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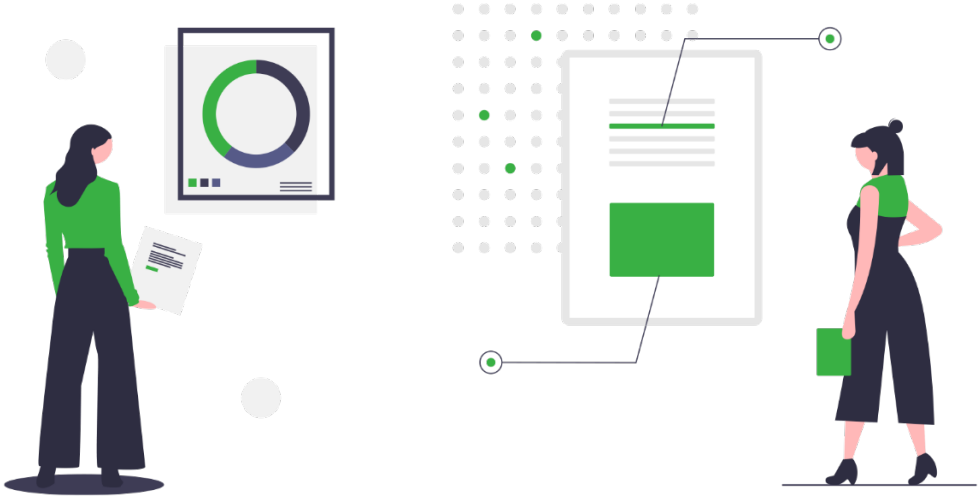
FINAL REPORT

UNDERSTANDING END-USERS OF SOCIAL RESEARCH IN POLISH PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION



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INTRODUCTION

Study rationality and goal

The challenge of using research insights in public policy practice (also called knowledge utilization in practice) is well recognized in the literature (Pielke, 2007; Weiss, 1980). It is often characterized by gaps between two communities - decision-makers and researchers are driven by different imperatives and time frames using different languages and practices (Caplan, 1979; Dunn, 1980). This disconnect results in missed opportunities, where valuable research findings fail to translate into effective policy interventions, or where policymakers make decisions without the benefit of available evidence.

The need for cooperation between researchers and policymakers has become increasingly urgent in today's complex, interconnected world. Societal challenges such as climate change, demographic shifts, economic inequality, and public health crises require a sophisticated understanding of human behavior, social structures, and cultural contexts. Public administrators need insights from rigorous social research to understand the multifaceted nature of these problems better, the perspectives of diverse stakeholders, and the potential consequences of different policy approaches. Without this evidence base, policies risk being ineffective, inefficient, or even counterproductive.

The value of social research in policy contexts extends beyond simple problem descriptions to enabling effective intervention design. A recent example is the case during the COVID-19 pandemic; knowing what stops the virus spread was not enough; reshaping the behavior of individuals and societies was crucial for fighting the pandemic. Social research provided critical insights into risk perception, communication strategies, community trust, and behavioral motivations that helped public officials craft more effective public health policies (van Bavel et al., 2020). Similar evidence-informed approaches are vital across all domains of public administration, from education and social services to urban planning and economic development.

THE GOAL of this study is to help organizations funding the research better understand the context of decision-making and the information needs of public policy practitioners. We hope the insight provided in this report will contribute to designing solutions that facilitate effective cooperation between researchers and policy practice.

Study focus and key assumptions

This study has been purposefully focused to ensure depth and practical relevance within resource constraints. First, it concentrates primarily on humanistic and social science research, aligning with the strategic programming priorities of the contracting authority – the National Science Center, Poland. Social and humanistic research offers unique insights into human behavior, social dynamics, and cultural contexts essential for addressing complex public challenges. Yet, its utilization in policy contexts often faces barriers.

Second, while recognizing the broader policy ecosystem, this study narrows its focus to users within public administration – both political appointees and civil servants. We acknowledge the crucial role of various stakeholders and social actors in democratic public policy processes, including civil society organizations, think tanks, and citizen groups. However, due to time and resource constraints, we have chosen public administration as our starting point, as these professionals represent the formal institutional machinery through which policies are ultimately designed, implemented, and evaluated. Their unique position at the intersection of political directives and practical implementation makes them particularly important subjects for understanding research utilization.

The study is grounded in two fundamental assumptions that are well-established in both the literature and daily practice of social research in public policy contexts:

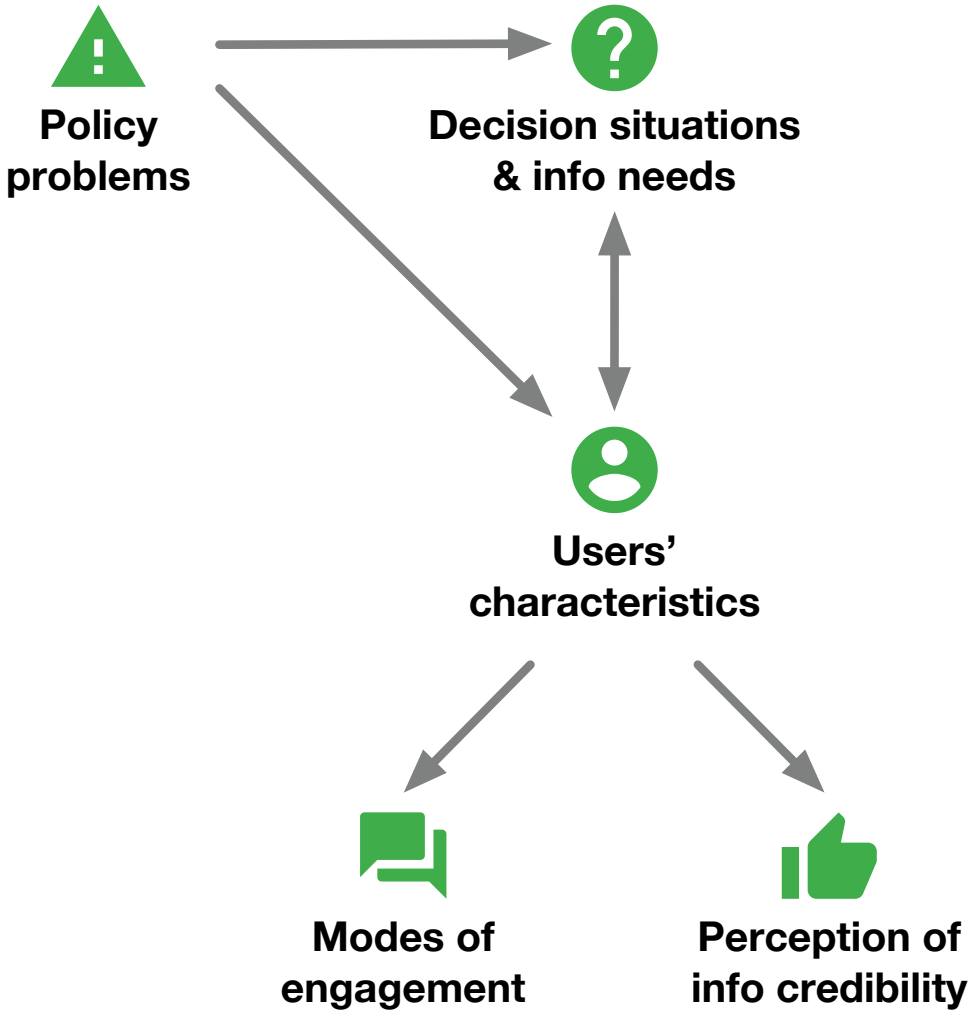
First, we recognize that research evidence represents only one of several sources of information utilized in public policy decision-making processes. Policy decisions emerge from complex interactions between empirical evidence, political considerations, budgetary constraints, public opinion, institutional traditions, and time pressures. Understanding how social research competes with and complements these other information sources is essential for enhancing its influence and impact. This study does not advocate for a simplistic "evidence-only" approach but rather seeks to understand how research-based insights can be better positioned within this multifaceted decision-making environment.

Second, we acknowledge that the use of research evidence itself results from a dynamic interplay of individual, organizational, and social factors. At the individual level, personal backgrounds, cognitive processes, professional identities, and epistemological perspectives shape how policy practitioners engage with research. Organizational factors include institutional cultures, workflows, incentive structures, and knowledge management systems. Social factors encompass wider professional networks, political contexts, and societal values regarding expertise and evidence.

Guiding framework

Our study is based on the conceptual framework that have emerged from our earlier work on evidence-informed policies (Newcomer et al., 2021; Olejniczak, 2017; Olejniczak, 2012) and the recent literature on research and public policy (Boaz et al., 2019; Cairney, 2016; Oliver & Cairney, 2019; Vorley et al., 2022). Figure 1 summarizes key group of factors shaping the use of research results in policy.

Figure 1. Guiding framework for this study



Narrative of the guiding framework

Policy problems trigger specific decision situations and activate specific information users - public policy practitioners. Once users engage in decision situations, they develop specific information needs (a.k.a. questions).

Users hold certain characteristics – ways of thinking, roles performed in specific organizational settings. Thus, when looking for answers, users demonstrate specific preferences about modes of engagement (forms and channels of communication). They also judge the credibility of information.

Our guiding framework provides clear and straightforward five implications for the researchers. Those points are covered in details in the remaining of the report.

Researchers who want to productively engage in public policy decision-making with their research results should know the following things.

1. Researchers need to understand the generic **nature of the policy problem** they want to contribute with their research insights.
2. Researchers need to **get the timing right** - that is, understand the decision situation they are coming into and provide merit at the right moment. Sometimes, they can even reshape the information needs.
3. Researchers should **understand who the users are**. With what mindset, what role, capacity, and settings do users operate when dealing with policy problems.
4. Researcher must deliver their insights using forms and channels that fit the **users' communication preferences**.
5. When designing the message, researchers should **consider perceived credibility** in the eye of the beholders - users.

Study method

The study is built on two main pools of information. First is the body of empirical insights that we have collected, over the span of over 10 years, researching various initiatives of evidence-informed polices in public administration. In particular: overview of practices of organizational learning and knowledge management in administrations of 12 OECD countries (Olejniczak & Mazur, 2014), role of evaluation researchers and policy analysts (Olejniczak et al., 2017), knowledge brokering in public sector (Olejniczak et al., 2016), communication strategies with decision-makers (Olejniczak & Jacoby, 2024), and emerging method of learning agendas as tool for evidence-informed policies (Newcomer et al., 2021; Hart et al., 2024). This pool of information was complemented by rapid literature review (April 2025) focused on factors shaping the use of research in public policy.

Second pool of insights are 15 interviews conducted with Polish policy practitioners (April 2025). Interviews covered all five areas of our conceptual framework (see: Figure 1), as well as questions on main challenges and opportunities for productive cooperation between policy practitioners and researchers. The interviewees group consisted of senior decision-makers (directors of departments in ministries and public agencies), public managers, and knowledge brokers (researchers or policy analysts engaging in public policy advice). The underrepresented group in our sample was high level political appointees (1 interviewee). Thus, we tried to address this limitation with an innovative method – an AI-assisted analysis of *memoirs* of 13 polish Prime Ministers (Raczkowski, 2015; Sadecki, 2009). W used those two books to explore nature of policy problems and decision situations.

In our analytical approach, we employed a hybrid abductive coding method that balanced structure with discovery. We began with a broad framework derived from literature insights (see: Figure 1), which guided our interview design and initial organization of data (deduction). During the analysis phase, we worked within these established topic areas while remaining attentive to emergent patterns and unexpected themes within each category (induction). This flexible approach allowed us to capture both anticipated and unforeseen dimensions of research utilization in policy contexts. As analysis progressed, we iteratively refined our conceptual framework, incorporating newly identified themes and relationships to create a more comprehensive understanding of how social research is accessed, interpreted, and applied within Polish public administration. This method flexibility was particularly valuable for exploring the complex, contextual nature of knowledge utilization while maintaining analytical coherence across diverse interview data.

Structure of the report

The report is organized into three main sections. The first section examines the key factors that influence how research is utilized in policy contexts, covering five critical dimensions from our conceptual framework: the nature of policy problems, the spectrum of decision situations and information needs of practitioners, the roles and organizational settings of users, various modes of engagement between researchers and users, and factors affecting the perceived credibility of information sources.

The second section puts forward detailed profiles of three distinct user groups within Polish public administration—high-level political appointees, senior decision-makers, and personnel managing policies—each with their unique characteristics, constraints, and research utilization patterns.

The report concludes with forward-looking perspectives on cooperation between researchers and policy practitioners, summarizing initial ides that emerged during interviews with policy practitioners.

This structure allows readers to move from theoretical frameworks to practical user insights and, ultimately, to actionable recommendations for enhancing the impact of social research in public policy.

KEY FACTORS SHAPING USE OF RESEARCH IN POLICY

Nature of policy problems

In this part, we discuss the peculiarities of policy problems and how they substantially differ from research problems. Based on the literature, we provide an overview of generic types of policy problems so researchers can quickly position their work in the policy context.

Insights from literature

The nature of policy problems significantly shapes how research evidence is sought, interpreted, and applied in public administration settings. Policy problems confronting today's societies are inherently multi-dimensional, spanning economic, social, technological, legal, and cultural domains simultaneously, which necessitates integration of diverse knowledge types rather than siloed expertise. These problems are often value-based, involving competing priorities and normative judgments about desired outcomes, resource allocation, and acceptable trade-offs. The most complex problems are called wicked problems (Head, 2019).

The complex nature of policy problems (so different from research problems that are focused, with clear boundaries and causal links) have two substantial implications. First, most of the policy problems can be ameliorated rather than definitively solved, requiring ongoing learning, adaptation, and intervention rather than one-time solutions. In fact public policy is often called tireless tinkering (Wildavsky, 2018). Second, the policy practitioners operate under high uncertainty and ambiguity (Cairney et al., 2016).

Public policy literature offer number of typologies of policy problems, from sectoral grouping, through root cause (market failure, government failure, social failure) (Peters, 2018), narrative used to describe causal stories (Stone, 2011). For the purpose of the report we have chosen the typology developed by Hoppe & Turnbull. It is straightforward and it focuses on degree of values agreement and degree of certainty on policy issue. These two dimensions heavily shapes the dynamics and temperature of discussions on policy issue. Thus, they will be crucial for researchers to understand.

Table 1. Typology of policy problems

		VALUE AGREEMENT	
		High	**Low**
DEGREE OF CERTAINTY	**High**	Structured	Moderately structured (means)
	Low	Moderately structured (goals)	Unstructured

Based on: (Hoppe, 2011; Turnbull & Hoppe, 2019)

The examples of the four types can be following: Structured Problems - vaccination campaigns against established diseases, road infrastructure maintenance, basic utility infrastructure (water, electricity). Moderately Structured (Means) - climate change mitigation strategies, healthcare system reform, economic inequality interventions. Moderately Structured (Goals) examples are: emerging technology governance (AI, biotech), urban development planning, educational curriculum reform. Finally Unstructured Problems examples: legalization of controversial substances, end-of-life care policies, cultural heritage preservation vs. development.

Insights from current interviews

The interviewed persons across the documents consistently highlight the multifaceted and complex nature of public policy problems. A prevalent theme across multiple documents is the pervasive pressure of time constraints. This urgency often necessitates reactive responses to immediate crises, overshadowing long-term strategic planning. This is further complicated by the need to balance short-term tasks with long-term goals. This time constraint often limits the depth of research and analysis possible, hindering the effective use of available information.

The political and social context was also well visible in our interviews. Political considerations significantly influence policy decisions, often prioritizing immediate concerns over thorough research and analysis. The interviewed persons highlight the need to balance scientific findings with social and political considerations, including public opinion and values agreement. The cultural context also plays a role, pointing to a preference for individual relationships over strong institutional structures, hindering systematic knowledge building and collaboration.

Interviews with PMs also reveal the tension between short-term and long-term goals - the immediate pressures of politics and the need for long-term strategic planning. The need to balance immediate needs with long-term reforms is a recurring theme in PM talks. Those interviews also offer three unique perspectives on policy problem dynamics: the mismatch between the speed of market operations and political decision-making, highlighting the influence of financial markets on national policy, the tension between policies serving the common good and those serving particular interests, and the negative populism's impact on long-term policy goals.

Synthesis

Unlike research problems with clear boundaries and causal links, policy problems are often value-based, involving competing priorities and normative judgments about desired outcomes and acceptable trade-offs. The Hoppe & Turnbull typology highlights how varying degrees of value agreement and certainty fundamentally shape policy discussions, creating four distinct problem types—structured, moderately structured (means), moderately structured (goals), and unstructured—each requiring different approaches to knowledge utilization.

A critical insight for social researchers is the temporal dimension of policy work revealed through interviews. Policy practitioners operate under persistent time constraints that create tension between addressing immediate crises and pursuing long-term strategic planning. This urgency often necessitates reactive responses that may prioritize political considerations over thorough research and analysis. Social researchers must recognize that their evidence exists within this context of competing pressures—where scientific findings must be balanced with social and political considerations, including public opinion and values. Understanding that most policy problems can be ameliorated rather than definitively solved can help researchers frame their contributions more effectively, positioning their work as supporting ongoing conversations and adaptation rather than offering definitive one-time solutions.

Decision situations & information needs

This part briefly explains the dominant approach in the literature used to map policy dynamics – the so-called policy cycle approach. Then, we propose an alternative, more pragmatic, and more realistic frame that emerges in research – the types of decision situations that policymakers face and the types of practical questions they are confronted with.

We discuss the spectrum of decision situations, characterize each, and explain what role researchers could play in each of those situations and what they can bring to the table.

Insights from literature

The most common framework used to describe policy is called the policy cycle – it presents the process as stages from agenda setting through policy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and evaluation. It is useful for academic purposes but too theoretical, missing the iterative, dynamic, and often discontinuous character of decision-making (Howlett & Cashore, 2020; Tyler, 2013).

We propose the alternative approach based on the Theory of Disproportionate Information-Processing (Baumgartner & Jones, 2005), which explains how the government processes information in producing public policies. The whole policy process is portrayed as a collective problem-solving effort. Policy actors allocate their limited attention to specific decision situations related to the policy problem. These four different decision situations are: (1) noticing policy issue, (2) defining policy problem, (3) choosing a solution, and (4) executing policy interventions (Baumgartner & Jones, 2005; Hallsworth, Egan, Rutter, & McCrae, 2018; Olejniczak et al., 2024).

We see it as a useful frame for social researchers because it allows to think in terms of windows of opportunity when decision-makers look for specific information to make specific decisions. In particular there are three advantages of this framework. First, by focusing on distinct decision situations rather than a linear policy cycle, this framework acknowledges the real-world complexity of policymaking, where issues are often addressed in parallel, iteratively, or out of sequence. This allows social researchers to identify specific entry points where their expertise can be most valuable. They can target their research and communication efforts to match the actual cognitive and information processing needs of practitioners at each decision juncture.

Second, the framework's aligns with how practitioners actually experience policymaking—as a series of problem-solving challenges under conditions of limited attention, time constraints, and cognitive biases. By recognizing these practical realities, social researchers can better tailor both their message to address the specific information gaps, cognitive shortcuts, and decision-making constraints that practitioners face.

Third, this approach provides a more psychologically realistic model of how policy decisions actually unfold, acknowledging the bounded rationality of human decision-makers rather than assuming perfect information or purely rational and structured processes. This helps social researchers develop more nuanced understandings of how their evidence might be used (or overlooked) in practice.

Table 2. Four types of decision situations in public policy

DECISION SITUATION	KEY PARTICIPANTS	POTENTIAL ROLES FOR SOCIAL SCIENTISTS	POSSIBLE QUESTIONS FROM POLICY DECISION MAKERS
Noticing Policy Issue	Politicians, sectoral stakeholders, interest groups, general public/media	Monitor trends and horizon-scan for emerging issues Provide alternative theoretical frameworks to reframe problems Use data to help prioritize attention Develop evidence-based narratives that challenge dominant discourse	What societal trends should we be paying attention to? Is this issue as urgent as media portrays it? What evidence suggests this is a growing problem? Are we missing important dimensions of this issue? How are other countries/regions addressing similar issues?
Defining Policy Problem	High-level decision makers, affected stakeholders, policy designers, directly affected citizens	Articulate underlying systemic assumptions Conduct rigorous fact-checking Amplify marginalized perspectives and voices Question mainstream theoretical frameworks Translate complex evidence for non-expert audiences	What are the root causes of this problem? Who is most affected by this issue and how? What assumptions are we making about how this system works? What perspectives are we missing in our analysis? What will happen if we don't address this issue now?
Choosing a Solution	Senior decision-makers, stakeholders,	Develop assessment criteria frameworks	What are the likely outcomes of each policy option?

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	policy designers, representatives of target groups	Articulate alternative theories of change Compare evidence across policy contexts Analyze trade-offs between options Facilitate evidence-informed deliberation among stakeholder groups Identify unintended consequences of proposed solutions	What evidence supports this approach working elsewhere? Who will likely benefit or be harmed by each option? What unintended consequences should we anticipate? How can we design this policy to be most effective for our context? What criteria should we use to compare options?
Executing Policy Solution	Policy designers, street-level bureaucrats, specific stakeholders, policy users	Analyze implementation mechanisms and contextual factors Document and analyze user experiences and adaptation Assess policy coherence across interventions Balance operational metrics with strategic outcomes Identify system feedback loops and emergent properties Develop realistic implementation timelines	How are citizens actually experiencing this policy? What implementation barriers are we facing? Is this policy coordinated with other related interventions? How should we measure success beyond the obvious metrics? What adaptations could improve effectiveness? What system dynamics are influencing implementation?

Based on: (Baumgartner & Jones, 2005; Hallsworth, Egan, Rutter, & McCrae, 2018; Olejniczak et al., 2024).

Insights from current interviews

Many interviews emphasized the iterative and organic nature of the policymaking process, with ongoing monitoring, adjustments, and feedback loops, relying on informal networks and personal relationships. This iterative approach underscores the dynamic and evolving nature of policy development and implementation.

The four types of decision-making situations (noticing, defining, choosing, executing) demonstrated their applicability to various policy contexts discussed by interviewees. However, the emphasis on each stage varied. Some interviews provided relatively balanced accounts across all four stages, while others focused more heavily on the "noticing" and "choosing" stages or on the "choosing" and "executing" stages (in the context of budget creation and crisis response).

The information needs are particularly pronounced when developing long-term strategies and policies. The core information needs revolve around understanding the causes of problems, assessing the effectiveness of potential solutions or interventions, and determining the scale and nature of relevant phenomena. According to our interviewees, many decision-makers also seek information to support novel initiatives or verify various stakeholders' claims. The need to understand stakeholder opinions is also prevalent.

The analysis of narratives presented by Polish PMs shows a very different typology of decision situations – broad functional policymaking arenas. These are coalition building and political maneuvering, economic policy and reforms, international relations and supranational cooperation, internal governance and administrative reform, crisis management, and unexpected events. However, within those areas, we can also identify the logic of the decision situation. For example, the responses to these crises often involved seeking information to understand the situation, assess risks, and develop appropriate responses.

Synthesis

Social researchers seeking productive engagement with policy practitioners should recognize that policymaking unfolds not as a linear cycle but as a series of distinct decision situations where key actors allocate limited attention and process information dynamically. The Theory of Disproportionate Information-Processing helps us to identify four decision junctures—noticing policy issues, defining policy problems, choosing solutions, and executing interventions—each representing a

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unique "window of opportunity" where specific types of evidence and expertise are sought. This framework acknowledges the real-world complexity and bounded rationality of policy practice, where issues are often addressed iteratively, in parallel, or discontinuously, allowing researchers to target their contributions to match the actual cognitive needs of practitioners in specific decision situations.

Interviews with Polish policy practitioners confirm the framework's applicability while revealing nuanced variations in how decision situations manifest in practice. Policy work is characterized by an iterative, organic process heavily reliant on informal networks and relationships, with varying emphasis on different decision situations depending on the policy context. Information needs are particularly pronounced when developing long-term strategies, understanding problem causes, assessing potential solutions, and determining phenomenon scale. For social researchers, this suggests the importance of packaging research insights to address specific decision situations while remaining flexible to policy practice's dynamic, relationship-based nature. Rather than focusing on producing comprehensive evidence for an idealized rational process, researchers would benefit from developing targeted, timely contributions that address practitioners' immediate cognitive challenges and information gaps at each decision juncture.

Users' characteristics

In this section we identify the main dimensions that differentiate potential users of research information in public policy context.

Insights from literature

The literature offers a broad perspective on possible characteristics of knowledge users in public policy. We can group around three aspects. First, the most obvious aspect is the specific actor's role in the policy-making process. The role or institutional position determines the agency of the user, the capacities (including available time and attention span), as well as capabilities (institutional resources, network, and access to information). Users can take multiple roles (Tyler, 2013) but also change their roles (Reid & Chaytor, 2022). However, broadly speaking, we can see three profiles when focusing on public administration: political appointees and high-level decision-makers, senior decision-makers in civil service, and managers who implement the public intervention. The additional types are knowledge brokers – policy analysts and experts within public administration.

The second aspect that shapes knowledge users' characteristics is the organizational environment in which they are embedded. Here, the stream of literature on organizational learning and knowledge management comes in handy (Dalkir, 2005; Easterby-Smith et al., 1999). Some organizations are more open to reflection, learning, and experimentation (Edmondson, 2011). The key mechanism here is the institutionalized use of insights coming from research, regular reflection on one's own successes and failures, feedback from the environment, and a well-developed network of knowledge providers (March 1991; (Sessa & London, 2006). In public administration, risk aversion and high procedural regulation can be substantial factors of limited learning (Olejniczak & Newcomer, 2014). Additionally, in the Polish context, the learning routines are often underdeveloped and not institutionalized. Insights and knowledge come from informal networks and personal connections (Olejniczak, 2012).

The last aspect is the individual human features of information users. On the one hand, we have unique personality traits – attitudes and preferences for types of information and knowledge (e.g., qualitative stories or quantitative data, value placed on scientific research or other forms of knowing and sense-making, etc.). On the other hand, these are universal human heuristics and decision-making biases under uncertainty (Kahneman, 2011; Kahneman et al., 2011). The public policy literature is very clear that all types of policy decision-makers are exposed to biases

identified by behavioral and cognitive research (Cairney et al., 2016; Dudley & Xie, 2019; Hallsworth et al., 2018).

Insights from current interviews

The use of research insights in Polish public administration is multifaceted, varying significantly across different organizational settings and the roles of those involved. High-level decision-makers (ministers, deputy ministers, department directors) consistently emerge as key users, but their engagement with research is often mediated through departmental staff who filter and summarize findings. This filtering process highlights the crucial role of internal expertise, particularly in specialized areas like taxation. However, the level of direct engagement with research varies. Some interviewed persons actively seek out and utilize research to inform strategic decisions and policy development, while others rely more heavily on internal data and analyses. The interviewed persons' roles significantly influence their information needs and use of research. Those involved in strategic planning and long-term policy development require more in-depth research, while those dealing with immediate crises or operational issues often need quick analyses and data provision.

Organizational context and research capacity is the second theme in interviews. The organizational setting significantly impacts access to and utilization of research. Ministries and Marshal's Offices with dedicated research units or access to internal expertise tend to utilize research more extensively than organizations with limited internal capacity. Public research institutes play a crucial role in providing expertise to various government bodies, but their findings are not always directly requested and sometimes used without explicit communication. Some organizations rely primarily on internal expertise and readily available data, while others actively commission external research using various funding mechanisms. The routines and processes for knowledge acquisition and utilization vary widely, reflecting organizational culture and capacity differences. Some interviewees highlight the influence of political agendas and lobbying on decision-making, sometimes overriding evidence-based approaches.

Users' personal characteristics and information preferences also emerged across the interviews. Interviewed persons consistently value concise, actionable information, practical recommendations, and clear articulation of findings over extensive theoretical analyses. The importance of trust in sources, based on reputation and prior experience, is also emphasized. However, preferences regarding research methods (qualitative vs. quantitative) vary. Some interviewed persons initially held a

negative view of academic research due to its perceived lack of practical application, highlighting a significant gap between academic research and the needs of policymakers. Other emphasizes the importance of data-driven decision-making and actively seek to verify the reliability of research findings.

Synthesis

Social researchers seeking to engage with public policy practitioners should recognize the multifaceted nature of knowledge use in Polish public administration, where research utilization varies significantly across organizational settings and professional roles. Three key dimensions shape how research is consumed: the institutional role of users (from political appointees to civil service managers), organizational environment (including learning culture and institutional knowledge routines), and individual characteristics of information users (their preferences, cognitive biases, and information processing habits). Particularly influential are high-level decision-makers whose engagement with research is often mediated through departmental staff who filter and summarize findings, highlighting the importance of understanding both direct and indirect pathways for research influence. Organizational capacity also plays a crucial role—ministries and offices with dedicated research units tend to utilize evidence more extensively than those with limited internal capacity.

For effective engagement, social researchers should recognize that many practitioners initially view academic research skeptically due to its perceived lack of practical application, revealing a significant gap between academic production and policymakers' needs. The Polish context presents additional challenges, as learning routines are often underdeveloped and not institutionalized, with insights and knowledge frequently flowing through informal networks and personal connections rather than formal channels.

Modes of engagement

Insights from literature

Effective engagement between researchers and policy practitioners requires a deliberate strategy that recognizes the diversity of actors, institutions, and dynamics within the policy process. This section outlines the main modes of engagement, understood as a combination of how knowledge is communicated (forms of communication) and where and through whom it is transmitted (routes or channels of communication).

Understanding and leveraging both dimensions is essential for ensuring that research-based knowledge informs not only formal policy outputs such as legislation or strategy papers, but also broader processes such as agenda-setting, implementation, and long-term shifts in policy thinking.

Forms of communication

The question of **how research is communicated** is no less important than what is being communicated. In the context of policymaking, where decisions are often made under time constraints, political pressure, and cognitive overload, the form of communication becomes a critical determinant of whether a message is even registered—let alone absorbed or acted upon.

Communication that is overly technical, too long, or insufficiently framed is likely to be ignored, regardless of the quality of the underlying evidence. What matters is the ability to present information in a way that fits how policy actors actually think and make decisions. This includes awareness of cognitive shortcuts, the role of emotional cues, and the importance of aligning messages with prevailing institutional narratives.

The way in which research findings are communicated has a significant effect on whether they are noticed, understood, and acted upon. Policymakers operate under time pressure, limited cognitive bandwidth, and in emotionally charged and politically complex environments. As a result, effective communication requires more than clarity; it requires strategic design that takes account of how people think, feel, and decide.

Key forms of communication include (Cairney & Kwiatkowski, 2017):

- Synthesis and simplification: Presenting concise, focused summaries of evidence that reduce cognitive burden and make key messages easy to retain.

- Framing: Aligning the presentation of evidence with the values, priorities, or institutional language of the target audience, helping decision-makers recognize its relevance to their goals.
- Narrative and storytelling: Using illustrative examples, personal stories, or emotionally resonant metaphors to make abstract problems concrete and memorable.
- Visual and structured communication: Employing diagrams, infographics, and clear formatting to aid rapid comprehension.
- Respectful mirroring: Adopting the tone and language used by the policy audience to create trust and familiarity.

These forms of communication shape how knowledge is perceived and whether it is integrated into policymaking processes. The same research, differently presented, can lead to radically different outcomes.

Routes and Channels of Communication

While communication form determines how a message is framed, the route of communication determines where it is delivered and through which institutional or relational mechanisms. Routes vary in terms of formality, visibility, duration, and their potential to influence different stages of the policy process—from idea generation to legislative scrutiny to public debate.

Researchers can engage with the policy process through multiple routes. These routes vary in their visibility, formality, and scope of influence (Reid & Chaytor, 2022):

- **Membership of a ministerial advisory group** allows for sustained, high-level input. It informs strategic policy documents, legislation, scrutiny, and specific decisions, while also helping shape long-term policy thinking.
- **Submission of written evidence to government or parliamentary consultations** enables researchers to contribute to formal policy processes. This route is impactful when well-targeted and timely, informing white papers, legislation, scrutiny, and public debate.
- **Undertaking government-commissioned research** is a direct route to shaping policy documents and decisions. Though often less visible publicly, it aligns closely with government priorities and fills targeted evidence gaps.
- **Participation in government-led policy reviews** contributes to evaluating and refining existing policies, influencing both legislative reform and strategic reorientation.
- **Engagement in stakeholder meetings** facilitates dialogue and mutual understanding. It informs scrutiny and decisions, and supports iterative, co-produced knowledge exchange.

- **Speaking at policy-relevant conferences** promotes broader policy awareness. It rarely informs direct decisions but can help shape long-term thinking and raise visibility of new issues.
- **Writing blogs, media articles, or using social media** offers influence over public narratives and frames of interpretation. This route primarily informs public debate but may indirectly shape policy priorities.
- **Policy fellowships or secondments** place researchers directly within policy institutions, providing immersive experiences that influence nearly all areas of policymaking—from strategic planning to implementation.
- **Drawing attention to an overlooked issue** is an agenda-setting strategy. It is particularly useful in prompting awareness, reframing problems, and opening new areas for engagement.
- **Lobbying with unsolicited evidence or analysis** is a proactive, risk-tolerant mode. When contextually relevant, it can influence legislative development, policy thinking, and decision-making.

Each route carries different potential for influencing distinct functions of policymaking—such as developing policy documents, supporting implementation, shaping public debate, or preventing undesirable actions. Moreover, impact is not always direct or visible. It may involve influencing how issues are framed, who is included in discussions, or how decisions are justified internally. Some effects unfold over time, through relationship-building and the gradual alignment of perspectives.

Selecting the most appropriate engagement route depends on understanding the institutional environment, the policy stage, and the intended function of the contribution. Engagement that resonates with policymakers' needs, timing, and decision-making context is more likely to succeed. However, **even strategic engagement may take time to manifest in visible change**—and often it is the cumulative effect of many small interactions that leads to longer-term impact.

Insights from current interviews

One of the strongest themes was the differentiated preference for information formats depending on a practitioner's position within the administration. High-ranking officials and political appointees tend to prefer short, focused materials—such as one-page briefs or bullet-point summaries—that can be absorbed quickly, often during a commute or in preparation for a decision-making meeting. These materials are valued for their accessibility and immediacy. **Some respondents even mentioned listening to podcasts or audiobooks as a practical way to engage with research while traveling.**

In contrast, operational staff and analysts are more receptive to longer formats, including full reports and sectoral studies, especially if accompanied by a clear executive summary. This allows them to scan for relevance and decide whether a deeper read is necessary. However, even those who engage with longer texts stress the importance of clarity, simple language, and visual organization to support information processing under time pressure. **The inclusion of graphs, tables, and clearly highlighted conclusions was seen as essential to aid comprehension.**

Despite broad patterns, preferences often reflect individual habits and institutional cultures. Some officials appreciate documents that include theoretical background or links to academic debates—particularly those trained in economics, evaluation, or political science. Others find theoretical content superfluous and call for highly targeted, policy-relevant material.

Visuals such as graphs and tables are well received when embedded in summaries or reports. Infographics, however, evoke mixed reactions. Some see them as helpful in capturing attention or presenting comparisons, while others consider them overly simplistic or lacking depth. Preferences here often depend on the decision-making context and the complexity of the issue.

Across interviews, there was strong appreciation for research that directly addresses the policy field in question, particularly sectoral reports or policy briefs developed by respected institutions such as the Polish Economic Institute, international organizations (OECD, EU), or domain-specific think tanks. **Reports from the Central Statistical Office (GUS), National Health Fund (NFZ), and expert institutions like the Centre for Eastern Studies (OSW) were also commonly cited as credible and relevant sources.** Practitioners recognize the added value of research when it reflects institutional knowledge or is prepared by organizations with direct experience in the policy area.

This was especially true for long-term strategies (e.g., green transition, public health, or labor market), where systematic research was seen as critical in shaping new directions. In such cases, the relevance of findings and their contextual grounding are more important than methodological novelty. **Research that ties directly to policy timing and provides actionable recommendations was seen as especially impactful.**

Interviewees repeatedly emphasized the importance of face-to-face or virtual meetings with researchers and experts. Regular expert group meetings—particularly when experts are engaged continuously in a given policy process—emerged as one of the most valued forms of engagement. This mode enables mutual learning, continuity, and responsiveness. **These interactions are valued far more than**

conference participation, which was generally viewed as too broad and too busy to offer tangible outcomes.

These meetings are seen as more productive than one-off consultations or passive receipt of reports. When relationships are established and maintained, the mutual understanding between researchers and policymakers deepens, allowing for quicker uptake of evidence and iterative shaping of recommendations. **This also builds long-term trust, which practitioners said influences whether they return to the same experts again.**

Conversely, conferences were rarely described as effective engagement mechanisms. Their scope was seen as too broad, with an overload of topics, presenters, and participants, making it difficult to derive actionable insights. **One interviewee noted that the best exchanges happen not during panels, but in informal conversations over coffee or in short, closed-door meetings.**

Commissioning research remains a common mode of engagement, yet practices vary. Some institutions use formal public procurement processes—especially when the budget is substantial—while others prefer simpler procedures like requests for quotations. Importantly, in practice, informal reputation often plays a decisive role in selecting a research partner, even within formal procedures. **Public procurement was also seen as a procedural barrier by some, particularly where there is a shortage of staff or time to follow through on implementation.**

Institutions frequently rely on known researchers or institutions with a proven track record. Responsiveness, prior collaboration, and the ability to adapt findings to institutional needs are often more valued than academic prestige alone. **In this context, knowledge brokers (i.e. intermediaries who translate research into practical guidance) were mentioned as a helpful but underdeveloped mechanism.**

Interviews underscore that one-off research products, even when methodologically rigorous, are less impactful than engagements embedded in ongoing policy processes. Regular meetings, co-creation of policy questions, and responsiveness to emerging needs were all seen as key drivers of effective collaboration. The most successful examples of evidence use stemmed from arrangements that fostered continuity—either through long-term research partnerships, embedded analysts, or institutionalized expert groups. **Interviewees emphasized that in case of policy formulation (for example creation of a strategy) successful collaboration begins early, i.e. already at the stage of defining information needs.**

Such ongoing collaborations are seen as particularly valuable in situations where policy problems evolve rapidly or when the evidence base is contested. They allow both sides to build trust, jointly frame problems, and iteratively refine solutions.

Synthesis

Insights from both the literature and interviews underline that effective engagement between researchers and policymakers is not just about the quality of evidence, but about the strategy and structure of communication. Forms and channels of engagement need to align with how policy actors work—under pressure, with limited time, and often within politicized or institutionally rigid environments. Literature highlights strategies such as synthesis, framing, narrative, and visual clarity as tools to increase the visibility and usability of research, while interviews confirmed that these forms significantly affect whether evidence is noticed and acted upon.

Interview data reinforced that preferences for communication formats vary by administrative role. Senior officials prefer short, high-level briefs that allow for quick orientation, while mid-level and operational staff are more open to detailed reports—especially when accompanied by well-structured summaries. This matches literature emphasizing cognitive load and attention constraints as key barriers to evidence use. However, practitioners also cautioned against over-simplification, noting that while visual tools like graphs or tables can enhance clarity, infographics without depth may reduce credibility.

For routes of engagement, sources agree on the centrality of personal relationships and embedded collaborations. Literature outlines a broad spectrum of engagement, i.e. from advisory roles and commissioned studies to informal dialogue and social media, while interviews highlighted regular expert meetings, direct consultations, and co-creation of research questions as the most effective. In respondents' options, these routes facilitate iterative exchange, responsiveness to policy needs, and mutual understanding—factors often missing in one-off reports or conferences, which were viewed by practitioners as too generic to yield actionable insights.

Finally, both sources emphasize that institutional reputation, responsiveness, and contextual relevance matter as much as academic prestige in shaping effective engagement. While formal commissioning processes are in place, practitioners often rely on known individuals or organizations with a proven track record. In this sense, strategic, relationship-based engagement—tailored to institutional needs and grounded in policy timing—offers the most promising pathway to meaningful research uptake.

Perceived credibility of information

This section is devoted to how policy practitioners judge the new information presented to them. We focus on the perceived credibility of information, contrary to research practice, which is not focused only on the quality of the research method.

In evidence-informed policymaking, credibility is often treated as synonymous with methodological quality. However, in practice, what counts as credible is shaped by a broader set of judgements. Policy practitioners do not only ask whether the evidence is valid; they also consider whether it is useful, timely, and aligned with their institutional goals and constraints. As a result, the perceived credibility of information is influenced as much by how and when it is delivered as by how it was produced [cf. Donaldson et al., 2014].

This divergence between research and policy worlds points to a fundamental tension: while academic norms may prioritize internal validity and methodological precision, policymakers tend to view credibility through **multiple lenses**, including whether the information confirms existing expectations, supports practical decisions, or provides a compelling rationale for action.

Understanding the factors that affect credibility in the eyes of policy actors is essential to explaining how evidence enters—or fails to enter—decision-making processes.

Insights from literature

Criteria used in credibility judgements

Credibility is assessed through multiple, often simultaneous, criteria. While methodological soundness remains a relevant factor, decision-makers also consider the familiarity of the source, the clarity of the presentation, and whether the findings confirm or challenge existing assumptions. Two overarching logics underlie these assessments: one concerned with the validity of the information itself, the other with its practical implications and applicability to a given policy context (Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1980).

Rather than evaluating evidence in a neutral or purely technical way, policy actors draw on both cognitive and strategic filters. They may ask whether the evidence

supports a course of action they are already considering whether it introduces reputational risks, or whether it can be integrated within existing institutional procedures.

Weiss and Bucuvalas (1980) illuminate the cognitive filters through which decision-makers assess research. Their study identifies two core logics: the **truth test**, which asks "**Is this study valid?**" and the **utility test**, which asks "**Is this useful for what I need to do?**"

Khagram and Craig (2010) argue for a more integrative and nuanced approach to evidence credibility. Their proposition reflects a growing recognition that no single "gold standard" can accommodate the diversity of goals, settings, and stakeholders in modern governance. Instead, the credibility of evidence is tied to:

- its **scientific soundness**,
- its **contextual validity**,
- its **practical relevance**, and
- the extent to which it includes **stakeholder perspectives**.

Rather than settle debates about "what works," this approach invites a more pluralistic view: where evidence is evaluated not only by how it was generated, but also by how it resonates with and supports the judgement of policy actors in particular contexts.

Importantly, these tests are not applied consistently or formally. They are shaped by prior beliefs, institutional cultures, and individual experience. Even technical experts may prioritize one over the other depending on context. In some cases, evidence will be dismissed not because it fails on technical grounds, but because it violates expectations or challenges prevailing narratives. In others, seemingly weak evidence may gain traction because it is timely, resonates with decision-makers, or provides convenient justification for planned actions.

In practice, the application of these tests is context-sensitive. The same piece of research may be seen as highly credible in one context and dismissed in another—depending on political climate, institutional norms, and perceived risks of acting on the evidence.

This illustrates that credibility is not assessed in a vacuum. It is relational, comparative, and often provisional – shaped by who is asking the question, what is at stake, and how the information fits within the broader informational and political landscape.

The role of methodological hierarchies

When evaluating credibility, users rarely rely on a single indicator. Instead, they respond to a range of characteristics that include, but go beyond, methodological quality. Core dimensions that affect perceived credibility include accuracy, clarity, balance, impartiality, currency, and completeness (Miller, 2015). Information that is up-to-date, free of factual errors, presented in a balanced way, and seen as unbiased is generally judged more favorably – even if it is less methodologically sophisticated.

Traditional hierarchies of evidence—such as those placing randomized controlled trials at the top—have long been used to rank the reliability of research. However, their practical value in policymaking is limited, particularly when evidence is needed for questions that concern implementation, acceptability, or contextual dynamics.

In such cases, methods that explore lived experience, identify enabling conditions, or trace causal pathways may be more appropriate than those designed to establish narrow causal attribution. Methodological appropriateness thus becomes a more meaningful indicator of credibility than position within a rigid hierarchy (Petticrew & Roberts, 2003).

These characteristics do not always coexist. A study may be technically precise but outdated or framed in a way that seems partial or overly abstract. In such cases, users often balance multiple, sometimes contradictory cues to reach an overall judgement. Information may also be assessed for relevance to current needs, its potential usefulness in practice, novelty, and consistency with what is already known (Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1980). Information that feels repetitive, redundant, or disconnected from immediate priorities is more likely to be disregarded, regardless of its technical quality.

Recognizing the limitations of generalized rankings allows for more context-sensitive assessments of what constitutes "good" evidence in a given policy situation.

Additionally, these evaluations are shaped not only by the content itself, but also by how the information is packaged. People often use surface cues – such as well-composed language, attractive formatting, or professional presentation – as proxies for credibility. These cues create a sense of cognitive ease, which can increase the likelihood that a message will be trusted and remembered (Kahneman, 2011; Miller, 2015).

The role of relationships and context in credibility judgements

Judging credibility is equally about assessing the **source** of that information and the **perspective** of the recipient. People tend to extend credibility to sources they already trust, to those whose roles or affiliations signal authority, or to those whose views align with their own. These sources are often described as possessing cognitive authority – a status that allows their claims to be believed with minimal scrutiny (Miller, 2015).

Four broad dimensions of source credibility influence these judgements:

- **Presumed credibility**, based on stereotypes of institutional reliability;
- **Reputed credibility**, derived from titles, roles, and affiliations;
- **Surface credibility**, based on the professional appearance of the content and communicator;
- **Experienced credibility**, grounded in prior direct or indirect positive encounters with the source (Miller, 2015).

Emotional state also affects judgement. Information encountered while in a good mood or during multitasking is more likely to be processed heuristically rather than analytically. This makes surface cues even more influential: a clean layout, a calm tone, or an appealing graphic can all make information feel more credible, even if the content is weak. In this way, perceived credibility is often a result of affective, intuitive processes as much as rational assessment.

To sum up, credibility is not a static property of a text, dataset, or evaluation report. It is a judgement, constructed through interactions between evidence, communicators, institutions, and audiences. This judgement is shaped by context, emotion, experience, heuristics, and beliefs - it rarely depends solely on technical criteria (Miller, 2015).

Insights from current interviews

Practitioners consistently pointed to specialized and internationally recognized institutions—such as the OECD, IMF, Eurostat, and the European Commission—as inherently trustworthy. Reports and data from such sources are often accepted without further scrutiny of the underlying methodology, as the institutional label itself signals quality and credibility. Similarly, national institutions with a strong reputation—such as the Polish Economic Institute—are considered reliable providers of locally relevant, high-quality information.

Internal data sources—such as inspection reports, monitoring tools, and in-house analysis—also play a central role, especially among those with strong analytical teams. For many practitioners, this internal evidence is not only more current but better aligned with the institutional logic and administrative realities of their work.

Practitioners rarely rely on a single factor to judge credibility. Most commonly, assessments are based on the **reputation of the institution or individual expert**. Certain experts are repeatedly sought after—not only for their subject-matter expertise, but also for their ability to communicate effectively and translate complex ideas into actionable insights. Communicative clarity and an understanding of public administration contexts are often valued more than academic credentials alone.

A second criterion used in credibility judgments is **alignment with the practitioner's own experience or intuition.** Several interviewees acknowledged that they are more inclined to trust findings that confirm what they already believe or have observed in practice. In this way, perceived credibility often reflects cognitive resonance rather than methodological scrutiny.

The role of methodology in credibility assessment varied. Some respondents took the time to evaluate sample size, data sources, and the logic of analysis. Others relied more on institutional trust or expert reputation, assuming that rigorous standards had already been met.

The format in which information is presented strongly affects how credible it is perceived to be. Short notes, presentations, and executive summaries—when clear, well-organized, and visually structured—were widely regarded as both useful and credible. Tables, graphs, and dashboards were seen as effective in conveying key findings quickly, especially in high-pressure decision-making environments.

However, excessive simplification—such as in some infographic-style outputs—was viewed by several practitioners as diminishing the seriousness of the message. While graphics can support clarity, they should not replace substantive content. For those working on strategic or long-term issues, longer and more detailed documents were preferred—as long as they were structured logically and included clear conclusions.

Synthesis

Both literature and interviews make clear that credibility in policymaking is not solely a technical concept, but a relational and contextual judgement. While methodological quality remains a foundational criterion, policy practitioners

routinely draw on a broader set of filters, including trust in the source, practical utility, alignment with institutional goals, and the way information is presented. Literature distinguishes between “truth” and “utility” tests in evaluating credibility, and this distinction is mirrored in practice: practitioners do not necessarily privilege methodologically rigorous research unless it also answers pressing questions, confirms lived experience, or can be operationalized in their institutional setting.

Across interviews, credibility was most often tied to institutional or individual reputation. Sources such as the OECD, IMF, Eurostat, and established national think tanks like the Polish Economic Institute were trusted largely on the basis of brand or familiarity, rather than detailed methodological scrutiny. This reflects the idea of "cognitive authority," where certain sources are granted presumed or reputed credibility, bypassing more analytical assessments. At the same time, many practitioners emphasize the importance of communicative competence—valuing experts who can translate complexity into actionable insights over those who merely demonstrate academic sophistication.

Affective and heuristic processes also play a substantial role. Just as literature points to the impact of surface cues—such as language, structure, or visual clarity—practitioners reported being more likely to engage with materials that are concise, visually structured, and easy to navigate. Formats such as short briefs, dashboards, or clear presentations enhance the perceived credibility of information, especially under time pressure. However, oversimplification was seen as a credibility risk; outputs that lacked depth or context could be dismissed, regardless of visual appeal.

The findings also show that internal data—generated within the institution—can often carry more weight than external studies, as it is perceived to be contextually aligned and immediately actionable. This highlights the dual role of familiarity and institutional fit in shaping credibility. Finally, interviews underscore how credibility is not assessed in isolation, but in interaction with prior beliefs, urgency of the problem, and organizational routines. In this light, building credibility requires not only sound evidence, but also relational trust, contextual relevance, and strategic communication.

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: USERS' PROFILES

In this part of the report we present the typical profiles of the potential users of research in public administration settings. In design literature and practice they are called: personas (Lidwell et al., 2010, pp. 182-183).

These profiles provide researchers with valuable insights into how different levels of public administration consume and utilize research, enabling more effective knowledge translation.

By understanding preferences and conditions specific to each user's profile, researchers can tailor both their research outputs and communication strategies accordingly. Rather than producing one-size-fits-all reports, researchers who customize their approach based on these profiles—adjusting content focus, technical complexity, format, delivery channels, and timing— hopefully increase the likelihood that their findings will influence policy processes at the appropriate level.

This highly targeted approach is a good practice coming from the field of design studies (Kumar, 2012, pp. 210-211; Stickdorn et al., 2018, pp. 69-72). It transforms academic research from merely interesting information into actionable intelligence that meets each stakeholder's specific needs, constraints, and decision-making contexts.

Applying users' profiles in three steps

We propose to apply the user profile in three steps. In **STEP ONE,** the researcher should reflect on the policy problem and decision situation in which they want to engage with their research findings.

This step is crucial because by understanding the timing and character of the decision situation, the researcher can better predict who will be involved (what type of decision-makers) and the information needs and questions asked by policy practitioners. They can also better predict tensions around value perspectives and frames used to characterize policy problems and their potential solutions.

In **STEP 2,** the researcher should identify the users' profile in decision-making.

That step requires unpacking three things. The starting point is the user's formal position in the system (their agency, their role in the decision-making process). This aspect is covered by our three profiles of users (see next sections). The second aspect is the users' organizational contexts in which they operate – basically the extent to which a specific organization has a culture that allows learning from research. The last part is personal traits – is the decision-maker a person who puts high or low value on research insights.

In **STEP 3,** the researcher can adapt their engagement strategy (form, channels, and styles of communication) to the profiles of the users.

The details of communication strategies have been discussed in the earlier section, and they are also integrated into the profiles of users. However, here we want to stress out more universal techniques of communication identified by Cairney (Cairney et al., 2016):

1. The proposed solutions or information should be feasible, and timely in terms of matching decision-makers motives and opportunity
2. It is recommended to combine facts with emotional appeals because that grasps policymaker attention
3. The narrative developed around research results really matters – stories address people's biases, highlighting the moral and political value of potential policy interventions
4. New research findings should be anchored or related to earlier developments in specific policies because decision-makers usually interpret new evidence, throwing light on earlier situations
5. When interpreting new evidence, it is worth identifying and using the lens of the pre-existing beliefs of key actors within policy coalitions and stakeholders that dominate policy networks.

Profile 1: High-level political appointees

Position and role

Takes strategic, directional decisions affecting a country or region, its sectors, and institutions. May hold formal leadership roles (e.g., minister, deputy minister, or department director) or serve as a senior advisor shaping policy directions, drafting legislation, or coordinating strategic planning processes. Sets policy priorities and establishes the political agenda for major government initiatives. Represents the highest level of political authority within their jurisdiction and maintains direct accountability to the electorate.

Working context

Operates in a demanding and high-pressure environment, often balancing formal, slow-paced legislative procedures with urgent crisis response (e.g., pandemics, environmental disasters, geopolitical shocks). Must navigate institutional complexity, interministerial negotiations, and media scrutiny. Key features include:

- High political sensitivity: Actions are shaped by electoral cycles, party agendas, and media narratives.
- Reactive decision-making: Often prompted by crises, stakeholder pressure, or urgent deadlines rather than long-term planning.
- Resource constraints: Limited time, staff capacity, and funding for engaging with external research or commissioning studies.
- Procedural rigidity: Legal and bureaucratic hurdles limit flexibility in engaging with researchers or rapidly procuring evidence-based analyses.

Topics of interest

They are interested in large (although not always strategic) subject matters, media arguments, sensitive social issues and important economic issues, mainly of a positive nature. Not interested in a single research study, but rather an issue which is supported by the findings of various studies. They seek information that can be translated into political narratives and public messaging that resonates with constituents. They often use research to “legitimize” rather than “inspire” policies.

This type of decision-makers focus on policy-relevant evidence that supports:

- Legislative initiatives and regulatory changes.
- Crisis response and urgent interventions.

- Strategic documents (e.g., employment strategies, green transition, public health frameworks).
- EU funding negotiations and policy implementation evaluations.
- Diagnosing root causes of complex problems (e.g., labor market shifts, public health trends, demographic changes).
- Predictive analytics, foresight (e.g., AI impact on jobs), and cost-effectiveness of interventions.
- International comparisons and benchmarks.
- Brief summaries of multiple sources rather than single research studies
- Information that supports already planned initiatives rather than exploratory research.

Preferred modes of engagement

Format Preferences: Decision-makers overwhelmingly prefer information that is brief, visually accessible, and directly applicable. The most effective formats include:

- 1–2-page policy briefs, executive summaries, and bullet-point memos.
- Infographics and data dashboards for quick orientation and visual scanning.
- Slide decks (PPT) for ministerial briefings and cabinet discussions.
- Podcasts, audio briefs, or short videos, are often consumed during commutes.
- Long-form reports and academic articles are generally avoided unless accompanied by a clear, front-loaded summary.

Interaction Preferences: Direct, short expert consultations (30 minutes) are favored over large conferences or passive webinars. Ad hoc phone calls, informal chats, and quick feedback loops play a key role in "just-in-time" policy-making. Ongoing collaboration is more likely when experts are embedded in advisory roles or working groups. Decision-makers rarely reach out to researchers themselves; instead, they rely on trusted intermediaries (senior civil servants, advisors, or known experts).

Quality Assessment: trust is grounded in the reputation of the source—known institutions (e.g., Eurostat, IMF, national think tanks) and recognizable experts carry more weight than lesser-known providers. Decision-makers often check for method clarity, such as sample sizes, indicators, and institutional endorsements. Peer review is valued but not required if the expert is already recognized. Presentation format also influences credibility—a professional layout and accessible design imply reliability.

Timing is critical—"good data at the right time" is more valuable than comprehensive analysis delivered too late. Evidence is most often sought in

moments of crisis, budget planning, or EU negotiations. Policy windows are short; a delay of weeks can render an analysis obsolete.

Language: Preferred communication is clear, non-technical, and action-oriented. Avoidance of academic jargon, lengthy theory sections, and conditional phrasing is essential. Effective language is concrete, conclusive, and aligned with the logic of policy implementation (e.g., “this will reduce costs by 30%”). Use of relatable metaphors, real-world examples, and alignment with current political discourse increases engagement.

Challenges and Constraints

Time scarcity: Little capacity for reading lengthy documents or conducting in-depth analysis.

Institutional limitations: Complex procurement rules, rigid hierarchies, and budget constraints impede agile cooperation with researchers.

Political pressure: Risk aversion and reputation management reduce willingness to act on findings that challenge prevailing narratives or agendas.

Fragmented access: Research is often siloed or poorly aligned with policy cycles and administrative routines.

Cherry-picking: Evidence is sometimes selectively used to confirm prior decisions or defend public narratives.

Direct Implications for Knowledge Providers

To increase policy impact, researchers and knowledge intermediaries should:

1. Tailor formats: Prioritize brief, visual, and narrative-enhanced outputs for higher-tier political users; provide longer versions for directors or analysts.
2. Build trust: Collaborate with or get endorsements from reputable institutions or experts known to the target audience.
3. Be timely: Align with key political or budgetary windows; adapt output to crisis conditions when needed.
4. Use brokers: Engage intermediaries (e.g., knowledge brokers, think tanks, KSAP) to translate findings and ensure relevance.
5. Co-create: Involve decision-makers early in research design to align with actual policy needs and reduce later resistance.
6. Create institutional bridges: Advocate for mechanisms like shared expert rosters, policy-research fellowships, and centralized evidence repositories.

Profile 2: Senior decision-makers

Position and role

Senior decision-makers are typically directors of departments in ministries or key units within governmental agencies. They function as crucial intermediaries between political leadership and administrative execution. Their responsibilities include formulating solutions to policy problems, designing interventions, defining budgets, overseeing implementation, and ensuring compliance with both political directives and administrative regulations. They also often mediate between strategic vision and practical feasibility, sometimes representing their institutions in interministerial or international negotiations.

Working context

They operate at the intersection of political expectations and bureaucratic constraints. Thus, their work is shaped by competing demands: (i) political pressures from elected superiors (e.g., rapid response during crises, alignment with elected officials' electoral interests), (ii) Administrative constraints (e.g., procedural compliance, budget discipline), and (iii) evidence-based ambitions (e.g., informed policymaking, effective public spending). They navigate a fast-paced and often reactive environment, especially during emergencies (e.g., pandemics, environmental crises), which requires balancing immediate action with longer-term planning. They are accountable for both policy design and ensuring successful implementation through bureaucratic channels while navigating financial constraints and complex public procurement procedures.

Topics of interest

They are especially interested in timely, concise, and applied insights that support both strategic decisions and routine policymaking tasks. They focus on specialized topics relevant to their government office responsibilities. Their key information needs include:

- Diagnosis of problem causes rather than merely symptom descriptions (causes, prevalence, affected populations),
- Background information and interpretations of statistical data
- Evidence to justify legislative changes and strategic documents
- Forecasts and scenarios regarding future developments,
- Assessment of effectiveness, outcomes, and cost-efficiency of interventions
- Benchmarking and good practices from other countries or sectors,

- Trade-off analyses and policy options with consequences,
- Evidence to justify legislative or budgetary changes.

They particularly value comparative information about similar interventions implemented elsewhere and evidence of effectiveness in comparable contexts. Unlike their political superiors, they have time for deeper methodological discussions and can engage more thoroughly with research details.

Preferred modes of engagement

Format preferences: Short (1-2 page) briefings, executive summaries, short PowerPoint decks, infographics instead of lengthy reports ("8 pages not 80 pages"). Appreciate asynchronous formats - briefings, podcasts, and short videos that can be consumed during travel or between meetings.

Interaction preferences: Small, focused working meetings (1-2 hours) rather than all-day conferences. They appreciate direct access to experts for consultations. They value expert councils and periodic meetings (every 1-2 months) with stable groups of experts.

Quality assessment: They examine research methods, sample size and characteristics, and values peer reviews. Pay attention to the reputation of institutions and researchers providing evidence.

Timing: Values "good knowledge at good time" - research delivered when needed for decision-making processes.

Language: Can process more technical and specialized language than political appointees but still prefers clear, direct communication without academic jargon or excessive theoretical framing. They value concise, direct communication with clear findings and recommendations and "hybrid depth" - summary up front with access to detailed data and methods (in annexes).

Challenges and Constraints

Key obstacles that senior decision-makers face can include:

- Severe time constraints – they often lack time for in-depth analysis of long reports,
- Rigid procedures – procurement and legal frameworks inhibit the timely commissioning of research,
- Political sensitivities – findings that contradict prevailing agendas may be ignored or downplayed,

- Fragmentation and overload of information – difficulty locating or navigating existing evidence,
- Lack of institutional intermediaries – the absence of "knowledge brokers" or integrated platforms for research access and translation.

These constraints mean that even evidence-hungry senior officials often rely on rapid, ad hoc consultations or pre-existing relationships with trusted experts.

Direct Implications for Knowledge Providers

To work effectively with senior decision-makers:

1. Frame findings within the real-world constraints and timing of their decisions,
2. Use structured, layered communication (summary first, detail later),
3. Emphasize credibility through source reputation, transparent methods, and co-creation where possible,
4. Offer flexible and rapid-response modes of engagement (short meetings, online check-ins),
5. Be aware of institutional and political dynamics that may shape demand for research.

Profile 3: Personnel managing policies

Position and role

Managers deal with the everyday implementation of public interventions. They work on streamlining the execution of successive stages of an intervention in conformance with procedures. Responsible for translating policy designs into operational reality and implementing public policies, including resource management and ensuring that planned interventions are delivered efficiently and in line with procedural requirements. Acts as the operational backbone of policy execution, frequently involved in translating strategic intentions into concrete actions under time and resource constraints.

Working context

Managers operate under tight administrative and political timelines, with pressure from senior leadership and external stakeholders. Their work is deeply embedded in formal frameworks (e.g., EU-funded programs, legal compliance) and involves managing implementation risks such as delays, non-compliance, or public dissatisfaction.

Their decision-making authority is often limited; however, responsibility for delivering results remains high. They work across a range of topics (employment, environment, social inclusion) within established bureaucratic frameworks with significant time pressure ("24 hours a day, 100 issues daily"). They operate in two distinct modes: a slow, formalized legislative process ("from draft through consultations, parliamentary process and Senate, and then implementation") and crisis response requiring immediate action. They often work in departmental silos with limited access to data from other institutions. Frequently, they must respond to political pressures and electoral considerations that may override evidence-based approaches. Organizational culture varies significantly between ministries.

Topics of interest

They are mainly interested in operational issues connected with the interventions they are managing, and specifically, issues of processes and procedures. They also need, although seldom realize this, a broader view of the intervention – information on how these activities are linked with the activities of other organizations and on the effects of their work. Managers are especially interested in following topics:

- Practical solutions for operational bottlenecks (e.g., delays, staff shortages, reporting overload).

- Monitoring tools for tracking performance and identifying areas needing corrective action.
- Evidence-based recommendations during crises or when facing pressure from media/public.
- Implementation feasibility: how similar solutions work in other regions (benchmarking), what adaptations are needed in the Polish context.
- Impact assessments: cost-effectiveness, efficiency, side effects of interventions.

They are often unaware of the strategic value of long-term research, using it mostly to validate already planned interventions or respond reactively to problems.

Preferred modes of engagement

Format Preferences: these users prefer detailed, technically rigorous documents — reports that go beyond superficial summaries and include data breakdowns, method explanations, and operational implications. While long narratives are discouraged, well-structured content with clear headings, graphs, and annexes is appreciated, especially if directly relevant to their specific policy area or program. Executive summaries and infographics are valued as entry points, not replacements for full documentation.

Interaction Preferences: They favor structured, formal engagements that allow for back-and-forth clarification and adjustment. Ideal formats include working meetings or consultations (60–120 minutes) where they can ask specific questions and give feedback on draft findings. They opt in for personal briefings or sector-specific technical workshops rather than large-scale conferences. They have a preference for a series of iterative engagements over one-off presentations to ensure findings are relevant and usable in their evolving implementation context.

Quality Assessment. These users actively evaluate the credibility of sources. Key trust signals include clear information on sample size, method, and data sources, reports authored by recognized institutions or well-known experts, and evidence that findings were peer-reviewed or practically validated. They are skeptical of overly general claims and require traceable logic and justifications behind recommendations.

Timing. Timeliness is crucial. These users need access to insights at the right moment, particularly during the drafting of legislation, operational procedures, or funding applications, budget planning and reporting cycles, emergent implementation issues, or public controversies. They appreciate advance notice and

early sharing of preliminary findings, which allows them to incorporate evidence into internal planning and timelines.

Language: While this user can engage with technical language, it must be clear, unambiguous, and aligned with administrative practice. They dislike "academic slang" and demand plain, precise terminology without oversimplifying complex mechanisms. They like the use of policy and legal vocabulary that aligns with existing frameworks and procedures, as well as translations or glossaries for unfamiliar analytical terms when needed.

Challenges and Constraints

Key challenges for this group of users in interacting with research include:

- Time scarcity - too many tasks per day leaves no room for reading
- Budget limitations - lack of funds to commission external research or hire data specialists.
- Procedural inertia - rigid public procurement laws slow down access to expert support.
- Information overload - without clear summaries, valuable research gets buried.
- Low research literacy - in some departments makes it hard to assess methodological quality.
- Fragmented access to data - valuable internal data is often inaccessible even to staff.

Direct Implications for Knowledge Providers

To work effectively with personnel managing policy interventions, the researchers should:

1. Frame research as a tool for reducing implementation risk, not just strategic foresight.
2. Use real-world examples and comparative cases, especially from similar jurisdictions or EU contexts.
3. Build ongoing relationships with intermediaries (e.g., departmental analysts, senior managers) who act as internal champions for using evidence.
4. Help them link operational problems with upstream causes, offering systems-thinking without jargon.
5. Offer tailored support for translating insights into implementation-ready steps, e.g., checklists, templates, or procedural maps.

EMERGING IDEAS AND PERSPECTIVES FOR COOPERATION

Broadly speaking there are three generations of thinking on evidence use (Boaz et al., 2019, pp. 257-261). The first is highly rational-linear dissemination (researchers produce knowledge which get disseminated to end-users). Second approach is relational, focusing on interactions among people creating and using evidence. The third generation thinks in systems-wide approaches, where relationships are embedded and shaped by institutional and organizational structures.

In this report we take the perspective of 2nd generation thinking – we focus on situational sharing of evidence, the development of partnerships and networks of stakeholders with common interests.

We advocate for a second-generation approach in this report because that would serve as a necessary foundation for Poland's eventual transition toward third-generation - systems thinking. Currently, Poland lacks the institutional infrastructure and ingrained collaborative practices required for fully implementing systems-wide approaches to evidence use. The fragmentation of policy sectors, variable capacity across different levels of government, and continuing development of evidence culture within Polish public administration present obstacles to immediate adoption of third-generation models.

Thus, we postulate building first robust networks and partnerships through second-generation approaches - the relational groundwork necessary for more ambitious systems transformation. As stakeholder relationships mature and collaborative practices become institutionalized, the conditions will emerge for addressing the structural and organizational factors that shape evidence ecosystems—the hallmark of third-generation thinking.

In this part of the report we presented emerging ideas coming from interviews – notably answers to the questions on (i) current barriers for cooperation, (ii) needs and opportunities for developing cooperation, and (iii) lessons from good practices of using research in policy decision-making.

PLEASE NOTE that these ideas are initial, they have not been discussed or analyzed by us due to the time limit. This set can be treated only as a starting point for further conversations.

Perceived barriers for cooperation

Despite a shared understanding of the value that evidence can bring to policymaking, effective cooperation between researchers and policy practitioners remains constrained by a range of systemic, procedural, and cultural barriers. Insights from interviews highlight several recurring challenges that undermine the integration of research into policy processes.

Time and resource constraints

One of the most pervasive barriers is the chronic lack of time and financial resources within public administration. Policymakers operate in environments dominated by urgent tasks, crisis management, and political deadlines, leaving little room for engaging with complex or lengthy research outputs. Even high-quality studies risk being overlooked due to this time pressure. Financial limitations further exacerbate the problem, as many institutions lack dedicated budgets for commissioning external research or expert consultations. This forces reliance on internal data and reduces opportunities for external, evidence-based input.

Procedural and institutional challenges

Rigid procurement procedures and bureaucratic inefficiencies significantly hinder flexible cooperation with researchers. Public procurement processes often emphasize cost over quality, lack agility, and are ill-suited to the fast-paced needs of policymaking. Several respondents noted the absence of streamlined mechanisms for quickly sourcing expertise or commissioning targeted studies. Moreover, cooperation is frequently ad hoc, driven by individual initiative rather than embedded within institutional frameworks. The lack of formalized structures for sustained engagement leads to inconsistent and reactive collaboration, limiting the strategic use of research.

Communication and accessibility gaps

A critical barrier lies in the disconnect between how research is produced and how policymakers consume information. Academic outputs are often perceived as too technical, verbose, or framed in inaccessible language. Without clear, concise, and actionable summaries, research fails to align with the cognitive and operational realities of public administration. Additionally, restricted access to scientific databases and paywalled journals discourages the use of academic sources, particularly when immediate answers are required. This mismatch reduces the practical utility of research in day-to-day decision-making.

Political and cultural barriers

Interviewees emphasized that political dynamics frequently overshadow evidence-based reasoning. Decisions are often influenced by electoral considerations, media pressures, or reputational concerns rather than by objective analysis. In such contexts, research that challenges existing policies or political narratives may be disregarded or even viewed with suspicion. Furthermore, openness to research varies widely across institutions, depending on leadership attitudes, personal experiences, and organizational culture. This lack of a systemic commitment to evidence-informed policymaking results in uneven and unpredictable engagement with research.

Trust, credibility, and selective use of research

A recurring theme across interviews was the selective use of research to legitimize pre-determined decisions—a practice commonly referred to as "cherry-picking." Practitioners often commission or cite studies not to explore new solutions, but to reinforce positions already taken. Trust in research is primarily anchored in the reputation of known institutions or individual experts, with methodological rigor playing a secondary role. While this reliance on familiar sources reduces perceived risk, it also limits exposure to diverse perspectives and innovative approaches, reinforcing path dependency.

Overreliance on personal networks

Closely linked to trust issues is the dependence on informal relationships for accessing expertise. While personal networks facilitate swift cooperation, they also create closed circuits of interaction, excluding new actors and limiting transparency. This reliance on established contacts can stifle innovation and hinder the development of open, competitive processes for engaging with a broader research community.

Limited analytical capacity within administration

Some respondents pointed to a gap in analytical competencies among policymakers and administrative staff. Not all practitioners possess the skills required to interpret complex research findings critically. This capacity deficit leads to a preference for simplified formats and internal data, even when external research could offer deeper insights. Without efforts to build analytical literacy within public institutions, the effective use of research will remain constrained.

Misaligned timelines and priorities

Finally, a fundamental barrier is the misalignment between academic research cycles and policy needs. Policymakers often require rapid, context-specific evidence, while academic projects are typically long-term and oriented toward publication rather than immediate applicability. The absence of flexible frameworks for short-term, policy-relevant research delivery discourages engagement and limits the responsiveness of academia to real-time policy challenges.

Ideas for improving cooperation

Idea 1: Establish knowledge brokers and advisory councils

Interviews highlighted the pressing need for intermediaries who can bridge the gap between researchers and policymakers. These knowledge brokers would focus on translating complex academic findings into clear, actionable insights tailored to policy needs. Their role would involve aligning research outputs with decision-making contexts, curating relevant evidence, facilitating dialogue, and helping frame findings in ways that resonate with institutional priorities. Unlike occasional collaborations, knowledge brokers would provide a continuous link, ensuring that research informs policy processes in real time.

In addition to individual intermediaries, respondents emphasized the importance of revitalizing advisory councils. While such bodies exist, they are often formalities with limited influence.

These bodies would ensure continuity, foster trust, and facilitate the adaptation of research findings to administrative realities. Knowledge brokers, whether embedded within institutions (e.g., KSAP, corporate municipal bodies) or operating as external facilitators, could play a critical role in aligning research outputs with policy needs and timelines.

Both knowledge brokers and advisory councils would supplement reliance on informal networks, creating structured pathways for consistent, evidence-based input. This approach addresses not only communication barriers but also the lack of institutionalized cooperation mechanisms, fostering a more systematic and enduring relationship between research and policymaking.

Idea 2: Develop a central research repository tailored to policy needs

One of the most frequently mentioned challenges in the interviews was the fragmentation and inaccessibility of research outputs relevant to policymaking. Policy practitioners often struggle to locate timely, reliable, and context-specific information due to the absence of a centralized, user-friendly platform that aggregates research tailored to their needs.

The proposal to create a **centralized repository**—a searchable platform cataloguing research summaries, policy briefs, and sector-specific analyses—was seen as a practical solution. Such a repository should prioritize clear, concise formats (e.g., executive summaries, infographics) and categorize content according to administrative priorities. This would reduce the cognitive and logistical burden on policymakers, allowing for quicker identification of actionable knowledge. Open access, combined with secure integration of public data resources (e.g., APIs to government registers), would further enhance usability.

While some repositories and databases already exist—particularly within certain ministries or at the national level—the respondents highlighted that these systems are often poorly maintained, outdated, or not aligned with the practical realities of public administration. Access is further complicated by technical barriers, lack of awareness, or overly academic categorization, which makes it difficult for non-researchers to navigate and extract actionable insights.

By developing a central, policy-oriented research repository, administrations would significantly reduce the time and effort required to locate credible, actionable knowledge. This would empower decision-makers at all levels—particularly those in smaller offices or regions without strong analytical support—to base their actions on evidence.

Ultimately, this initiative would not only enhance accessibility but also promote a culture of evidence use within public administration, making research a routine part of decision-making rather than an occasional add-on.

Idea 3: Flexible funding mechanisms for targeted, short-cycle research

A recurring theme in the interviews was the misalignment between the pace of policymaking and the rigid structures of research funding. Policy practitioners often face dynamic environments where timely decisions are required, but traditional research commissioning processes—characterized by lengthy public procurement procedures or large-scale grant schemes—are too slow, complex, or inflexible to meet these immediate needs.

Respondents emphasized the necessity for flexible funding mechanisms that would allow public administration to quickly access targeted research or expert analysis without being constrained by bureaucratic hurdles. These mechanisms should support short-cycle research projects, designed to deliver concise, actionable insights within weeks or a few months, rather than the extended timelines typical of academic studies.

Such flexibility would enable policymakers to respond to emerging challenges, fill evidence gaps during legislative processes, or obtain rapid assessments of policy options. For example, when drafting a new regulation or addressing unforeseen socio-economic developments, administrations often require focused analyses, comparative studies, or scenario evaluations that are context-specific and decision-oriented.

Several practitioners pointed out that while ad hoc funding pools or simplified procurement paths sometimes exist, they are either underfunded, poorly promoted, or encumbered by unclear guidelines. As a result, opportunities for agile collaboration with researchers are frequently missed.

Developing dedicated budget lines for rapid-response research, combined with streamlined contracting procedures—such as framework agreements with pre-vetted research institutions or expert rosters—could significantly enhance the capacity of administrations to engage with evidence in real time. These funds should prioritize relevance, clarity, and applicability over methodological complexity, reflecting the practical needs of decision-makers.

Idea 4: Incentivize academic engagement with policy through recognition systems

While a system for recognizing academic engagement with public administration already exists—primarily through performance evaluation points for applied research—interviewees highlighted that it functions poorly in practice. The current mechanisms are often seen as insufficiently motivating, overly formalistic, or disconnected from the realities of collaboration with policymakers.

Practitioners and researchers alike pointed out that the value of policy-relevant research is not adequately reflected in academic career advancement or institutional assessments. As a result, scholars may deprioritize cooperation with public administration in favor of activities more directly rewarded by academic evaluation frameworks.

To address this, respondents suggested strengthening existing recognition systems. This could involve assigning greater weight to applied research outcomes, co-authored policy documents, and expert advisory roles within academic performance reviews. Additionally, clearer guidelines on how policy impact is measured (and a reduction in bureaucratic hurdles for reporting such activities) would encourage more researchers to engage meaningfully with policy challenges without fearing negative consequences for their academic standing.

Idea 5: Promote continuous, dialogue-based engagement models

One-off research projects or ad hoc consultations, while useful in addressing immediate information needs, often fail to generate lasting impact in policymaking processes. Interviews clearly highlighted that continuous, dialogue-based cooperation between researchers and policy practitioners leads to more meaningful and sustained use of evidence.

Several respondents pointed out that when experts are regularly involved in policy development, they gain a deeper understanding of institutional contexts, political constraints, and evolving priorities. This ongoing engagement allows for mutual learning, where researchers can adjust their analyses to be more relevant and actionable, while policymakers become more familiar with the potential and limitations of scientific evidence.

Such models include long-term partnerships, institutionalized expert groups, or embedded analysts working alongside administrative teams. Regular meetings, iterative consultations, and co-creation of research agendas ensure that evidence is not only produced but continuously refined to fit changing policy dynamics.

A key benefit of this approach is responsiveness. In fast-moving policy environments, static reports quickly become outdated. Continuous dialogue enables researchers to provide timely updates, contextual interpretations, and scenario-based recommendations as new challenges arise. This flexibility is particularly valuable in areas such as environmental policy, public health, or economic development, where external conditions can shift rapidly.

Moreover, long-term engagement fosters trust and credibility—factors repeatedly identified as crucial for research uptake. When relationships are built over time, policymakers are more likely to seek input proactively, rely on expert advice, and integrate findings into decision-making processes.

To promote such models, institutions could formalize framework agreements with research bodies, establish permanent advisory panels, or create joint task forces for specific policy areas. Ensuring that these mechanisms are adequately resourced and embedded within administrative routines would help move beyond fragmented cooperation toward a more strategic, dialogue-driven partnership culture.

Idea 6: Raise awareness among researchers about policy communication standards

A recurring theme in the interviews was the **mismatch between academic communication styles and the needs of public administration**. Practitioners often expressed frustration with research outputs that are too complex, theoretical, or lacking clear conclusions. Lengthy reports filled with academic jargon, extensive literature reviews, and ambiguous findings were seen as a barrier to effective use of research in policymaking. Interviewees stressed the importance of **raising awareness among researchers** about the specific expectations of policy audiences. Researchers need to understand that when addressing public administration, **clarity, brevity, and actionable recommendations** are critical.

This could be achieved through **closer collaboration with practitioners during the research process**, where expectations regarding format and communication are set from the outset. Additionally, academic institutions and research organizations could develop **internal guidelines or best practices** for preparing policy-oriented

outputs—encouraging teams to produce **executive summaries, key findings sections, and clear, prioritized recommendations** alongside full reports.

In essence, **bridging the communication gap** starts with making researchers aware that impactful cooperation depends not only on methodological rigor but also on how findings are presented and translated into the decision-making context.

Lessons from good practices of using research in policy decision-making

Effective integration of research into policymaking does not happen by chance: it is the result of specific practices, relationships, and institutional habits that foster trust, relevance, and usability. Interviews with policy practitioners reveal several recurring factors that distinguish successful cases of evidence use from instances where research remains underutilized.

A key lesson is the importance of **proactive engagement and timing**. The most effective use of research occurs when it is embedded early in the policy process—not merely as a reactive tool in moments of crisis. Practitioners highlighted that when research is commissioned or consulted at the agenda-setting or design stage, it allows for deeper analysis, better alignment with policy goals, and avoids the pitfalls of rushed, superficial studies. This proactive approach supports more innovative and forward-looking policymaking, particularly in areas requiring long-term strategies, such as environmental policy or labor market reforms.

Another critical factor is **building trust through stable, long-term relationships** with researchers and institutions. Several respondents pointed to ongoing collaborations (whether through advisory councils, regular expert meetings, or repeated partnerships with trusted think tanks) as central to effective evidence use. These relationships enable mutual understanding, reduce the transaction costs of each new engagement, and ensure that researchers are familiar with the administrative and political context in which their findings will be applied. Trust in individual experts, reinforced by prior positive experiences and clear communication, often determined whether research recommendations were implemented.

Good practices also emphasize the need for **contextualization and adaptability**. Successful examples show that research is most impactful when it goes beyond generic recommendations and is tailored to the specific legal, political, and institutional environment of the policymaker. Practitioners valued studies that acknowledged local constraints, sectoral nuances, and the feasibility of proposed actions. This adaptability was often achieved through iterative dialogue during the research process, allowing findings to be refined in response to administrative realities.

In terms of communication, effective cases consistently relied on **clear, concise, and well-structured outputs**. Policy briefs, executive summaries, and visually supported reports (with charts or tables) were highlighted as formats that facilitated decision-

making. However, practitioners also stressed that clarity should not come at the expense of substance—successful communication struck a balance between accessibility and analytical depth. Interactive formats, such as workshops or focused expert sessions, further enhanced understanding and allowed for immediate clarification of complex issues.

Finally, **institutional roles and structures** played a significant role in good practices presented by respondents. Departments with dedicated analytical units, directors acting as bridges between research and decision-making, and the involvement of reputable think tanks or scientific institutes were repeatedly mentioned as factors contributing to use of evidence.

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