Toolkit Stage 5
Evaluating impact and further gaps in knowledge

This stage is intended to guide you through reviewing or measuring the progress, outcomes and impact of your research/project.

Key steps

- Develop an impact measurement framework
- Monitor and document all activities within your knowledge translation strategy on a regular basis
- Invite feedback from your target audience(s) or research users to assess how the research outputs/knowledge and evidence is being used
- Record all types and levels of impact, including process impacts as and when they occur in the research/project life cycle
- Use any feedback or learning as soon as possible to improve knowledge, practice or policy development and to refine your theory of change framework

Theory

Although reviewing and evaluating your progress and outcomes is often thought of as the final stage in the process (and appears as the final stage in the toolkit), it is important to stress here that this does not necessarily reflect the order of research/project process. Evaluation should not be left until the end of the project. Reviewing and evaluating should actually form an integral part of each stage in the research/project cycle, and in particular the planning stage.

At the very beginning of the research/project cycle you will have carefully considered your aims, objectives and measures and recorded these in your theory of change framework or logic model. In order to create a comprehensive picture of the research/project's progress and impact, you will need to continuously review these throughout its lifespan (and also beyond its completion) to build the evidence of impact and full value.

It is important to monitor and document all of your knowledge translation and dissemination activities to evaluate the usage, outcomes and impact of your research. The review and evaluation process often happens at the end of the research/project cycle because that is traditionally when any formal dissemination of research outputs occurs. Again, it is important to see the research/ project approach as a continuous cycle and so reviewing should be part of each stage of the process in order to inform the next.

Things to consider

Capture any **process** 'impacts' or 'influence' throughout the research project cycle. It is important to capture the process impacts as they happen, as well as the usage, outcomes and impact of the final outputs. By process impacts, we mean capture evidence of any changes that occur during the process of conducting the research (for example, a change in stakeholders' knowledge, skills or attitudes as a direct result of either taking part in the research or any formal or informal knowledge exchange activities). Build this into your research project management, for example, by making it part of your steering/ advisory group meetings or project review meetings with the researcher.

Apply your learning from either the process or the outcomes of the research project as soon as possible and record this each time it happens (including exactly what was learnt and how this was then applied, ie to either develop knowledge, practice or policy).

Measuring reach and impact

How will you know if the research outputs or findings are being used and applied as desired or expected? How will you find out?

If the research or research outputs are not being used as desired or expected then why? Are there any barriers to it being used and applied in practice or policy?

Helpful hints and possible pitfalls

Be mindful of potential data collection and sharing issues. Having steering/advisory group meetings and/or regular progress meetings with the researcher(s) in place can be crucial in facilitating essential data access or sorting out any potential problems with data sharing.

In developing your impact measurement framework, the first step is to revisit your project plan and your knowledge translation strategy. Use this to decide how you will then measure the use and impact(s) of the research/project.

Remember to be aware of and record any unexpected and negative outcomes or impact as well as the positive. These are often the source of the most useful learning to be applied!

Exercise/Framework

Develop an impact measurement framework to track and quantify practical examples of the research usage, outcomes and impact (positive and negative). Record these within a framework that can be incorporated into your original project plan/theory of change/logic model. Figure 6 shows an example of a possible framework to be used.

There are various frameworks and resources to help you when thinking about evaluation or impact measurement. These can be used or adapted to suit your specific needs.

The Economic and Social Research Council website provides a wealth of information and guidance on research and evaluation strategies for different needs from analysis and scoping to economic impact evaluation www.esrc.ac.uk/funding-and-guidance/tools-and-resources/impact-evaluation/index.aspx

The nef website also provides guidance on measuring impact and developing good indicators etc www.proveandimprove.org/meaim/developgoodindicators.php

Big Lottery Fund have developed an introduction to impact measurement to help funders demonstrate what they are achieving (at project/programme level) www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/er_impact_measurement.pdf

Figure 6

Details of usage, outcome or impact of research	Source of evidence	Type of impact	Level of impact	Beneficiary of impact	Stage at which impact occurred
		eg conceptual; process, instrumental; symbolic; capacity-building; operational; strategic	eg local; regional; national; international	eg research funder; grantee/ researcher; practitioners; service commissioners; service providers; policy-makers; other agencies	eg setting the policy agenda; policy or practice development; policy or practice implementation

Stage 5 checklist

○ All possible measures of impact identified

○ Mechanisms to monitor all activities within knowledge translation strategy in place

○ All activities within knowledge translation strategy recorded on a regular basis

○ Feedback on research use or impact obtained from target audience(s)

○ All types of impact (including **process** impacts) recorded on a regular basis

○ Learning from research project applied as soon as possible and details recorded

○ Further gaps in knowledge identified