**Issues Brief Template**

When an issue or problem arises that has impacts outside of an individual unit or manager’s control, writing a briefing paper serves several purposes. The process of writing a paper forces clarity to the issue and the impacts, allows for explanation of competing viewpoints, and provides a basis for raising the issue for decision or discussion.

Following is a general structure to use when raising issues. While any particular format is necessarily limiting in its rigor, having a consistent presentation is beneficial when there are many issues to deal with. Each segment of the general structure includes strategic questions to guide the writer through a thought process. Not all questions will be applicable or appropriate for every situation and there may be additional questions to consider that are not listed below.

The most critical elements of the structure are clarity, conciseness, and the complete description of all sides of the issue. Constructing an argument to move in any one direction is relatively simple if potential concerns or opposition are glossed over (or not even recognized). If options are presented, they should provide a balanced (with all other options) description of the impacts. In other words, a briefing paper should be used only partially to make a particular case; the broader purpose should be to inform a discussion of an issue and its impacts.

**Structure**

**Issue Statement**
- What problem/issue needs to be resolved?
- If the remainder of the paper is extensive, an Executive Summary should be included

**Discussion/Background**
- Why does the issue exist/how did the issue originate?
- What is the situation that causes it to surface or be elevated now?
- What are the impacts of the issue?
- Who is impacted by it?
- What is the statewide significance?
- What are the arguments in support of and in opposition to potential resolutions?
- What work has been undertaken around the issue and what are the results?
- What constraints exist that limit the range of alternatives to addressing the issue?
- What are the risks or ramifications of not resolving the issue?
- What references exist to inform this issue (i.e. Op Notice, policy, manual, etc.)

**Options and/or Recommendations (typically, choose one)**
- What are the proposed options?
  - How do the options address the issue?
  - What are the opposing arguments (whether they’ve been made or could be made)
  - Financial implications?
  - Precedent implications?
  - Political implications?
- What is the proposed approach to developing options or recommendation?
- Should a sub-team be developed to explore options and/or develop a recommendation for resolution?
- Should the issue be delegated or elevated to another leadership team?
- Other method/approach to develop options or a recommendation?

- **What is the proposed recommendation or solution?**
  - How does the proposed recommendation resolve the issue?
  - What are the benefits?
  - What are the risks?
  - What are the opposing arguments (whether they’ve been made or could be made)
  - Financial implications?
  - Precedent implications?
  - Political implications?

**Implementation**
- How will the solution be implemented?
- Who will implement?
- What are the key steps or deliverables involved?
- What are the timeframes for implementation?
- What does “success” look like?
- How will the recommendation be documented? (i.e. Op Notice, manual changes, policy changes, etc.)

**Communication**
- Who needs to approve?
- Who needs to know?
- How will the recommendation be communicated? Is a communication plan needed?