Staff* *Prospective Students*

Recommendation	Stakeholder Group(s) Needed to Implement

Synthesize the previous three charts to practice writing your recommendations here: