A Guide to Ensuring Wide
Dissemination and Lasting Impact
for Your Research

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Contents

Introduction

Sharing valuable research is a crucial part of making sure your work has an impact outside your organisation. There are, however, so many different ways of doing this that it can be difficult to know where to start and daunting to decide which of the myriad channels that are available today suit you best. This brief paper will give you practical information to help you get your work noticed and used by policymakers, practitioners and funders.

Why disseminate the results of your research?

You put a huge amount of effort into conducting your research. You need to make sure that this effort is rewarded. Your work is valuable and can transform practice and lives but only if your findings are widely shared with people who can use them to change policy and practice. Disseminating to a wide audience increases the impact of your research a thousand fold.

Practitioners need to know what you have discovered so they can use your conclusions and recommendations to improve their own work. Funders want to know what you have learned in order to know that their money was well spent and will want others, especially organisations like yours, to learn from your work. Policymakers can use your findings to improve services and create better communities. Other researchers need to know about your results so that they can build on and further develop the findings, rather than wasting time, money and effort in duplication.

The subjects of your research – people and organisations – need to know about your findings that describe or reflect their work and its value, while your organisation will feel a huge sense of pride from having its work acknowledged publicly.

Each of these groups finds information in different ways, so it is important to share your findings through many channels and media to reach all your target audiences. This takes work and planning, but can easily be done and generally at little or no cost. There are so many opportunities and a myriad of different, exciting and cost-effective ways to get your message out to a wider world, including published reports, journal articles, book chapters, websites, conference papers, poster sessions, social media, video clips, brochures and blogs.

Dissemination is not especially difficult. There are a number of simple steps you can take to ensure that your work is known about, used and developed to create better services and communities. These steps can significantly increase public knowledge of your research findings and therefore maximise the effect of your work. We start with the easiest steps, but it is important to use as many different channels as possible to share your message to the widest possible audiences and over an extended time period.

Pre-research

Arrange funding for dissemination costs

The work of dissemination begins before a research project is even underway. The first step to promote your work successfully is to include disseminating results into your initial project planning. Funders want to ensure that their money is spent in the best way possible and will likely be glad to finance your dissemination. In fact, many funders now require that the results of the research they support be made freely available and want others to learn from the work they have supported. Make sure you include the costs of dissemination in your funding application.

Plan dissemination

Different people look for and use different types of information. By tailoring your research output to the way your target audience finds and absorbs information, you can make sure that they learn about your work and use it successfully.

Funders find research reports, especially ones with clear, brief summaries, most useful.

Researchers look for research reports, journal articles, book chapters and conference papers, especially if these are available electronically and free of charge.

Practitioners and policymakers find brief papers, research reports and professional journals most helpful.

Communities like personal presentations, brief report summaries, websites and video clips to learn about your work and its results.

Journalists like brief summaries and video clips.

Your website is the first place people will look for your publications once they have heard about your project. Use blog posts and Twitter to reach the various audiences mentioned above and drive traffic to your site.

Finally, if you have gathered a lot of data for your study (especially statistics or personal stories), lodging this (known as a dataset) in an archive allows other researchers to reuse the data and develop your study. This step will create more knowledge, prolong the life of your study and provide much better value for your funders' investments.

Use tools to maximise impact

The ultimate purpose of disseminating your research is to make a difference on social, economic and policy areas in your field. Research assessment exercises now formally evaluate impact and many toolkits and resources are available that are useful across disciplines. In the United Kingdom, Research Councils UK has developed resources that encourage researchers to think about the impact of their work from the start. Here is a link to their Pathways to Impact: www.rcuk.ac.uk/ke/impacts/.

Clarify copyright and ensure consent

The copyright owner controls whether and how you can share the results of your study. At the beginning of the project, reach an agreement with your researchers on who holds the copyright for your study. Try and get an agreement that your organisation holds the copyright. If you cannot own it outright, agree to share it with the researchers, or get written consent about how you may share the results. For example, that agreement may mean you can publish a report, write articles or book chapters based on the research, present at conferences and lodge the dataset (anonymised) with an archive.

You should have ethical approval from a research committee to agree to how you will conduct the research and what will happen to the data you collect. If your researchers work for a university, they will be able to use their college's research committee to get approval for the research. Each university and government agency has its own systems and approach so it is important to find out the specific requirements for your research. Here is one template from King's College that may be helpful:
www.kcl.ac.uk/innovation/research/support/ethics/applications/apply.aspx.

If you are doing research that involves finding out any personal information about people (their life experiences, their mental or physical health, income or anything else that is personal), you will need to get the research participants' consent to obtain this information, either by asking the participants or those who hold this information (e.g., doctors or teachers) to use it in your study and afterwards. If necessary, obtain consent from parents or guardians for minors or others who cannot give their own consent. You will need to provide participants with information about how you want to use it, how long and where you will keep it, and who else will have access to the information.

For that reason, you should ensure that your consent forms and ethical approval cover the way you wish to use the material later. The consent should include an agreement for ongoing access to the research data, publication and, when you are doing research with individuals, lodging the datasets to allow other researchers to re-use your raw data for their studies. Again, each organisation will have its own procedures, which you will need to obtain. Here is a resource from the University of North Carolina, Charlotte, that provides a good overview on obtaining consent:
https://research.uncc.edu/departments/office-research-compliance-orc/human-subjects/informed-consent.

Identify suitable journals for publication

Journal articles have the greatest level of credibility among researchers. These articles are included in databases that list the scholarly literature and are one of the most important ways that other researchers can find out about your research. Publishing in journals also means your work will appear in Google Scholar, https://scholar.google.com/, and Microsoft's Academic Search, the alternative to Google Scholar, http://academic.research.microsoft.com/. Articles in professional journals are good avenues to reach practitioners and other professionals.

Use www.journalguide.com to identify suitable journals for your articles. When you are publishing articles based on your research:

- **Ensure you pick a journal with a wide circulation and a high impact factor, which is widely indexed in the research databases.** If possible, choose one with an open access option, which means that people do not need to pay for the journal or the articles to be able to read them. You can search for open access journals at http://doaj.org/.

    You or your employer may have to pay a fee for making your article open access. If you are employed by a university, check with the communications or research support office for details on this. Also check the publisher's website to learn whether it is open access. Here is one example from Elsevier: goog.gl/s4dxLX.

    The Association of College & Research Libraries publishes a guide for researchers wishing to make their publications open access: http://crln.acrl.org/content/74/9/473.

    Finally, here's a quick guide from the Institute of Education to check the quality of the journal you are thinking of publishing in: http://libanswers.ioe.ac.uk/a.php?qid=295422.

- **Make sure the journal is included in the standard indexes.** These are PubMed for health subjects, Sociological Abstracts for sociology, ERIC for education and Psychinfo for psychology. Databases index articles from major journals and are used by libraries and researchers to find new research, so publishing in one of these is an important way to get your research noticed. Check the journal's website to see what databases include their publication. Here's an example from Wiley Online Library: goog.gl/cZiNJX.

- **If the journal is not well-indexed, but is still the best place for your article (because of the subjects it covers and the people who read it), check that it is included in Google Scholar, where other researchers will find it.**

Compile mailing lists for dissemination

Think hard about whom you think should see your research and compile a mailing list that includes your funders, your community, other researchers, organisations in your network, journalists, politicians, policymakers and practitioners. As much of this can be done by email, there is no cost other than your time. Also think about any mailing lists you may know of and add them, e.g., info@bulletin.activelink.ie, which is an online network for Irish nonprofit organisations. Make sure you send them regular updates on your progress and copies of your publications, details of your seminars and any other news.

Join social media groups

Social media such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr are great ways of getting your message out. Follow people and organisations that have the same interests as you and use these channels to share your research findings. If you use Facebook, put links to your publications on your page where your friends will find them. If you are on www.linkedin.com, join groups like the Social Research group and send a message to the group any time you publish anything about your research. If you use Twitter, compile lists of other Twitter users and use these to inform them of your progress. This is a helpful article on how to use such lists: https://support.twitter.com/articles/76460-using-twitter-lists#. Use appropriate hashtags in your tweets to reach relevant audiences.

During the research

Create a blog or use your existing one, or write newsletter articles to communicate about your research as you go. This connects you with your audience from day one and keeps them updated with your progress as you go. Even very short postings are valuable. These postings can cover milestones such as the fact you are starting interviews, are making presentations, have useful resources to share or have completed your report.

If you are employed by a university or college, you should contact your communications office for advice and support on communicating the importance of your research. Talk to your funders about including details of your project in their own publicity. Look for opportunities to give talks or participate in podcasts about initial findings or learnings from the research.

Post-research

Plan for how you will publish your research. If you want your work to inform policy or practice, it is important that it continues to be visible over time. Publishing a single report is unlikely to be the most effective way to achieve this. Therefore, you should also publish journal articles on different elements of your research findings, make presentations at conferences, contribute chapters to books, blog about your research and tweet about it.

When you speak at conferences, put your presentations on www.slideshare.net or www.prezi.com where other people can find them through a simple web search. If you hold poster sessions at conferences, include the images on your website or Pinterest pages and in newsletters. Add Vine clips, https://vine.co/, (six-second repeating films) to your website and upload your talks onto https://soundcloud.com/ or iTunes university, www.apple.com/education/ipad/itunes-u/. As new social media channels become available, take advantage of them to share your research with a wider audience.

Publish report and summary

Where possible, publish in paper and electronic formats to ensure that your material stays around for as long as possible. Make sure your publications are in formats that are universally accessible (e.g., PDFs) so that they can be easily read. When you publish a report, consider its appearance. Attractive, well laid out reports are read more than those with poorer design. Include a clear, succinct summary to provide readers with a quick overview of the content.

Publish your reports using a Creative Commons Licence. This will allow anyone legally to download your report free of charge (but not change it) as long as they acknowledge you as the author. You can learn more about Creative Commons Licence at www.creativecommons.org.

Publish suitable audiovisual clips

If possible, make sure that you have good YouTube, Vimeo or Vine clips as they will be picked up by general search engines. Keep clips as short as possible. Clips longer than four minutes will be less frequently watched than shorter ones. Videos that provide people with a flavour of the work that your research is examining are particularly compelling. Add these clips to your Twitter and Facebook accounts. While the following video is a bit longer than four minutes, it is a good example of how a children's organisation brought its research findings to life: www.youtube.com/watch?v=I7bLB9NZgHo#t=69.

Launch report on website, newsletters and other outlets

Publish your report on your website with a simple URL that will make it easy to share. If you can't get a short, simple URL for the report, use http://tinyurl.com/ to contract it. More than half of all web access is now on mobile devices and this trend is growing, so check how your publications appear on iPads, tablets, Kindles and smart phones.

Ensure that the report is available on your website from the home page and through the publications section. Make your report as easy to find as possible with attention-grabbing headlines and summaries. Try and get as many other websites as possible to include a link to your publication(s). A good start would be networks of nongovernmental organisations or funders, other interest groups and organisations with whom you are working closely.

Ensure that you publicise all publications by using as many social media channels as possible to market them. Send copies of your reports and books to the review editors for the major journals or publications in your field. If they review your report or book, researchers will read the reviews and libraries will order copies for their collections. Provide a copy to Google Books so that the full text of your report can be read by anyone. See https://goo.gl/mxWlJF.

If you have a compelling video or news article about your work, send it to outlets that promote solutions-focused news. Media organisations such as newspapers and television stations use these outlets when they are looking for positive news stories. These outlets can be an efficient way to put your organisation's work in front of thousands of readers or viewers. One such outlet is www.sparknews.com.

Post to Wikipedia

All of these groups also use Wikipedia to gather information. While it is not a research website, it contains hundreds of thousands of pages of academic research. As it is well indexed and optimised for search engines, any material in it appears at the top of results in Google and Bing searches. Being so widely used and accessible, it makes sense to ensure that your findings are included in it. Here is how to do it: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Your_first_article.

Altmetrics is a new term used to describe the number of times a scholarly item is mentioned in social media such as Wikipedia, Twitter, etc. You can track your research's social media mentions on www.altmetric.com.

Self-archive

You should also 'self-archive' or upload your publications to your own blog or an online archive such as www.mendeley.com/, www.academia.edu/ and www.researchgate.net/ for sciences or www.zotero.org and www.ssrn.com/en/ for social sciences.

Before you self-archive, ensure that you are legally entitled to do so. Your constraints will be who holds the copyright and, in the case of journal articles, your publisher's policy. Many publishers are reluctant to allow you to upload the final printed article (post-print) but will let you archive the final Word version (pre-print) so be sure to check what they will allow. This is a helpful guide to self-archiving from the London School of Economics and Political Science: goog.gl/J6mEka.

If you publish journal articles, check with the publisher how you can archive copies and lodge them in repositories. You can find our more about journal publishers' policies on archiving and copyright at www.sherpa.ac.uk/romeo/.

Lodge copies in legal deposit and other libraries

If you publish paper reports, it is advisable to get an International Standard Book Number (ISBN) for them. This makes it easy for bookshops and libraries to find your publications and order them. You can get more information by emailing isbn.agency@nielsen.com or at www.isbn.nielsenbook.co.uk. You can find a good guide to publishing books or reports at www.nibooks.org/pages/index.asp?title=Publishing_Advice.

Libraries are where most researchers find your publications so it really makes sense to lodge copies of all your publications there. National, university and college, public and specialist libraries will all want your publications so you should provide them with copies of all your paper and electronic publications. This way, anyone who wants to read them can find them and, as they will be included in libraries' catalogues, they will also be picked up in Internet searches, especially through the www.worldcat.org site, which lists the contents of libraries worldwide. In addition, libraries manage most repositories so sending electronic copies means they will also get included there.

You are also obliged to deposit copies of your books, reports and journals or newsletters in a number of specified libraries called legal deposit (copyright deposit) libraries in your state. The Irish legal deposit libraries are: the National Library, Trinity College, National University of Ireland Galway, National University of Ireland Maynooth, University of Limerick, Dublin City University and University College Dublin. The British Library, Oxford and Cambridge Universities, and the National Libraries of Scotland and Wales are also entitled to copies of Irish publications. For more information see http://goo.gl/KG3qe7.

To find the legal deposit libraries in your country, check https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Legal_deposit and simply post them to the legal deposit section of the library. If you also have an electronic copy, make sure you tell them about this, so they can include the URL in their catalogues.

If you are employed by an organisation that has a repository (e.g., a university, or a research institute) upload a copy to your repository. If you don't have an organisational library (or even if you do) supply copies to other repositories, e.g., www.lenus.ie (for health and social care), www.drugsandalcohol.ie, and http://edepositireland.ie/ (for any subject) and to sites like www.issuelab.org, an international repository for the nonprofit sector. That way your publications will be found by anyone searching the national repositories, www.rian.ie, and international ones, www.basesearch.net, and may be downloaded and used by them. To find a relevant repository for your publications, check www.opendoar.org/countrylist.

You should also draw up a list of other relevant libraries such as your local public library, college and university libraries, and any special libraries that are relevant to your work. In Ireland, these include:
- The Library of the Houses of the Oireachtas, www.oireachtas.ie/parliament/about/libraryresearchservice
- Barnardos, www.barnardos.ie/library
- The National Disability Authority, www.nda.ie/cntmgmtnew.nsf/libraryhomepage?OpenPage
- Research into Child Health in Europe, www.childhealthresearch.eu.

In Northern Ireland, these include:
- The Northern Ireland Assembly, http://archive.niassembly.gov.uk/researchandlibrary.htm
- The Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action, www.nicva.org
- Queen's University Belfast, QUB.ac.uk
- Ulster University, www.ulster.ac.uk.
For the latter two, look for the acquisitions department.

Deposit datasets

If you created datasets during the course of your research, you should deposit them in an archive, where other users can reuse your data, as long as you have received consent from the participants and ethical approval for archiving. You must make sure that all the data is sufficiently anonymised so that none of the participants can be identified. There are two Irish data archives for the social sciences: the Irish Qualitative Data Archive for qualitative datasets, www.iqda.ie, and the Irish Social Science Data Archive for quantitative data, www.ucd.ie/issda/. For other Irish datasets see https://delicious.com/bridmcgrath/datasets,Ireland.

The UK Data Archive www.data-archive.ac.uk/ has a wide range of datasets from British research since the 1950s and has recently begun to include datasets from Northern Ireland. Other Northern Irish datasets are held in www.ark.ac.uk. A helpful guide to depositing datasets is *Best Practice in Archiving Qualitative Data* by Jane Gray, et. al., goo.gl/HMw0i3. The following report explores the ethical and practical aspects of archiving datasets: Bríd McGrath & Robin Hanan, *Report to The Childhood Development Initiative on archiving of C.D.I. data*, www.lenus.ie/hse/handle/10147/306181.

Conclusion

Disseminating your findings gives your research a much greater impact, helps to change policy and practice and has the potential to change lives and communities for the better. It allows other communities and groups to make their own work more efficient and effective because you have shared what you have learnt through your own research. It has never been easier to get your message out to the people and organisations who can benefit from your work, through reports, articles, social media and audiovisual clips. Go for it!

Dissemination checklist

Pre-research

- Arrange funding, including dissemination costs
- Plan dissemination
- Use tools to maximise impact
- Clarify copyright and ensure consent
- Identify suitable journals for publication
- Compile mailing list for dissemination
- Join social media groups.

During the research

- Use newsletters and blogs to provide progress reports on your research
- Contact university communications office for support
- Talk to funders about including details of the project in their publicity.

Post-research

- Publish report and summary
- Publish audiovisual clips
- Launch report on website, newsletters, and other outlets
- Self-archive
- Lodge copies in legal deposit and other libraries
- Deposit datasets.

The
ATLANTIC
Philanthropies