



Evidence Translation in Community-Level Public Policy Decisions

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Abstract

Community-level public policy decisions are frequently made under conditions of limited time, fragmented information, political pressure, uneven administrative capacity, and competing community priorities. Although research evidence has become increasingly accessible, its availability does not automatically ensure its meaningful use in local policy processes. Evidence translation provides an intermediate function through which scientific findings, administrative data, professional experience, and community knowledge are interpreted and converted into forms that decision-makers can understand and apply. This study develops a community-oriented evidence-translation framework and examines, through a transparent simulation, how structured translation practices may improve the readiness of evidence for local policy use.

The framework emphasizes five dimensions: contextual relevance, accessibility, stakeholder engagement, timeliness, and implementation readiness. A simulation-based comparative design was applied to illustrative community policy scenarios rather than real participants or completed governmental interventions. Scores representing a conventional evidence pathway were compared with scores under a structured translation pathway incorporating evidence synthesis, contextual adaptation, knowledge brokering, community participation, and implementation-oriented communication.

The simulated results indicate an increase in overall policy-readiness scores from 50.4 to 80.8 on a 100-point scale, with the largest improvement observed in stakeholder engagement. These results should be interpreted as model-generated illustrations rather than empirical estimates. The study argues that evidence translation should be institutionalized as an interactive governance process rather than treated as the final dissemination stage of research. Community-level policy systems are likely to benefit when credible evidence is combined with local knowledge, transparent interpretation, citizen participation, and practical implementation considerations.

Keywords: evidence translation; evidence-informed policymaking; community governance; knowledge translation; local government; public policy; citizen engagement; knowledge brokering

1. Introduction

Evidence-informed public policy has become increasingly important as governments confront complex problems involving public health, environmental change, social inequality, infrastructure, education, economic vulnerability, and community well-being. However, the presence of credible research does not mean that such evidence will automatically enter the policy process. Community-level decisions are



particularly sensitive to administrative capacity, political priorities, resource availability, public expectations, implementation feasibility, and the immediacy of local problems. The World Health Organization conceptualizes evidence-informed decision-making as a process involving identification, appraisal, mobilization, and appropriate use of the best available evidence rather than a mechanical transfer of scientific findings into policy.

The problem becomes more pronounced when evidence is produced in technical formats that are difficult for local administrators, elected representatives, community organizations, or residents to interpret. Scientific publications may emphasize methodological precision and disciplinary terminology, whereas local decision-makers often require concise answers concerning the scale of a problem, affected populations, expected benefits, costs, implementation requirements, risks, and alternative policy options. Earlier local-government research has shown that evidence use is strongly influenced by organizational context and by the relevance of available information to immediate decision requirements. Armstrong and colleagues therefore argued for multilevel knowledge-translation strategies involving skill development, evidence-access tools, knowledge brokers, and professional networks rather than reliance on information dissemination alone.

Evidence translation addresses this disconnect by transforming research findings into decision-relevant knowledge while preserving the integrity and uncertainty of the original evidence. Translation may include rapid evidence synthesis, policy briefs, contextualization of findings, deliberative discussions, visual communication, economic interpretation, stakeholder consultation, knowledge brokering, and co-design. Importantly, translation should not be understood as simplification that removes scientific uncertainty. Its purpose is to make uncertainty, applicability, benefits, risks, and implementation requirements intelligible to decision-makers. Brownson and colleagues emphasize that evidence relevant to implementation extends beyond narrowly defined research findings and can incorporate practice-based knowledge, professional expertise, contextual information, and perspectives from community partners.

Community participation adds another important dimension. Local residents possess experiential knowledge concerning service accessibility, cultural acceptability, unintended consequences, neighborhood conditions, and barriers that may not be visible in formal datasets. WHO guidance consequently recognizes citizen engagement as an important component of evidence-informed policymaking. Similarly, the policy co-design literature indicates that stronger participation by policy users can support community mobilization and improve attention to community needs. Evidence translation at the community level should therefore operate in two directions: research must be translated toward decision-makers and communities, while local experience must also be translated into evidence that can influence policy design.

The present study develops a structured model for this two-way translation process. Because no primary dataset or completed community intervention was supplied for the study, the analysis uses clearly identified simulated values rather than presenting invented field findings. The purpose is methodological and conceptual: to examine how a community-oriented evidence-translation pathway could change the readiness of evidence for policy consideration across five dimensions. The resulting framework integrates the established literature on evidence-informed policymaking, knowledge



brokering, contextual adaptation, co-design, and implementation capacity while placing particular emphasis on the practical circumstances of community-level governance.

2. Objectives of the Study

2.1 Evaluating the Policy Readiness of Translated Evidence

The first objective is to develop a structured basis for examining whether evidence becomes more usable when it moves from a conventional research-dissemination pathway to a community-oriented translation pathway. Policy readiness in this study refers to the extent to which evidence is sufficiently understandable, locally meaningful, timely, participatory, and implementation-oriented to support an informed policy discussion.

2.2 Identifying Core Evidence-Translation Dimensions

The second objective is to examine five dimensions that influence community-level evidence use: contextual relevance, accessibility, stakeholder engagement, timeliness, and implementation readiness. These dimensions were selected because previous research repeatedly identifies context, communication, decision-maker capacity, relationships, and practical applicability as important determinants of research use.

2.3 Developing a Community-Oriented Translation Framework

The third objective is to propose an integrated framework that connects evidence synthesis with local data, citizen knowledge, knowledge brokering, deliberative interpretation, and implementation planning. The framework is intended to provide a conceptual foundation for subsequent empirical testing by municipalities, local authorities, community organizations, and interdisciplinary research teams.

3. Review of Literature

3.1 From Evidence Availability to Evidence Usability

The literature increasingly distinguishes between producing evidence and making evidence usable. Kneale, Rojas-García, Raine, and Thomas found through a systematic scoping review of English local public-health decision-making that researchers need to understand more closely the evidence requirements of decision-makers and collaborate in developing solutions to evidence underutilization. Their work is particularly relevant to community governance because local decision environments typically combine scientific, economic, administrative, experiential, and political information.

Van der Graaf, Cheetham, McCabe, and Rushmer subsequently examined how research can be localized and tailored for public-health decision-making. Their study showed the value of adapting evidence to the specific needs and circumstances of local decision environments rather than assuming that nationally or internationally generated evidence is automatically applicable at the local level. This insight is central to evidence translation: credibility and local applicability are separate properties. Highly credible research may have limited decision value if policymakers cannot determine whether its assumptions, population, cost structure, or implementation environment resemble their own community.

Brownson, Shelton, Geng, and Glasgow further broaden this understanding by arguing that implementation-oriented evidence involves multiple sources, including scientific research, practice-



based knowledge, professional experience, and community perspectives. More recently, Mpinga and colleagues' systematic review of scientific evidence in public-health decision-making reinforced the continuing importance of understanding how evidence is incorporated into real policy processes rather than merely examining the volume of research produced.

The literature therefore suggests that evidence translation should not be reduced to producing shorter documents. It requires a judgment concerning what evidence means within a particular decision context, for whom it is relevant, what uncertainties remain, and what operational changes would follow from acting upon it.

3.2 Knowledge Brokers, Capacity, and Institutional Relationships

Knowledge brokers occupy the boundary between evidence production and policy application. Their role can include locating evidence, interpreting methods, facilitating communication between researchers and policymakers, convening stakeholders, identifying knowledge gaps, and maintaining relationships across institutional boundaries. Armstrong and colleagues' work on local-government public-health decision-making proposed a multistrategy approach combining knowledge brokering, training, evidence tools, and information-sharing networks.

King and colleagues' 2024 scoping review of knowledge-translation capacity and capability similarly demonstrates that effective translation cannot be separated from organizational and system-level capacity. Training an individual officer to interpret evidence may have limited impact if organizational procedures, leadership incentives, procurement requirements, budgeting systems, or political timelines discourage evidence use.

OECD work reaches a similar conclusion from a governance perspective. Its capacity framework stresses the need to connect the supply of evidence with demand inside government and to build institutional and individual capabilities for evidence-informed policymaking. The OECD's later work on evidence-informed policymaking ecosystems further emphasizes professional knowledge-broker functions, institutional commitment, communities of practice, and systemic capacity rather than isolated evidence products.

Thus, an effective local evidence system requires more than researchers who communicate clearly. It requires an institutional environment in which policy staff can ask researchable questions, locate trustworthy evidence, interpret limitations, engage stakeholders, and explain how evidence contributed to a final decision.

3.3 Citizen Engagement and Contextual Translation

Community-level public policy is distinct because the people affected by a policy may also possess critical knowledge needed to design it. Community members can identify practical barriers, uneven distribution of benefits, historical distrust, cultural concerns, accessibility problems, and potential unintended effects. WHO guidance explicitly treats citizens' voices as an underused but important form of evidence in policymaking.

Walker and colleagues' review of policy co-design found that more substantive participation by policy users was associated in the reviewed literature with stronger attention to community needs and mobilization. Co-design therefore moves translation beyond the one-directional model in which experts



prepare evidence and policymakers receive it. Instead, evidence, policy options, and implementation assumptions can be discussed iteratively.

Recent knowledge-translation research also shows the importance of this participatory orientation across emerging policy challenges. Mulopo and colleagues' 2025 review of climate-change research translation identified approaches including citizen participation, knowledge synthesis, communication, collaboration, advocacy, education, and decision-support tools. These findings are transferable beyond climate policy because community decisions frequently require scientific knowledge to be interpreted alongside locally experienced risks.

The principal research gap is therefore not the absence of evidence-translation concepts but the limited integration of these concepts into a concise community-level decision framework combining local relevance, accessibility, engagement, timeliness, and implementation readiness. The current study addresses this gap through a transparent simulation that can later be empirically validated.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Analytical Scope

The study adopted a simulation-based comparative research design. No residents, government officials, or organizations were recruited, and no real municipal dataset was analyzed. Consequently, all numerical results presented below are illustrative model values and must not be interpreted as measured effects of a completed intervention.

The analytical unit was an illustrative community-level policy decision. Examples might include neighborhood public-health programs, local waste-management measures, community transport initiatives, climate-adaptation interventions, youth services, or local environmental policies. The framework was designed to remain sector-neutral.

Two hypothetical evidence pathways were compared. The conventional pathway represented a situation in which research evidence is mainly provided through reports, datasets, academic literature, or standard administrative documentation. The community-oriented translation pathway incorporated contextual evidence synthesis, plain-language interpretation, knowledge-broker support, stakeholder dialogue, local-data integration, citizen engagement, and explicit implementation planning.

4.2 Measurement Framework and Proposed Questionnaire

Five domains were developed from the reviewed evidence: relevance, accessibility, stakeholder engagement, timeliness, and implementation readiness. Each domain was conceptualized on a 0–100 scale, with higher values representing stronger readiness for policy use.

For future empirical validation, the following five-item questionnaire is proposed. It was not administered in the present study.

Table 1: Proposed Five-Item Instrument for Empirical Validation

Item	Proposed Questionnaire Statement	Construct
Q1	The evidence provided is directly relevant to the needs and conditions of the community affected by the policy decision.	Contextual relevance
Q2	The main findings, limitations, and implications of the evidence are understandable to non-specialist decision-makers.	Accessibility
Q3	Relevant community groups and policy stakeholders have meaningful opportunities to contribute to the interpretation of evidence.	Stakeholder engagement
Q4	The translated evidence becomes available within the time frame required for the policy decision.	Timeliness
Q5	The evidence provides sufficient information about feasibility, resources, risks, and implementation requirements.	Implementation readiness

A future field study could measure these items using a five-point or seven-point Likert scale and evaluate internal consistency, construct validity, inter-rater reliability, and relationships with observable outcomes such as policy adoption, amendment, implementation fidelity, and stakeholder confidence.

4.3 Simulation Procedure and Ethical Position

Illustrative baseline scores were assigned to represent common weaknesses identified across the evidence-use literature. The conventional pathway was therefore modeled with moderate relevance and timeliness but lower accessibility, stakeholder engagement, and implementation readiness. The structured translation pathway was modeled by applying higher scores where translation mechanisms would theoretically address these barriers.

The simulation incorporated five translation activities: local contextualization of research findings, concise decision-focused communication, facilitated stakeholder deliberation, rapid synthesis aligned with decision timelines, and explicit translation of findings into implementation requirements. No inferential statistical significance testing was performed because synthetic scores do not constitute independent observations generated by a real sampling process. Reporting artificial *p*-values or confidence intervals would create a false impression of empirical validation. The analysis is consequently descriptive and hypothesis-generating.

Because the study contains no human participants, identifiable records, interventions, or private data, formal human-subject ethical approval was not applicable to the simulation. Future empirical validation involving public officials, residents, interviews, surveys, or administrative records should obtain appropriate institutional ethics approval and informed consent where required.

5. Analysis

5.1 Comparative Policy-Readiness Profile

The simulation produced a clear descriptive difference between the two pathways. The conventional evidence pathway generated an overall mean readiness score of 50.4, whereas the community-oriented translation pathway generated an illustrative mean score of 80.8. The modeled difference was therefore 30.4 points on the 100-point scale.

Table 2: Simulated Evidence-Translation Readiness Scores

Policy-Readiness Dimension	Conventional Evidence Pathway	Community-Oriented Translation Pathway	Simulated Change
Contextual relevance	58	82	+24
Accessibility	49	79	+30
Stakeholder engagement	46	85	+39
Timeliness	55	81	+26
Implementation readiness	44	77	+33
Overall Mean	50.4	80.8	+30.4

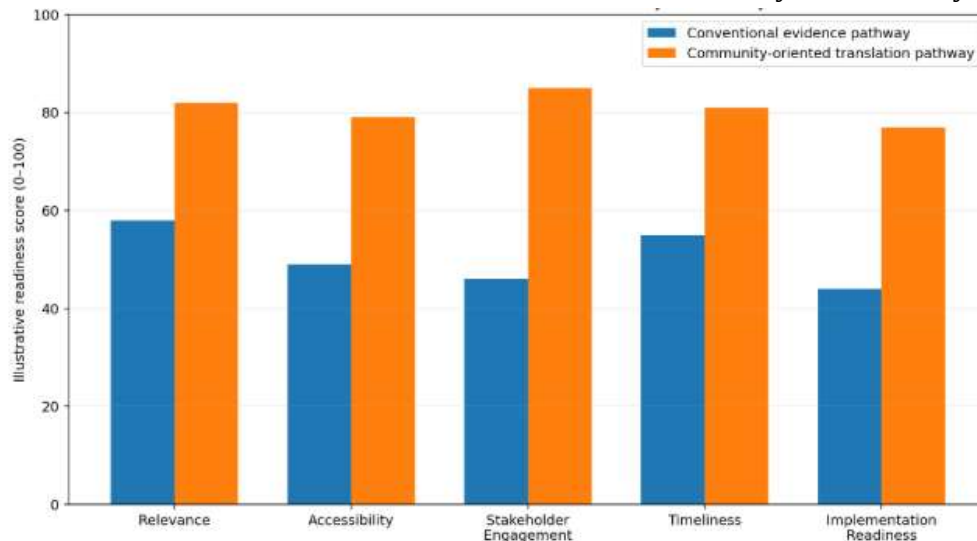
Source/Note: Author-generated simulation developed for methodological illustration. Values are not observations from real policymakers or communities.

The largest simulated difference occurred in stakeholder engagement. This is theoretically plausible because a conventional evidence pathway can operate largely through documents and expert analysis, while a community-oriented pathway deliberately creates opportunities for interpretation and deliberation with stakeholders.

Implementation readiness showed the second-largest simulated improvement. This reflects an important conceptual distinction between knowing whether a policy intervention has evidence of effectiveness and knowing whether a particular community can realistically implement that intervention.

5.2 Graphical Interpretation

Graph 1: Simulated Effect of Evidence Translation on Community-Level Policy Readiness



The graph demonstrates that the translation pathway exceeds the conventional pathway across every modeled dimension. The graphical pattern should not be read as evidence that translation will always create improvements of this magnitude. Instead, it illustrates the hypothesis that translation is multidimensional. A policy system may improve accessibility without improving stakeholder participation, or it may provide locally relevant evidence too late to affect a budget or legislative decision.

The practical implication is that translation performance should be assessed as a profile rather than through a single indicator such as the number of policy briefs produced.

5.3 Interpretation of the Simulated Pattern

The simulated findings support three propositions for future empirical testing. First, evidence becomes more decision-ready when contextualization occurs before a policy option is finalized. Localizing research can help decision-makers understand whether population characteristics, institutional arrangements, costs, or implementation conditions differ from those in the original studies. This interpretation is consistent with the work of van der Graaf and colleagues on tailoring evidence for local decision-making.

Second, stakeholder engagement may have a particularly strong influence because it allows evidence to be interpreted against lived experience. A technically effective intervention may still face resistance when it overlooks accessibility, distributional consequences, cultural expectations, or community trust. WHO's citizen-engagement guidance and Walker and colleagues' co-design review both support more participatory approaches to evidence-informed policy processes.

Third, translation requires organizational capability. Even high-quality evidence briefs may have limited influence when public institutions lack staff time, analytical competence, leadership support, information infrastructure, or established relationships with research organizations. OECD and recent knowledge-



translation literature therefore support capacity-building approaches that extend beyond individual communication skills.

6. Discussion

6.1 Evidence Translation as a Governance Function

The analysis suggests that evidence translation should be regarded as part of governance rather than as an auxiliary research-communication activity. Traditional models often place translation at the end of research: evidence is produced, published, summarized, and delivered to decision-makers. Community policy processes are less linear. Problems can change during consultation, new administrative data can become available, political feasibility can shift, and residents may identify consequences that were absent from the original evidence.

An effective translation system must therefore maintain interaction between evidence producers, knowledge brokers, public administrators, political representatives, service providers, and community stakeholders. This structure is closer to an evidence ecosystem than a publication pipeline. Recent OECD work similarly frames evidence-informed policymaking as a system involving institutional structures, capabilities, professional roles, and communities of practice.

Such an approach does not mean that scientific findings should be adjusted to satisfy political or community preferences. The quality and limitations of evidence must remain transparent. Translation changes the form in which evidence is understood and contextualized; it should not alter findings for strategic convenience.

6.2 Balancing Scientific Evidence and Community Knowledge

Community knowledge provides contextual information that formal research may fail to capture, but it should not automatically be treated as equivalent to causal scientific evidence. Different forms of knowledge answer different questions.

Randomized or quasi-experimental research may provide stronger evidence concerning whether an intervention produces a particular outcome. Administrative records may show which populations are using a service. Qualitative research may explain why participation is low. Frontline professionals may identify operational barriers, while residents may reveal issues of trust, accessibility, dignity, or cultural acceptability.

Evidence translation becomes valuable precisely because it allows these sources to be examined together without collapsing their methodological differences. Brownson and colleagues' broader conceptualization of evidence in implementation science supports the inclusion of multiple evidence forms while retaining attention to their purpose and context.

The resulting policy decision can therefore be evidence-informed without pretending that evidence alone determines policy. Decision-makers must still consider legal responsibilities, budget limitations, equity, political mandates, community preferences, ethical obligations, and implementation feasibility.

6.3 Institutional Implications, Limitations, and Future Research

Community authorities seeking stronger evidence use should invest in permanent translation capacity rather than relying exclusively on occasional reports. Potential mechanisms include knowledge-broker



positions, research–government partnerships, rapid evidence services, community evidence panels, shared local-data infrastructure, standardized evidence briefs, and post-implementation learning systems. Capacity-building should also focus on the ability of decision-makers to ask answerable questions, assess evidence credibility, understand uncertainty, identify inappropriate generalization, recognize conflicts of interest, and distinguish evidence quality from rhetorical certainty. OECD's capacity framework explicitly identifies the importance of strengthening governmental skills and institutional arrangements connecting evidence supply with policy demand.

The present study has important limitations. Its numerical results are simulated and therefore cannot establish causal effects, generalizable effect sizes, or statistical significance. The five-domain framework may also require modification across policy sectors. Public health, transportation, environmental regulation, housing, policing, education, and economic development operate under different institutional and legal conditions.

Future studies should consequently test the framework using real municipal or community-policy processes. Longitudinal research could compare decisions before and after evidence-translation interventions. Comparative case studies could evaluate whether knowledge brokers or citizen deliberation improve policy quality. Experimental or quasi-experimental designs could examine different formats of evidence briefs. Mixed-method research could assess not only whether evidence was cited but how evidence changed problem definition, resource allocation, policy design, implementation, and subsequent learning.

7. Conclusion

Evidence translation represents a critical but frequently underdeveloped connection between knowledge production and community-level public policy action. The central challenge is not simply whether research exists. It is whether relevant evidence reaches the appropriate decision-makers in a form that is understandable, locally meaningful, timely, inclusive, and sufficiently connected to implementation realities.

This study developed a five-dimensional framework based on contextual relevance, accessibility, stakeholder engagement, timeliness, and implementation readiness. The simulation illustrated how a structured translation pathway could theoretically create a stronger policy-readiness profile than a conventional evidence-delivery approach. The numerical improvements are illustrative rather than empirical, but they provide testable propositions for subsequent research.

The broader implication is that communities require evidence ecosystems rather than one-way dissemination systems. Knowledge brokers, policymakers, researchers, frontline practitioners, civil-society organizations, and citizens each contribute distinct forms of expertise. Their interaction can help identify where global or national research is locally transferable, where adaptation is required, where uncertainty remains, and whether implementation is practically and socially feasible.

Institutionalizing evidence translation may therefore strengthen both the technical quality and democratic legitimacy of community policy decisions. The most mature evidence-informed systems will not be those that merely produce more reports. They will be those capable of converting reliable knowledge into transparent deliberation, context-sensitive choices, implementable action, and continuous learning.



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