

# **Achieving and Assessing Research Impact: past, present and future**



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# Research Impact

Guidance on Advancement,  
Achievement and Assessment

Hugh P. McKenna

## PRESENTATION OUTLINE

- **What is research impact**
- **Research impact Past, Present, Future**
- **Why pursue research impact?**
- **Planning impact prior to starting a study.**
- **Integrating impact into research training.**
- **Pursuing impact by researchers**
- **Challenges in the pursuit of research impact.**

## Impact Evolution of Universities:

**The Classical University:** The first generation primary focus was teaching, by transmitting knowledge through oral communication and manuscripts.

**The Research University:** The second generation emphasised the creation of new knowledge, making universities hubs of research and innovation.

**The Entrepreneurial University:** The third generation saw universities become economic players, commercialising research, forging closer ties with industry.

**University 4.0:** The fourth generation are focused on socio-economic impact. These universities are engines of innovation and transformation, linking academic expertise with diverse societal needs delivering real-world impact.

*(Aleks Subic, 2025 Vice-Chancellor Aston University).*

# Research Impact: what it is, what it is not!

*An effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life.*



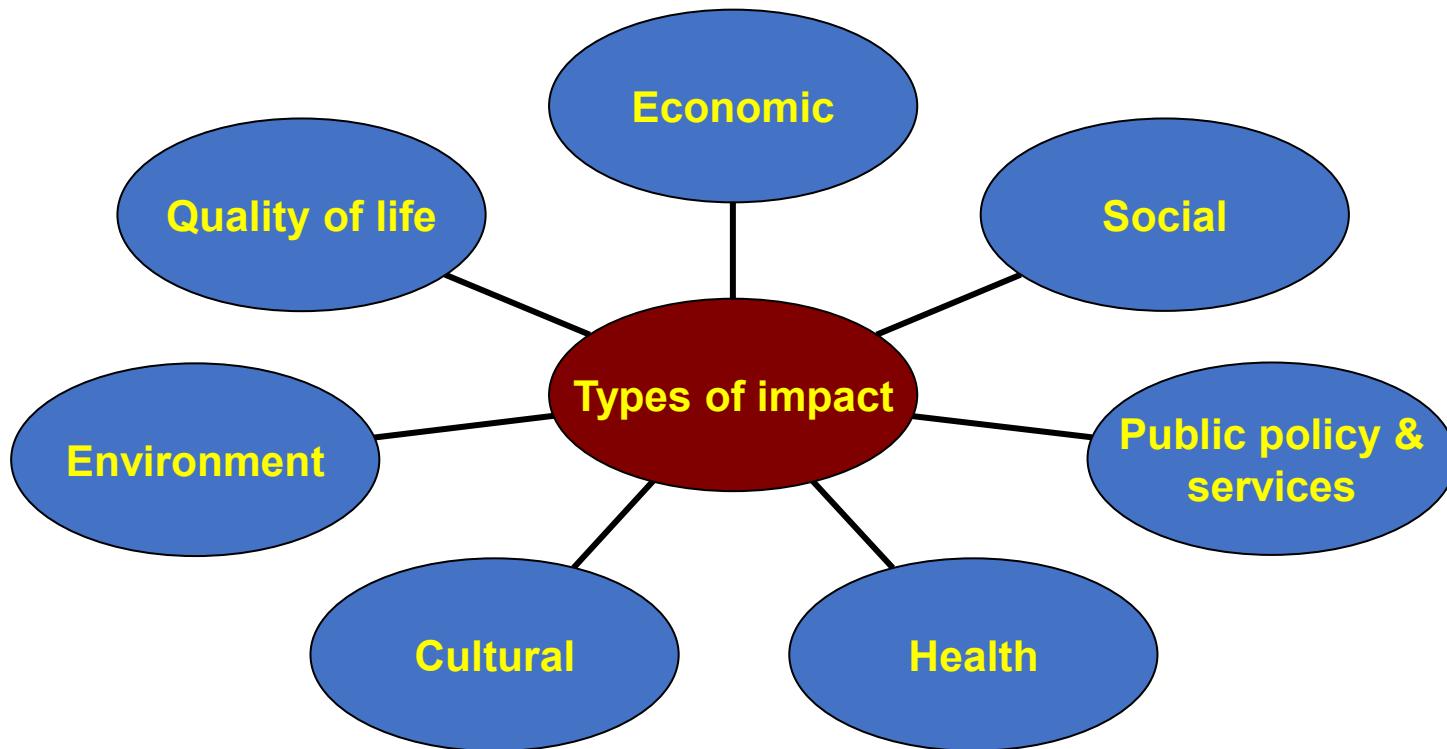
Impact **includes** an effect, change or benefit on:

- **Processes:** the activity, attitude, awareness, behaviour, capacity, policy, opportunity, performance, practice, or understanding;
- **People:** an audience, families, beneficiary, community, constituency, or individuals;
- **Places:** any organisation or geographic location whether locally, regionally, nationally or internationally.



# Research Impact: what it is, what it is not!

An identifiable benefit to, change or influence on:



**P.E.S.T.L.E.**

**McKenna, H.P. (2015) Research assessment: The Impact of impact *International Journal of Nursing Studies.* 52 (1) pp. 1-3.**

# Research Impact – Criteria

**Reach:** the extent and/or breadth of the beneficiaries of the impact, as relevant to the nature of the impact.

**Significance:** is the degree to which the impact has enabled, enriched, influenced, informed or changed the products, services, performance, practices, policies or understanding of commerce, industry or other organisations, governments, communities or individuals.



# RESEARCH IMPACT – SOME THOUGHTS

- Most research funds come from taxes or charitable giving - it is not unreasonable to ask researchers whose investigation is being undertaken at public expense to provide some evidence of its impact.
- Hivve's analysis of Hong Kong's research showed that it takes an average of 7-19 years to create impact.
- Research Impact is now a key part of research assessments in the UK, Italy, Poland, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, Norway & Australia.
- The Coalition for the Advancement of Research Assessment (**CoARA**) aims to maximise the impact of research and advocates for research assessment that recognizes diverse forms of impact.

# Research Impact Culture



Human Resources  
'Impact champions'



Black Tie team  
celebrations'



Senior Management Buy-in



Training evolution

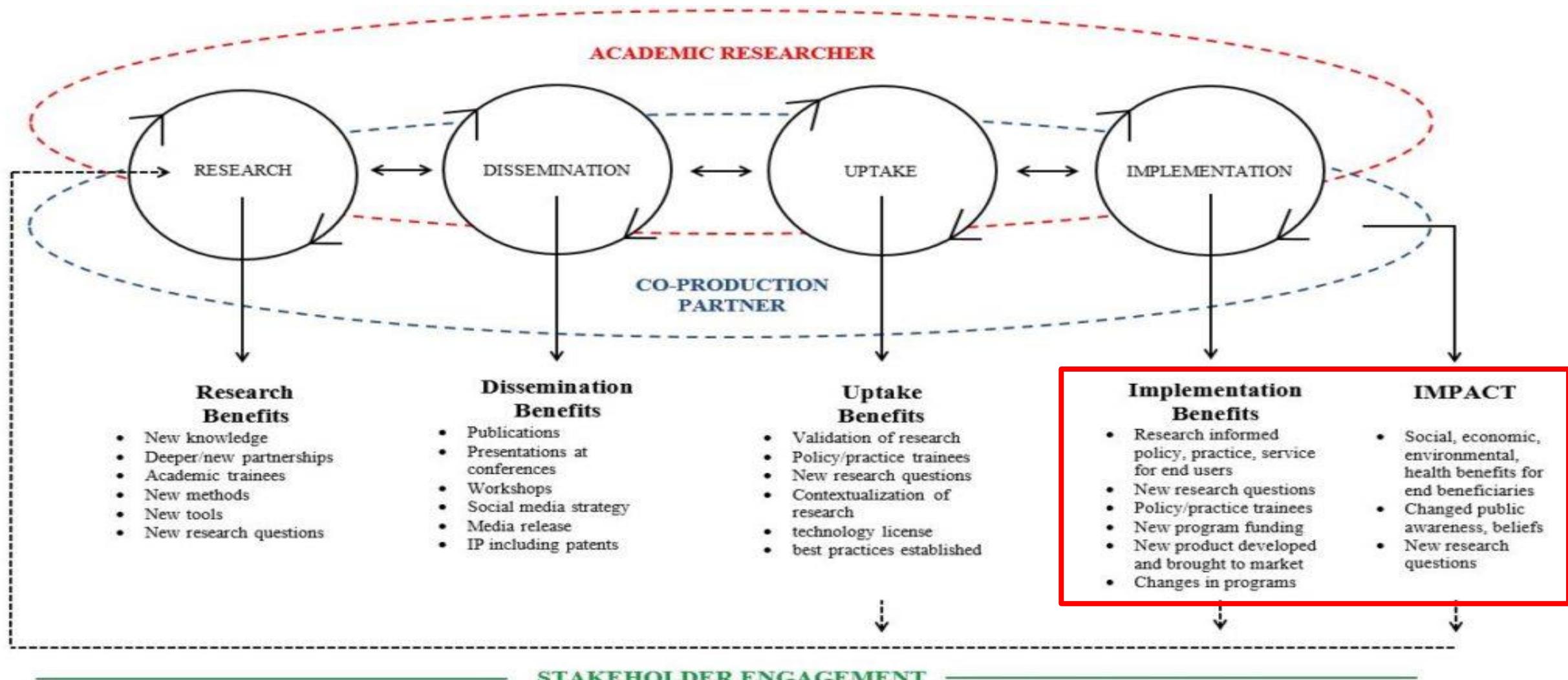


Impact data capture

## Research Impact – An extension to the Research Pathway!

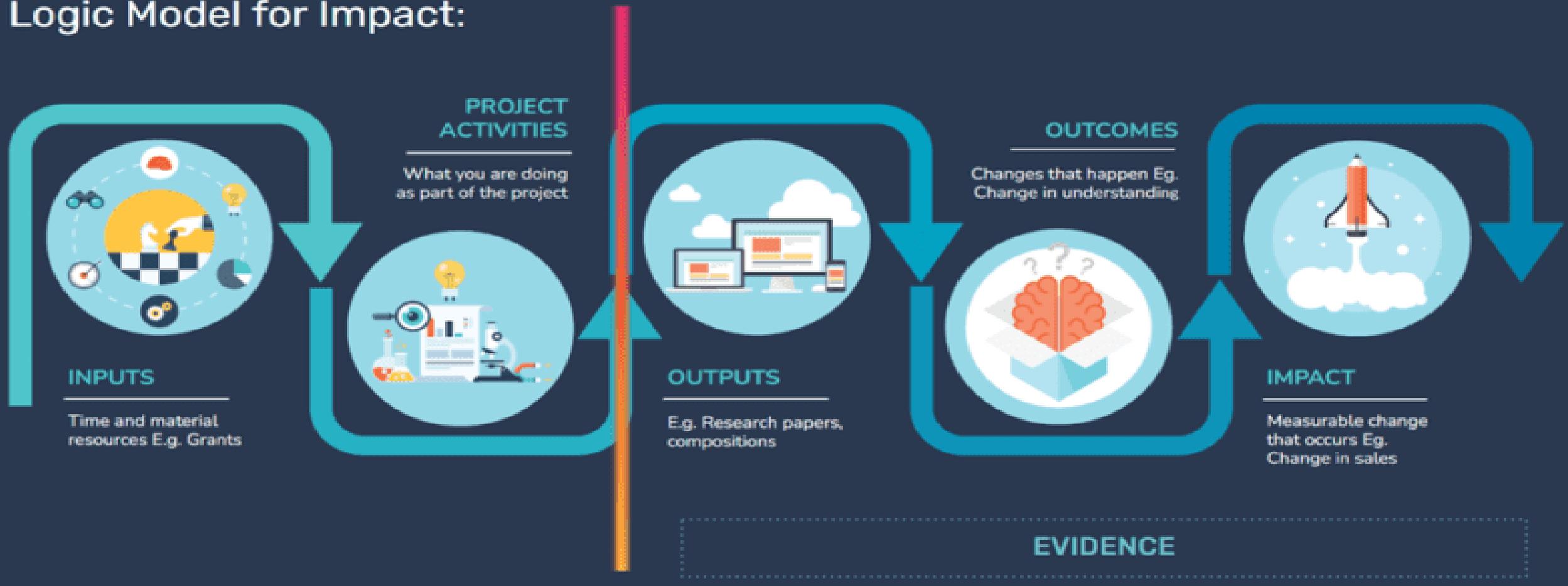


# Research Impact – Where are you on the continuum?



# The Impact Trajectory- Logic Model

## Logic Model for Impact:



Logic model was invented in the 1980s from the Kellogg's Foundation

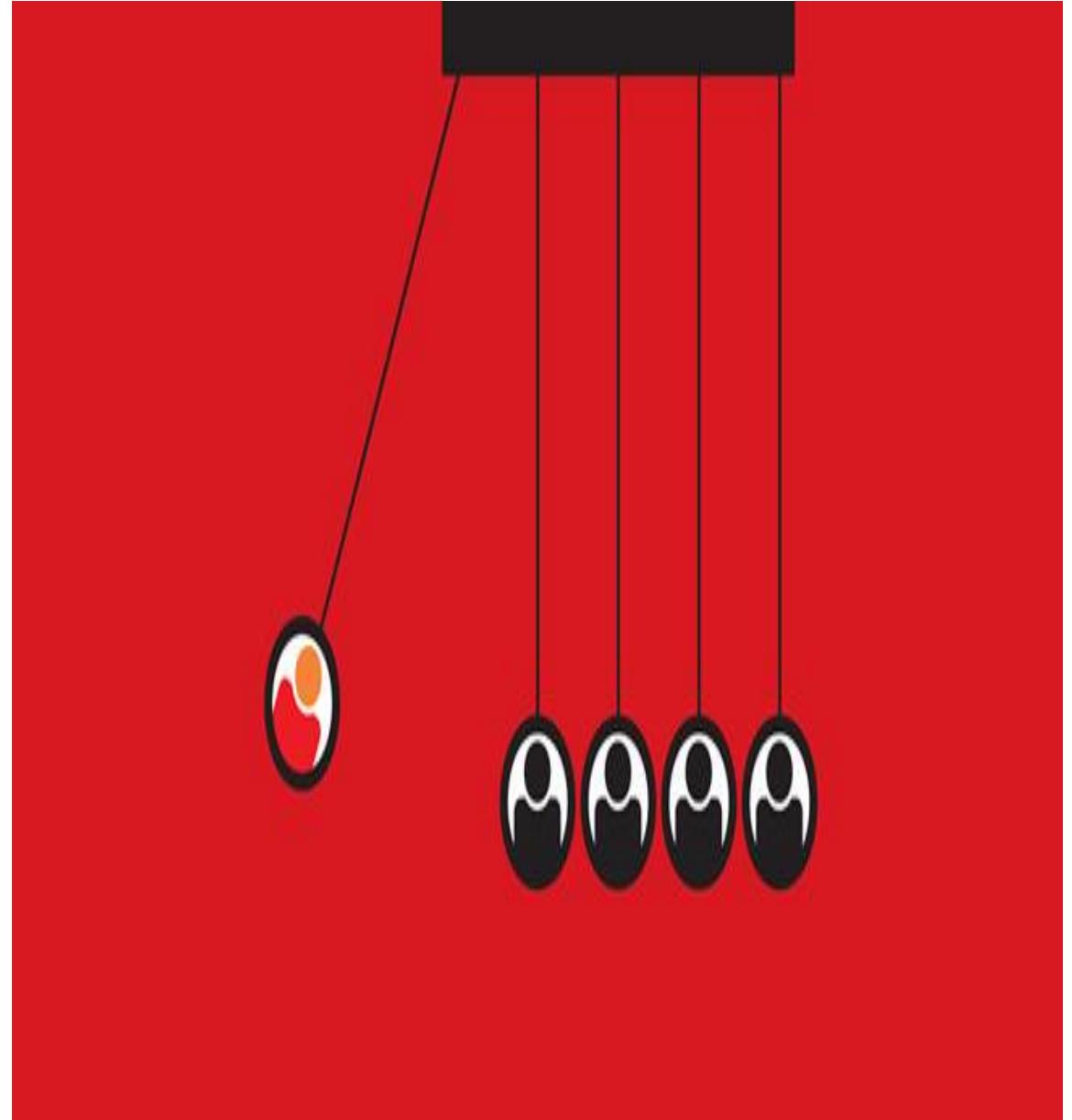
<https://www.nj.gov/state/assets/pdf/ofbi/kellogg-foundation-logic-model-development-guide.pdf>

**ATTRIBUTION**  
**Must be no  
disjoint  
between  
impact and its  
underpinning  
research**



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## Why Researchers should Pursue Research Impact?



# Why Pursue Research Impact?

Importance of Engagement - Sir Ron Dearing.

Provide accountability for public investment and produce evidence of the benefits.

We grow no food on campus.

Universities perceived as reservoirs of knowledge.



Encourage the seamless transfer of knowledge from our research to our teaching to society.

*The sole purpose of research is being of benefit to mankind (Francis Bacon, 1561-1626)*

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# Planning a Pathway to Impact in Research



IMPACT

# Pathway to Research Impact

## PAST

- Research is complete.
- Findings disseminated.
- Findings may or may not be found and used by others to have impact.

## PRESENT

- Research is complete
- Findings are disseminated.
- PhD graduates Identify potential impact partners who could help them develop impact.

## FUTURE

- Researchers Involve stakeholders from Design to Dissemination to Development.
- Engage with them to map out the journey to impact.
- Research 'with', rather than 'about', 'for' or 'on'.

McKenna, H.P., Thompson D.R., (2025) Achieving research impact: the advice we would give to our younger selves. *International Journal of Nursing Studies.* Vol 62. 105311

# Future Pathway to Research Impact

## Question 1

- What are the potential impacts if this research study is completed?

## Question 2

- Who would be the possible beneficiaries of the research findings?

## Question 3

- How can I best engage with these beneficiaries at the earliest possible time?



Moving Impact from being an effect of research to being a purposeful act planned for upstream.

# Stanford University's 'Design Thinking' for Research Impact

## Question 1

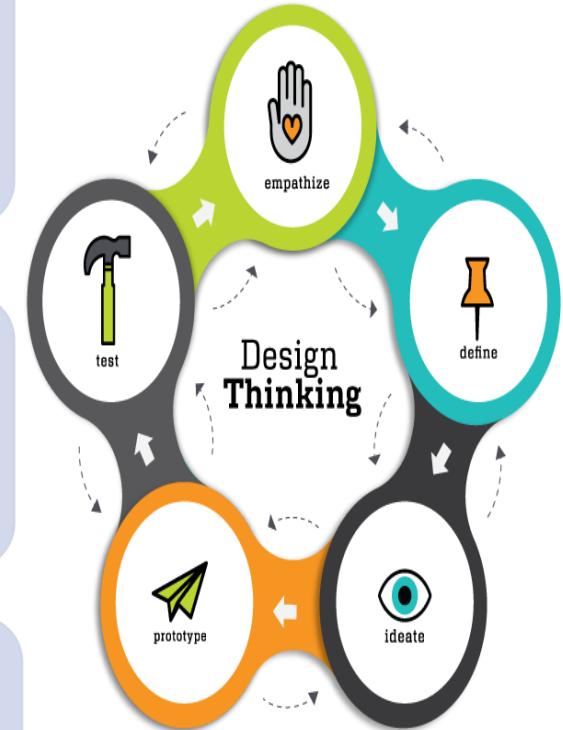
- Can I engage with the beneficiaries to define what their problem is?

## Question 2

- Can we work together to create new solutions to solve the problem?

## Question 3

- Can we partner to jointly research these new solutions to create impact?



# 5 steps to Research Impact

- **1. Start with the “why”**

Don't wait until a funding application to think about impact. Ask yourself why your research matters – to whom and how?

- **2. Know your stakeholder space**

Understand who your research could influence, benefit or challenge. Build relationships early and often and maintain those relationships for mutual benefit. Impact is relational, not transactional.

- **3. Co-create, don't just disseminate**

Share ownership of the research process. Engage beneficiaries as collaborators, not just recipients. See the value from both sides.

- **4. Document continuously**

Capture benefits and testimonies as you go. Good impact stories aren't written from memory – they're built over time. Leaving it to the last minute might mean that contacts have moved on.

- **5. Value impact as scholarship**

Challenge the narrative that “real” research is only what's published in journals. Impactful research *is* good research – it's research that matters.

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# Pursuing Research Impact





# Why Researchers Pursue Research Impact

*Having impact from my research allowed me to show prospective employers and co-researchers that my research on dementia diagnosis delivered benefits for patients and families”*

*My government and my family have committed money and support to my research career. So it must have benefit to society beyond publications*

*Impactful researchers pass on some of their knowledge to those they work with, boosting their creativity and productivity.*

*Having research impact not only brings a better salary and greater personal benefit but generates benefits to wider society.*

# Researcher's Impact 'Elevator Pitch'

**My research findings, showed that** \_\_\_\_\_

(New evidence)

**This Help(s)** \_\_\_\_\_

(Patients, Carers, Policymakers)

**Who want to** \_\_\_\_\_

(Get Better, Achieve Something)

**By** \_\_\_\_\_

Verb (Reducing, Avoiding) a problem

**And** \_\_\_\_\_

Verb (Increasing , enabling) a solution

**Unlike** \_\_\_\_\_

(What happens now)

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## Challenges for the Pursuit of Research Impact.



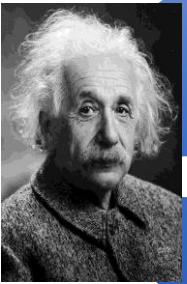
# Challenges to Pursuing Research Impact



**Research Impact Training**

A distraction from research.  
Imposter syndrome

Non reproducibility of studies that have claimed impact (e.g. MMR-Autism)



**Research and Impact Time Lag**



Disciplinary issues and research impact



Research Impact-not always good (Gimpact)



**Attribution Theory**



**Basic Vs Applied Research**



**Conflicting Research Advice and Impacts**

# Is this Research Impact?



# Relevant Publications

- **McKenna, H.P. (2025)**. Achieving research impact: the advice we would give to our younger selves. *International Journal of Nursing Studies.* 62. 105311.
- **McKenna, H.P. (2020)** **Research Impact**: attainment achievement and assessment. Springer Nature, London.
- **McKenna, H.P (2019)** **Research Impact** and Mental Health Nursing. In *Mental Health Research*. In Brooker C & White E (eds.) *Mental Health Nursing: from the outside, looking in*. Cheshire: White Winstanley, pp. 121-124.
- **McKenna, H.P. (2015)** Research assessment: The **Impact** of impact *International Journal of Nursing Studies.* 52 (1) pp. 1-3.
- Finnegan, A. **McKenna, HP**, Lauder, W. (2016) The Challenges and Psychological **Impact** of Delivering Nursing Care within a War Zone. *Nursing Outlook*.
- **McKenna, H.P. (2015)** Patient and Public involvement and **research impact**: a reciprocal relationship. *Journal of Research in Nursing.* 20 (8), 723-728.
- Hasson, F., **McKenna, H.P.** and Keeney, S. (2012). A qualitative study exploring the **impact** of student nurses working part time as a health care assistant. *Nurse Education Today*, 33, 873-879. DOI: 10.1016/j.nedt.2012.09.014
- Ryan A.A., McCann S. & **McKenna H.P.. (2009)** **Impact** of community care in enabling older people with complex needs to remain at home. *International Journal of Older People Nursing* 4, 22–32
- **McKenna, H.P.,** Keeney, S., Hasson, F., (2009) Health care managers perspectives on new nursing and midwifery roles: perceived **impact** on patient care and cost effectiveness. *Journal of Nursing Management.* Vol 17(5), 627–635.