

# DRAFT

## Bridging the Gap: Creating Plain Language Summary Texts



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Comments on this document are welcomed. Please send comments to [cjimen01@uoguelph.ca](mailto:cjimen01@uoguelph.ca) by May 15.

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# Background

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This resource was developed through the Connecting the Dots initiative. This initiative focused on mobilizing rural research to reach community leaders, organizations, businesses, all levels of government, and researchers. In partnership with knowledge creators, the Connecting the Dots initiative co-constructed research focused on rural people, rural environments, and rural places into impactful plain language summaries and brief videos. Through a strategic communication plan, these outputs were shared through social media and newsletters among rural organizations across Ontario and Canada.

The Connecting the Dots initiative was funded by the Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance, a collaboration between the Government of Ontario and the University of Guelph. Learn more about the Connecting the Dots initiative at <https://ruraldev.ca/connecting-the-dots-mobilizing-rural-knowledge-to-knowledge-users/>

# Purpose of This Guide

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Plain language summaries (PLS) have emerged as a key method to translate research into clear, concise, and action-oriented outputs. In so doing PLS have the potential to function as a bridge to connect local development practitioners, policy makers, and community leaders directly to the academic evidence that can inform their work.

Within the knowledge mobilization workflow PLS are a foundational tool as they provide the essential translation of academic contents into written and visual language that diverse stakeholders can understand and use. At the same time, summaries serve as the basis for the elaboration of further knowledge mobilization tools such as research videos, infographics, and social media messaging. This guide provides step-by-step strategies and practical tips for creating effective summaries.

# Step 1: Study Selection

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The first step is to carefully identify knowledge that align with rural planning and development. Depending on the goals of your organization or knowledge mobilization project, relevant sources may vary. These can include research outputs from universities and colleges, reports from government, or documents from community-based organizations.

Prioritize knowledge that relates to rural planning and development by considering three broad categories:

- Rural places / geographies
- Rural practices / activities
- Rural planning models or policy frameworks

Studies that integrate, compare, or contrast elements across these categories tend to have greater relevance and impact for knowledge mobilization processes.

When reviewing potential sources, keyword identification can be informed by an analysis of current thematic agendas within rural organizations and institutions, including emerging rural processes, challenges, and priorities.

When summarizing your own work, this initial step can also serve as a preliminary assessment of how your research connects to rural studies, planning, and development.

When pre-selecting knowledge to mobilize, reflect on the following questions:

- How does this knowledge relate rural place(s), rural communities and models or regulatory frameworks?
- How does this knowledge help us better understand, plan for, or strengthen sustainable rural futures in Ontario?
- How does this knowledge align with current concerns from rural organizations and communities?
- How does this knowledge address questions related to public interest and the improvement of quality of life in rural communities?

\*Example: “Mapping Women’s Community Sport Participation to inform sport development initiatives” [https://bpb-ca-cl.wpmucdn.com/sites.uoguelph.ca/dist/9/365/files/2026/03/Final-version\\_RowSummary.pdf](https://bpb-ca-cl.wpmucdn.com/sites.uoguelph.ca/dist/9/365/files/2026/03/Final-version_RowSummary.pdf)

<b>Study Selection Key Words</b>	Community + Participation
<b>Rural focus / Intersection with rural planning and development</b>	Rural Places: water bodies, waterfronts Rural activities: Free time, recreation, public health Policy frameworks: SDGs, OPPI’s community engagement priority, provincial Sport policies
<b>Public Interest</b>	Low female rural sport participation as a general trend
<b>Addressing of public concerns</b>	This research points to ways of strengthening public health, social connection, gender equity and landscape accessibility/improvement.

# Step 2: Establish Communication and Approval from Authors and/or Coauthors

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Establish early and transparent communication with author(s) of selected knowledge by informing them of the purpose of the summary and the broader knowledge mobilization initiative. Using standardized communication templates (adapted as needed) can improve team coordination, streamline approval processes, and increase the likelihood of successfully publishing summaries and related follow-up outputs such as videos and infographics.

This template for a first communication with authors can be adapted to your specific knowledge mobilization objectives and context.

*Dear Prof. [Name]*

*I hope this email finds you well.*

*I am writing to brief you about the Connecting the Dots (CTD) initiative at the University of Guelph. The initiative aims to connect Ontario's knowledge producers to rural knowledge users through accessible research outputs, including plain language summaries, videos, and infographics.*

*We have identified your publication titled [add title] online at [add name of Journal]. It would be a pleasure to have you participate in the CTD initiative.*

*Here is how it works: as soon as I receive your response, I will proceed to generate a plain language summary for your review. Once finalized with your input and with your permission, we will post this summary on [rural.uoguelph.ca](http://rural.uoguelph.ca) and share it via social media to disseminate the research insights more broadly.*

*Thank you for considering knowledge mobilization under the Connecting the Dots initiative at the University of Guelph.*

*Kind regards,*

# Step 3: Deep Reading and Extraction

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Once a knowledge product is selected and approved the core elements need to be extracted

- the main research question and challenge(s) for rural life
- the methodology (in simple terms)
- the most important findings
- practice or policy implications
- any regional or rural-specific insights

It is important to avoid getting lost in technical details. Focus on what truly matters for rural audiences. However, when technical aspects seem to be fundamental to understanding the broader implications, contact the author(s) for clarification with specific questions.

In identifying the core elements, reflect on these questions:

- What are the 3-5 insights someone in a rural municipality should know?
- What would your targeted audience find useful?
- What might change because this research exists?

**\*Example:** “Mapping Women’s Community Sport Participation to inform sport development initiatives”

## **Methodology Vs Key Insights**

In knowledge mobilization, conveying key insights relevant to rural audiences, policy makers, etc. takes precedence over explanation of technical components or research methodologies such as “spatial analysis.”

### **Key insights of the study:**

Regional Differences, rates of female participation, age and retention patterns, distance to sport settings, etc.

# Step 4: Structure the Summary

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In the Connecting the Dots initiative, each plain language summary was structured with three key sections: overview, research results, and why it matters. The following figure illustrates this structure and contents. Details of what information was included in each section are listed below.

## RESEARCH SUMMARY

# Mapping Women's Community Sport Participation to Inform Sport Development Initiatives: A Case Study of Row Ontario



## INTRODUCTION

This document summarizes of a journal article by Kyle A. Rich, Emily Moore, Jeffrey Boggs and Ann Pegoraro in [Frontiers in Sports and Acting Living](#) in 2022.

## OVERVIEW

This study looked at where and how women and girls participate in rowing across Ontario, using membership data from Row Ontario, the provincial sport organization for rowing. By mapping participation patterns, the researchers found important differences between urban and rural regions showing how geography, age, and local conditions shape who gets involved in sport. The study also revealed that women make up most of the organization's members, which is unusual in Canada, where women are generally less active in organized sports. These findings can help tailor sport programs that reflect local needs, build on existing strengths in rural areas, and make opportunities for sport and recreation more inclusive across Ontario.

### Research Results

**1. Regional Differences Matter:** The province was divided into eight regions, each with distinct age patterns, demographics, and participation rates, showing that "one-size-fits-all" programs do not work everywhere.

**2. Strong Female Participation:** Across all regions, women represented the majority of participants (over 70% in some northern and rural regions) suggesting strong community engagement and untapped potential to expand women's sports.

**3. Age and Retention Patterns:** In some regions, participants were older, suggesting a need for outreach to younger women. In others, the challenge was retaining young adults beyond their early twenties.

**4. Contextual Barriers:** Rural areas face unique challenges, such as distance to water bodies and limited sport infrastructure, highlighting the importance of place-based approaches to planning and sport development.

### Why This Matters

Understanding where and how women and girls participate in sport helps make rural planning and sport policy more equitable and responsive. By supporting community-based and regionally tailored sport programs, especially in northern and rural Ontario, this research points to ways of strengthening public health, social connection, and local resilience through inclusive sport participation.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

The full publication titled "Mapping Women's Community Sport Participation to Inform Sport Development Initiatives: A case Study of Row Ontario" can be accessed online through [Frontiers in Sports and Acting Living](#). See more <https://www.krichsportandrec.com/sportpolicyimplementation>

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research summary was generated as part of the [Connecting the Dots](#) initiative. This research is funded by the [Ontario Agri-Food Innovation Alliance](#), a collaboration between the Government of Ontario and the University of Guelph.



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## 1. Overview (~ 110 words)

The overview answers:

What is this study about and why should rural audiences care?

- Introduce the issue in accessible language for a general audience.
- This can be done using a hook in question form or through a strong opening statement.
- Explain what the study examined.
- Identify the novelty and focus of the study (e.g., new findings, new methods, new regional insights).
- Situate it within a rural or regional context while also noting broader implications

\*Example: “Mapping Women’s Community Sport Participation to inform sport development initiatives”.

The text opens with a gender-based approach and then presents relations between sport involvement dynamics, tailoring of (sport, planning, health, etc.) programs and inclusiveness across the province.

## 2. Research Results (~ 130 words)

The results section answers:

What did the researchers discuss that is relevant for the rural world?

- Focus on patterns, trends, and actionable insights.
- Use short paragraphs or bullet points summarized by a guiding term that highlights the result.
- Highlight regional differences when it is relevant.
- Remove statistical overload unless it is essential.

\*Example: “Mapping Women’s Community Sport Participation to inform sport development initiatives”.

- Regional Participation: clear differences between northern and southern regions.
- Rural Participation Gap: 1% are rural participants over 30 years old.
- Strong Female Participation: Women represented over 70% of members in some rural regions.

## 3. Why It Matters (~ 50 words)

This section is crucial because it explicitly answers:

Why does this matter for the rural world?

Move beyond description and explain:

- The social meaning of the findings
- Implications for everyday rural life and landscapes
- Relevance for planning and governance
- Public health, infrastructure, equity, sustainability, etc.

For example:

- In the sport participation study, the broader implication was strengthening public health and community wellbeing in northern and rural regions.

Rather than repeating findings or extending to much the list of results, emphasize potential impacts if the study is implemented or widely known. Identify how specific findings might be generalized across Ontario or adapted in similar rural contexts

# Step 5: Writing Strategies: The Challenge of Plain language

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Writing in plain language is not only about replacing or clarifying technical terms but also finding a tone and addressing the right audience.

- Avoid academic debate style, theoretical language, and citations. Main readers may include municipal planners, community organizations, rural residents, non-profits, small businesses, and policymakers.
- Engage the reader, but not in “promotional” terms which means presenting the research neutrally, accurately, and transparently. Therefore, avoid framing or describing the study as groundbreaking, world-leading, cutting-edge, highly successful, unprecedented, etc.
- Articulate 3 to 5 key messages, using similar phrasing for the core ideas to achieve consistency. This will be useful later as these texts will be later adapted visually and narratively in research videos, infographics and social media campaigns.
- Change or present in a legible manner technical terms but avoiding “light” language or oversimplification.

For example:

- When identifying the relevance of a concept such as “Food systems”, it could be described as “...everything involved in getting food from the farm to your plate.”
- When talking about “spatial analysis methodology”, it can be put as “...where and how women and girls participate in rowing across Ontario”.

# Step 6: Final Review Checklist

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Before final layout and publication, ask the following questions:

- Are the rural implications and relevance explicit?
- Are key findings easy to identify?
- Is jargon removed or clearly explained?
- Does the “Why It Matters” section go beyond summary?
- Could this text support short video script (30–50 seconds)?
- Could its key numbers or trends be transformed into an infographic?

# Step 7: Tips: Preparing the Layout

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- Follow and, where possible, improve the templates already developed.
- Use online repositories (e.g., Pixabay) to locate images that clearly convey the main topic of the summary. Use keywords from the summary and relevant synonyms to guide your search.

For example:

- For water infrastructure topics, search terms such as “rural water system,” “community water treatment,” or “groundwater.”
  - For participation or recreation topics, search for “community sport,” “women rowing,” or “rural recreation.”
- Images should reinforce the rural dimension of the research whenever possible.

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