# RESEARCH UPTAKE

## Key finding from the Safe and Inclusive Cities program

Researchers need to distill high-level, relevant findings and communicate them effectively to decision-makers, policymakers, and practitioners to inform strategies and interventions that address urban violence.

## Understanding research uptake

Research processes should be designed in such a way that research findings can be applied and used. Addressing common challenges can help researchers carry out research and disseminate results that are applicable beyond academia and research networks.

**Challenge 1**:  Definitions of research influence can differ across contexts, depending on the methodology and research approach. Research can influence policy and practice in many ways, including by raising awareness and building capacity; providing statistical evidence; or building new theoretical frameworks based on empirical evidence.

These different approaches are all valid and can co-exist. The appropriate strategies for communicating research will differ depending on the goals and approach, at the research-project level and more broadly within the Safe and Inclusive Cities (SAIC) program.

**Challenge 2:** Research involving sensitive contexts and with groups facing violence can pose particular problems for research uptake because communicating research results could expose researchers or participants to risk and backlash.

For example, some SAIC research sites had to be relocated; and a research team was advised not to publish its findings. One researcher reported difficulties in building relationships with local government and policymakers who were suspicious of social movements.

**Challenge 3:** Researchers must often navigate complex policy-making processes and politicized relationships.

These have appeared in SAIC research in various ways. For example, potential participants have queried researchers' political affiliations; and researchers' capacity to engage with certain partners has been limited. In one location, researchers had difficulty presenting the findings of local teams to policymakers because they considered Western/foreign knowledge and research to be more credible and important.

### QUESTIONS FOR LEARNING:

1. What are your underlying assumptions about the influence of research on policy and practice? In your experience, what are the pathways through which research influences policy and practice?

2. What approaches and tactics have been more/less successful with specific decision-makers, policy-makers, and practitioners?

3. Is research communicated differently depending on the topic or focus?  What is the difference between a communications and a knowledge translation strategy?

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**Challenge 4:** Academic research can be difficult to convey in a format and language that is accessible and relevant to non-academic audiences, such as decision-makers, policymakers, and practitioners. Reaching these audiences requires "translation", i.e. adaptation to reach non-specialist audiences. This often involves knowledge translation experts in the interpretation and synthesis of research for non-specialist audiences and the development of products adapted to and relevant to particular audiences.

## Implications

Researchers can strengthen uptake by developing a knowledge translation strategy. Future initiatives should strengthen relationships with policy-makers and practitioners by testing a more collaborative approach for state-led programs or interventions.

Developing a knowledge translation strategy: When developing a strategy, research teams should articulate how they understand policy and practice. They can then better identify what mode of research and communication are most appropriate.

Contextual analysis is an important element of the strategy. This analysis should be conducted at the outset, then revisited throughout the research cycle. This updating allows researchers to consider changes, such as local elections or changes in the position of armed groups, which may affect how the research will be viewed.

Knowledge translation strategies should recognize the need for adaptation to different knowledge sets and areas of practice, and adjust the language used to communicate the research and its findings. An intermediary may be needed between researchers and diverse stakeholders, but the approach taken should be tailored to the context. For example, researchers themselves may engage in on-going and in-depth negotiations with government staff or representatives; mediators, such as knowledge translation experts, can be used; or more formal forums can be established. Where applicable, strategies should consider how research can be made more broadly accessible, such as using illustrations when communicating with illiterate communities.

Building relationships: To test a cooperative, collaborative approach with research users, future research could be structured to have a closer relationship with specific governments, such as those engaging with state-led programs and interventions. However, some projects would remain independent of government to maintain the ability to critique the government and other policymakers.

## About this learning summary

This learning summary is based on the analysis of data gathered for a mid-term evaluation of the program. The data was compiled from a document review, observations, and discussions at the Safe and Inclusive Cities Mid-Term Workshop, as well as informant interviews with researchers, IDRC experts, and external stakeholders. The evaluation team used these data sources to compile and code a qualitative analysis using the key evaluation questions. This process enabled evaluators to analyze experiences from across the program to find patterns and resonances that point to important challenges for the entire group.

This learning summary presents some of SAIC's research uptake challenges and their implications for SAIC or other global knowledge networks. It does not, however, describe every challenge or include examples of these challenges across the program. The learning case encourages critical analysis of challenges within SAIC and identifying possibilities for peer learning and future exchange.

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