superu ⊕

Making sense of evidence:

A guide to using evidence in policy

Using Evidence for Impact

Contents

About this guide

This guide is the second in Superu's *Making Sense* series. The first handbook in the series is our award-winning Making Sense of Evaluation: a handbook for everyone (2017).

Use this guide to help you take a structured approach to using evidence at every stage of the policy or programme development cycle or evaluation design. Whether you work for central or local government, or the community and voluntary sector, you'll find advice to help you:

• understand different types and sources of evidence
• know what you can learn from evidence
• appraise evidence and rate its quality
• decide how to select and use evidence to the best effect
• take into account different cultural values and knowledge systems
• be transparent about how you've considered evidence in your policy development work.

This guide complements the policy resources available from the Policy Project (dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project), part of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC).

I want to know what **types of evidence** support my policy or programme idea and what **sources** I should look at.

I want to be able to **deal with evidence gaps** in my policy or programme.

I have gathered some evidence and want to know how **suitable the evidence** is to support my policy or programme ideas.

What do I need to do to ensure my stakeholders **understand and take account of the evidence** in my policy?

Why using evidence effectively matters

As a policy practitioner, programme designer or evaluator, you already know how vital evidence is to your work. Gary Banks, former chair of the Australian Productivity Commission said in 2009: "without evidence, most policies are experiments"[1] relying on gut instinct, ideology, anecdote or popular belief, or (at best) a well-thought out theory. Such policies or programmes can go seriously astray: Banks (2009) gave several examples, including how tax breaks for private sector research and development do not generate greater amounts of research but instead pay for the firms to undertake work they would have done anyway (without the tax break); or where children took up petrol sniffing so they could gain access to welfare benefits and 'give-aways' in a programme designed to eliminate petrol-sniffing.

This is not to argue that policy or programmes should never go ahead without sufficient and robust evidence. Nor does having more evidence necessarily give you more or better answers. It is not always possible to get good evidence, and when decisions must be made quickly, there is no time to generate it. That said, a rapid review can be done in a few days, if necessary.

Hence, it is important to use the evidence you do have as effectively as possible. Using evidence effectively is not about how much evidence you have, but how credible and appropriate it is to the policy you're developing.

Making good use of evidence is both a science and an art. You need to know the best types and sources of evidence to draw from, any problems associated with those sources, and how to select and use the most relevant evidence. Policy development and programme design are rarely linear or clear processes. Thinking early about using evidence will ensure the evidence you gather makes a valuable contribution.

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Effective decision-making requires good advice, and that depends on informed use of evidence

Peter Gluckman, Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor (2013)

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1. Banks, G. (2009) Evidence-based policy making: What is it? How do we get it? (ANU Public Lecture Series, presented by ANZSOG, 4 February), Canberra: Productivity Commission.
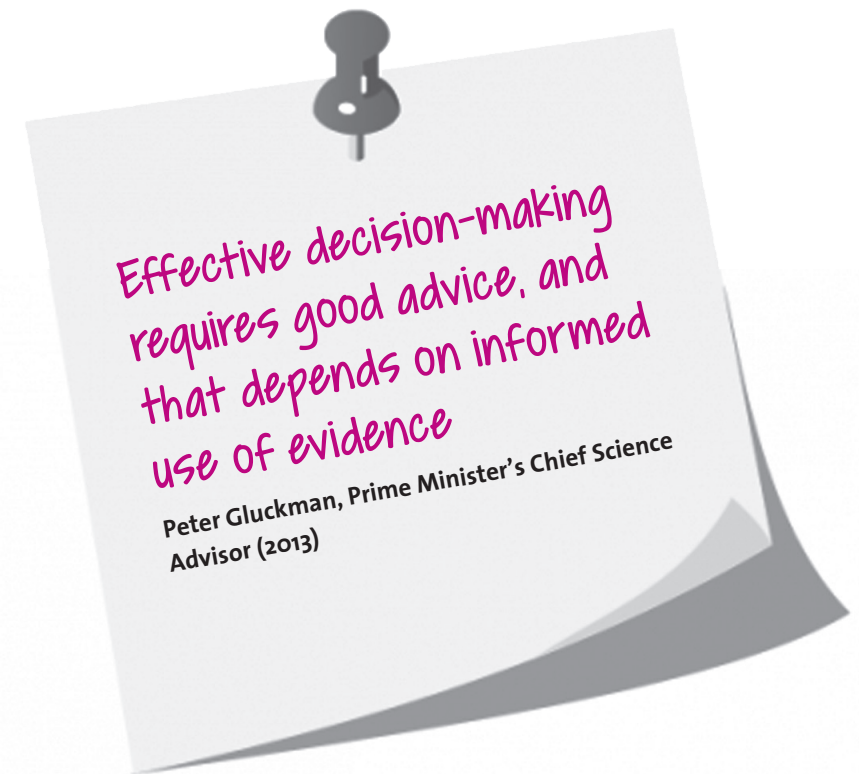
What you'll find in this guide

The six sections of this guide aim to help you understand and use evidence effectively.

1. Understanding types and sources of evidence

Consider the three main types of evidence and the kinds of questions each is best placed to answer. See which sources align with each type of evidence.

2. Three principles to selecting and using evidence effectively

Understand three guiding principles for choosing and using evidence effectively in your work.

3. What does this all mean? Using appropriate evidence in the policy process

Find out which types of evidence are best to answer questions at each stage of policy development.

4. Dealing with gaps and uncertainties

Tips on handling situations where you have no evidence, gaps in evidence, conflicting or weak evidence.

5. Bridging different cultural perspectives

Learn how to draw on cultural perspectives from the beginning of your policy development work. Use our framework to bridge different cultural perspectives with integrity.

6. Pulling it all together: Getting stakeholder buy-in to evidence-informed policy

Get ideas on how to engage stakeholders and participants with the evidence you've gathered and used in the policy process.

Further sources to assist your use of evidence in policy are found throughout this guide.

What you won't find in this guide

This guide does not tell you how to:

- gather evidence

- conduct your own research, systematic review or evaluation

- assess the quality of individual studies.

Tip:
If you work in an organisation which has a 'Research and Evaluation' or 'Data and Analytics' team or Departmental Science Advisor, we highly recommend seeking their advice.

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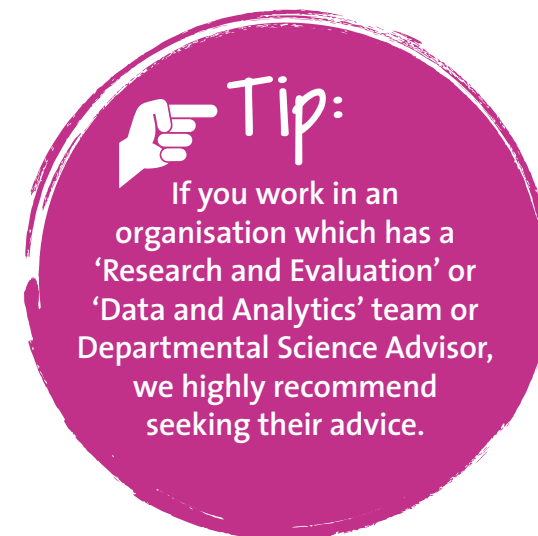
Understanding types and sources of evidence

This section describes the three main types of evidence and the questions they can address. It also includes information about different sources you might consider when gathering evidence for a particular purpose.

While it might be tempting to ignore the need for evidence when you are in a hurry to produce something for a stakeholder, it is always better to have some evidence than none at all.

It is better to be roughly right than precisely wrong

John Maynard Keynes

We need to challenge the thinking that research trumps other forms of knowledge.

Sarah Morton, What Works Scotland, Address to Superu's Evidence to Action Conference 2017

What counts as 'evidence' and who provides it?

By evidence we mean "the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid"[2]. Synonyms for evidence include proof and verification.

Although you might think of 'evidence' as coming from scientific research, that is just one type of evidence. Contextual and experiential evidence, drawn from a variety of sources, can inform decision-making too.

The same principle applies to the term 'expert'. Knowledgeable and skillful people can be found in many places outside the research world. When policymakers don't recognise, consider or appreciate other sources of expertise, the people who a policy is for can feel frustrated because it doesn't reflect their needs.

The three main types of evidence

Evidence usually falls into three main types: research evidence, contextual evidence (from the context or setting) and experiential evidence (from people's experiences). Strong policy weaves together all three types of evidence to form high-quality and relevant advice.
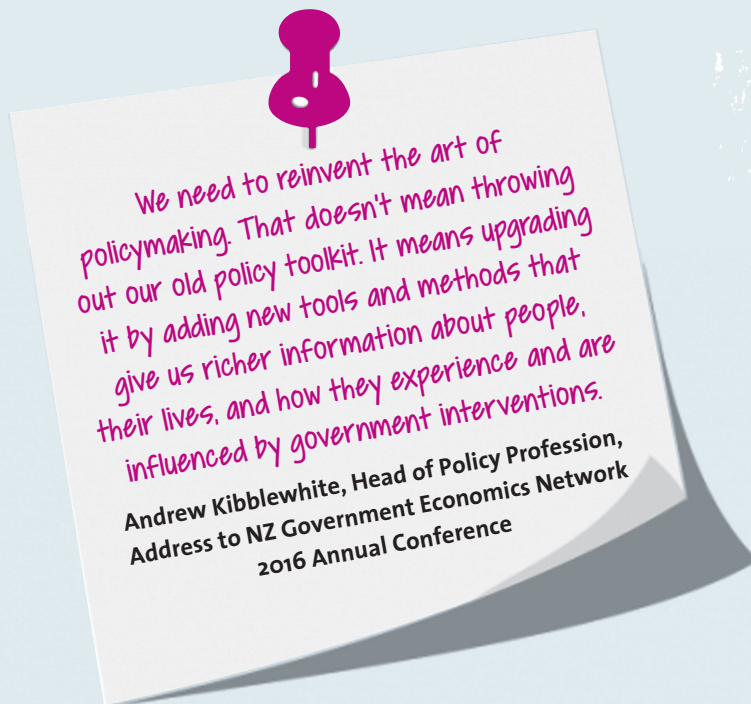
Tip:
Different sectors tend to focus more on one type of evidence than the others. It is important that you consider all three types when developing policy and programmes to ensure that you have a balanced perspective.

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2.   https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/evidence, cited 30 October 2017.

The following model shows that the three main types of evidence are complementary and overlapping, and together enable evidence-informed decision-making, whether for a programme, practice or policy. For more on this model see the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's interactive web resource: vetoviolence.cdc. gov/understanding-evidence

Each type of evidence addresses different questions.

We need to reinvent the art of policymaking. That doesn't mean throwing out our old policy toolkit. It means upgrading it by adding new tools and methods that give us richer information about people, their lives, and how they experience and are influenced by government interventions.

Andrew Kibblewhite, Head of Policy Profession, Address to NZ Government Economics Network 2016 Annual Conference

The inter-relationship between the three types of evidence

CONTEXTUAL EVIDENCE

RESEARCH EVIDENCE

Evidence informed decision-making

EXPERIENTIAL EVIDENCE
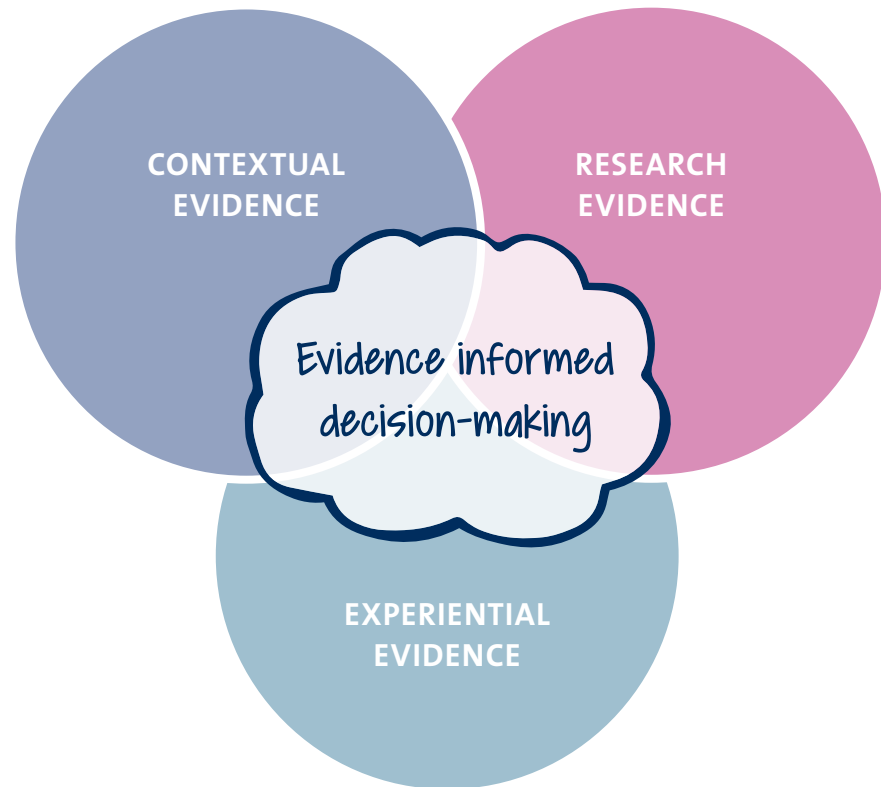
Source: adapted from vetoviolence.cdc.gov/understanding-evidence

Research evidence

Research evidence is sometimes referred to as 'scientific evidence.' It is a body of facts or information that can be numerically-based (quantitative) or more descriptive (qualitative) and generally focuses on the effectiveness of a particular solution or option. Research evidence can originate from various sources, including performance monitoring, research, surveys and evaluations.

Generally, when the design of a research study or evaluation rigorously adheres to a recognised methodology and practice, its evidence is considered more compelling.

Where research evidence is still being developed, you won't always be able to get the exact evidence you need. Furthermore, research evidence showing a policy or programme is effective overseas or in a different context may not be relevant to your particular setting.

In either case, you will have to rely on the 'best available' research evidence – and clearly state in any documents what you have done.

Questions that research evidence helps to answer

- Does the evidence validate, or accurately describe, your initial hypothesis, the target population and/or the drivers for change?

- Is there evidence for potential programmes, practices or policies being effective in addressing the issue you want to resolve? Have any of these been tested and evaluated in New Zealand and/or in a setting similar to the population you are working with? Have any of them been tested on a similar target population?

- Is there any research evidence demonstrating the effects for different cultural groups, particularly te ao Māori?

- Are there well-designed studies or evaluations available to support or validate the success factors or outcomes you are seeking?

- What positive, negative or unintended effects has a programme, practice or policy had on changing behaviour or outcomes?

- Is there any implementation guidance available? What does the evidence say about the resources, processes and capacity needed to successfully implement a change or intervention?

Sources of research evidence and how to use them

Evaluations are a useful source of evidence. An evaluation is defined as a systematic and rigorous method for assessing the value of a programme, service or organisation. Findings can be considered the building blocks of research evidence, and they can also contribute to contextual and experiential evidence. Evaluations can employ different methodologies and approaches and gather a range of quantitative and qualitative data or information. It is the analysis of this data and information that generates the research evidence: merely having a dataset is not enough.

When gathering evidence for your project, you need to check the specific circumstances underlying the study to determine if it is relevant to your policy or programme situation, setting and local context.
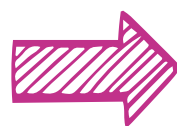
The 'sources of evidence' tables:

- summarise **some** of the different sources of research evidence and their uses – not every potential source is identified

- give you the advantages and limitations of each source

- These prompt you to reflect on the different methods as you collect your evidence.

There is some overlap in sources across the three types of evidence: for example, surveys could be used to collect research, contextual or experiential evidence. Each source is described only once, with a marker in the other table/s it applies to.

Source of evidence	What is it?	Advantages	Limitations
Systematic reviews/ meta-analysis – either published or created for your specific project	Work to identify, appraise and synthesise all the empirical evidence (particularly evaluations) that meets pre-specified eligibility criteria to answer a given research question Uses explicit methods aimed at minimising bias A meta-analysis pools statistical results	+ Rigorous methodology – replicable by other researchers + Can tell you what worked, how it works and what might do harm + Useful way of identifying gaps in evidence + Can provide a fast, high-quality summary of a complete body of evidence + Reduces personal bias in identifying the evidence gaps	– Commissioning can take too long to be effective for policy responses – Requires a reasonable number of robust studies or publications on a given topic – Methodology less well developed for use with qualitative research evidence
Randomised control trials (RCTs) Sometimes referred to as experimental design	A comparison study between two or more groups from the eligible population Study members may be *randomly* selected into the study or *randomly assigned* to a particular group Used to test cause and effect	+ Provides a very powerful response to questions of cause + Demonstrates that what is being achieved is a result of the solution or intervention and not anything else	– Mainly found in medical and health studies – RCTs are typically much harder with complex social problems – Can't tell you why the intervention worked or didn't work – Poor on taking context into account, eg cultural, institutional, historical and economic settings – Withholding an intervention might not be ethical in some contexts, making RCTs unlikely

Source of evidence	What is it?	Advantages	Limitations
Quasi-experimental design	Different interventions are offered but with no random allocation to groups The natural population, case matching or matched comparison groups may be used. Various types of analysis may be performed	+ Can provide reasonably strong evidence on the relationship between the intervention and the measured outcomes + Useful for exploring impact when randomisation is impossible or unethical	− Matching groups requires complex analytical work and specialist knowledge − Requires good understanding of factors to be matched − Inability to ensure the equivalence of groups or prevent change over time can result in less reliable findings
Delphi technique/ expert panel	A face-to-face or 'virtual' (email) group of people, who are experts on the issue, are solicited for their expert opinions via an iterative process of answering questions. After each round of questions, responses are summarised and circulated for discussion in the next round. This enables a consensus on the issue to be developed, while taking into account common trends and outliers Used to explore anticipated outcomes and future trends, particularly where there is no other evidence base	+ Can create consensus on what is appropriate evidence + Offers a robust and transparent process + If the virtual approach is taken, can avoid direct confrontation of people with opposing views	− Requires a high level of participant motivation − Requires careful selection of participants as the quality and accuracy of the responses depend on the expert quality of the participants involved. With a diverse population, participant numbers can be quite large, making the process more difficult to manage
Analysis of admin data (usually as part of an evaluation)	Refer to contextual evidence table on page 11		− Usefulness will depend on the policy or programme you are considering
Surveys (usually as part of an evaluation)	Refer to contextual evidence table on page 10		− Usefulness will depend on the policy or programme you are considering
Case studies/success case method (usually as part of an evaluation)	Refer to experiential evidence table on page 13		− Usefulness will depend on the policy or programme you are considering

Find more information on using research evidence

To help you use research evidence effectively and avoid common pitfalls, check out Nesta (2016) *Using Research Evidence: A Practice Guide*, available from nesta.org.uk/publications/using-research-evidence-practice-guide

Contextual evidence

Contextual evidence is based on factors that make up a local setting, including its population. Contextual evidence can help you work out whether an intervention or policy is needed, feasible, likely to be accepted and/or useful in a particular local setting.

The following table shows examples of the kinds of data and information that may be part of your contextual evidence.

Examples of contextual data and information

Location-specific	Operational	Population
• Community history	• Wait times	• Education
• Community needs or resources	• Processing times	• Income
• The whakapapa of previous policy in this setting	• Staff-to-client ratios	• Gender
• Institutional or organisational culture	• Regional performance	• Racial, ethnic and cultural identity
	• Capacity and capability of organisations	• Religious or gang affiliation
		• Sexual orientation
		• Crime rates/offending patterns

Questions that contextual evidence helps to answer

- What are the characteristics of the people the policy will serve? How and to what extent are the people affected by the issue, problem or opportunity?

- Which people and organisations will implement the policy? Do they have the skills, resources and capacity to implement it?

- Are the policy strengths documented in the research evidence a good match with the needs and aspirations of your target population? Can it meet the diverse needs within a population?

- What are the cultural attributes, knowledge, values or socio-economic circumstances of your population or target groups? Does the policy or programme you are considering recognise these?

- What are the relevant cultural values and priorities in your setting, particularly kaupapa Māori, that the policy or programme you are considering will need to be respectful of and informed by?

- What do evaluations of similar approaches say about the context? How can those evaluations inform or strengthen the approach for the context you are working in?

Sources of contextual evidence and how to use them

To be considered as *evidence*, contextual information must be systematically collected <u>and</u> analysed. Aside from administrative data (also called admin data), on-going surveys, longitudinal studies and population census may be good sources of contextual data, depending on the issue you are considering.

Source of evidence	What is it?	Advantages	Limitations
Process or formative evaluation	A process evaluation assesses whether an initiative is fulfilling expectations: was it implemented as intended? Is it operating/ delivering services as intended? What outputs and/or outcomes are being provided? A formative evaluation occurs *during* the implementation of a new initiative or when an existing one is being adapted or modified Information and data may be collected through interviews, focus groups, observation, surveys and, for process evaluations, analysis of admin data	+ Results of a process evaluation can provide evidence to support your policy and improve future activities + A formative evaluation can provide evidence of the initiative's feasibility, acceptability and appropriateness before it is fully implemented. Changes can be made if needed	– Often the context is quite different and/or can change over time, meaning that some or all of the findings may not apply – Bias in information collection may influence the results, although triangulation of results can address this
Surveys or census	A technique for gathering the opinions or experience of a group which is often used to summarise results for a larger population Survey data can be used to describe: • characteristics of a population at a given point • associations between factors (eg that a relationship between *x* and *y* exists) • the baseline experience of a service or elements of a service	+ Representative of a population + Can tell the 'what', 'when' and 'how' + Can be multi-dimensional, ie cover a range of topics and issues + If the survey is repeated at regular intervals, you can establish trends + Can be set up quickly, if an existing survey does not meet your needs	– Not good for determining why something happened – Not always timely (eg large New Zealand surveys tend to be updated quarterly, annually or 5-yearly) check how recently the survey was done to determine its relevance – Survey sample can be too small to draw valid conclusions about your target population – Survey or census data is not in itself evidence, but requires analysis to make sense of it

Source of evidence	What is it?	Advantages	Limitations
Analysis of admin data	Data collected by organisations and agencies while conducting their business to satisfy legal requirements, or record transactions or events. School records, hospital admissions records and welfare recipients' data are all examples of admin data Admin data can be used to: • describe the characteristics of a population at a given point-in-time • explain associations between factors (that a relationship between x and y exists) • monitor outputs • understand operational capacity and capability (and limitations) • depending on the context, admin data may also be analysed as part of an impact evaluation to assess long term outcomes	+ Tells the 'what' and 'when' + Often relates to large samples + Up-to-date + Linked admin data, such as from the Integrated Data Infrastructure (IDI), provides a multi-dimensional picture across a range of topics and issues + Admin data is more likely to be aggregated + Helps with understanding customer journey patterns and their change over time + Useful in identifying process bottlenecks	– Doesn't tell why something happened (ie the cause of the association) – Limited information about individuals and outcomes – There can be restrictions on access to the data, pre-empting useful analysis for your context – Data content and collection methodologies can change over time, affecting any possible time series analysis – Admin data is not in itself evidence, but requires some analysis to make sense of it: data PLUS analysis may be used as evidence
Longitudinal/ cohort studies	An observational study which follows the same group of people over a period of time to gather repeated information about their lives Longitudinal data can be used to: • look at the relationship between past behaviour and future outcomes • describe patterns over time (eg can track employment history) • when done well, will differentiate between 'trends' and statistically significant findings	+ Tells 'what', 'when' and the links between factors + Best source on association between childhood experience and later life outcomes + Collects data from individuals as it happens, therefore minimising recall bias (faults of memory)	– Data often emerges too late for effective policy-making – Need a large sample to be valid – Doesn't tell why something happened (the cause of the association) – If participants drop out of the study at a high rate, this can affect the strength or validity of the findings
Ethnography	Refer to experiential evidence table on page 13		

Experiential evidence

Experiential evidence is the collective 'real-world' experience and expertise of people who practice or live in the setting you're focusing on. Experiential evidence includes knowledge, understanding and insights from:

- people who are experts on the issue/location/subject – people who are knowledgeable about the community or target population you're interested in

- people living in the community the policy will affect

- community leaders and people from:
  - service providers and their clients
  - peak bodies (advocacy groups for professions and industries)
  - iwi trusts
  - local authorities, crown entities, commissioning agencies
  - professional boards or networks
  - research and evaluation, insight or operational policy teams
  - the philanthropic sector
  - learning institutions.

People who are sources of experiential evidence have often accumulated their knowledge over time – they have what is known as 'intuitive or tacit knowledge'. Take care, however, as people can be vested and positive about the effect of their work in ways that may not be supported by other types of evidence.

Tip:

Experiential evidence is stronger when you have perspectives from a wide range of stakeholders, so consider a collaborative model for gathering and using it. See section below for more information on working in different cultural frameworks and knowledge systems.

Questions that experiential evidence helps to answer

- How does the policy approach reflect the experiences and knowledge of the people it aims to serve?

- What can their earlier experiences tell you about the acceptability, importance and appropriateness of the policy or programme to the target population or group?

- What can the experiences and knowledge of stakeholders tell you about what has previously worked or not worked with the target group?

- What common goals do the stakeholders and target group have around the issue the policy addresses?

- What does the evidence tell you about how well matched the experiences and aspirations of the target group are to the goals of the policy?

- What experiences have been captured from evaluations or reports from similar initiatives? How could they be used to strengthen your approach?

- What Māori, Pacific or other ethnic group values, perspectives and strengths need to be incorporated into thinking about the policy problems, opportunities and solutions?

Sources of experiential evidence and how to use them

Experiential evidence is drawn from people and their experiences in a variety of ways. You may also find experiential evidence in published process and impact evaluations and community group reports.

Source of evidence	What is it?	Advantages	Limitations
Case studies Focus groups Oral histories/interviews Service user feedback Provider feedback	Case studies, focus groups, provider and user feedback can be used to provide insight into how services or interventions are received Narrative or survey accounts of an individual's experience of using a service or intervention	+ Valuable insights from those at the receiving end, particularly about access to services and effectiveness + Compels professionals to stay focused on the service users' priorities + Helps with understanding how decisions are made.	– Expressed needs may not translate into actual service use – potential for 'group think' or status quo bias – feedback may not relate to outcomes being sought
Ethnography – either published or created for your project	Detailed observations and interviews to explore social interactions, behaviours and perceptions that occur within groups, teams, organisations and communities	+ Helps policy practitioners address complexity in society by understanding people better in the context of their lives + Provides rich, holistic insights into people's views	– Small sample sizes may not be representative if large or diverse populations are affected by the decision – It is important to consider whether or not the context and population in a published study is similar to the situation and population you are targetting
Personal anecdote	An account by a person with direct experience of, or affected by, an issue May be useful as a 'case study' of how a policy has impacted, or could impact, on someone in your target population	+ Powerful and immediate + May give vivid insights into events concealed from much of the population	– Difficult to verify – Individual anecdotes are not intended to be representative – May lead to inflation of prevalence – Emotive first-person stories may inhibit critical appraisal
Survey	Refer to contextual evidence table on page 10		

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Three principles of selecting and using evidence effectively

Selecting and using evidence effectively and with integrity means not manipulating or cherry-picking evidence to suit or promote a desired outcome. On gathering your evidence, you can select and use it based on our three guiding principles, with the aim being to look across the range of evidence to see if there is a pattern or trend.

These guiding principles capture the essential characteristics of evidence selected and used in decision-making – characteristics that are recognised internationally and here in New Zealand. The three principles guide you to select and use evidence that is:

1. appropriate
2. credible
3. transparent.

These principles apply to all three types of evidence – research, contextual and experiential – so all evidence is selected and applied effectively and consistently.

Not all evidence is equal. Some is better quality and will be more appropriate to your challenge.

Using research evidence: a practice guide (Nesta and Alliance for Useful Evidence, 2016)

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Principles for selecting and using evidence in policy

Appropriate

What do you need to know from the evidence?

The type and source of evidence you access and use will be influenced by:

- The stage of the policy-making process you are in. For example, do you want to demonstrate the effectiveness of an intervention, describe the context, identify the target population, understand the pitfalls of implementation, explain causal relationships or something else?

- The context (location or setting) for the policy – has the intervention been shown to work in New Zealand or in settings similar to the one you are working with?

- Timeliness – the relevance of evidence can change over time and with the advance of technology.

- Your audience – they may have a view on what evidence they see as 'appropriate'.

Credible

What is the quality of the evidence?

- Does the evidence come from a known and reputable person or organisation?

- Are the research design, method and analysis appropriate for the research question being addressed? Did the methodology for gathering and/or analysing the evidence follow valid and reliable practices in order to minimise the risk of bias? The appropriate method will depend on the type of evidence you require.

- What is the strength of the evidence base? If you are assessing the body of evidence for the effectiveness of an intervention, you can use Superu's Evidence Rating Scale. Otherwise, you could consider the consistency of findings across the body of the evidence: are they repeated or corroborated in different studies and contexts or in a systematic review?

- Has the evidence been peer reviewed by recognised experts?

Transparent

What can you say, or not say, based on the evidence?

- Are the findings and/or conclusions supported by the results?

- Are the findings generalisable or transferable and reproducible? For example, are the findings, conclusions and/or lessons learned applicable to a larger or different population, a different setting or another group?

- Has evidenced been incorporated throughout the process? You can use the Transparency of Evidence Framework on page 19 to check.

- Can you identify any gaps in the evidence? Are potential reasons for any gaps flagged?

- How important are these gaps to the policy problem you are addressing and/or to others involved in or affected by the policy or programme? Can you identify ways to fill these evidential gaps, for example through evaluation of the implementation or outcomes or a review of the policy?

Making sure your evidence is appropriate

Before you identify and use evidence, you need to work out if it is appropriate for your policy setting. You need to be clear about:

- what you're asking and why you're asking it
- which of the available sources are best-placed to answer your question
- your stakeholders' views of different types and sources of evidence, as these may affect its influence on decision-makers.
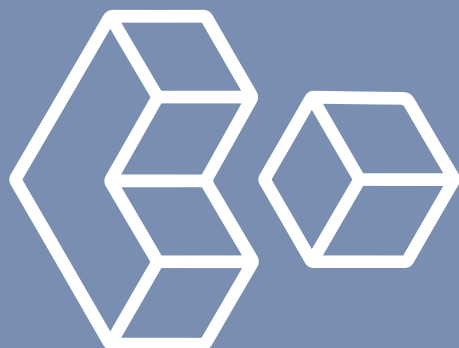
Clearly state the policy question or problem so evidence can answer it

Articulating a policy question or problem so that evidence can answer it is sometimes challenging. If your question is too broad or multi-faceted, or fails to link the problem definition to a desired outcome, connecting it with your evidence base in a useful way will be difficult. You also need to recognise the cultural framing being applied to it and the knowledge system it is drawn from.

The DPMC's Policy Project has developed the Start Right tool box (dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/policy-methods-toolbox/start-right) to assist with defining and scoping the policy problem and getting the process on the right track. Discussing it with your organisation's research and evaluation team may also be useful.

Seeking evidence relevant to the local context

Another aspect of appropriateness is whether the evidence applies to the local setting and/or target population. Even if the evidence shows effectiveness in one community or population, it doesn't mean it will work everywhere or for all the people all the time.

In New Zealand, we're often faced with a lack of locally completed research and evaluation, so it might be worth investing in research to generate your own evidence.

If conducting your own research at an early stage of the policy process is not feasible, be sure to allow sufficient resources for monitoring and evaluating any intervention or programme that is implemented. This will add to the New Zealand evidence base, as well as validate any assumptions you have made along the way.

Find more information about appropriate evidence

Using research evidence: a practice guide (Nesta and Alliance for Useful Evidence, 2016) nesta.org.uk/publications/using-research-evidence-practice-guide

The Politics of Evidence: from evidence-based policy to the good governance of evidence (Parkhurst, 2016) routledge.com/The-Politics-of-Evidence-Open-Access-From-evidence-based-policy-to-the/Parkhurst/p/book/9781138939400

Making sure your evidence is credible

Once you've identified the most appropriate sources of evidence, you need to think about quality or credibility of the evidence.

Assessing the credibility of evidence for the effectiveness of an intervention

Superu's Evidence Rating Scale provides an easy-to-use set of criteria to assess:

1. the strength and quality of evidence for interventions or programmes

2. their effectiveness for target populations and others.

The Evidence Rating Scale (superu.govt.nz/resources/evidence-rating-scale) is applied to both international and New Zealand evidence.

Assessing the credibility of evidence gathered for other reasons

To assess the evidence you have gathered to inform other aspects of your policy or programme development, consider the following questions.

Who funded or commissioned the research and why?

Asking who has funded or commissioned the research and why helps you identify possible conflicts of interest or other issues with the quality of the evidence.

If the funder or commissioner is a government agency, public entity, professional body or national body you can assume a degree of neutrality. However, research funded by sector groups could involve conflicts of interest.

Check peer-reviewed journals and reports published by reputable organisations to help you assess the quality of research.

Has the evidence been systematically generated using best practice methodologies?

The approach and methodology for data and information collection and analysis should be clearly laid out so you can make judgements about whether they were applied with integrity, whether or not surveys or RCTs or comparison groups were robustly designed and had sufficient sample size, whether or not underlying assumptions are reasonable and the data is up-to-date, whether or not the conclusions logically follow on from the findings, and so on.

Methodologies such as experimental studies, and especially randomised control trials, are viewed by some as the gold standard when it comes to credible evidence. While these methods are appropriate in some clinical contexts, they can create problems in others. Bear in mind that different types of research questions are best answered by different types of study – see the table on page 18.

How can you interpret the evidence?

Some common pitfalls with interpreting evidence are:

- misinterpreting correlation as causation
- incorrectly extrapolating findings from small-scale studies into larger populations (and vice versa)
- reporting single issues from a multi-factor study.

Not interpreting evidence properly can result in invalid conclusions, findings that don't tell the whole story or findings that can be taken out of context and misused.

The process of interpreting research and data is complex and best undertaken by people with specialist skills. If you are still developing these skills, seek input and peer review from people with the relevant experience.

Examples of credible evidence

Evidence type	What credible evidence might look like
Research evidence	Scientific evidence has specific quality criteria requiring an appropriate and rigorous methodology, which should be made transparent. What 'credible' looks like will vary across the different research designs. For example, research that uses a quantitative methodology tends to have a larger sample size, whereas an appropriate sample size in qualitative research may be smaller but provide much richer insights.
Contextual evidence	Credible contextual evidence is more than a description of the local setting – it includes factors that are most likely to influence policy compliance or implementation, e.g. do existing service providers have the capability and capacity to take on a new programme? Have you considered how well the socio-economic profile of the target population matches the proposed policy or programme? Etc.
Experiential evidence	A single anecdote or personal view from one expert isn't considered credible evidence, but multiple views from people who make up a representative, appropriate sample of the community are a potential source of experiential evidence. Quotes from experiential evidence can be woven into your policy narrative and used to illustrate the themes emerging from published research literature.
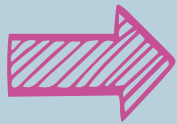
Find more information about selecting and using evidence that is credible

An Evidence Rating Scale for New Zealand (Superu, 2017)
superu.govt.nz/resources/evidence-rating-scale

Using research evidence: a practice guide
(Nesta and Alliance for Useful Evidence, 2016)
nesta.org.uk/publications/using-research-evidence-practice-guide

How to Note: Assessing the strength of evidence (UK Department for International Development, 2014) – particularly for single studies
gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-note-assessing-the-strength-of-evidence

The Politics of Evidence: from evidence-based policy to the good governance of evidence (Parkhurst, 2016) – particularly pp 122-123
routledge.com/The-Politics-of-Evidence-Open-Access-From-evidence-based-policy-to-the/Parkhurst/p/book/9781138939400

Making sure your evidence is transparent

Even when you have gathered a body of good quality evidence, it can't tell you what decision to make – it can only provide the background to your decision. Transparency in evidence use means being open and honest about what evidence you've used, how you've used it and towards what purpose. A transparent approach to evidence use means you:

- incorporate appropriate and credible evidence throughout the policy process
- acknowledge that different interpretations and views of evidence exist
- say how you've identified and prioritised your evidence and why
- recognise gaps in evidence and clearly describe them.

The principle of transparency applies to other aspects of policy development too. For example, Argyrous (2012) has a good discussion of how to be transparent when generating your own evidence for policy through research or evaluation. Among other things, being transparent in that context includes making the collection instrument, raw data and meta data available for others to use, being explicit about your analytical choices, assumptions and testing, as well as declaring any potential perceived biases (e.g. financial and other interests).
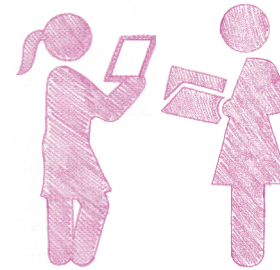
Being transparent in incorporating evidence throughout the policy process

For the purposes of ensuring that evidence is incorporated throughout, the policy process can be simplified to four main components: commissioning or diagnosis, proposal, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation.

We developed a Transparency of Evidence Framework, based on work done by Sense about Science, the Institute for Government and the Alliance for Useful Evidence in the United Kingdom (2016) to rapidly assess evidence transparency without subject matter expertise. In addition to the four main components noted here, the framework includes a separate category for 'economic evaluation', recognising that this has a distinctive set of questions.

The framework has four 'grades' for scoring the transparent use of evidence, which is based on the response to the question "So, can you see what evidence has been used and the role it has played?"

- **Not really/not at all** – Not mentioned at all or if mentioned, no explanation of how it has been used.
- **To some extent** – Evidence is mentioned, with some explanation of how it has been used.
- **Good** – The supporting evidence identified is mostly linked to the relevant parts of the policy, properly cited and findable, and there is discussion of how it has been used.
- **Outstanding** – Supporting evidence is consistently linked to the relevant parts of the policy, properly cited and findable, and there is assessment of uncertainties and contradictions in the evidence base.

Stage of the policy process	So, can you see what evidence has been used and the role it has played?			
	Not really/ not at all	To some extent	Good	Outstanding
Commissioning (or diagnosis: the issue that will be addressed) • What is known about the issue, its causes, effects (including who is affected) and scale • What success in addressing the problem would look like • What the causes of the problem are • What evidence the diagnosis is based on • How the strengths and weaknesses of that evidence have been assessed				
Proposal (design or policy formulation – the preferred option) • Why this intervention was chosen • What evidence, if any, that choice is based on • How the strengths and weaknesses of the evidence base have been assessed, including what has been tried before and whether that worked or not • Whether there are other options and why they have not been chosen				
Implementation (how the intervention will operated) • Why this method for delivering the intervention has been chosen • What evidence, if any, that decision is based on • Whether there are other methods and if so the reasons for not choosing them • Where delivery method is not chosen, what the method is for deciding				
Testing, monitoring and evaluation (knowing the policy has worked) • Any testing that has been or will be done • Plans to measure the impact of the policy and the outcomes that will be measured • Plans to monitor and evaluate the effects of the policy, including a timetable • Evidence to support plans				
Economic evaluation • What the costs and benefits are estimated to be • The assumptions behind those calculations • What evidence is being used to make those assumptions and estimates • The uncertainties about the costs and benefits and how the figures are to change				

Being transparent in your reporting

Effectively highlighting strengths and weaknesses in evidence is essential to developing sound policy and programmes. We propose an 'action-focused' approach to transparent reporting on the evidence used in developing policy or programmes. Being transparent about the evidence, its strengths and weaknesses and gaps, may pre-empt or weaken the position of anyone who challenges your evidence or proposed decision.

The seven steps to follow to be transparent are drawn from Morton and Seditis (2016):

1. Provide enough background for readers to understand the issue(s) under consideration.

2. Provide information about what actions might help to address the issues, for whom and in what circumstances.

3. Support readers to understand uncertainties in the evidence: what it can and cannot tell us, and what the gaps are in the evidence.

4. Include 'talking points' to help readers:
   • reflect on the evidence
   • consider the implications of evidence for policy development
   • use the evidence to plan policy developments
   • contribute to discussion about any areas where evidence isn't clear.

5. Offer more sources of information and examples for people wishing to delve further into the evidence.

6. Use clear language and structure for your readers (i.e. put the most important points first).

7. Have your work peer reviewed by at least one expert in the sector.

Action-focused reporting could also include commenting on any unintended consequences (positive and negative) and how your proposed solution may affect other sectors.

Section 4 gives you more advice on addressing gaps in evidence.

More information about being transparent with evidence

Evidence synthesis for knowledge exchange: balancing responsiveness and quality in providing evidence for policy and practice (Morton and Seditis, 2016)
doi.org/10.1332/174426416X14779388510327

The Politics of Evidence: from evidence-based policy to the good governance of evidence (Parkhurst, 2016) — see chapter 7
routledge.com/The-Politics-of-Evidence-Open-Access-From-evidence-based-policy-to-the/Parkhurst/p/book/9781138939400

Transparency of evidence: an assessment of government policy proposals May 2015 to May 2016 (Sense about Science, 2016)
senseaboutscience.org/activities/transparency-evidence

Evidence based policy: principles of transparency and accountability (Argyrous, 2012) Australian Journal of Public Administration 71(4):457-468

Tip:
If evidence is weak or non-existent, be honest and say so.

3.
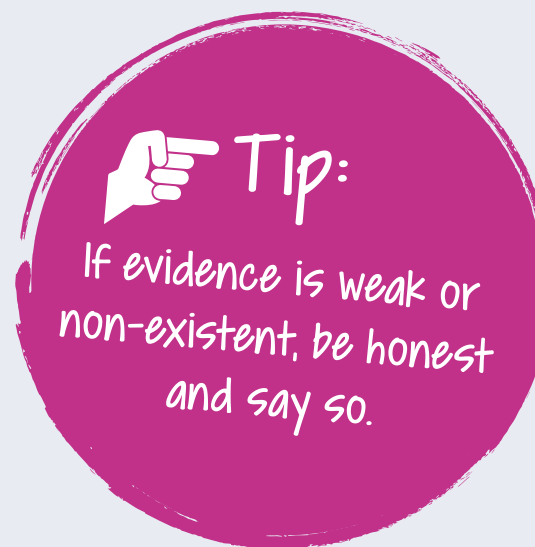
What does this all mean? Using appropriate evidence in the policy process

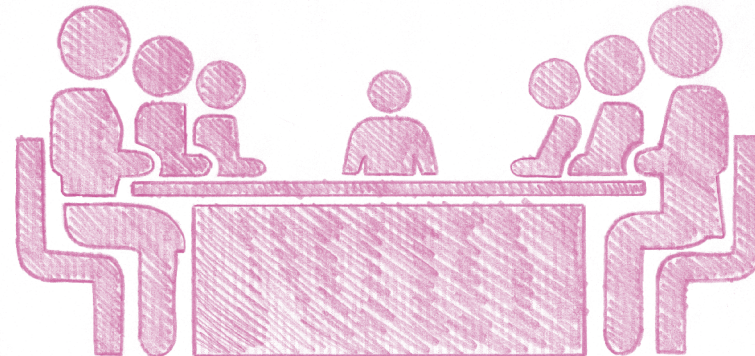The tables in this section show the **appropriate** types and sources of evidence for each stage of the policy process. These are adapted from Evidence, hierarchies and typologies: horses for courses (Petticrew and Roberts, 2003) and Investing in Evidence: Lessons from the UK Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Shaxson, 2014). It is up to you to assess how **credible** the evidence is that you have gathered and to use it in a **transparent** way.

Commissioning (or diagnosis)

At the **commissioning (or diagnosis) stage**, you're defining the opportunity or problem and asking yourself where you are now and where you want to get to. The DPMC Policy Project's Start Right tool box (dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/policy-methods-toolbox/start-right) includes guidance and tools for the commissioning stage.

You need evidence to help you:

• understand current drivers and trends

• understand causes and assess implications for policy outcomes

• consider what level of change and timeframe is likely to be acceptable to Ministers and the target population.

Commissioning stage	What evidence would be most appropriate to look at?													
	Research					Contextual					Experiential			
What policy question is being asked?	Systematic reviews	RCTs	Quasi-experimental (comparison groups)	Analysis of admin data	Surveys	Analysis of admin data	Surveys (including Census)	Process/formative evaluation	Longitudinal/ cohort analysis	Ethnography	Ethnography	Surveys	Case studies/focus groups/user feedback	Personal anecdote
Frame What is the nature, size and severity of the problem? Who is being affected and what is the distribution of impact, where? How is it changing over time?						✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Drivers What are people experiencing? What are the root causes of the problem? How are they likely to change over time?						✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Success What would success look like over the next 3, 5 or 10 years? For whom?	✓			✓		✓	✓					✓	✓	✓

Proposal (design and policy formulation)

When you move into the **design or policy formulation stage**, you'll be looking for evidence to help you to:

- understand whether it is possible to achieve the change you want
- assess the cost-effectiveness of the option against the perceived benefits
- evaluate risks, issues and uncertainties present now and likely in the future
- select the most appropriate solution or intervention.

Proposal stage	What evidence would be most appropriate to look at?													
	Research					Contextual					Experiential			
What policy question is being asked?	Systematic reviews	RCTs	Quasi-experimental (comparison groups)	Analysis of admin data	Surveys	Analysis of admin data	Surveys (including Census)	Process/formative evaluation	Longitudinal/ cohort analysis	Ethnography	Ethnography	Surveys	Case studies/focus groups/user feedback	Personal anecdote
Effectiveness What solutions or options could achieve the change we want to make?	✓	✓	✓	✓										
Appropriateness How confident are we that these solutions or options will work (for the people we are targeting as well as the service)?	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓			✓	✓	✓
Anticipate What might be the unintended positive and negative consequences?	✓	✓	✓	✓								✓	✓	
Cost effectiveness Do the solutions or options represent value for money?	✓	✓	✓	✓										✓

Implementation

At the **implementation stage**, you need to think about to how to get the change you're seeking – how to have influence. You need evidence that helps you to:

- assess whether the solution is workable and acceptable in the real world and what resources you need to make it work
- understand the feasibility of change
- gather early insights into the impact on the participants and other stakeholders.

Implementation stage	What evidence would be most appropriate to look at?													
	Research					Contextual					Experiential			
What policy question is being asked?	Systematic reviews	RCTs	Quasi-experimental (comparison groups)	Analysis of admin data	Surveys	Analysis of admin data	Surveys (including Census)	Process/formative evaluation	Longitudinal/cohort analysis	Ethnography	Ethnography	Surveys	Case studies/focus groups/user feedback	Personal anecdote
Process of service delivery — How does the service or solution work? Will it work in the intended setting?	✓	✓	✓					✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Acceptability — Will the community or service users be willing or want to take up the service or solution?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Resourcing — Can the service or solution be rolled out on its own or does it need additional resourcing?	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓					✓	

Testing, monitoring and evaluation

Testing, monitoring and evaluating progress against objectives should be considered early on in the process to capture any lessons learned.

Testing, monitoring and evaluation stage	What evidence would be most appropriate to look at?													
	Research					Contextual					Experiential			
What policy question is being asked?	Systematic reviews	RCTs	Quasi-experimental (comparison groups)	Analysis of admin data	Surveys	Analysis of admin data	Surveys (including Census)	Process/formative evaluation	Longitudinal/ cohort analysis	Ethnography	Ethnography	Surveys	Case studies/focus groups/user feedback	Personal anecdote
Impact/Effectiveness Has the solution or service achieved its outcomes, particularly for the target population? Has it addressed the problem as initially defined? Are there any unintended consequences?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									
Acceptability and accessibility Do users, providers and other stakeholders find the solution or service acceptable, accessible and that it meets their needs?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Learnings What worked/did not work in implementing and delivering this solution or service? What can government, stakeholders and communities share going forward?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓	✓	✓	✓

4.

Dealing with gaps and uncertainty

This section provides tips on handling situations where you have no evidence, gaps in evidence, conflicting evidence or weak evidence.

If there is no evidence or you have gaps in the evidence base

Policy decisions are often made with a less-than-ideal evidence base, hence the importance of being **transparent** about what you can say or not say about the evidence you have collected and identifying any evidence gaps, as discussed on page 19.

As noted earlier, such gaps can exist because of time pressure. When you have to compile advice quickly, you might not have enough time to identify, find and analyse evidence. In that case, the evidence being absent doesn't mean it doesn't exist, so your policy advice should state this clearly. If it is feasible, you could provide an indication of how and when you can fill the gaps. In these situations, it is doubly important to have a good rationale, theory or logic

model[3] underpinning the policy or programme – this is normally generated as part of a good policy process. A strong rationale, theory or logic model can then be exposed to rigorous scrutiny, particularly through monitoring and evaluation. This allows the policy to be changed or terminated if it fails.

Other gaps can come from a lack or absence of evidence. When an issue hasn't been identified or tested anywhere, you can propose to generate research, contextual and/or experiential evidence through pilots (see the box on page 29) together with monitoring and process evaluations, so you can capture useful evidence over time. The amount of your evidence-gathering activity will depend on the extent and importance of the policy or programme being tested.

Superu's Making sense of evaluation: a handbook for everyone (2017) can guide you through developing a logic model, including identifying outcomes and indicators for success, as well as developing suitable plans for monitoring and evaluation.

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3. A diagram or picture of your intervention that shows in simple terms how what you are doing is expected to lead to the outcomes that you intend. It usually identifies the resources or inputs, the activities, outputs and outcomes for the intervention.

If the evidence is conflicting

If you have evidence that conflicts, ask yourself what the nature of the conflict is and why it has come up. Sometimes what appears to be contradictory conclusions from different research studies may be because their sample populations were very different. In other cases, differences in results can arise due to poor implementation practices or questionable evaluation approaches.

If the research evidence points to an intervention being effective, but stakeholders or users have identified problems with it, look into the problems and seek guidance on how to effectively implement the policy.

Great policy advice hits the 'sweet spot' between:

- what is desirable — what will meet the needs of citizens
- what is feasible — what we can do using the tools government has at its disposal, including legislative change
- what is viable — what is financially sensible and sustainable.

The Head of the Policy Profession, Andrew Kibblewhite

If the evidence base is weak

When you find that the research evidence base is consistent in its findings but weak (perhaps with little research or few evaluations), you could place more emphasis on experiential evidence, including exploring public perception and acceptability. To do this, you might need to engage with people who could be affected by the changes a policy may bring.

The DPMC's Policy Project has developed resources to assist with generating experiential evidence or gaining knowledge from stakeholders, including the front line (operational or provider level) and the target population:

1. design thinking for policy – focuses on understanding problems from the perspectives of the users or customers

2. behavioural insights – focuses on understanding how people and organisations actually behave in order to identify the best levers or tools to use to have an impact and to design policies, services or programmes that are more effective

3. public participation – discusses how to engage with a range of individuals, groups and organisations to inform, consult, collaborate or empower them in all aspects of the policy process.

Working out how much evidence is enough

Working out how much evidence is enough can be tricky. Tapping into the experience of those around you can help. You can also make this call more easily when you have a well-synthesised evidence base that outlines:

- the body of information available
- where the sources of evidence converge, reinforce each other or diverge
- where the evidence gaps are
- how the evidence links through to the new initiative or policy.

You may have to acknowledge evidence gaps or shortfalls and indicate how these will be addressed (usually through monitoring and evaluation) over time.

In any policy process, it is useful to obtain agreement from key stakeholders as to:

- how complete the evidence base needs to be before you can make recommendations
- how much weight to give to various evidence inputs.

Overcoming an evidence gap: consider a pilot

It may be appropriate to propose the pilot of a programme in New Zealand where you have assessed the body of evidence for a proposed intervention or programme using Superu's Evidence Rating Scale and determined it is in 'early stages' or 'progressing', or that it has been successfully implemented and evaluated to show beneficial effects overseas.

A pilot programme, also known as a feasibility study or experimental trial, is a small-scale, short-term experiment that tests whether or not the intervention works as intended. It can provide useful information for replicating or rolling out the programme across multiple sites and for scaling it up in size.

A pilot can be used to test logistics, prove value (e.g. validate the indicative 'return on investment'), and reveal any deficiencies in a policy approach or programme. Adding the insights from a pilot programme to the full-scale implementation improves its likelihood of success.

Testing the logistics includes investigating the feasibility, time needed, adverse effects and/or unintended consequences, and the effect size (statistical variability) of implementing a new intervention or programme. Testing ways to gather evidence that will inform its evaluation may also be part of the pilot.

To maximise the usefulness of a pilot, its process and early outcomes evaluations should be completed before scaling up or rolling out the programme further. If this is not feasible, then at the very least analysis of the performance monitoring data can provide some guidance as to how the pilot is working (or not).

Find more information about pilots

The importance of pilot studies (van Teijlingen and Hundley, 2001) University of Surrey Social Research Update 35 sru.soc.surrey.ac.uk/SRU35.html

Beginning with the end in mind: planning pilot projects and other programmatic research for successful scaling up (World Health Organisation, 2011) expandnet.net/tools.htm

Eight strategies for research to practice (FHI 60, 2012) – particularly strategies 2, 7 and 8 fhi360.org/resource/eight-strategies-research-practice

5.

Bridging different cultural perspectives

This section helps you think about ways to draw on knowledge/evidence from different cultures in your policy work. It includes a framework to help you work with integrity when gathering knowledge/evidence from different cultural perspectives.

Seeking perspectives from te ao Māori (the Māori world)

New Zealand law recognises the partnership between iwi Māori and the Crown — a rich relationship that can yield significant rewards. The Crown's unique relationship with Māori as tangata whenua under the Treaty of Waitangi also creates an obligation to ensure that your policy development recognises and draws on evidence – which may have different characteristics or meanings – from te ao Māori.

Because there aren't yet any formal approaches to describing the nature of evidence from te ao Māori perspectives, consult with experts about the suitability of evidence that reflects or draws from te ao Māori. Seeking this cultural knowledge and understanding is especially important when you have competing evidence or doubts about the standard of 'Western science' evidence.

Seeking perspectives from different cultures

Apart from Māori, Pacific peoples and other cultures may describe evidence from their own perspectives and may place different value on different sources of evidence. You might be familiar with how evidence is perceived and valued in your own cultural background, but have less understanding of how other cultures perceive and value evidence. Seeking that understanding will help you develop policy more effectively.

The cultural make-up of your target population will determine which cultural perspectives you most need to draw from to inform your policy decisions.

A framework to help you bridge cultural perspectives

Te ao Māori

The following framework prompts you to think about how you include evidence from te ao Māori and other cultural perspectives. Use the principles in this framework alongside the three sources of evidence model in section 1 to draw on different perspectives effectively when you address a policy problem.

These principles are valid for engaging with various groups of stakeholders, whether or not they are culturally-based.

If you need help to resolve conflicting perspectives, consulting with experts can be a wise approach.

Kapasa — The Pacific Policy Analysis Tool

The Ministry for Pacific Peoples worked with DPMC's Policy Project to develop Kapasa – The Pacific Policy Analysis Tool to provide agencies with a strengths-based approach to identifying and incorporating the perspectives of Pacific peoples into the policy process. Even though Kapasa was developed with and for Pacific peoples, you can adapt the key questions for many subpopulations and target groups.

View Kapasa at: mpp.govt.nz/library/policy-publications/kapasa

Find more information about bridging cultural gaps

Superu (2018) Bridging cultural perspectives superu.govt.nz/research-evidence

Framework for bridging cultural perspectives – principles of integrity in practice

Partnership (Collaboration)	Ensure Māori and other ethnic peoples and organisations can tell their stories in their own voices. Provide enough time and space for clear and explicit discussion about how original material will be used in policy development.
Respect	In Aotearoa New Zealand, two distinct knowledge systems, Western science and mātauranga Māori, are identified and valued. Other knowledge systems are included as appropriate.
Honesty	Acknowledge any lack of understanding about other knowledge systems. This honesty then provides a basis to understand the extent of the cultural divide between different groups.
Relevance	Be clear about who will benefit from the policy and how they will benefit. Communicate the aims and use of the evidence/knowledge gathered from Māori and other cultural perspectives so it is easy to understand.
Reciprocity	When you first begin, negotiate with your partners to identify and collate evidence. Consider how the policy development process will be conducted, how the consultation and engagement processes will work, and how the final policy will be shared with others.
Protection	Ensure that the intellectual property rights of Māori and other peoples will be observed and protected from misuse and misrepresentation.
Participation	Ensure that dialogue spaces are culturally safe for open debate and discussion. Recognise that the dialogue space fosters open inquiry and discussion. Build trust between the different groups early.

6.

Pulling it all together: Getting stakeholder buy-in to evidence-informed policy

This section offers some information about techniques you can use to get stakeholders to engage with and accept the evidence you've incorporated into your policy process.
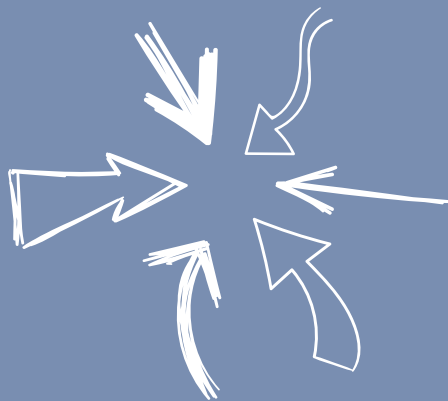
☞ Tip:

Early and on-going engagement of all stakeholders/stakeholder groups with a KISS (Keep It Simple Strategy) is the key

Engage stakeholders early – and keep them engaged

The DPMC Policy Project's Starting Right guide outlines the importance of ensuring all stakeholder views are gathered and understood from the very first 'commissioning conversation', even to ensure that you are asking the right question. Once you have the 'Green Light' to proceed with policy development, ensure that stakeholders are kept informed by providing regular updates along the way.

Engage with the target population and community

At some stage in the policy development process, you will want to inform, consult, collaborate with, empower, or some combination thereof, the target population and/or the community. The DPMC Policy Project's website (dpmc.govt.nz) provides some useful tips on public participation, which may include individuals, community groups, stakeholder and interest groups, businesses or other organisations.

Communicate your findings: Keep It Simple Strategy

If possible, take a multi-faceted approach to sharing your findings/progress: use a mixture of written papers, presentations and interactive sessions.

If you are preparing a document for public consultation or reading, it helps if you adopt KISS (Keep It Simple Strategy):

- make it easy to read
- keep the language simple
- use graphics or images where applicable
- include anecdotes or stories about real people (unless it is a Cabinet paper!) and
- make it relevant or timely.

The DPMC Policy Project has prepared guidance on How to write good quality Cabinet papers, available here: dpmc.govt.nz/publications/how-write-good-quality-cabinet-papers

Find more information on pulling it all together

Morton and Seditis (2016) provide further assistance on how to gather, synthesise & report on evidence: Evidence synthesis for knowledge exchange: balancing responsiveness and quality in providing evidence for policy and practice doi.org/10.1332/174426416X14779388510327

Breckon and Dodson (2016) reviewed the underlying mechanisms of getting research and evidence used by decision-makers: Using evidence: what works? A discussion paper London: Alliance for Useful Evidence http://www.alliance4usefulevidence.org/assets/Alliance-Policy-Using-evidence-v4.pdf

Check out the DPMC Policy Project for some useful tools for quality checking a policy-related document, including an ex-post assessment template and peer review checklist: dpmc.govt.nz/our-programmes/policy-project/policy-improvement-frameworks/policy-quality

Further reading about barriers to using evidence and how they might be overcome

Cairney, P. (2016) The politics of evidence-based policy making, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cairney, P. and K. Oliver (2017) 'Evidence-based policymaking is not like evidence-based medicine, so, how far should you go to bridge the divide between evidence and policy, Health Research Policy and Systems, 15:35 DOI 10.1186/s12961-017-0192-x

Head, B. (2016) 'Toward more "evidence-informed" policy-making?', Public Administration Review. 76(3), pp.472-484.

Oliver, K., Innvar, S., Lorenc, T., Woodman, J. and Thomas, J. (2014a) 'A systematic review of barriers to and facilitators of the use of evidence by policymakers' BMC health services research 14(1), p.2. biomedcentral.com/1472-6963/14/2

Shaxson, L., Datta, A., Tshangela, M., and Matomela, B. (2016) Understanding the organisation context for evidence-informed policy-making. Pretoria Department of Environmental Affairs and London: Overseas Development Institute.

Peter Gluckman, the New Zealand Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor, has written several interesting papers about the role of evidence in policy formation and how to enhance it – see pmcsa.org.nz/publications/

7.

Acknowledgements

This guide is the result of input from too many people to name them all, but we are grateful for their feedback and for being willing guinea pigs in the testing of the handbook.

The core team that produced this was Carolyn O'Fallon, Kirsten Tomlinson, Viv Smith and Isabelle Collins. Special mention must also go to George Argyrous and Malcolm Menzies for peer review, and our designers for their patience with developing the layout.

We would especially like to thank colleagues from the DPMC Policy Project who championed the project and resourced two workshops which helped shape the final product.

About Superu

Superu is a government agency that focuses on what works to improve the lives of families and whānau.

What we do:

- Generate evidence that helps decision-makers understand complex social issues and what works to address them.
- Share evidence about what works with the people who make decisions on social services.
- Support decision-makers to use evidence to make better decisions to improve social outcomes.

We also provide independent assurance by:

- developing standards of evidence and good practice guidelines
- supporting the use of evidence and good evaluation by others in the social sector.

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Learn more at superu.govt.nz

Superu
PO Box 2839
Wellington 6140

Telephone: 04 917 7040
Email: enquiries@superu.govt.nz
Website: superu.govt.nz

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Commission **Whānau**