

4 How to maximise the impact of your research

Whilst both academic and non-academic audiences comprise a wide spectrum of researchers, stakeholders, policy and decision makers, practitioners and other people with various interest, there are a number of common points to consider when communicating your research.

In order to communicate your research effectively, it is important to bear in mind some key questions:

- 1) Who is my intended audience?
- 2) What is my message?
- 3) What outcome do I want to achieve?
- 4) How can I best accomplish this?

4.1 Know your audience

Who is it that you want to communicate your findings to?

Are they experts or practitioners in the field? Are they policy and decision makers who can influence a change in policy? Are they community groups or interest groups who can further promote behavioural change within their communities or advocacy networks? Are they members of the public? Or a specific subset of the public, such as parents, young people, or university undergraduates?

How can I reach them most effectively?

Find out as much as you can about your intended audience. What are their priorities and pressures? Do they have a specific ideology or outlook? What level of existing knowledge on the subject can you expect them to have? Where do they access this knowledge? What organisations and individuals have the most influence on my audience?

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When is the best time to engage them?

Communicating your research should not wait until the end of a project. Think about building contacts and planning engagement throughout your research. Do you want to present all your findings in a single one-off event? Do you want to update your potential audience on a regular basis? Can it be useful to elicit feedback on an on-going basis to improve and contribute to the research?

4.2 Build a coherent narrative

What message do I want to convey?

Whether you are presenting your research findings to a group of fellow researchers or to a non-specialist audience, it is essential to construct a coherent and clear narrative. In particular, you should address the ‘so-what’ question – what difference does your research make? What is new or different about it, and why is it interesting and relevant to the audience you are trying to reach?

You should communicate the findings of the research first to highlight your contribution, whilst also setting your research in context by explaining how it relates to the existing evidence.

It is important to set the right tone for your audience, using clear and concise language and minimising the use of technical terms and jargon, where appropriate.

The word cloud below has been created from the vast amount of literature on the theory and practice of evidence-based policy making. Note the importance of building relationships, developing a diverse network, elements of trust and timing, as well as the use of language, emotions and storytelling.

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For example, you might want to adopt a layered approach to communicating your research – this can be thought of like a Wedding Cake, or a ‘taste, snack, feast’ approach and is a technique designed to generate maximum impact across multiple audiences.



Taste the ‘elevator pitch’, a tweet or an infographic

Snack a press release, briefing note or blog

Feast the academic paper or full report

Source: Adapted from Forbes, C. (2017). Fake news, gifs and hashtags: responding to a changing media landscape. *Risk & Regulation*, 34, 28-31.

Together all these ingredients make the cake which people can consume in a number of different ways depending on the channel they are engaging with, the time they have and their level of expertise.

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