Evaluating and evidencing the impact of your research

With the increased focus on the importance of non-academic impact of research comes a need for researchers to document their engagement and ensure they can capture relevant evidence throughout the project.

Having a robust plan for capturing impact will also strengthen the Pathways to Impact statement for RCUK applications

Ideally, plan your evaluation strategy at the beginning of a project. This will help you assess to what extent you meet your objectives, what changes occur as a result of the activity, how it could be more effective and to capture any unintended outcomes.

It is important to understand not only what happened but also why something did or didn't have the outcomes or impacts expected.

Ask external stakeholders if it is ok for you to recontact them after a few months to see if they have made any changes/ improvements/savings etc. as a consequence of their involvement with your research.

Impact from research mostly arises from knowledge exchange - either directly between researchers or beneficiaries or indirectly. It is important to bear in mind that activities in themselves do not count as impact; you have to demonstrate the change that your work contributed to.

Examples of evidence types

Email communications, External beneficiary contact details/ testimonials, Google alerts, Questionnaires/feedback forms, Websites, Social media comments, Quantitative data, Images, Documents, Self-reflection, Software, Objects…

Evidence capture example template

Primary objective/s?
Who/what are the likely beneficiaries/users?
How will your research benefit them?
When in the project timeline might this happen?
What would be the ideal evidence?
Alternative/additional sources of evidence?
Can you gather this independently? What time/ resources will that require?
What did you gather, and where is it stored?

For more guidance and tools on evaluating events and public engagement see
http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/how/guides/evaluation/resources