Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte
Health Service Executive

Building a Better Health Service
CARE COMPASSION TRUST LEARNING

Knowledge Translation, Dissemination, and Impact
A Practical Guide for Researchers

Guide No 5

How to achieve impact with your research: planning for impact

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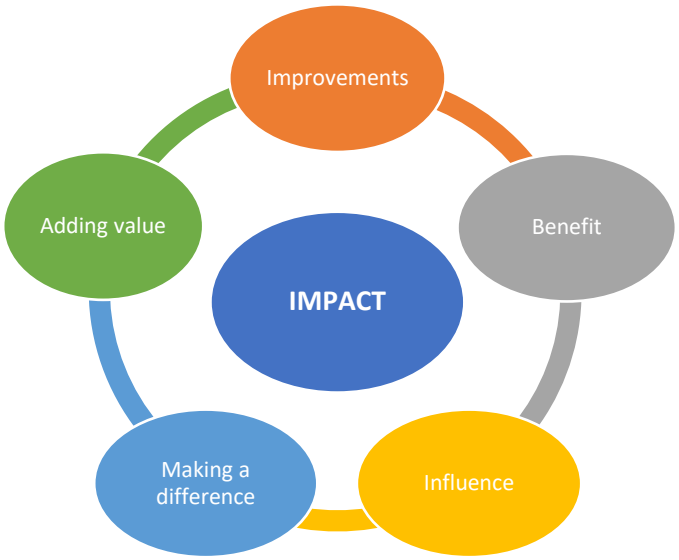
1. What is impact and why is it important?

Impact is the difference research and new knowledge makes to health care, policy, society, the economy, the environment, technology, or to education and training. It is when knowledge benefits or influences others, and we can demonstrate that has happened.

This does not always mean that something will change as research can sometimes indicate that change could be harmful or damaging.



If you are considering impact as part of your Knowledge Translation (KT) activity, it helps to understand how knowledge translation and impact differ. Knowledge Translation is the *process* between those who create knowledge and those who use it. Impact is the *change* that takes place.

2. Why is it important to think about the impact our research might make?

Researchers, research funders, and those who commission research, want to use the knowledge they gain from the research to make an impact but how do you know whether your research can make a difference?

There are lots of practical things you, as a researcher, can do with the knowledge you have gained from your research to make a difference. All research matters, whether it is a small local project or a big clinical trial, and this guide will take you through what you can do to try and make an impact with your research. The impact journey can be the most rewarding part of your research as this is where you can influence practice, guidance, policy, education, or training, or add to knowledge.

Impact is about much more than simply disseminating our research through an article in a journal or a conference presentation. It is about reaching people who can use the knowledge and benefit from it. Impact is a two way relationship between those who produce knowledge and those who use it. Although publishing our research, and telling people about it through social media, means that knowledge is more available than it was in the past, this might not always reach the people who can use it most effectively.

3. Types of impact

The impact resulting from research can be considered in terms of how it impacts on people, communities, and organisations. Researchers want to know what changes take place as a result of their research, for whom, and how to demonstrate change has occurred. Research can bring benefits to patients, population, health services, the economy, and academia. It can also bring about changes in activity or understanding including:

- Improvements to health
- Improvements leading to the prevention of disease and promotion wellbeing
- Improvements in how health services are delivered
- Contributions to research knowledge
- Economic benefits to health services and the economy
- Adding value and reducing waste.

The categories of impact that we might consider when thinking about what difference our research might make are shown at Figure 1 below. Although most health researchers will expect to find health or policy impacts, there may be multiple impacts including unexpected impacts e.g. training, that might emerge from the research. For HSE researchers the impact is likely to be in the categories of health, increasing knowledge understanding and awareness, training, technological, and economic. Examples of possible impacts under each category can be found in Table 1.

Figure 1 – Impact categories

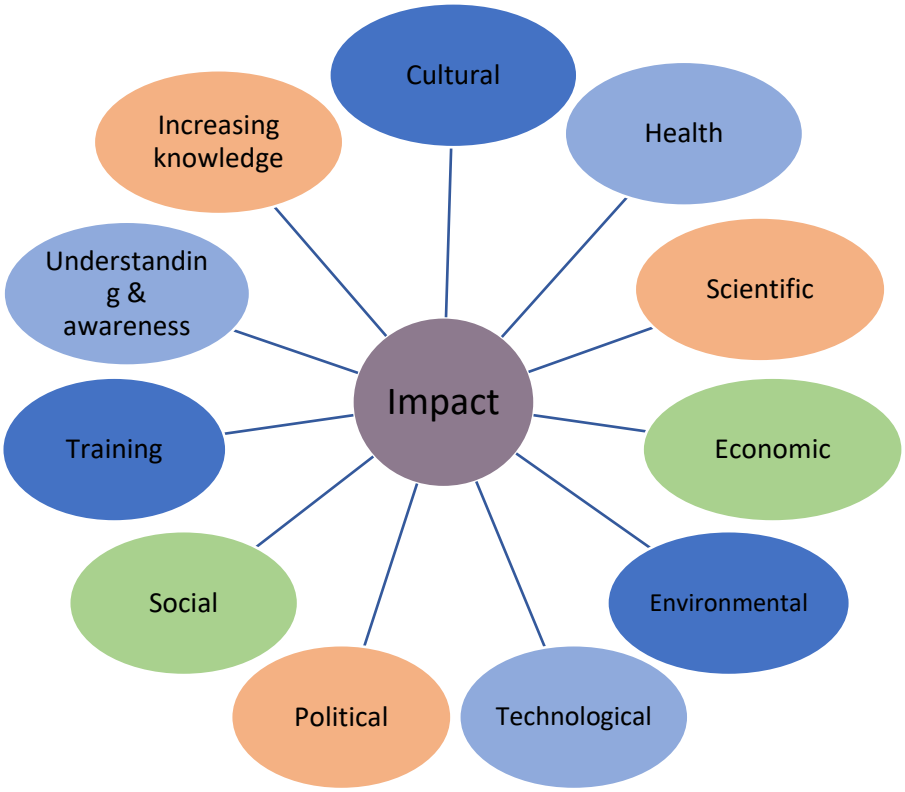


Table 1 – Examples of impacts

Cultural	Economic
• Adding to the understanding of ideas, values, and beliefs. Increasing awareness and educating the public. Improving local planning.	• Income generation. • Contributes to, or results in, cost savings, economic growth, increases in productivity. • More efficient use of resources. • Reduced waste. • Reductions in over prescribing or over treatment. • Commercial gains. Spin out companies.

Environmental	Health
• Impacts on the environment, increases sustainability. • Improved public health. • Changes in human behaviour. • Increased awareness and knowledge. • Reduces carbon emissions and the carbon footprint. • Improved planning.	• Improved services, patient care, patient outcomes, quality of life, life expectancy. • Leads to health gains. • Introduces new treatment or services. • Reduces inequalities. • Reduces mortality rates. • Changed behaviours.

Policy	Scientific
• Impacts on, or changes, policy. • Informs new guidelines. • Impacts on regulation. • Advises on policy. • Changes to professional bodies procedures.	• Adding to the knowledge base. • Leads to further research.

Social	Technological
• Adds to understanding of community and social environment. • Contributes to community development. • Enables community organisations to gain new funding.	• Creates new products or services. • Innovates.

Training and capacity building	Creating understanding and awareness and increasing knowledge
• Adds to learning, creates new learning tools or curricula. • Capacity building. Increases research capability. • Increased number of staff gaining qualifications. • More research active staff. • Improved staff retention.	• Informing practitioners, other professionals about the research. • Increasing professional knowledge about a topic. • Improving professional standards or guidance. • Increasing public or patient knowledge, understanding and awareness. • Increased awareness of others' perspectives.

4. Planning and measuring impact

An impact plan should be developed identifying the beneficiaries of the research, those who have influence and interest (see *Guide number 4 – stakeholder engagement*), and how they will be engaged throughout the research study. Evidence shows that engaging your partners/stakeholders is a major predictor of research being used[1].

The plan should set out the type of impact, the impact goals, how they will be measured and who will be involved. The impact plan should be cross referenced to the knowledge translation plan to ensure the goals and activities, and who will benefit from the research and knowledge, mirror each other. *Guide number 2 - Planning your knowledge translation activity* sets out how to develop a KT plan.

Also, consider the resources you might need including people, funding, materials, technology, knowledge. Who is needed to lead or manage the activity? Is any additional funding needed?

Your KT plan will have detailed the outcomes you want to achieve from your KT. Your impact plan will outline the impacts you want to deliver. It is important to understand the difference between outcomes and impact:
Outcomes: short to medium term changes that are steps to longer term impacts.
Impact: long term changes resulting from the research.

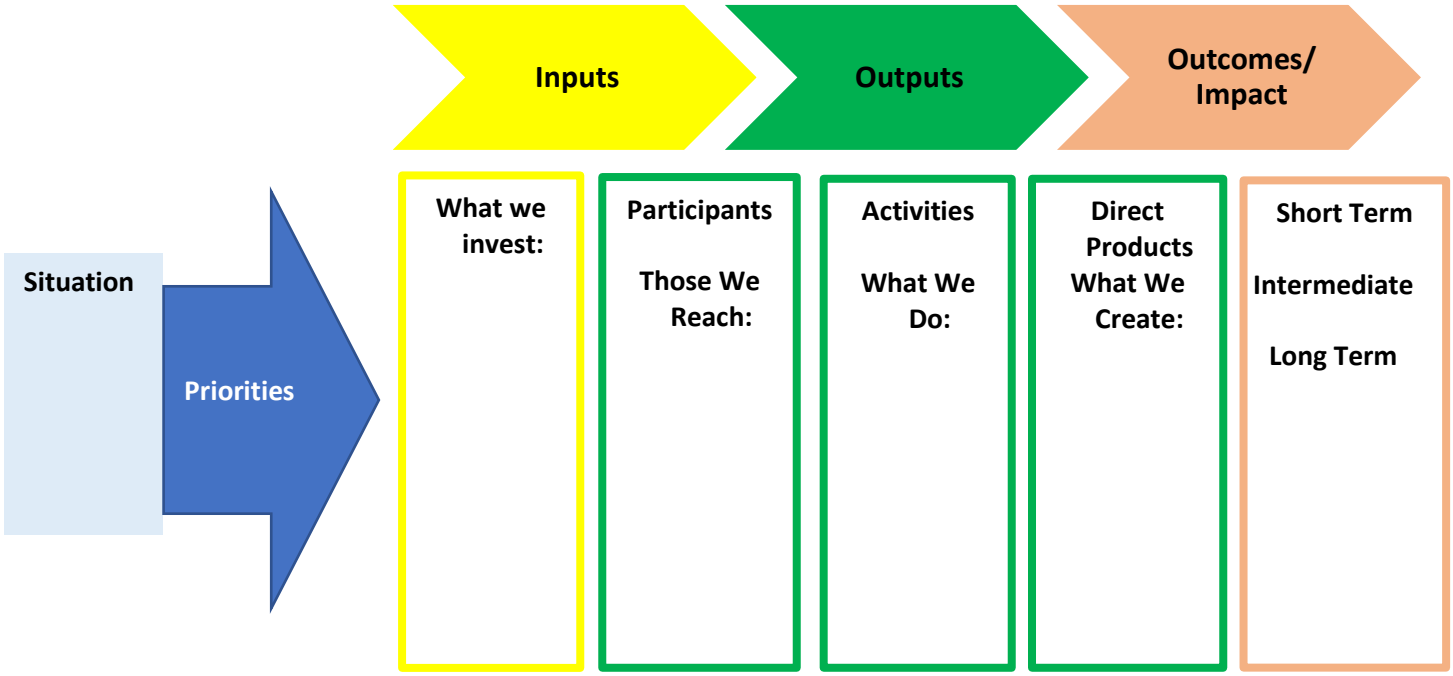
One of the following planning templates might be helpful:

[1] Bowen S, Botting I, Graham ID. Experience of health leadership in partnering with university-based researchers in Canada - a call to "re-imagine" research. International Journal of Health Policy Management. 2019;8(12):684- 699. doi:10.15171/ijhpm.2019.66

Impact plan template 1

Planned impact	What is the goal	Activities	Stakeholders who may benefit	Resources needed + who can help	Timescale for completion	Measures of impact

Impact plan template 2



5. Engagement

Some tips for engaging with stakeholders:

- It is a good idea to engage at the beginning of the research project to make sure stakeholders find your research relevant (see *Guide number 4 – Stakeholder engagement*, for further guidance on when and how to engage).
- Spend time sharing and presenting your research at different stages of the project.
- Keep the messages as simple and straightforward as possible.
- Deliver some early impacts or 'quick wins' as this can help build interest and enthusiasm for longer term impacts.
- Keep the momentum going to maintain interest and enthusiasm.
- Consider the right format for sharing your messages and engaging stakeholders e.g.
    - Workshops, conferences.

    - Social media.
- Use infographics to communicate your research to a range of stakeholders. This will provide a visual representation of key messages.
- Use social media to generate impact – Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, websites.

Engaging policy makers

Researchers can find it challenging to engage with policy makers so here is some guidance for building those relationships.

- Try not to focus only on those at the top level of policy making i.e. politicians, ministers, CEOs. There are also those who contribute to the development of policy – committees, advisers, civil servants, government researchers, other government departments, NGOs, advocacy organisations, consultants, who may be helpful. Reed[2] advocates a bottom up and top down approach. Bottom up – engage with more junior people. Top down – reach out to senior people e.g. minister, CEO or policy lead.
- Build relationships with members of the policy community when engaging in a project. Be aware of what their priority areas are. Find out who is working on what area. Follow them on Twitter or link on LinkedIn.
- Identify key messages (see *Guide number 3 - Knowledge Translation frameworks*, *what are they, how and when to use them*) and consider how to communicate those messages, particularly if they are complex.
- Be clear about what you want the policy maker to do; is it doable?
- Consider whether there is an organisation or individuals who could act as knowledge brokers[3].
- Work at and sustain relationships with policy makers once they are established.

Using social media to generate impact

Social media might include platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, LinkedIn, blogs, websites amongst others. It is easy to spend a lot of time on social media without gaining much impact if you do not plan your activity and choose the right platform for sharing your research. However, social media can help you to reach people, and get a response from them, where other forms of dissemination (conferences, publications) may not. Some tips for using social media:

- Think about who are you trying to reach and why.
- Consider which platform is likely to reach your stakeholders.
- Following those people who you want to reach through social media can give you an insight into the topics they are interested in.
- Think about your messages:
    - An image or video can help to engage people.
    - Space and character limits on some platforms can restrict the amount of information you share.

[2] Reed M. The Research Impact Handbook. 2018. Fast Track Impact Ltd.

[3] Knowledge brokers are intermediaries who develop relationships and networks between knowledge producers/researchers and the users of knowledge. Knowledge brokering involves linking colleagues to a variety of research, knowledge, and information resources.

    - Mishandling your message or not being clear can have negative consequences.
- Decide how you are going to find out and measure whether you have an impact with your social media activity. How will you gather data?

6. How to collect and show evidence of impact

Research funders and sponsors, HSE, your managers, will want evidence of the impact your research has made. You may also have to report to the funder using a template they provide.

You need to consider how to track and demonstrate the impacts from your research. One method is to keep a record of the impacts. The record might include:

- Details of what has changed, evidenced from:
    - Publications
    - Downloads or views of information or reports
    - Feedback from stakeholder questionnaires
    - Media coverage
    - Testimonials
    - Policy reports
    - Training programmes
    - Social media activity

Stakeholder feedback is a useful tool in gathering evidence of impact and HSE Research and Development recommends the use of the VICTOR impact tool (making Visible the ImpaCT Of Research). This is particularly useful for those who want to find out about the benefit of a research project for their own organisation. The VICTOR pack has some useful stakeholder questionnaires that can be used to seek feedback and can be used in conjunction with this guide.

You might also want to ask stakeholders for testimonials describing how they used the research, what difference it made, and what changes took place.

7. Evaluating and sustaining impact

It is important to learn from both the knowledge translation and impact process and record:

- hat has worked well and what has not worked so well.
- Which relationships have been successful and contributed towards making an impact?
- Whether the impact goals have been achieved and if not, the reasons why they were not achieved.
- What activities need to be sustained to maintain the impact and who is going to ensure this happens.

For guidance on evaluating knowledge translation and impact, see *Guide number 6 – Evaluating your knowledge translation and dissemination: how do you know what you achieved?*