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## What It Takes for Expert Advice to Lead to Improved Public Policy

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## CURRENT EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

# What It Takes for Expert Advice to Lead to Improved Public Policy

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In this issue of *OMJ*, Matthew W. McCarter and Bryan L. Bonner report on a series of three laboratory studies by which they examined the practical issue of how advice from external experts might affect willingness of individuals to cooperate to contribute to the development of a real-world public good, such as a wind farm to generate electricity for a community. Part of their addition to the literature arises from simultaneously considering the presence of two standard types of uncertainty that affect the decision to cooperate and contribute: social uncertainty and outcome variance. From existing prior research they can assert that the likely presence of such uncertainties makes individuals susceptible to possibly seeking advice from third-party experts, who will thereby provide informational social influence. With their three studies, McCarter and Bryan examined combinations and interactions among valence of advice

(adviser estimate), group members' trust of fellow members, variations of trust in experts, and variations in estimates of value of the public good. As one reviewer characterized the findings, it seems that "uncertainty leads to interest in outside advice leads to trust in that advice leads to trust in the other group members leads to contribution decision." And, McCarter and Bonner state that "whereas they interpret favorable estimates from third-party experts as glad tidings, individuals view mixed and negative estimates as grave warnings, discouraging cooperation and the provision of the public good." Current widespread social and economic concerns regarding funding of upgrades to U.S. (and other countries') infrastructure provide practical stimulus for *OMJ* readers to consider the way this article highlights important possible dynamics for developing national and local policy.

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