How to Identify and Develop Practice Briefs

About This Tool

Purpose: To provide a “how to” document for identifying and authoring practice briefs that can be used to support practitioners and researchers in their educational improvement activities.

Audience: Members of a partnership responsible for authoring and/or editing resource collections related to the work.

When to Use: When a partnership is developing insights and approaches that are ready to be more broadly shared with educational practitioners.

What Is a Practice Brief?

A “practice brief” is a short document designed to support educators with research-based information as they improve their practice and work to give all students access to meaningful learning experiences.

With that goal in mind, each brief should:

- Integrate a focus on equity throughout each tool
- Focus on a specific, broadly felt problem of educational practice
- Gather the best knowledge from both research and practice to help readers more fully understand each issue

- Highlight what people in different roles can do to address this problem of practice, providing context, actionable advice, strategies, and tools, all of which should connect to educators’ everyday work
- Suggest ways to take action with respect to the problem of practice by linking off to other tools, articles, websites, and resources
- Prompt further reflection and support discussion among colleagues

Who Uses Practice Briefs?

Practice briefs are designed to meet a variety of needs in education. While several of their uses are detailed below, we also encourage users to employ them creatively in ways that fit their goals and context.

- Individuals can use briefs to reflect on and refine their practice. Briefs can help educators align their teaching with the latest knowledge from both research and practice and make their instruction more equitable.
- Professional development sessions, professional learning communities, and project meetings can use practice briefs to spark conversation and brainstorm about a particular topic or to focus discussion and promote a shared understanding.
Part 1: How to Launch a Brief Development Initiative

Step 1: Learn About Why a Brief Development Initiative is a Useful Partnership Activity

Research-practice partnerships investigate and work on problems of practice that impact teaching and learning in educational settings. These partnerships can develop useful insights and tools based on close collaboration between researchers and practitioners.

Academic papers may not be the most straightforward way for busy educators to find or process information. Practice briefs allow research-practice partnerships to share research-based knowledge from their work quickly and straightforwardly with educators who can readily use the information to inform their practice.

For example, read more about the impetus for the STEM Teaching Tools practice brief initiative, a project of the Research + Practice Collaboratory.

Step 2: Identify the Audience, Purpose, and Structure for the Practice Briefs

Identify the desired communication initiatives for the partnership. Briefs about research and practice have been shown to be useful resources for educational improvement projects. Practice briefs—of the kind discussed here—frame a problem of practice, identify relevant ideas and resources, and prompt practitioner reflection. Research briefs, on the other hand, synthesize existing research around topics and problems of practice in order to highlight known problems or findings that can inform progress.

For a particular practice brief project, formally identify your audience, purpose, and scope. A brief creation project often emerges out of a long-term relationship between researchers and practitioners. This relationship could take the form of a university-district partnership, a collaboration between researchers and educator professional associations, or inquiry group meetings on topics that bring researchers and practitioners together. Importantly, this foundation can help participants better imagine or envision their audience—as researchers already have had close, frequent interactions with practitioners. This preexisting relationship can also help a practice brief creation project identify potential authors from a variety of backgrounds, both in research and practice.

Once audience, purpose, and scope have been identified, develop a desired structure and template for the briefs. Again, if a practice brief creation grows out of a preexisting research-practice partnership, participants are likely to be better-equipped to identify what categories of information practitioners need and what type of knowledge researchers and practitioners will be able to provide.

Step 3: Get Feedback from Stakeholders on the Approach

Develop a sample practice brief using the template created in Step 2. Put it through an iterative pilot testing process to “tune” the approach to the needs of all of the intended audiences.

Step 4: Identify an Editorial and Production Team

Develop the authoring, editorial, and production strategy for your initiative. Your editorial team should be a small group of both practitioners and researchers to be involved in the editing process of every brief. This
consistent editorial voice helps keep the tone and style of the briefs uniform across the collection.

The authors of your briefs should involve a variety of diverse voices from both research and practice. This group should be involved in identifying brief topics and in the writing of the briefs.

A production team should develop a structured template for the layout of the briefs. A similar design approach to all briefs allows readers to more easily navigate and use the collection over time.

**Part 2: How to Author a New Practice Brief**

**Step 1: Identify a Problem of Educational Practice to Focus On**

The goal with each brief is to develop a resource that will support educational progress around broadly felt problems of educational practice. The identified problem or topic should be grounded in the needs of practitioners (classroom teachers, informal educators, district staff, etc.)—and not in what researchers simply believe to be relevant to practitioners.

The selected focus for the brief should also fit coherently into the broader collection of resources being developed. This helps ensure that the brief collection can serve as an ongoing learning resource in support of deeper learning and capacity building (e.g., by having individuals read a sequence of briefs).

Consider the scope of a particular brief carefully. Can it be adequately covered in the space laid out in your brief template? If not, you may consider breaking it up into smaller topics. However, you may elect to not feel completely bound by your template either; if a brief would be more helpful to your readers if you expanded the word count or change the template, you might elect to alter it or develop a non-standard brief.

**Step 2: Researchers and Practitioners Co-Author an Initial Draft**

Practice briefs are intentionally designed to include the most relevant knowledge from both research and practice in ways that illuminate and resource progress on the identified problem of practice. The best strategy to ensure this is for the briefs to be co-authored by
Step 3: Review and Refine the Draft Through Internal and External Review

The editor/editorial team of the collection should deeply review and revise the brief in order for it to be further focused, elaborated, edited down, articulated with other briefs, and aligned to broader educational vision documents as appropriate (e.g., *The Framework for K-12 Science Education*). (For more on creating an editorial team, see Part 1, Step 4, above.)

If the editor is a researcher, a review pass should then be made by a practitioner to weed out unnecessary technical terms and to focus the language used on terms of practice. Technical academic language should be used strategically, as absolutely necessary. The revised brief is then sent out for external review by researchers and practitioners with relevant expertise. They are asked to suggest refinements to the texts and tools referenced in the brief. The editor incorporates the reviewer feedback and produces an updated brief draft. This includes identifying the full set of potential images and external resources that are to be linked to. The document is then proofread for grammar and style.

Finally, the original authors are provided with the opportunity to refine the penultimate draft of the brief. The editor takes their suggested final edits and produces the final brief to the published.

Step 4: Polish, Publish, and Promote the Brief

The final production design work is completed for the brief—layout, linking, imagery, etc. A single brief might be represented in both web and standalone document forms—depending on the approach.

The brief is published in relevant outlets, probably including social media, in ways that fit the resource distribution strategy. Establishing partnerships with professional associations that serve practitioners is a very productive way to disseminate the practice briefs. Developing a systematic social media strategy is also a worthwhile investment of time and effort as a way to connect directly with practitioners.
This template is based on an existing Research+Practice Collaboratory brief collection called STEM Teaching Tools. Template features may be more or less appropriate, depending on the specific strategy being employed.

**Part 3: Sample Practice Brief Template**

**Why it Matters to You?**

**Rationale for how/why the issue is important for different stakeholders in education**

**What is the Issue?**

Concise title and description of the problem of practice, topic, or issue

**Reflection Questions:**

Prompts or quotes related to the topic that support educator reflection and discussion about their practice

**Things to Consider:**

Knowledge from research and practice about the topic/issue, highlighting what educators need to know

**Specific Guidance:**

Explicit steps that educators can take, and tools to support relevant work

**Equity:**

Highlight the equity dimensions of the topic explicitly in every brief

**Links to Related Resources:**

Other related resources in the practice brief collection