



How to...

Develop a knowledge exchange and impact strategy

This guide will help you to develop a strategy for enhancing the impact of your research. It provides a set of questions and prompts for you to consider with some examples, and a ‘notes sheet’ where you can start getting your thoughts down on paper. Going through this exercise will help you to address the ‘**impact statement**’ and ‘**pathways to impact**’ part of applications to AHRC or ESRC. It will also help you to develop a knowledge exchange and impact strategy for your research funded by other sources.

1. What is your research about?

Identifying the essence of what your research is about is key to developing an impact strategy.

- What is unique about your research?
- How does the subject matter, methodology and/or outputs differ from, or develop previous research undertaken in this field of study?
- Why is it important? Why now?

This will help you to write the **summary** of your research. This is often the first section that is read by reviewers and is generally published on the funder’s website.

2. What difference could it contribute towards?

An ambitious vision for what difference your research could make will focus your impact strategy.

Imagine you are in 2030. What, ideally, would you like to be different as a result of your research? Are people better informed about a historic period? Do people behave differently? Is there an improvement in community cohesion? Is health and wellbeing better among a group of people? Has policy changed? Has there been an improvement in a public service? Is a company more profitable? Does an organisation work better?

This will help you to develop **objectives** for the impact of your research. These will sit alongside your academic objectives

Whilst keeping the vision, it is important to be realistic when making plans for generating impact. Avoid making claims that are beyond the scope of what you are doing. Think about the part that your research plays in the bigger picture.

- Briefly summarise the benefits you would like your research to generate. Examples could be to:

- Raise awareness among...about...?
- Improve knowledge and understanding among...about...?
- Change the attitudes and perceptions among... about?
- Inform the policy on...?
- Inform guidelines or curriculum?

What is impact?
In this guide, impact is defined as “the demonstrable contribution of research to changes that bring benefits to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life.”

3. Who might be interested in your research?

You will need to engage a range of people to achieve impact.

Direct beneficiaries:

The people whose lives may be improved as a result of your research. For example: members of the general public such as people with an interest in a topic related to your research; school children of a particular age or subject field; service users such as patient groups; service providers such as social workers; staff and audiences of cultural organisations; companies such as learning technology developers. In order to demonstrate impact, the beneficiaries should be as specific as possible.

This will help you to specify target audiences in the Impact Summary in RCUK applications.

Decision-makers and influencers:

Decision-makers are politicians, directors, heads of departments and others with the power to make change. Influencers have access to the decision-makers. The stronger your claims about impact, the more you have to demonstrate that you know how to reach these individuals. In order to get their ear, you will need to identify who the gatekeepers are. These may include civil servants, curators, advisors or others trusted by those you want to target. They could also include established academics so explore and draw on your colleagues' contacts.

Partners and collaborators:

Allies who can get the research to the influencers and decision makers and/or to the direct beneficiaries. For example: cultural organisations with established audiences and facilities for holding public events; trade associations with access to companies; or charities who engage directly with patient groups and/or with policy and practice. Partners and collaborators can help to ensure that the questions asked from the research are relevant and that the outputs are in a useful form for knowledge users.

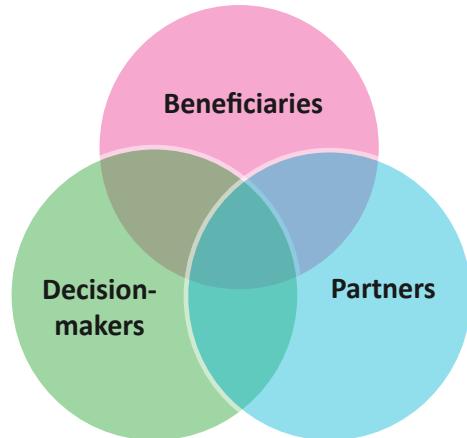


Figure 1 Target audiences for enhancing research impact

Figure 1 above shows that the three categories are overlapping. A partner could, at the same time, be a decision-maker and a direct beneficiary of the research. The point, therefore, is not to get hung up on what category they belong to but to ensure that your engagement strategy includes all the roles needed in order for your research to make a difference.



List the target audience of your research using the categories above.

- Direct beneficiaries
- Decision-makers and influencers
- Partners and collaborators.

In each group, who do you know already? Who do you have access to? Do you know someone who has? If not, how will you approach them?

4. What's in it for them?

Assuming that your target audience will be interested is a common problem when creating strategies for impact.

Your identified beneficiaries, decision-makers and potential partners are all likely to be busy; probably at least as busy as you are. So why would they pay attention to your research?

The key to getting their interest will be to show how working with you will directly benefit them. Will a museum be able to create an innovative exhibition? Will a cultural organisation be able to attract new audiences? Will a festival be able to engage hard-to-reach groups? Will advocacy groups gain evidence to use in their work? Will partner organisations be

This will help you to identify the benefit in the Impact Summary in RCUK applications.

able to develop new skills by working with you? Will practitioners gain new knowledge that will advance their practice? Will policymakers gain new insights that will inform a change to legislation or service provision? This brings us back to the initial question about what difference your research ideally could make.



Consider:

- **What is on your target audience's agenda right now – and in near future? How will your research contribute to this?**
Examples: Stronger evidence for decision making, new ideas to help solve an issue, maintaining services with dwindling resources.
- **What opportunities could the project bring them?**
Examples: Involvement in public engagement, funding/co-funding for activities that are of direct relevance to their organisation, skills development.
- **What insights and resources could they bring to the project?**
Examples: Access to direct beneficiaries, decision-makers and influencers, knowledge about how guidelines and policies are interpreted and used on the ground, creative input, understanding of the cultural sector.
- **What form might their involvement take?**
Examples: Membership on advisory group, co-organiser of events, designing how to creatively engage target groups.

Try to put yourself in their shoes when you first make contact. Needless to say, make contact with the partners in good time before you plan to submit the application to ensure that you have time to start building a relationship.

5. How will you engage with them and when?

The next step is to identify when and how to engage your audience.

Impact does not occur through dissemination alone. You need to develop relationships with potential partners and people involved in your area to discuss the implications of your findings. People are far more likely to listen to the findings if they have been involved in the project at an early stage.

This will help you to develop the **Pathways to Impact** statement for RCUK applications.

Think about the role partners can play. Advocacy groups and charities may be better placed to do the lobbying needed to effect change in policy or practice. Cultural organisations such as theatre groups and museums may have direct access to a public audience and have creative ways of engaging people in research. If organisations use your research in their advocacy work, or to change the way they engage with their audiences, this is impact in that you have enhanced their ability to fulfil their aims.

Think about how to get gatekeepers involved at an early stage, so you have access to decision-makers when needed.



Consider:

- What activities are appropriate for developing the impact you hope to have?
- Who do you need at the start to help set priorities and shape the project?
- Who do you need throughout the process for feedback and to help share information and findings?
- Who needs to know about the result after the project is completed?

For each of your audiences, consider:

- What do their days/weeks, etc. look like?
- What are their needs and resources?
- How do they prefer to receive information and in what form?

Being more aware of their situation will make it easier for you to target the approach appropriately.

Activities that can be used to exchange knowledge with target audiences and help foster impact include:

- Having an advisory group with key users on board
- Face to face meetings and targeted events involving knowledge users
- Briefings addressing the policy and practice implications of your research
- Easily accessible reports or attractively designed research summaries
- Digital communication channels such as blogs, Twitter, etc.
- Video reports or webinars
- Education outreach and associated materials.

This is not an exhaustive list and there may be other creative ways to target your audience.

6. Capturing impact

You will need to develop evaluation plans, document your engagement and ensure you are able to capture evidence throughout the project.

This will help you to report on impact.



Evidence of impact may include:

- Citations (or evidence of citation) in user generated documents
- Testimonies from partners, influencers and decision-makers
- Incorporation of research in training material and curriculum
- Articles and commentary in the media referring to your research
- Reference to research in Parliament and other policy debate
- Visitor/audience numbers or number of participants
- Feedback from visitors and audiences demonstrating how the research based activity has changed attitudes, opinions or behaviours
- Numeric data relating, for example, to cost savings, organisational performance or income.

At the University of Edinburgh, impact is logged on the PURE database.

7. Resourcing knowledge exchange activities

What do you need resources for and what will it cost?

All research funders would like to see impact from the research they fund, and normally they will allow for costs to generate this. Not including costs to generate impact may actually be detrimental to the assessment of your application!

This will be crucial for the budget and justification of resources in RCUK applications.



Please ensure you have provided realistic costs for:

- Events, including room hire and catering as appropriate. You may also consider including a facilitator and note-takers for interactive events
- Travel and subsistence related to meetings with practitioners and stakeholders, including advisory group meetings
- Developing professional webpages and social media
- Production of research briefings and other material tailored to your target audience
- Assistance with writing for non-academic audiences.

3 types of impact:

ESRC Impact Toolkit: <http://www.esrc.ac.uk/research/>

- **Instrumental impact:** Influencing the development of policy, practice or service provision, shaping legislation, altering behaviour
- **Conceptual impact:** Contributing to the understanding of policy issues, reframing debates
- **Capacity building:** Through technical and personal skill development

This guide was produced by the CAHSS Knowledge Exchange Office. We help colleagues to engage with industry, policy and practice to maximise the impact of their research. Find out more at www.ed.ac.uk/cahss/rke

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