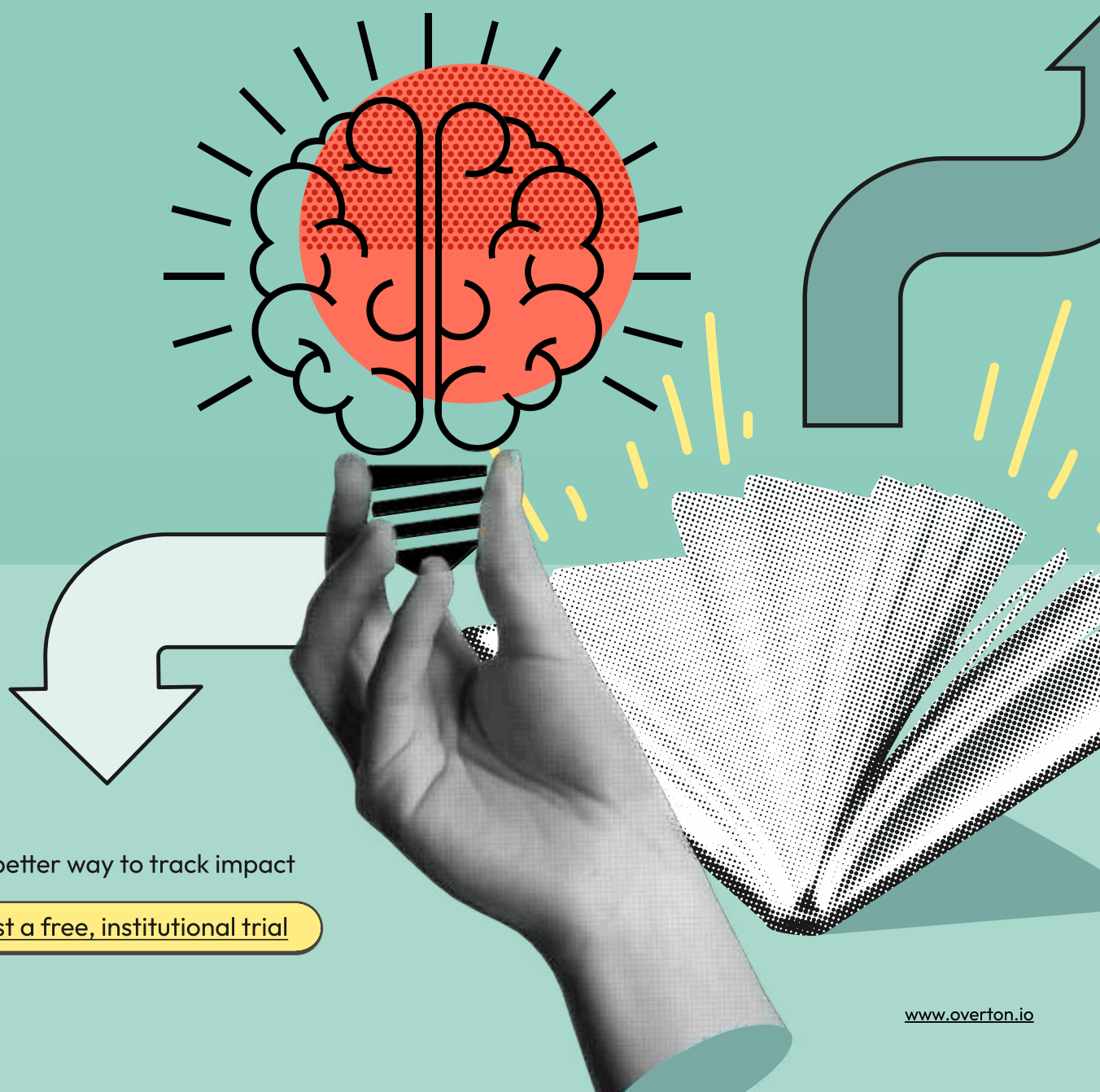


# Empowering academic leaders to tell compelling stories of **policy impact**

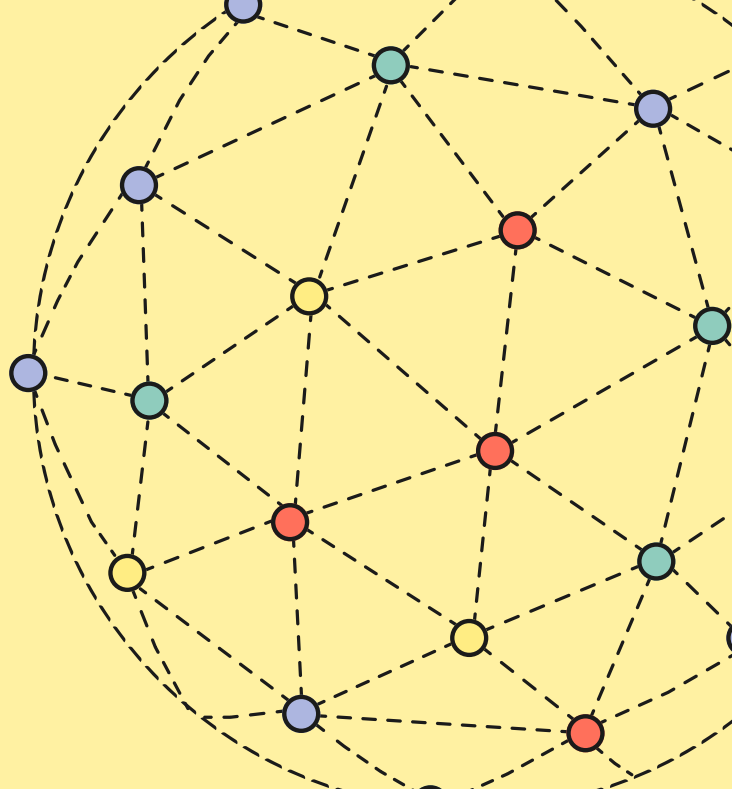
Tools and techniques to help you build powerful  
research impact narratives to boost reputation  
and secure funding.



Find a better way to track impact

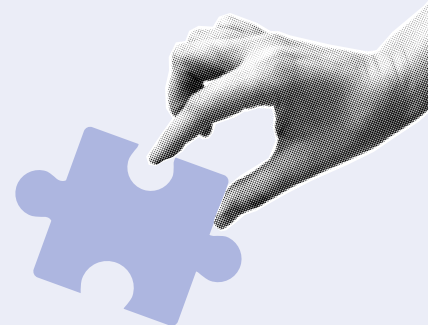
[Request a free, institutional trial](#)

# Why policy impact matters in modern higher education



## The changing landscape of accountability

In today's competitive higher education environment, universities face unprecedented pressure to demonstrate their value beyond traditional metrics. Funders, assessment bodies and - of course - the public increasingly demand evidence of societal contribution and real-world relevance. This shift reflects a fundamental change in how society views the role of universities - not merely as producers of knowledge, but active contributors to solving global challenges.



## The strategic importance of impact reporting

### Reputation and credibility

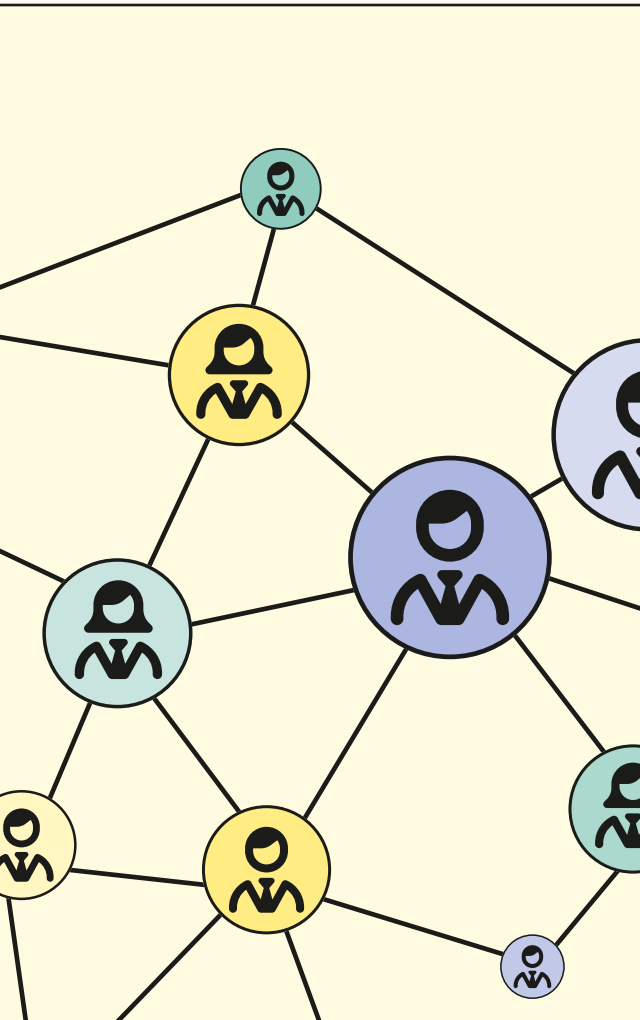
Demonstrating how policy stakeholders consume your research can help your university brand. Strong impact narratives and credible data can help improve your global rankings, build public trust and enhance reputation, enabling you to attract the best faculty, students, partners and investment.

### Financial stability

Well-evidenced impact stories are critical for supporting your claims of societal relevance and influence in grant applications, as well as supporting alumni engagement and major gift cultivation, and corporate partnerships and industry collaboration.

### Strategic positioning

Tracking and reporting on your institution's policy influence enables you to identify and enhance your institutional strengths and gain insights into what kind of research is cutting through to policy, helping you to inform future research strategies. You can leverage the data to influence key policymakers and build on successful external partnerships.

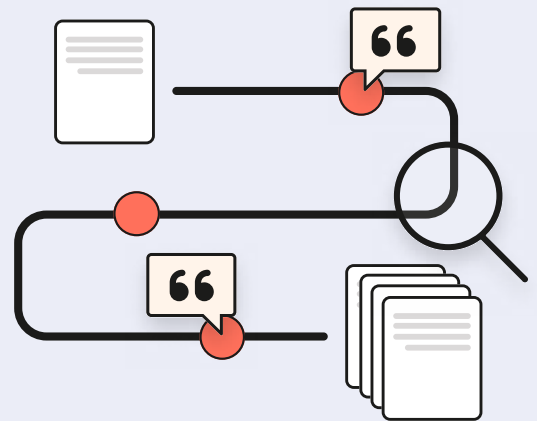


# The power of policy citation data

Policy influence is a powerful demonstration of research relevance, and so policy citations make for compelling evidence of societal engagement for external audiences.

Demonstrating how your scholarly outputs have influenced policy or resonated with policymakers shows that your work addresses pressing real-world challenges, translates academic insights into actionable solutions, and is influential and relevant enough to shape decision-making across local, national and international spheres.

At Overton we help research organizations quantify and map the visibility of their scholarly works in policy, and gain insight into the research that is informing policy worldwide. Using policy citation data to evidence the reach of your research can help your institution differentiate itself from competitors, while analysis of said influence can support efforts to further policy engagement, visibility and impact.



**37** out of **50**

state governments have a local university as their top source of research cited in policy

**42** out of **50**

state governments have a local university in their top 3 sources of research cited in policy

**29** out of **40**

large cities in the US have a local university in their top 3 sources of research cited in policy

## State and local level

US State and municipal governments tend to prefer research and expertise from local institutions: our analyses show that three quarters of states and large cities in the US cite more research from their local university than from any other single institution. By looking at documents collected at the city as well as the state level, Overton users can pinpoint and showcase where their research is being translated into local problem solving or otherwise benefiting their local community.

## Federal level

Research informs national policy by helping policymakers understand and navigate complex issues. Academic research is used and cited by the federal government directly, but often reaches it via knowledge brokers like think tanks, NGOs or charities. These organizations take academic research and translate it into briefs and reports more suited to a policymaker audience. By mapping out this entire process, Overton users are able to see where their work influences national legislation and guidelines both directly and indirectly.

## International reach

Overton Index highlights the United States' status as a research superpower, gathering evidence as to how its research outputs influence policy internationally. Governments and national bodies worldwide, as well as IGOs (like the United Nations or the World Bank), regularly turn to R1 universities when developing policy. Overton users can also identify where their work has been used to create policy related to international frameworks like the Sustainable Development Goals.

**“In mid-career, you want to have a national presence. But to be a full professor, you want an international reach where people around the world know your work and ask you for help. Overton helps with making your profile rise.”**

David Flynn,  
Senior Research Librarian,  
Boston University



# Definition of research impact

Multiple definitions of research impact coexist in the US academic landscape. Some of the most prominent come from US funding bodies:

According to the [National Institutes of Health](#) it is "the likelihood that the project will exert a powerful influence on its field" or "the likelihood for the project to exert a sustained, powerful influence on the research field(s) involved."

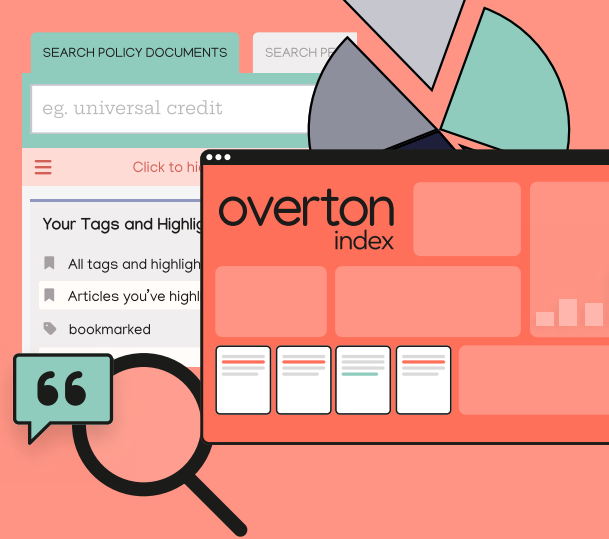
The [National Science Foundation](#) (NSF) focuses on how research benefits society beyond just advancing science. NSF expects all funded research to have "broader impacts" which can happen through the research itself, through activities directly related to the research project, or through complementary activities that are supported by the research.

Even though they have a subtly different definition, they tend to converge around a core concept, which is the demonstrable beneficial change that occurs in the real world as a result of academic research.

More and more universities actively engage efforts to demonstrate different types of research impact, and namely their:

-  Economic impact
-  Health and medical impact
-  Policy impact
-  Educational and workforce impact
-  Social and cultural impact
-  Environmental and sustainability impact
-  Technology and innovation impact
-  National security impact
-  Public engagement and scientific literacy
-  Capacity or preparedness

Impact subtypes initially defined by Mark Reed



## overton index

Overton Index is the world's most comprehensive full text policy document database, tracking over 23 million public policy documents from national, state and city governments, think tanks, NGOs and IGOs worldwide. It helps universities identify and track policy citations of their research, demonstrating how their scholarship influences real-world policy decisions and creates tangible societal impact.

**Our mission:** Bridge the gap between research and policy, empowering academic leaders to discover, quantify and communicate their institution's real-world contributions.

## 2.1 million

US researchers cited in policy

## 146,700

US researchers mentioned in policy

## 19,700

US research organizations  
referenced in policy

## 2.3 million

articles from US authors cited in  
policy



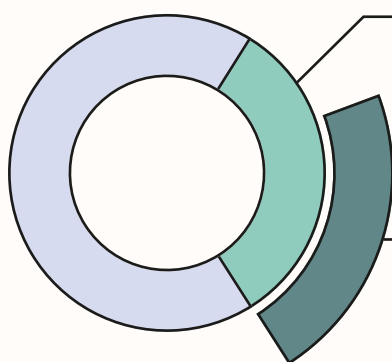
# The research-policy landscape in the USA



## Dominance of US research in policy: insights from Overton

Though less than 6% of peer reviewed research is cited in policy, US research dominates global policy citations.

Overton currently identifies nearly 7.2 million scholarly outputs cited in 3.1 million policy documents globally. Of these, 2.3 million are to research produced in the US.



32% of all policy-cited research outputs were produced by US researchers

Of these, 71.5% got cited by more than 1 policy document

# 1 million

Policy documents that have cited US research

# 261,300

Policy documents that have mentioned US researchers

# 2,475

Policy sources that have cited US research

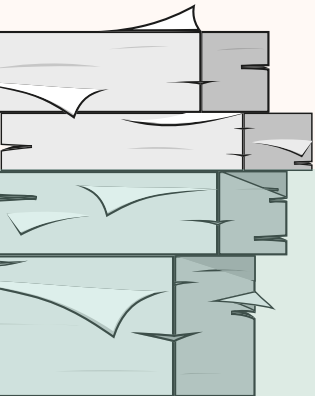
# 181

Countries that have cited US research

# Deep dive into the data

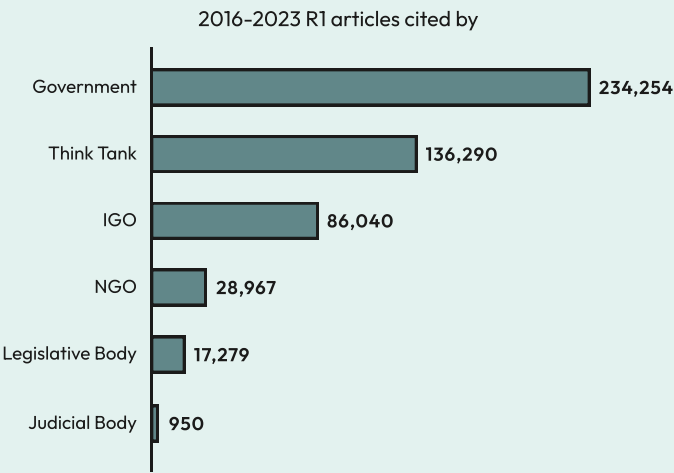
Let's dig into a smaller subset of these results. If we look at data from R1 institutions across a recent period (2016-23):

More than 361K scholarly works with at least one author affiliated with a R1 university and published in this 8 year publication period got cited in policy.



Amongst this set of R1 scholarly works, **65.5%** of these articles are cited more than once in policy.

## What types of organizations cite this research?



## Who cites the most US research?

Though Overton indexes far more policy documents from federal and state governments, entities like think tanks, NGOs and legislative bodies tend to cite research more frequently.

### Legislative bodies:

- US Government Accountability Office
- Congressional Research Service
- Senate Committees
- Legislative Analyst's Office
- American Legislative Exchange Council
- Minnesota House Research Department

### NGOs:

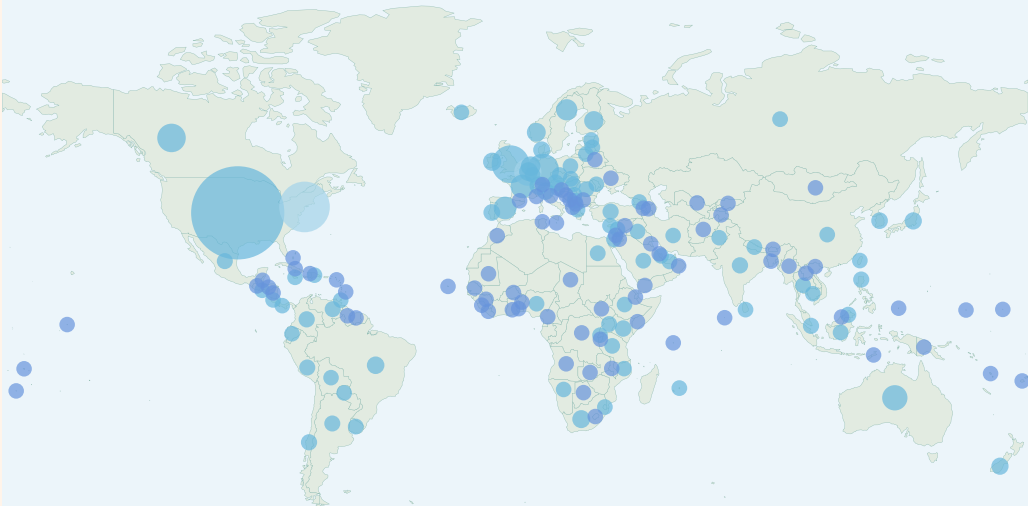
- Mathematica
- Health Affairs
- National Academy of Medicine
- ACLU
- Union of Concerned Scientists

### Think tanks:

- NBER
- RAND Corporation
- Brookings Institution
- Urban Institute
- IFRI

## Where is this research used?

These R1 2016-2023 publications got cited in 170 countries and 2,244 policy sources (data is updated weekly).



# Effective policy impact reporting



Effective impact reporting relies on storytelling. You can package this story into external reports or research marketing to build reputation. You can also use it as part of your internal assessments or in reporting to funders or other stakeholders.

High-level figures form part of this story, as does context-driven narrative. Overton helps you do both quantitative and qualitative analyses of your policy influence, providing concrete and shareable data.

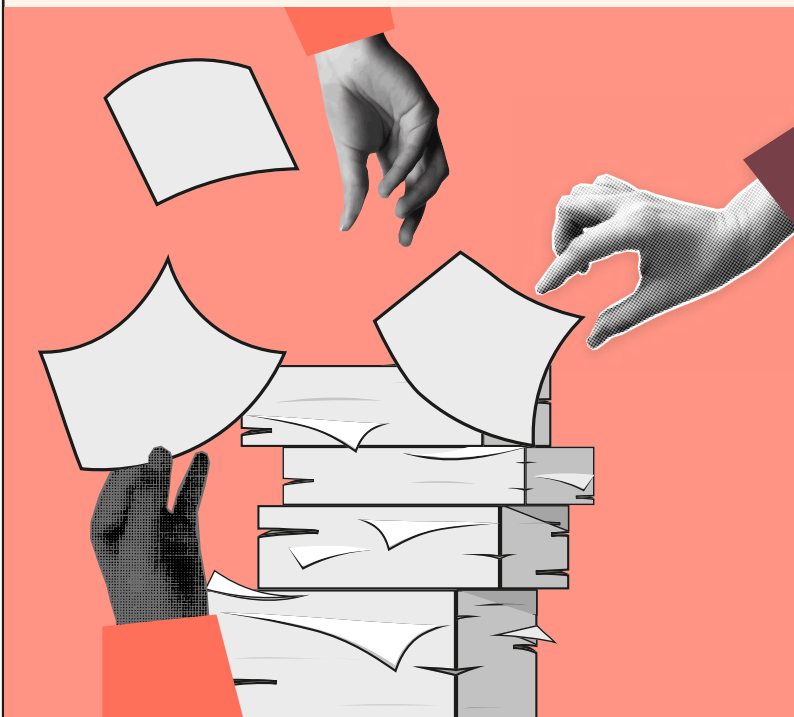
Lots of US institutions use Overton to develop [impact reports](#). Here, we'll set out how you can create the most powerful impact stories, and how Overton supports this.

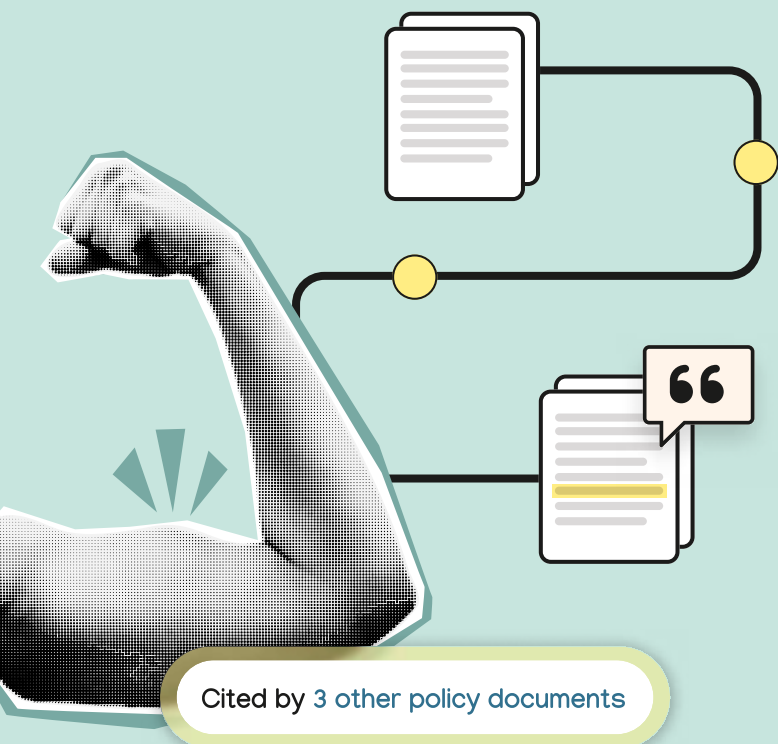
## What data do you need?

- **Policy citations** and mentions of your research
- **Geographic reach** of your research in global policy
- **Connection to policy priorities** (SDGs, prominent issues at local/national level)
- **Detailed citation context** so you can understand how your research is used
- **Detail of citing organizations** (federal/state government, NGOs, think tanks) to show the diversity of your reach
- **Citation networks** so you can track your scholarly ideas through the policy ecosystem

## What are you trying to demonstrate in your impact reports?

- **Reach:**  
Who is engaging with and using your research?
- **Relevance:**  
How does your research address societal challenges?
- **Significance:**  
What real-world changes has your research influenced?





## What Overton reveals: using the data effectively

### Top level statistics:

Generate headline figures – “X articles cited by Y policy organizations across Z countries” – that provide credibility and scope.

### Institutional strengths:

Identify and showcase areas where your research is highly influential, by analyzing which research topics generate the most policy engagement (supporting both research marketing and strategic planning).

### Impact narratives:

Build compelling stories that trace research from publication to policy engagement, and highlight the societal benefits.

### Celebrate faculty achievements:

Spotlight your most cited researchers or articles and demonstrate the excellence of your faculty.

## How to create a compelling story (and what not to do)

 Key elements of a strong impact narrative:

### Provide evidence of the research connection:

Clearly link the academic work to policy use via citations or mentions.

### Give context:

Clearly explain how your work has contributed to a change or decision.

### Demonstrate societal benefit:

Connect your policy citation to priority areas, like SDGs.

 And one common pitfall to avoid:

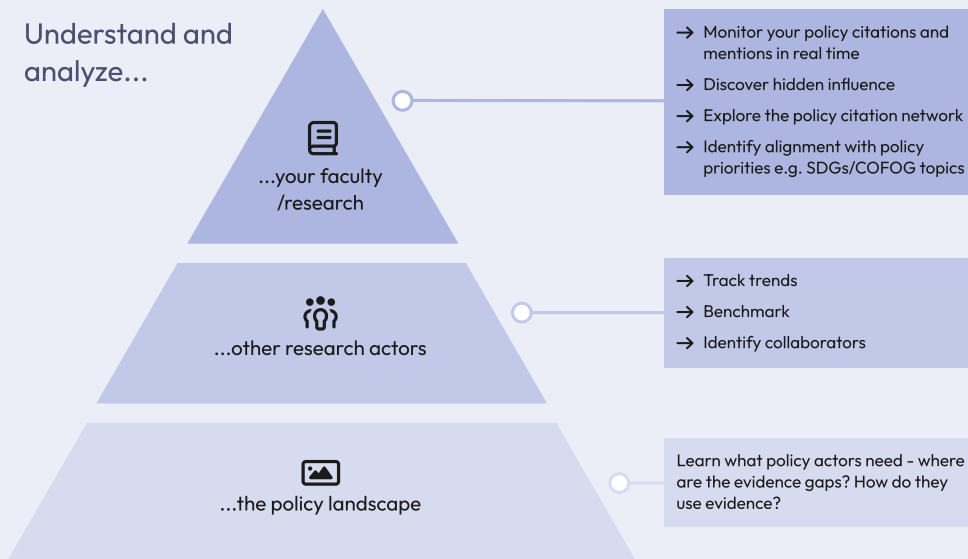
### Over-claiming impact:

Understand what the citation is telling you, and understand that not every reference in policy will be ‘positive impact’. You should also consider the limitations and the scope of the data to avoid making over-blown statements!



# How Overton helps you create powerful impact stories

## Understand and analyze...



How does this help you?

Build your reputation and maximize positive outcomes

Plan, anticipate and grow your influence in policy

Overton is designed so you can track and evidence institutional influence in policy for use in impact reporting or research marketing.

But monitoring past influence is merely the first step to creating powerful impact resources to build credibility and reputation. Overton also helps you analyze and strategize in order to understand and grow your policy influence.

Undertaking these analytical steps helps you level up impact monitoring into something more active. From internal monitoring to competitive intelligence to policy monitoring – Overton helps you go from impact tracking to impact growth. Learn how Overton helps you do everything from citation network analysis to responsible benchmarking, and how you can use this for institutional benefit.



Your faculty/research

## Real time monitoring of policy citations/ mentions

Overton systematically and automatically tracks references to your scholarly works and faculty in policy documents, eliminating manual searches. Save your queries and set up email alerts for new mentions. Extract data continuously or pull months or years of influence data at once for any reporting cycle.

## Discover hidden influence

Overton's extensive and comprehensive coverage reveals citations from sources you weren't aware of – influence you would miss through manual search. Our full text indexing of all documents also enables you to find references to faculty and research without needing a direct citation.

## Explore the policy citation network

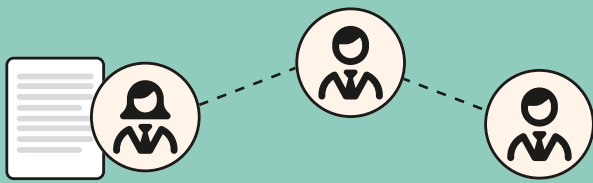
High-level policy documents rarely cite scholarly work directly. Instead, knowledge brokers like think tanks repackage and synthesize research into digestible messages with clear recommendations for policymakers. Overton's tracking of 'policy to policy citations' reveals this crucial translation step, mapping how ideas propagate through the policymaking network.

## Identify alignment with policy priorities e.g. SDGs, COFOG topics

Overton's extensive filters allow you to analyze the specifics of your faculty's contributions and impact. You can assess influence by geography (local, national or international), organization type (such as federal government), contribution to UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and alignment with priority government topics through our Classification of Functions of Government (COFOG) filter.







 Other research actors

## Track trends

You can track your institutional influence over time and analyze policy landscape trends. For example, monitor the volume of policy publications on specific topics to gauge growing or declining interest. Track scholarly citation increases to identify organizations with growing interest in academic evidence and find potential stakeholders for your work.

## Benchmark

Overton allows you to create custom comparisons at school, institution or country levels to understand how you perform relative to similar research in a specific policy domain. Use this data to identify your strengths and to inform your research strategy – identifying opportunities for growth and monitoring progress and trends.

## Identify Collaborators

Use Overton's data to build strategic partnerships across academia, government, industry and NGOs. By analyzing your cited research, you can map co-authorship networks around your most-cited publications and identify influential collaborators (including knowledge brokers skilled at engaging policymakers) to amplify your research's reach.

 The policy landscape

## Understand the policy landscape

Overton helps align research with policy by identifying which research programs currently influence policy decisions. Analyze these programs' characteristics to strengthen your research proposals and develop targeted outreach. Overton's AI generated document overviews help you quickly understand what a document is about, so you can create clusters of policy documents relevant to your research priorities, then examine their stakeholders and influence patterns for strategic insights.



 How does this help you?

## Build reputation and maximize positive outcomes

**Outcomes:** Overton connects your research publications to policy documents, demonstrating how your academic work creates real-world impact and societal benefits. This connection builds public trust and helps you tell compelling impact stories that showcase research excellence. Use these stories to attract top faculty, engage alumni and demonstrate value to donors and funders.

## Plan and anticipate for the future

**Outcomes:** Using Overton data to understand policy dynamics will help you grow your policy influence, by improving the effectiveness of your research strategy and communicating your institutional performance. You can use Overton's insights to design targeted communication strategies to share key breakthroughs with relevant policy organizations, and actively engage with policy groups in your research areas.



Find a better way to track impact

[Request a free, institutional trial](#)

# Detailed walkthrough of impact tracking in Overton

Read a step by step outline of impact tracking in Overton using the University of Washington as a use case.

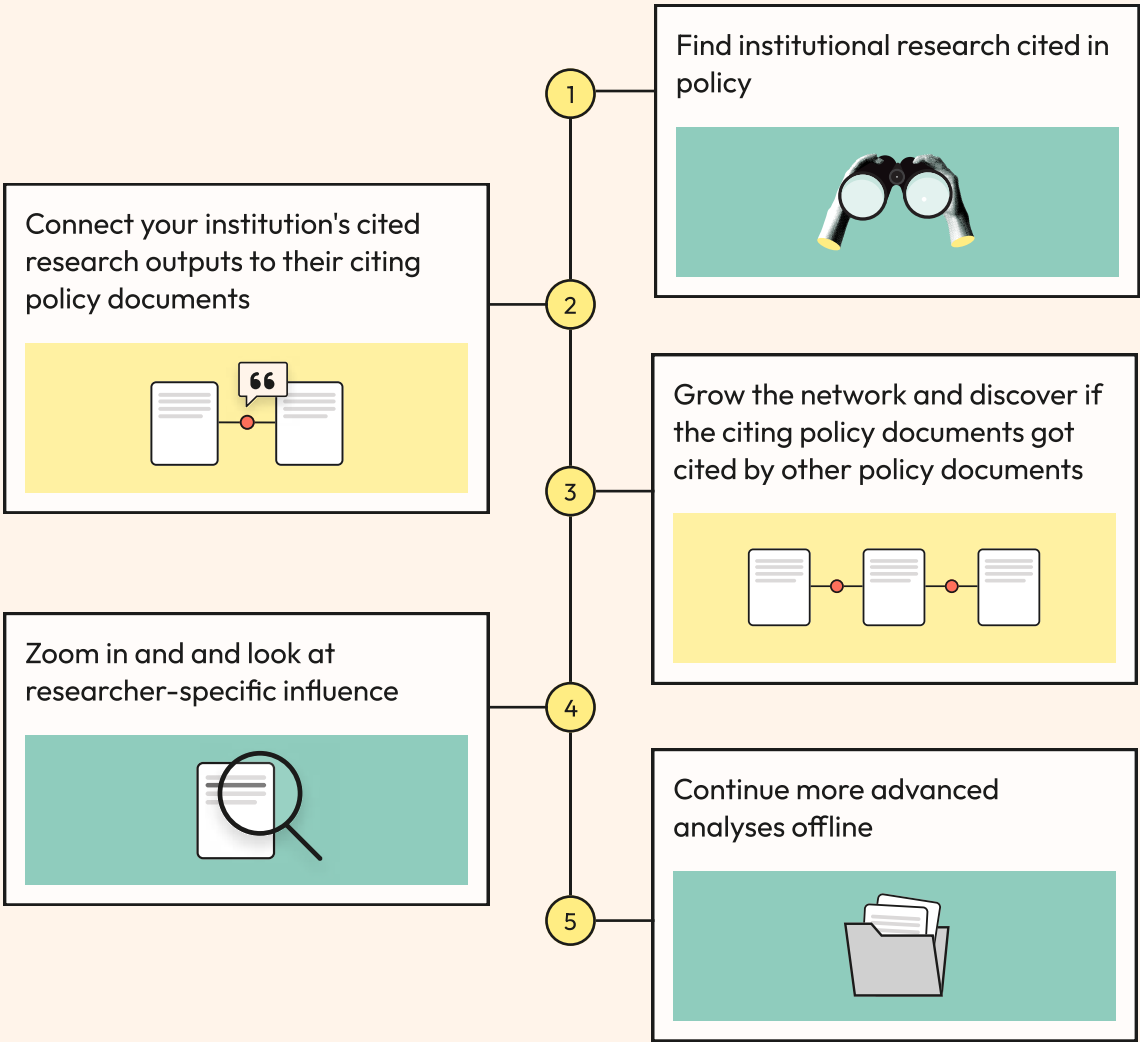
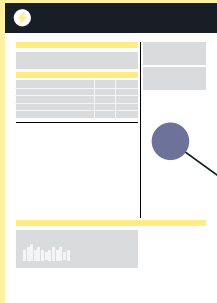
Using Overton data, we show how the University of Washington can demonstrate the breadth of their policy influence. We found over 16,800 of their scholarly works from 2016-2023 cited in policy, with 61.5% of these works being cited multiple times.

You'll learn how the Overton platform allows you to review, sort and visualize your research that's cited in policy before getting a quick list of your most highly cited articles.

Then we'll show you how to connect your cited research outputs to the citing policy documents before diving into the characteristics of these documents to understand how they contribute to priority areas like SDGs.

You'll also learn how to analyze the policy citation network to learn more about onwards citations and further impact.

Search



# Using Overton across the institution

Overton has many use cases beyond creating impact reports

## Pre- and post- award grant management

Use Overton to quickly find policy citations that show the influence and relevance of existing institutional research, to support claims of impact in new proposals. Meanwhile, continuously and systematically track policy citations from the beginning of the research lifecycle to simplify funder reporting.

## Tenure applications

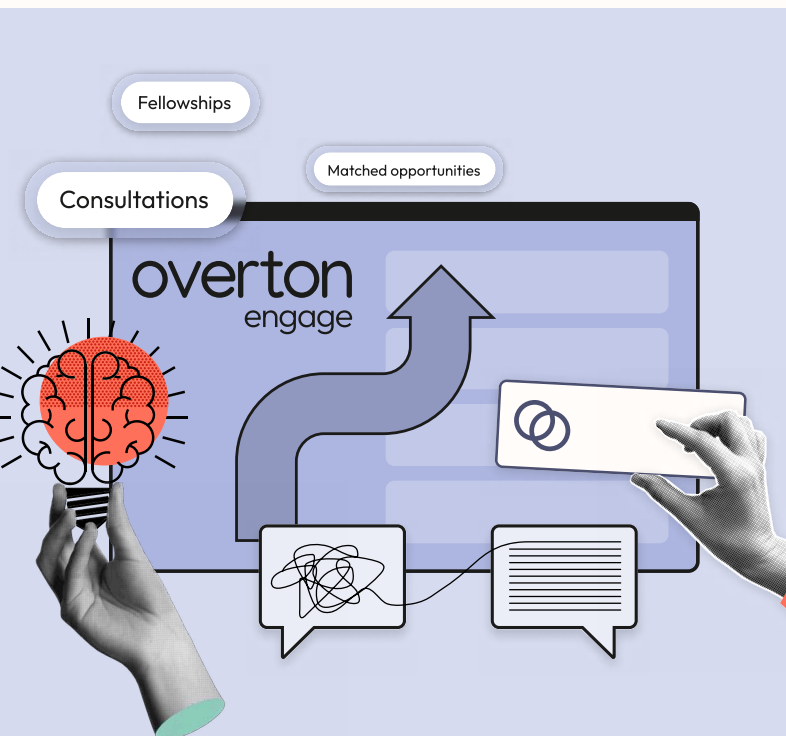
Overton's impact tracking can help your faculty demonstrate their unique strengths for use in performance appraisals and tenure applications.

## Research tool

Your faculty can use Overton as a discovery database for uncovering grey literature (and the research they cited) in public, social, domestic or formal policy areas. It's also used as a tool for bibliometric analyses and systematic reviews!

## Overton Engage

Overton Engage is a database of policy engagement opportunities. Subscribers to Overton Index can access the free version of Engage and find policy opportunities worldwide. A paid subscription to both unlocks premium Engage features like 'researcher matching' in which we suggest suitable faculty for each opportunity.



## Coverage and limitations

Overton Index tracks over 23 million policy documents from more than 2700 policy sources worldwide, making it the most comprehensive collection of public policy documents and grey literature. While we aim for global coverage and to minimize geographical and language bias, our scope is limited to documents published online. This creates an inherent geographical bias toward digitally advanced, knowledge economies.

Unlike scholarly papers, policy documents lack standardized citation formats and often omit formal bibliographies. To capture references wherever they appear, Overton casts a wide net and adjusts detection thresholds to balance precision (accuracy of matches) with recall (completeness of detection). We prioritize accuracy over completeness, preferring to miss some references rather than incorrectly identify them.

## Using Overton's data responsibly

Policy citations show how often scholarly research is recognized and referenced in policy contexts, which is one indicator of research impact. However, 'impact' is an elusive concept that can rarely be captured by quantitative metrics alone. At Overton, we view research-policy indicators as useful tools that require careful interpretation. Our platform acts as a spotlight, illuminating research dynamics, supporting expert judgment, and strengthening evidence-based narratives.

We're committed to transparency with the scholarly community. Logged-in users can access our data notes, which detail potential limitations and biases in our analysis.

Overton is a signatory of the San Francisco Declaration of Research Assessment (DORA) and commits to operate within the framework it outlines.

# Ready to get started?

[Request a free, institutional trial](#)

