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Impact Literacy Workbook

Helping you demonstrate the provable effects of your research in the real world.

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#RealImpact

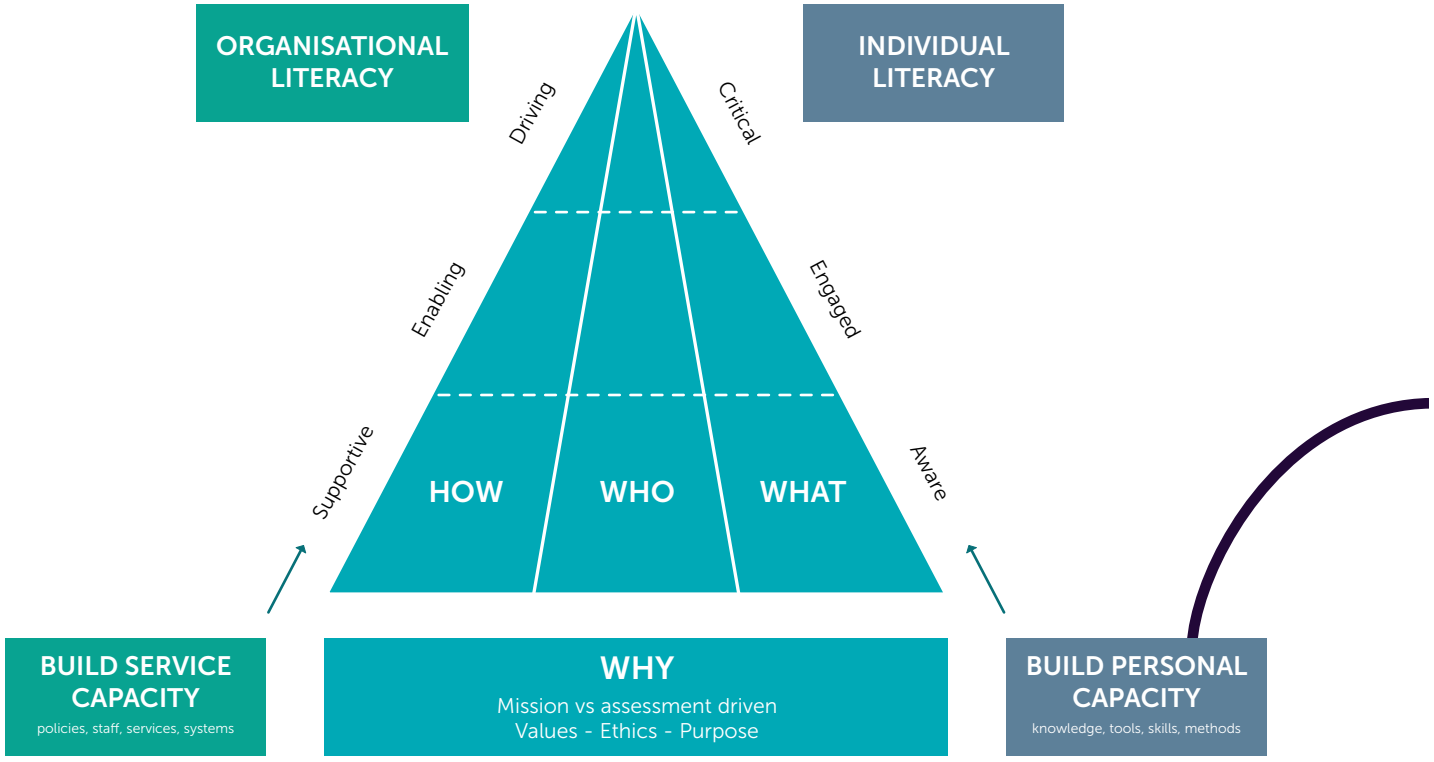
Impact literacy workbook

Good impact is achieved by mapping, connecting and assessing the results of the path from research to effect(s). Impact is not defined by how big it is, when it happens or the route taken to get there. Impact can happen quickly, take a long time, and/or require a series of smaller sequenced changes. There is no 'one size fits all' approach. Whether you're a fundamental scientist or an applied researcher, a graduate student or a non-academic partner, it is important to understand how impact works and where your research fits into the landscape. By building your impact literacy, you can connect your work meaningfully and appropriately to the world beyond academia.

This workbook focuses on integrating impact at any stage of the research to impact process. It is always more beneficial to draw impact into research as early as possible, but it is never too late. This workbook is designed to help individuals think through some of the key aspects of impact and to help develop skills in impact planning. As a reader you're encouraged to use this as the starting point and remember that impact is ALWAYS unique to the project. The aim is not to make you fit things into boxes; the aim is to provide a way of thinking for you to build your own pathways.

There are a series of exercises given throughout this workbook which add increasingly more information needed for the plan. You can complete the workbook in any order you wish, and may wish to go back and forth between sections. At the end there is space to coordinate these thoughts into a map, along with a general notes section.

The training and materials here are based on the concept of impact literacy (Bayley and Phipps, 2017), and the extended model (2019) shown below. In this workbook we will focus on the 'individual literacy' side and explain this diagram further in the next section. If you wish to look at institutional literacy then see our Institutional Healthcheck workbook



Bayley J and Phipps D. Extending the concept of research impact literacy: levels of literacy, institutional role and ethical considerations [version 2; peer review: 2 approved] Emerald Open Research 2019, 1:14 (https://doi.org/10.12688/emeraldopenres.13140.1)

Contents

Introduction	4
1. What is impact?	4
2. What is knowledge mobilisation?	4
3. What is impact literacy?	4
The elements of impact	5
4. Framing the problem(s)	5
5. Framing the impact (or 'flipping the problem')	6
6. Identifying indicators and evidence	7
7. Identifying stakeholders and beneficiaries	8
8. Co-producing impact	9
9. Mobilising your knowledge: methods	10
10. Challenges and facilitators	12
Assembling this information: Your plan	13
Next steps	15

Introduction

1. What is impact?

Impact is *the provable effects of research in the real world*. Impact is the changes we can see (demonstrate, measure, capture), beyond academia (in society, economy, environment) which happen because of our research (caused by, contributed to, attributable to). Impact may look and operate slightly differently across disciplines, and for fundamental vs. applied research, but ultimately is about connecting academic research to changes in the real world.

Impact is driven by a number of factors including funders' requirements and research assessment. However, it's important to focus on making impact meaningful to you, your stakeholders and your research, not just delivering on these higher level agendas. By taking charge of mapping the impact for your research, you can pursue the most valuable and realistic paths for your research and maximise the benefit your work can have.

2. What is knowledge mobilisation?

Impact is often used as a capture-all term to describe the part of research process beyond academia. However, in its truest form, 'impact' is the term for the change not the process itself. The process is better described as knowledge mobilisation. You may find it helpful to split 'process' from 'effects'. Ie:

- Knowledge mobilisation: the process by which our research is connected to the real world. Examples include dissemination, communication, engagement, knowledge transfer, knowledge exchange, commercialisation
- Impact: the measurable change which occurs

3. What is impact literacy?

Given the breadth of impact possibilities it is important to understand how impact operates for you and your research. More specifically, it's important to be able to understand, appraise and make decisions about how to connect your research to the outside work. This is *impact literacy*.

In simple terms, being impact literate means understanding:

- What changes (impacts) happen, for whom, and how you can demonstrate it
- How you can mobilise your research into action
- Who is needed, with what skills, to make this happen
- Why impact is being pursued (including considerations of ethics, values and purpose). It is vital to understand 'why' to ensure plans are based on what matters to those affected.

As shown in the diagram, individual literacy can progress from basic awareness through more active engagement with evidence and best practice, through to active critique and advancement of the area.

This workbook will help you map out some of the key elements for impact and start building a strong and stakeholder informed impact plan.



The elements of impact

4. Framing the problem(s)

Are you clear on the problem(s) your research is related to? What's the reason your research is needed and who has confirmed that your research is actually needed? This is the starting point of your impact journey. You need to consider the gap into which your work offers a contribution, and you need to frame this negatively, eg

- Too much...
- Lack of/too little...
- Poor...
- Insufficient...
- Declining...
- Unsafe....

Imagine the problem at two levels:

Level 1: The overall problem: the social, economic or environmental problem to which your work aligns. eg.

– *High rates of teenage pregnancy*

– *Poor diagnosis of specific health condition*

– *High levels of accidents due to waterlogged roads*

– *High levels of food wastage*

You should also consider what evidence there is that this problem exists, such as policy documents, national datasets, local/organisational reports or direct communications. Remember the importance too of speaking with stakeholders, those people directly affected by the problem you are addressing to work out what changes matter to them.

A: Identify the overall problem

The overall problem in which my work fits is:

.....

.....

The evidence for this problem is:

.....

.....

Level 2: The specific part of this problem are you focused on:

Research studies can only ever contribute to a bigger issue. They offer a focused insight on a particular area and help address the bigger issue, eg: .

– *Poor use of contraception*

– *Low technical quality of diagnostic tools*

– *Insufficient knowledge about motorway drainage processes*

– *Limited consumer understanding of use before dates.*

What particular part of the problem are you focused on?

B: Identify specifics

The particular part of the problem I'm focused on is:

.....

.....

.....

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5. Framing the impact (or 'flipping the problem')

Having framed the problem as a negative, flip this to work out what impact looks like. At its simplest, impact goals are the positive version of the problem you've listed, eg:

High rates of teenage pregnancy → **Low rates/Reduced teenage pregnancy**

Poor quality information available for diagnosis → **Good/improved information available for diagnosis**

Insufficient compliance with building regulations → **Sufficient/improved compliance with building regulations**

If unsure you can use the following 'flips':

High/too much → **Reduced**
Manageable

Lack of/too little → **Increased**

Poor → **Improved**

Insufficient → **Sufficient**

Declining → **Increasing**
Maintained (i.e. halt decline)
Sustained (i.e. halt decline)

Now consider what impact matches the problems you've identified.

C: Identify the overall impact

The overall impact goal (flipped overall problem) is:

.....

.....

.....

.....

D: Identify how your research contributes towards impact

The contributions my research makes to impact (flipped specific problems) are:

.....

.....

.....

.....

6. Identifying indicators and evidence

Look at the specific impacts you've listed. How will you know if they've happened? This may or may not be something you can do yourself; the aim here is to consider how you might be able to demonstrate the changes.

Ask yourself four key questions for each impact specific impact:

1. What changes? (your impact contributions)
2. How will you know? What markers and information (qualitative and quantitative) are available and from where?
3. How can you demonstrate it? What evidence could be used to prove it? From where will you collect this evidence (source of the data)
4. How will you record it? How will you store and compile the information?

E: Indicators and evidence

1. What changes?

2. How will you know

3. How can you demonstrate it?

4. How will you record (log) it?

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7. Identifying stakeholders and beneficiaries

Stakeholders are individuals/ groups who have an interest in your work. They can:

- Help frame the problem/research question
- Co-produce the research
- Help to communicate the work
- Provide data on impact
- Benefit from the work (called a 'beneficiary')
- Use the work (eg. a clinician who uses the research to help their patients)

They may each need to be communicated with in different ways, using different formats and communicating different messages. Use the table below to list stakeholders and their role/importance to your work.

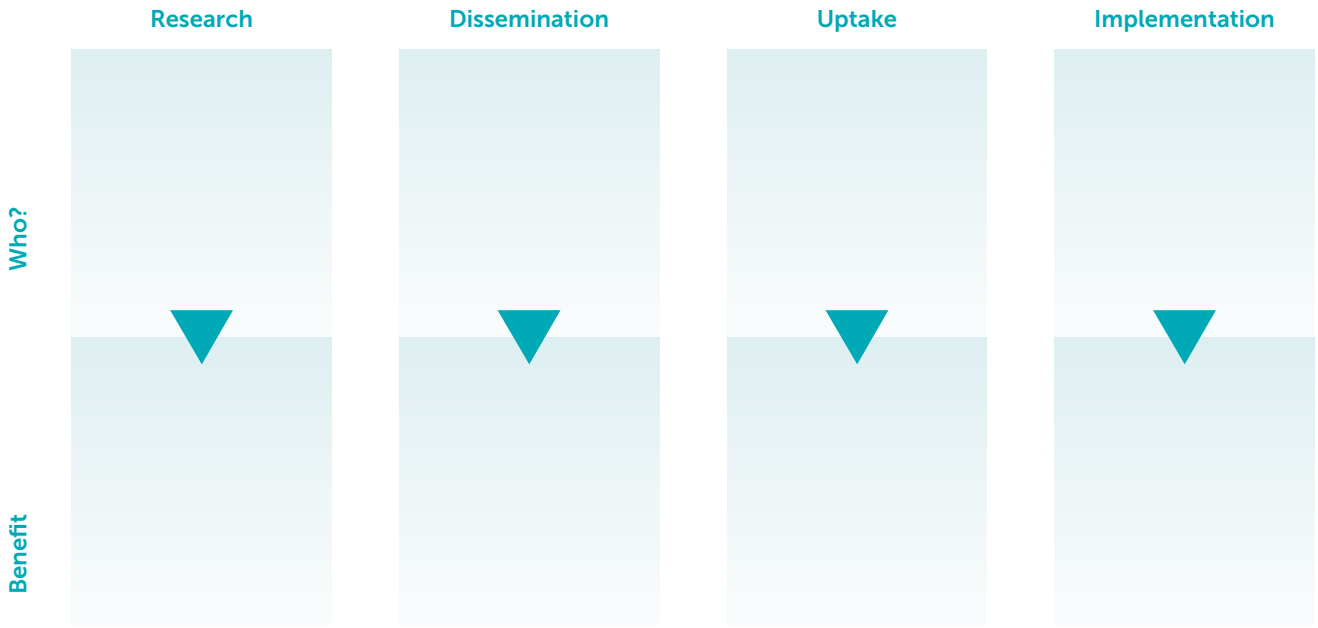
F: Stakeholders

Who?	Why are they important? What role do they play in your research / impact

8. Co-producing impact

Think through when these stakeholders need to be involved in the research process?
What benefit does this give at each stage?

G: Co-production[2]



How and when are you going to engage these people?

[2] Adapted from Phipps, D.J., Cummings, J. Pepler, D., Craig, W. and Cardinal, S. (2016) The Co-Produced Pathway to Impact describes Knowledge Mobilization Processes. J. Community Engagement and Scholarship, 9(1): 31-40.

9. Mobilising your knowledge: methods

What methods could you use to engage stakeholders, communicate your work and help improve the likelihood of your work into practice? In column 1, think through as many different methods as you can (some ideas have been given to help you get started). Now look back at your stakeholder list. Which methods are likely to be most suitable for which stakeholders? List the stakeholders in column 2 and draw lines to the best methods.

H: Methods for mobilisation	Stakeholders
Website *Conference* *Co-production* *Attending patient groups*	



Your skills

What skills do you need to make this impact happen[3]? How can you develop them?

I: Methods for mobilisation	Stakeholders
Skill area	**Skills needed and your training needs**
Working with stakeholders Communicating research Managing partnerships/ relationships Networking and engaging internal/ external stakeholders Facilitating, liaising and negotiating	
Leading impact/ knowledge mobilisation plans	
Helping individuals/ organisations to change	
Understanding and applying existing tools for knowledge mobilisation/impact	
Creating/identifying research for use in the real world	
Evaluating impact	
Managing legal issues and intellectual property	
Training others and building capacity for impact	

Bayley, J.E., Phipps, D., Batac, M. and Stevens, E. (2018). Development of a framework for knowledge mobilisation and impact competencies. Evidence & Policy: A Journal of Research, Debate and Practice, 14(4), pp.725-738. https://doi.org/10.1332/174426

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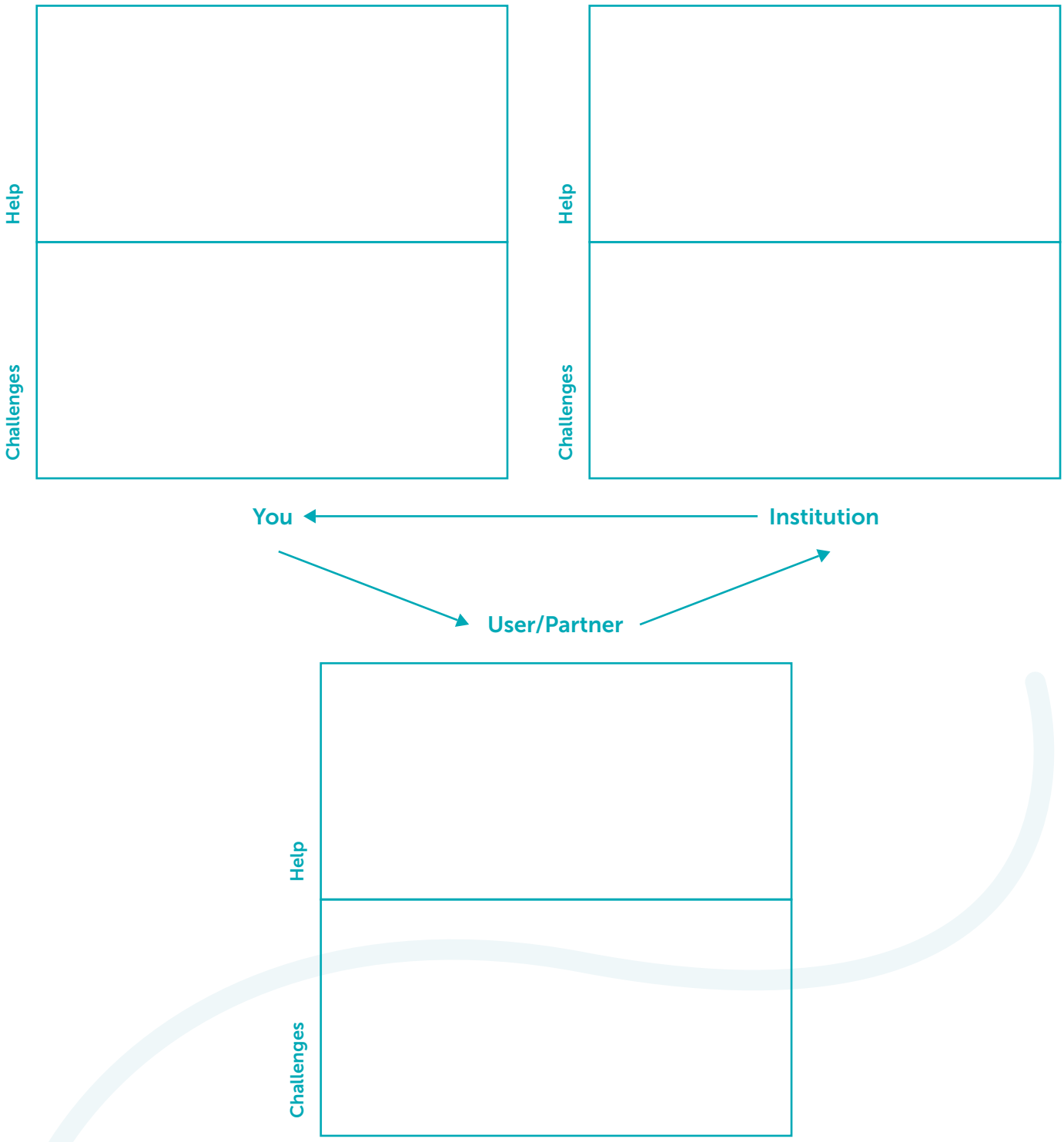
10. Challenges and facilitators

Even with plans in place, impact can be challenging. What challenges are you, your institution, and your 'users' likely to experience. What could help address these?

J: Challenges and support



Assembling this information: Your plan



Now you've considered:

- What impact
- How it can be measured/indicated
- Who your stakeholders are
- What knowledge mobilisation activities are appropriate
- What skills you need

...it's time to assemble these into a summary plan. Use the diagram on the next page as a starting point. To complete the plan:

1) **Write a short summary of the research** in the 'Research (brief)' box to show how the problem connects through this to the impact
2) Each box is labelled alphabetically to correspond with the activities throughout this workbook. **Review your answers to fill in each box**.
3) Use the '**Next steps**' space to consider how you might follow up, scale up the impact or take the research forward.
4) Summarise your key training needs and help required in the table below

Key training needs (I)	
Key help to get in place (J)	

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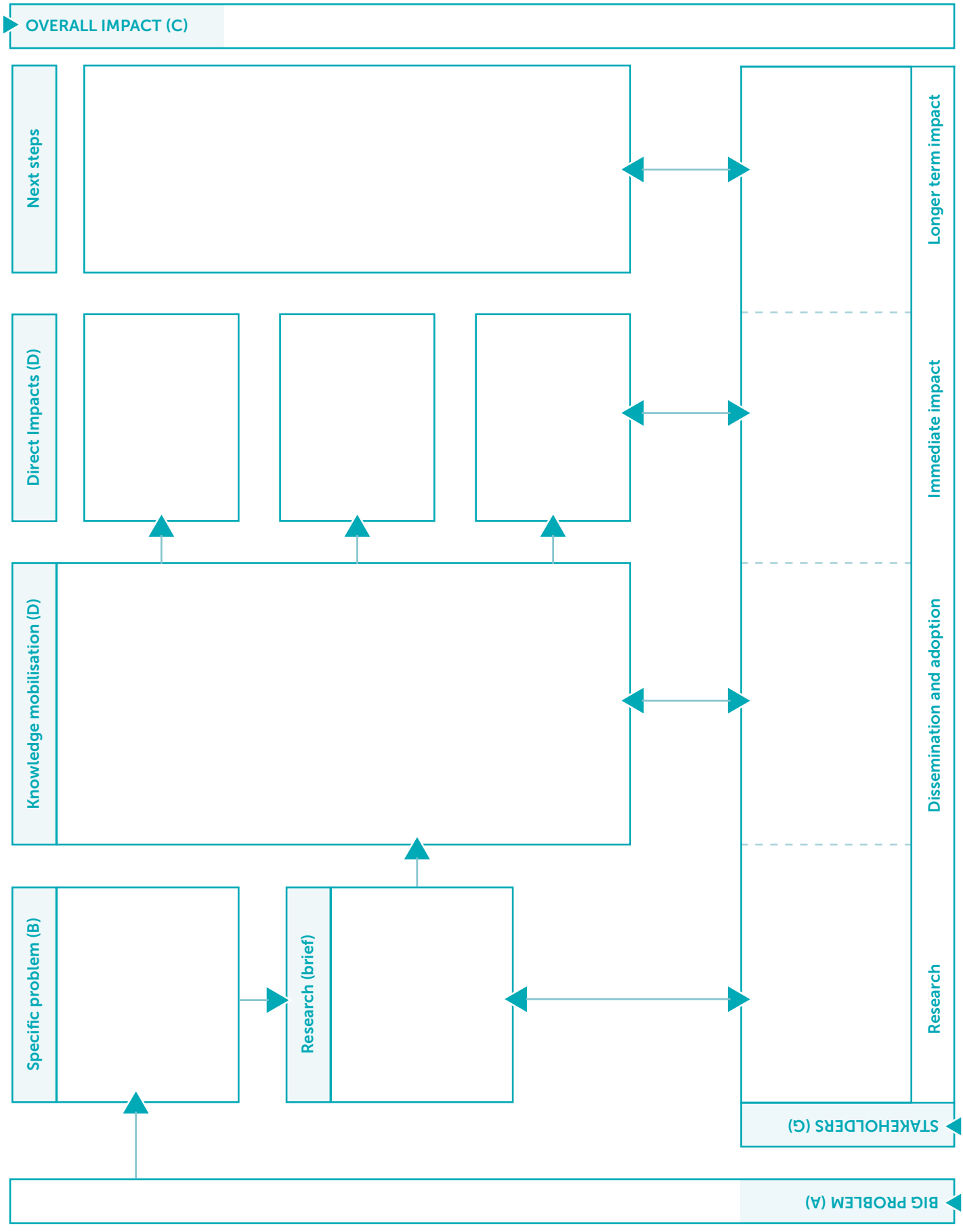
OVERALL IMPACT (C)
Next steps
Direct Impacts (D)
Knowledge mobilisation (D)
Specific problem (B)
Research (brief)
Longer term impact
Immediate impact
Dissemination and adoption
Research
STAKEHOLDERS (G)
BIG PROBLEM (A)

Next steps

Use this process to consider impact for more of your research. Building this into the start of your research process will help engage the right stakeholders early and address any challenges that might limit the reach of your work.

Think about how you can scale the impact up. Look at your stakeholder list and impact goals. Can you get more/different stakeholders? Can the research be translated to other areas or groups of beneficiaries? What do you need to grow the effect or keep contributing step by step to that overall impact aim? How can you build a research culture to support this? By keeping your thinking in line with the overall goal, you can make good decisions about who to 'push' the work to, and where to showcase it to increase the chance of it being 'pulled'.



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