

**Lessons Learned in Preventing and Responding to Atrocities:
Organizing, Expanding, and Encouraging Use of Policy-relevant Knowledge**
Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

Project description
October 2019

Motivation: It is inarguable that knowledge about the effectiveness of different policy options should influence how governments devise strategies to prevent and respond to atrocities. Beyond the general need to tailor strategies to the specifics of any given case, at least three interrelated problems impede the realization of this vision: (1) Extant knowledge is diffuse and rarely organized in ways that respond to policymakers' key questions; (2) There are large gaps in the existing knowledge base; and, (3) Policy processes frequently fail to make use of policy-relevant knowledge, even when it exists in accessible forms.

Overview: This project aims to improve atrocity prevention strategies by strengthening their linkages to an expanding and increasingly accessible body of policy-relevant knowledge. The first element of the project is to collect, distill, and organize existing policy-relevant knowledge--defined broadly to include theoretical and empirical research as well as the insights of experienced practitioners. The second element is to help expand the knowledge base by conducting or commissioning retrospective studies of U.S. policy in relation to major atrocity crises. The third element is to analyze how "lessons learned" could be more regularly integrated into U.S. government atrocity prevention policymaking processes.

Research questions:

- What is currently known about the contexts in which different atrocity prevention or response strategies and tools are most likely to be effective? What is currently known about the ways in which these strategies and tools should be designed and implemented to increase the likelihood of their effectiveness?
- What can be learned about the effectiveness of different strategies and tools by studying U.S. government actions, and their alternatives, in recent atrocity crises?
- How can U.S. government policy processes be reformed to ensure that "lessons learned" are applied in practice?

Key audiences: U.S. and other government policymakers, international organizations, scholars, advocates

Expected outputs: Evidence briefs summarizing knowledge on different strategies and tools, ultimately to form the basis of an interactive online resource; reports of retrospective studies of mass atrocity crises; and a report with recommendations for increasing the use of lessons learned in practice.