

# The Findings Brief — Worked Example and Template

**In plain language:** a findings brief tells a busy leader what to decide, what we found, how we know, and what we recommend — on one page, in that order.

[Here is the one-page brief from the course, with its six moves marked, and a blank template with the same five sections to write your own.](#)

The brief below is what a WOSC analyst would hand a program director about the finding the room ranked first. Every fact in it comes from the case materials we worked with; the quote is one applicant's real words from the feedback we read. The notes after each paragraph mark the moves this genre depends on. Read the brief first, straight through, the way a director would. Then read the notes.

## The Brief — One Page

**TO:** Program Director, Credentialing Services

**FROM:** CFST Program Analysis Team

**RE:** Hours verification — the unreachable signatory

**DATE:** June 2026 · One page

**The decision.** We are asking you to decide whether WOSC will scope an alternative way for applicants to prove supervised hours when the original signatory cannot be reached.

**Where this sits in our findings.** Of the four findings from this year's feedback analysis, we ranked this one first. On impact and feasibility alone it ranks last — the fix is a policy pathway, not a quick win. But it is the only finding that excludes qualified people from the credential entirely rather than making it harder, and the state's equity principles direct us to weigh complete exclusion above widespread inconvenience.

**What we found.** Some applicants cannot complete their application because the person who must sign their hours verification — a former employer — has died, retired, closed the business, paid in cash, or refuses contact. For these applicants the barrier is not the form; it is the signatory. There is currently no other way to prove the hours, so these applications stall indefinitely. One applicant told us: *"I don't know how to get a dead man to sign a form and nobody at WOSC will tell me either."*

The barrier is structural, not a trait of any group. Applicants in the same situation who could still reach a cooperative former employer cleared the requirement in days. What separates a stalled application from a smooth one is whether a cooperating former employer still exists — a circumstance no applicant controls. Sole proprietors are simply more likely to be in it.

**How we know, and what we don't.** Nine of the fifteen sole-proprietor first-time applicants in this year's feedback described this mechanism, in the same structure every time; a community organization independently reported the same pattern for the workers it serves. We tested against held-back cases; this method tells us how it fails people, not how many. We cannot say how many of our 1,203 first-time applicants are affected — and we heard nothing from people who looked at the requirement and never applied. A targeted follow-up design is attached.

**What we recommend.** Direct policy staff to scope alternative attestation options (for example: applicant affidavit plus payroll or tax records, or attestation by clients or peers) and report back with a recommendation within one quarter. We are not recommending a specific pathway; we are recommending the decision to build one be made deliberately rather than left to stalled applications.

## The Six Moves, Marked

Each note names the paragraph it belongs to.

**1. The decision is line one** (*The decision*). The framing question — what is the leader being asked to decide? — is literally the brief's first sentence. A busy leader who reads nothing else knows what's being asked of them, and can say yes or no to it. The brief also leads with its point throughout; that is plain-language craft with a whole course behind it. Here we teach the genre moves.

**2. The ranked-order sentence** (*Where this sits in our findings*). This is the one stated reason from the ranking, doing its job in writing: it names both passes honestly — where the finding sat on impact and feasibility, and why the equity pass moved it. Ranking and brief are one workflow.

**3. The finding carries its mechanism** (*What we found, first paragraph*). *Unreachable signatory* — never "sole proprietors struggle." The disaggregated finding survives into writing without flattening into a group label, and the fix stays visible in the finding itself. The quote is one applicant's real words, doing what no summary can.

**4. Structural, not cultural — in writing** (*What we found, second paragraph*). The negative cases — the people who cleared it easily — are in the brief because they identify the mechanism. Naming the barrier as a circumstance rather than a group trait is what keeps an equity finding accurate, and defensible.

**5. Uncertainty surfaced without burying the finding** (*How we know, and what we don't*). The saturation claim is honest about what it is: *tested against held-back cases; this method tells us how it fails people, not how many*. That is the sentence we wrote in the workshop — what the finding rests on, and what it does not prove. The unknowns are stated, and each one points at the next research step rather than undermining this one.

**6. Found and recommend are separate, labeled sections** (*What we found · What we recommend*). What we found is evidence; what we recommend is judgment. Keeping them apart is what lets a leader disagree with the recommendation without distrusting the finding. It is also the line most often blurred: a sentence that says what the agency *should do* has no place under "what we found."

**Use this to write a one-page brief on any finding your research produces. The guidance under each heading says what the section is for; replace it as you write.**

Keep the whole brief to one page: a brief that needs two pages usually contains two briefs. The annotated worked example shows every section done well.

## The Header

**TO:** the person who can make this decision

**FROM:** you, or your team

**RE:** the finding, in a few words — name the mechanism, not a group

**DATE:** the date · One page

## The Decision

One or two sentences. What are you asking this leader to decide? Write it so they can say yes or no to it. This is the first thing they read — a busy leader who reads nothing else should know what's being asked.

*Trap: restating your finding, or naming a goal ("improve communication"), is not a decision. Nobody can say no to a goal, which means nobody has to say yes.*

## Where This Sits in Our Findings

One sentence, only if you ranked several findings: where this one landed and the stated reason why. If your ranking used two passes — impact and feasibility, then equity — say honestly what each pass did.

*This sentence should already exist: it's the reason you wrote down when you placed the finding.*

## What We Found

The finding, carrying its mechanism. Say what is happening and to whom, in the terms the people affected used — a short verbatim quote often does what no summary can. If the finding differs across groups, keep the *why* visible: name the circumstance that separates the people it fails from the people it doesn't, not just the group label.

*Trap: recommendations hide here. If a sentence says what the agency should do, it belongs in the last section.*

## How We Know, and What We Don't

Two or three sentences on method: what data, how much, how you tested your themes. Then the honest limits: what this method can and cannot tell you — a qualitative finding tells you how a service fails people, not how many — and who your data could never have reached. Each limit should point at a next step, not apologize for this one.

*This is the sentence from the workshop: what the finding rests on, and what it does not prove.*

## What We Recommend

Your judgment, clearly separate from your evidence. A leader should be able to disagree with this section without distrusting the one above it. If the honest recommendation is "decide to find out more," say that — it's a real recommendation. Name what happens next and by when.

*Trap: a recommendation that has crept into "what we found" costs you the finding. When a leader disagrees with a fix that was filed as evidence, they throw out the evidence with it.*

## Before It Goes

- Can the leader say no to the first sentence?
- Does "what we found" contain any sentence that says what the agency should do?
- Is the finding named by its mechanism, not by a group?
- Does the brief say what the method cannot tell you, and who it could never have reached?
- Is it one page?

Everything you write with this is a draft until someone who owns the decision has read it — that's what it's for.

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Customer Experience Research for Government Leaders

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