
Research Methods Training Course for Government Leaders: Surveys, Findings and Briefs

23 – 27 November 2026
Vienna





Research Methods Training Course for Government Leaders: Surveys, Findings and Briefs

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Programme Summary

Research methods training course for government leaders, lasting five days at managerial level and ending in a policy evidence brief for one issue. Public bodies commission surveys, studies and analyses constantly, yet the people who approve them are rarely trained to judge whether a sample was sound, a finding was reliable or a report was written to inform rather than to persuade. The programme moves from principles to evidence gathering, analysis and reporting, then applies each stage to a live policy question. Mars Training Centre UK delivers this research methods programme for senior public sector officials.

The Business Case

When research is commissioned without a clear question, studies arrive late, samples fail to represent the people affected, and reports bury findings under method detail that decision makers cannot weigh. Leaders who can frame a question, specify the evidence needed, read the results critically and require a usable brief can spend research budgets well, defend policy choices with sound evidence and avoid acting on weak findings.

- Research Value: Improves as every study starts from a stated question and a planned decision.
- Evidence Reliability: Rises as sampling, wording and analysis are checked before findings are accepted.
- Decision Clarity: Strengthens as reports are shaped into short briefs with stated limits.

Principles and Evidence Base

- Qualitative and quantitative methods: They frame the choice of approach for each research question in Session 1.
- Survey design and sampling: They guide the data collection plan built in Session 2.
- Descriptive statistics and inference: They structure the reading of results in Session 3.
- Triangulation across evidence sources: It shapes the confidence rating given to findings in Sessions 3 and 4.

Intended Participants

- Senior officials who commission surveys, evaluations and studies for policy and programme decisions.
- Directors of planning, statistics or performance units who review analysts' findings before they reach ministers or boards.
- Policy leaders who turn research into briefs, submissions and recommendations.
- Programme managers who use evidence to justify, adjust or stop a public programme.



The programme serves ministries, public agencies, municipal bodies and research units where officials depend on evidence prepared by others.

Learning Outcomes

1. Participants will be able to formulate a research question that links directly to a decision.
2. Participants will be able to select between qualitative and quantitative methods for a given policy issue.
3. Participants will be able to evaluate a survey plan for sampling, wording and response risks.
4. Participants will be able to interpret descriptive and comparison tables without overstating their meaning.
5. Participants will be able to critique a research report for bias, gaps and unsupported conclusions.
6. Participants will be able to construct a policy brief that states evidence, limits and recommendations.

Programme Structure

Day 1: Research Methods Principles for Government Leaders

What question is being asked, and which kind of evidence can answer it?

- Research Question Framing Sheet
- Qualitative and Quantitative Method Map
- Evidence Quality Criteria
- Triangulation Logic
- Research Commissioning Brief

Day 2: Gathering Evidence and Survey Design

How is data collected so that it represents the people affected?

- Survey Design Checklist
- Sampling Frame and Sample Size Logic
- Questionnaire Wording Review
- Interview and Focus Group Guides
- Data Collection Quality Plan

Day 3: Analysing Data and Interpreting Findings

What do the results show, and how far can they be trusted?

- Descriptive Statistics Summary
- Cross-Tabulation and Comparison Tables
- Qualitative Coding Frame
- Margin of Error Reading
- Finding Strength Rating



Day 4: Reporting Evidence to Decision Makers

How is evidence written so that a busy leader can use it?

- Report Structure Template
- Chart and Table Selection Rules
- Policy Brief Format
- Limitations and Caveats Statement
- Recommendation Logic Chain

Day 5: Applying Research Methods to One Policy Question

Is the evidence ready to support a recommendation?

- Applying the Session 1 Question Framing to the Chosen Issue
- Testing the Session 2 Survey Plan on Sample Data
- Reading the Session 3 Tables Against the Question
- Rehearsing the Briefing to Leaders
- Completing the Policy Evidence Brief

Methodology

The programme uses a data workshop built on anonymised survey extracts, interview summaries and sample reports from public programmes. Participants act as commissioner, analyst and reviewer, carry one policy question from framing to recommendation, and record the doubts that remain. Report writing is practised as a decision skill, so attention stays on evidence and judgement rather than on software.

- Suggested activity: Rewriting a vague request for a study into a commissioning brief with a clear question.
- Suggested activity: Finding the sampling weakness in a survey summary and stating its effect.
- Suggested activity: Condensing a long research report into a one-page policy brief.

Capstone Output

Each participant completes a policy evidence brief for one issue. It holds the framed question, the evidence plan, a plain reading of the main findings with a strength rating, the stated limitations, and a recommendation chain. The brief is used to inform a leadership meeting, instruct analysts on further work and record the basis for a later review of the decision.



Frequently Asked Questions

Is this research methods course suitable for officials without a statistics background?

Yes. The research methods content is pitched at managerial level for officials who commission and use research. It assumes familiarity with reports and simple percentages, but no statistical training or software skills.

Which approaches do research methods in this programme rest on?

Research methods here rest on qualitative and quantitative approaches, survey design and sampling, descriptive statistics with simple inference, and triangulation across evidence sources.

How is the policy evidence brief used at work?

You use the policy evidence brief to inform a leadership meeting, instruct analysts on further work, and record the evidence and limits behind a decision for later review.

How do research methods for government leaders differ from an academic research degree course?

Research methods for government leaders centre on commissioning, judging and communicating evidence for decisions. An academic research course centres on designing original studies and writing theses.