

Webpage: [Developing an Impact Strategy \(warwick.ac.uk\)](http://warwick.ac.uk)

Developing an Impact Strategy

Impact can occur in diverse and unexpected ways at any stage of a research project. As such, it is seldom possible to predict accurately what effects your research may have on its non-academic audiences. However, by developing a strategic approach to your activities, you will maximise the potential for impact and ensure that it is captured in a meaningful way. The following steps have been adapted from previous materials developed from ESRC which are no longer available on the [ESRC webpages](#), but the team and researchers have found these useful to develop an effective strategy.

7 Steps to Impact

1. Identify and target specific audiences

Qs: Who might be interested in my research? How might it benefit them?

Think beyond the obvious organisations and individuals. You can't target everyone, and it is important that you have a clear idea of your intended audience: rather than aiming your activities at broad groups such as 'the general public', 'policymakers', 'schools' etc., try to narrow it down to more specific groups. Ask yourself: which sections of society might be interested, what government departments may be affected, what age groups will be affected. This will enable you to develop a more targeted and appropriate plan.

2. Set objectives

Qs: What are the likely outcomes of this research? What would I like to change as a result of my research? How will I know if it has made a difference?

Once you have identified your potential audiences, you can begin to think about the difference your research can make to them. For example, if you are planning to work with a museum, you should think about the various ways the organisation might benefit from your expertise: e.g. enhancing staff understanding of your subject, attracting (new) audiences, improving curatorial practice. In this example, it is likely that other groups will also benefit from your work, such as the visitors to the museum. You should also consider how you would like your research to affect them. Once you have established your objectives, you should prioritise them and consider how they may change as the project progresses.

3. Develop your message

Qs: What are the key points of my research? How do they relate to everyday life? What might non-academics struggle to understand?

You should have a clear succinct message which adequately summarises your research project and what you are trying to achieve. Your message should include the key points of your research that you wish to get across. Use appropriate language for your target audience and avoid using too many technical terms or specialist terminology. If possible, try to think about how it may relate to people's everyday experiences, for example, Quassim

Cassam (Philosophy) connects his work on epistemic vices to [9/11 conspiracy theories](#), making it more immediately relatable and relevant to a general audience.

4. Choose communication channels

Qs: How large are my audiences? What is their preferred method of communication? Are there official channels and protocols to follow? How can I encourage meaningful dialogue?

It is important to consider the most appropriate channels to reach your target audience – for example through press articles, workshops, social media, one-to-one meetings, policy briefings. This will help you to frame the main activities of your impact plan. Bear in mind that your communication aims may change throughout the project - it is likely that you will focus on building awareness in the early stages - but that it is usually more effective to engage your audiences in dialogue, rather than simply disseminating your research through non-academic channels.

5. Plan activities

Qs: What activities will help me to reach my audiences? What is feasible within the budget? How much time am I able to commit?

You should have a clear idea from the outset of all the activities you are going to carry out. In general, when planning your activities, it is worth bearing the following in mind:

- Target your activities effectively – often it's better to do less, but do it well.
- Don't underestimate the resources involved – ensure you estimate time and cost as accurately as possible.
- Where choices have to be made, concentrate on your most important and influential audiences, prioritise high impact/low cost activities and use secondary channels to save time and money.
- Take advantage of any support, guidance and training that is available before embarking on unfamiliar activities such as media work or running events.

Visit the [event planning page](#) to find more detailed information on the nitty-gritty of planning events and activities.

6. Allocate resources (time and budget)

Qs: How much money do I have? How much time can I spend on impact activities? Can I get extra help if necessary?

This is a crucial element of every impact strategy and the answers to the above questions may well require you to rethink your initial plans.

- Do not underestimate the time and money involved in impact activities.
- Always build in contingency time (and funds, if possible) to take account of unexpected opportunities.
- Consider how your plans fit in with the timeframes and cycles of your partners (e.g. school years)

The ESRC recommends that up to 5-10% of your total funded research budget should be allocated to your impact plan but this will depend on the scale and nature of your impact activities. Your Impact Officer will be able to advise you of the time and money typically needed to run different activities.

7. Build in evidence-gathering process

Qs: What are my intended outcomes? How can I measure them? What resources will I need to gather evidence?

It is very important to build a robust evaluation process into your project from the outset and to gather evidence as you go along, taking stock at various points. This is necessary to provide evidence of impact to funders and REF panels and can also be a valuable source of feedback that may influence and enhance your research. There is no one-size-fits-all means of monitoring and measuring success, as your methods will depend on your intended outcomes. When planning your evidence-gathering, begin with **what** you want to measure and work from there to think about **how** you can measure it. This will help you to avoid collecting meaningless data and/or missing out on vital information. A detailed guide and toolkit for gathering evidence can be found by clicking on the section heading.