This study tested local-level evidence-based decision making (EBDM) capacity-building efforts, specifically the curriculum of an evidence-based public health (EBPH) training course, in four U.S. states (Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, and Washington), with a quasi-experimental design. A train-the-trainer approach was used to engage partners and improve EBDM capacity among local health departments. It demonstrates the potential for improving EBDM capacity, while allowing for local tailoring of strategies.

Prevention Research Centers in each state formed partnerships with either Public Health Practice-Based Research Networks or Public Health Training Centers to conduct capacity-building activities for their state’s local health departments. Representatives from each state attended a 2.5-day train-the-trainer workshop to learn the 9-module course curriculum, sources of data, ideas for modifying the course in their own states, and conducting a successful training.

Participants and controls were evaluated via online survey on importance, availability, and gaps in ten EBDM competencies.

Prioritization of program and policy options
Adapting interventions for different communities and settings
Evaluation designs useful in program or policy evaluation
Quantifying the issue using descriptive epidemiology
Quantitative evaluation approaches (e.g., surveillance, surveys)
Qualitative evaluation approaches (e.g., focus groups)
Action planning for how to achieve goals and objectives
Community assessment of needs and assets
Communicating research to policymakers effectively
Economic evaluation in the decision making process

Results and Lessons Learned
- Compared to the control group, course participants reported greater increases in availability and decreases in gaps in EBDM competencies. Significant differences between controls and participants were found in the areas of action planning, evaluation design, communicating research to policymakers, quantifying issues, and economic evaluation.
- EBPH courses can effectively improve the availability of skills that are essential to EBDM among health department practitioners.

"[The course] helped raise awareness about EBDM among agency leadership, paving the way for those of us who completed the training to discuss, promote, and facilitate integration of it in our public health programming, services, grant writing, etc. and receive increased support to do so. It assisted it in becoming part of a common organizational language."