



DEPTH OF USE: Not All Research Use is Created Equal

“Depth of Use” refers to both the purpose and practice of research use—the complex ways in which evidence use is meaningful, systematic, and likely to generate improvements in policy and practice. Each dimension is understood as a continuum, along which research use might be found at differing points for each.

Evidence | The use of scientific research and its integration with other forms of knowledge that influence decision-making. We conceptualize the evidence continuum as ranging from no engagement with scientific research to substantially inclusive of scientific research on the other.



Search | Use of research entails finding relevant research sources, which has two important and related aspects: the nature and extent of search. At one end of the search continuum, decision-makers may do a very limited search or focus on a resource with which they are already familiar. At the other end, a decision-maker seeks out multiple sources of research and synthesizes them to inform decision-making.



Interpretation | Evidence must be interpreted and transformed from information into knowledge, which requires the critical evaluation of information to determine its relevance for decision needs. The spectrum of interpretation seeks to better understand the strategies and extent to which decision-makers interpret research in informed and critical ways.



Participation | Understanding who participates in research use during decision-making is important because individuals’ working knowledge, ideologies, information, interests, and their interaction and negotiation with other participants, influences how evidence is interpreted. To capture variability in participation, the spectrum includes no one or few individuals on one end and collaborative groups or teams on the other.



Frequency | An indicator of the extent to which research informs decisions. The regularity with which research evidence is brought to bear on decisions may be an indicator of greater or lesser systematic use.



Stage of decision-making | Research may play a role in each or any single stage of decision-making: problem identification, search, and choice. The timing of evidence use may be an indicator of the type of research use occurring and its goal.

