



## Research-Policy Partnerships as an Innovation for Governance: Can We Sidestep the Debate over Evidence-Based Policy?

Innovations in Governance

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Evidence-based policy (EBP), as a principle, is supported by many academics because it seems to suggest that their research should have greater influence on policy decisions. Policy makers themselves may also support the principle, but for different reasons (e.g. to increase the perceived legitimacy of their decisions) and under different assumptions (e.g. about what counts as evidence). When we unpack the different interpretations of EBP, we uncover some crucial tensions that make the typical academic vision of EBP seem very unrealistic. That is, what is the appeal to a policy maker of being influenced to make decisions they would not otherwise make? Indeed, my research on climate science–policy relationships in BC reinforces prior work in showing that unsolicited policy advice from academics is typically unheeded. What, then, is to be done about the EBP enterprise? Is there genuinely no room for improvement in mobilizing the findings of academics for the policy arena? In this paper, I attempt to sidestep the high-level debates over EBP, and argue that there is a simpler solution that may give both academics and policy makers some of what they want from the other realm. My research suggests that forging partnerships between research organizations and policy agencies can result in seven short-term benefits for the latter, independent of any influence on decisions. These potential benefits are a more intuitive initial basis for partnership, and genuine influences on policy-making may still emerge organically through the relationship over the long term. Overall, this paper serves as a general argument in favour of evidence-informed policy, and research–policy partnerships in particular, directed at both academic and government audiences.