Impact Guide

TIPS WHAT TO WRITE IN THE IMPACT SECTION IN THE R&D PROPOSALS

by IRIS

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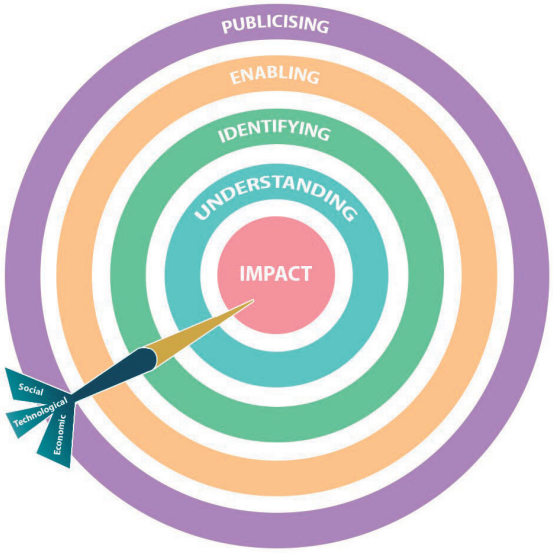
Contents

Impact Guide

Achieving impact plays a pivotal role both in the National and International funding agencies. The general objective will be to deliver scientific, technological, economic, and societal impact.



In practice, project beneficiaries must be ready to enhance their dissemination and exploitation activities and provide more data through new monitoring instruments (at national and/or international level). In summary, always keep in mind that your proposal needs to prove that it will have a high impact that meaningfully supports the funding agencies' challenges and priorities.

The impact is a key section of your project proposal that will make the difference to convince the evaluators (please take a look at the evaluation criteria of the project proposal you are applying for).

Regardless of what kind of project you are planning, every project goes through the same stages. Although each project will require their own set of unique processes and tasks, they all follow a similar framework. The planning phase is important, and the impact section is challenging to complete, so it needs dedicated time to excel. The impact section has become increasingly significant in recent years over the R&D programmes.

This guide has the objective to give some ideas and/or suggestions, explaining exactly what you need to know about this important aspect of your project proposal. Given that impact sections although necessary, do not clearly advance research, writing them can be quite tedious. This guide will try to help you overcome that barrier.

What is impact?

Impact is a powerful effect that something, especially something new, has on a situation. An impact is a change in an outcome caused by an action. An impact can be positive or negative; intended or unintended; short, medium, or long-term; expected or unexpected; temporary or permanent; and have reach or significance. Therefore impact = change.

Non-academic impact: an effect, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policies, health, environment, or quality of life beyond academia.

Academic impact: demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to academic advances across and within disciplines, including significant advances in understanding, methods, theory, and application.

What are the sections that make up the impact?

The impact is the most "political" section of your proposal. It should be aligned and reflect the funding agency's policy priorities. Think of your proposal not so only in scientific terms, but as a tool to implement policies and achieve goals. In practice, this means that, independently of scientific excellence, if your idea is not convincing enough to serve policy purposes, probably it will not be funded.

Typically, the impact consists of the following five elements:

1. A clear description of the issue or problem that your research addresses.
2. A statement of the action you are taking or intend to take to resolve the problem.
3. A description of beneficiaries of your work and in what ways.
4. A list of stakeholders.
5. A description of your background.

Who forms policy?

Policy is a set of rules or norms governing the behaviour in a particular field of science established by the policy-maker. The set of rules is accepted by the society and the policy-maker has the authority to set the rules. In our society the basis of that authority is statutory in nature, and may also include the power to enforce the rules and regulations. the most common policy-maker are: law-makers at a supra-national level, such as the European Commission; law-makers at a national level, such as the parliament; the bureaucracies that support the law-making process, such as the DGs of the European Commission; statutory bodies with sectoral, regional or subject-matter responsibilities, such as *Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia*, ect.

What outlines policy?

A few actions should be taken to shape policy, such as: consultation, enquiries and reviews, reports from think-tanks, lobby groups or interest groups, etc.

Who cares about impact?

Everyone is interested in the impact, in particular funders, governments, and policy-makers. Impact statements demonstrate how your work makes a difference in a relevant field. Documenting the results of your efforts is also increasingly expected by funders and policy-makers.

Who will benefit from your research and who will block it?

Stakeholders. What is a Stakeholder? A project stakeholder is affected by the execution or outcome of the project. Thus, stakeholders are those with any interest in your project's outcome. They are typically the members of a project team, project managers, executives, project sponsors, customers, and users. Stakeholders are invested in the project and will be affected by your project at any point along the way, and their input can directly impact the outcome. Key project stakeholders have the influence and authority to dictate whether a project is a success or not. These are the people and groups whose objectives must be satisfied.

Therefore, it is a good idea to practice good stakeholder management and constantly communicate with them to collaborate on the project. After all, they have a stake in how it all turns out. Examples of stakeholders: funders; NGO's, policy makers, governments, public entities, communities, Industry and services, patients, users, other researchers, and citizens.

Who may be impacted by your research?

It is important to consider who will be impacted. Add information about the positive or negative impacts you think each group might get from engaging with your work. You can try to convert a positive impact into an impact goal in your impact summary or pathway to impact. Choose your top stakeholders and create a plan to reach out to them all. Remember that you do not have time to reach out to everyone who might conceivably be interested in your research. Nevertheless, you will need to find out if there are any groups or organisations who might have the ability to influence your ability to accomplish the impact indirectly. An indirect influence over your impact can work in two ways:

Those who have the ability to facilitate your impact: organisations or groups who want to reach similar benefits for similar groups, who may provide you with significant new opportunities or resources that could empower you to achieve greater impacts than would have been possible had you not connected with them.

Those who have the ability to block your impact: organisations whose interests are compromised or harmed by your work, whether in real or ethical terms. They may have the power to prevent you from achieving impacts and it is crucial for pragmatic and moral reasons to engage early with these groups to ensure you do not have negative unintended impacts. Moreover, bringing dissenting voices inside is a method to find a way to work together (or work around them if necessary).

Who do you want to benefit from your research?

If you want your research to have an impact, you must know who might benefit from your work, as well as who may be disadvantaged or harmed in some way because of your research. You may want to identify groups that you think are not interested in your research, who you would like to be interested in, or who you think are important for other reasons.

Who is interested in my research?

They can just be a little bit interested, and they can be interested in just one aspect of your research. An organisation, an individual or a group may be interested in many different things, but you should list those interests that coincide with your research interests. The key thing is that you understand what aspects of your research you think each group is likely to be interested in, or if they're not interested but they are important for other reasons, write down why you think they are disinterested. Remember that different groups have quite different interests. The point is that you do not just reach out to whoever is easiest to reach, or those who shout loudest, use your time wisely, and prioritise those who matter most to you.

What should be in my impact?

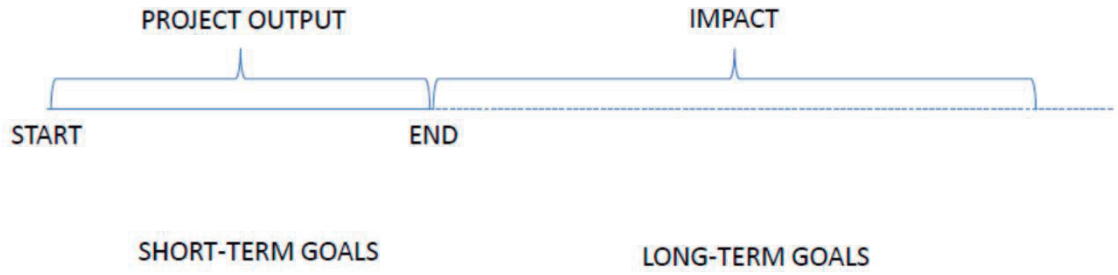
The actions that are part of a project are what cause impacts to occur. This section is one of the most important ones in your proposal. Therefore, you must make sure that evaluators see that your project has a tangible impact on individuals, organisations, and society. A strong impact summary and pathway to impact can make the difference between getting funded or not if your application is tied with others in the "danger zone" near the funding cut-off. Make sure you know the stakeholders and check with them what could be the impact of your project. You should know how your project will or may have an impact on all those who might be directly or indirectly touched by your project idea.

How might it influence my ability to achieve impact?

You need to consider if there are any groups who might have the ability to influence your ability to achieve impact. Any organisation who wants to achieve similar goals as you may provide you with resources that could empower you to achieve greater impacts than would have been possible had you not connected with them. Nevertheless, you should also identify those who can block your impact. Consider how influential each of the interested groups might be, whether they might facilitate or block your impact. Describe how you think each public or stakeholder could influence your ability to generate impact.

What will a project generate?

It is important to keep in mind that different funding schemes may have special impact requests, but all researchers should look at the impact as something that goes beyond their projects.



Examples of Impact

- Cross-sectorial knowledge/new subjects
- Development of new methods
- Development of openness and cooperation
- Financial impact
- Improvement of interdisciplinary approaches
- Involvement of stakeholders
- Knowledge of the own research field
- Knowledge of the partner countries learning system
- Knowledge transfer
- Language skills development
- Motivation for training and skills development
- Motivation to work in a multidisciplinary team
- Project management skills development
- Skills development
- Social skills development
- Stronger relationships among partners
- Teamwork development
- Tolerance regarding different cultures

Measures within the workplan to maximise the impact

All projects seek to deliver results. Therefore, results of your project will be the source of the impact.

How to move from results to impact?

1. Dissemination Plan to make the results available: peer review publications; conferences and events, Open Access Journals, Databases, etc.
2. Communication Plan to inform about the project: press releases, websites, social media, demonstrations, and events, etc.
3. Exploitation plan to future use of the results: intellectual property, patents, licensing, prototypes, pilots, policy guidelines, education sheets, training courses, commercialisation plan, among others.

How to measure the academic impact?

It should be noted that open science leads to more impact. With that in mind a good way to measure the impact of a project, is to prove a direct link between an activity and an evidence of impact.

Activity	Evidence
Publication in open access	Key Performance Indicators such as citations
Scientific event	Evidence: increased number of Conferences
Teaching and Training	More supervised researchers and more training courses.

In addition, the following aspects should also be taken into account to measure the academic impact of a project: gender dimension, open access, co-creation and citizen science.

Is it important to go beyond academic impact?

Yes, because your research must be too important to land solely in a scholarly journal.

Activity	Evidence
Engage people through events, meetings, workshops, focus groups	Stakeholders' testimony
Present evidence to governments, parliaments, public entitie	Independent report, review, paper, evaluation
Contribute to reports and policy documents	Media articles, social media activity
Take part in conferences and collaboration with other sectors	Data, statistics, case studies, survey analysis
Press materials, campaigns, marketing	Report of conferences, meetings, exhibition
Exhibitions, festivals, installations	Guidelines, policy papers

How does a funding agency assess the impact?

The assessment criteria are typically made considering the reach and the significance.

Reach: the extent and diversity of the beneficiaries of the impact, as relevant to the nature of the impact.

Significance: the degree to which the impact has enabled, enriched, influences, informed or changed the performance, policies, practices, products, services, understanding, awareness, or well-being of the beneficiaries.

So, you should try to assess the impact before submitting a proposal.

Impact assessment

There are different types of impact evaluation and assessment approaches and methods. These approaches tend to revolve around different notions of causality and have implications on the relevant methods and design of evaluations. Criteria for assessing the impact:

A. Outstanding impact in terms of the reach and significance.
B. Very considerable impact in terms of reach and significance.
C. Considerable impact in terms of reach and significance.
D. Acknowledged but modest impact in terms of reach and significance.
E. Little impact in terms of reach and significance.
F. No impact whatsoever. The impact is not suitable. The impact is not supported by the research plan.

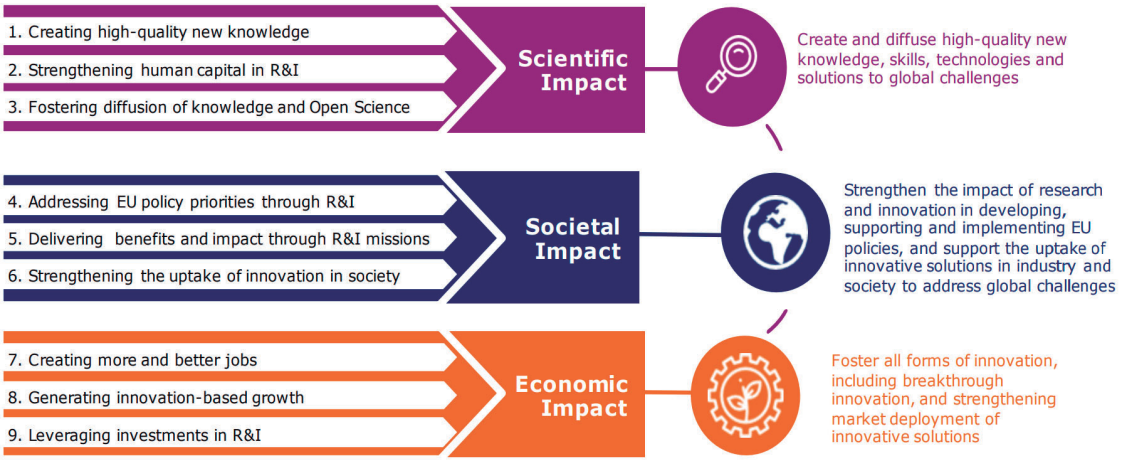


Figura 1: Proposed Key Impact Pathways of Horizon Europe[1][2]

Types of impact evaluation

Impact evaluations are usually concerned with the actual effects of an intervention. These are referred to as ex-post impact evaluations. An ex ante impact evaluation occurs before a programme is implemented. It is used to inform decisions about whether or not a programme should be funded based on its likely impacts. A third option in terms of the timing of an impact evaluation is during implementation, when the intended use is to check within a shorter-term policy cycle whether a project is on track to deliver longer term impacts. An impact evaluation involves answering at least three different types of questions: descriptive, causal and evaluative.

Descriptive questions ask about how things are and what has happened. They describe the initial situation and how it has changed, the intervention and other related programmes or policies, the context and the implementation environment.

Causal questions ask whether or not, and to what extent, observed changes are due to the intervention in question. Increasingly, causal analysis is about understanding how an intervention contributes to impacts along with other factors and other programs.

Evaluative questions ask about the overall value of a programme or policies, taking into account intended and unintended impacts, criteria and standards and how performance across different domains should be weighted and synthesised.

[1] Source: European Commission (2018), Impact Assessment accompanying the Commission proposal for Horizon Europe, the Framework Programme for Research and Innovation, SWD (2018) 307 final
[2] For more information, please check the Horizon Europe impact assessment: https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/horizon-europe-impact-assessment-staff-working-document_en

Tabela 1: Impact evaluation before, during and after implementation[3]

Type and intended use	Typical evaluation question	Implication
Ex post—done after implementation (although started well before this) to inform funding of subsequent programmes or continuation of existing ones	What have been the actual impacts of this programme and policy?	Need a feedback loop to ex ante and during implementation evaluations to iteratively improve estimates
Ex ante—done before implementation to inform funding of potential programmes	What are the likely impacts of this programme or policy if it is undertaken?	Need credible assumptions about likely impacts based on previous research and evaluation.
During implementation—done to provide evidence about likely impacts given current progress	What are the likely impacts of this programme or policy given the current situation?	Need credible assumptions about likely impacts based on evidence about intermediate outcomes and previous research and evaluation.

In addition, impact evaluations that include recommendations need to answer action questions by identifying and assessing possible options for responding to findings. Examples of action questions:

- Did the intervention make a difference?
- How much of a difference did the intervention make?
- For whom, in what situations, and in what ways did the intervention make a difference?
- To what extent can a specific impact be attributed to the intervention?
- How did the intervention make a difference?
- Will the intervention work elsewhere?
- What is needed for the intervention to work elsewhere?

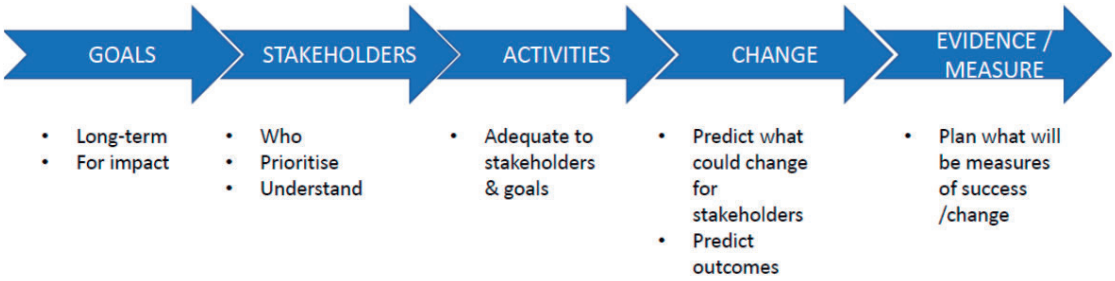
[3] Source: Australian Government (2015), Choosing appropriate designs and methods for impact evaluation.
For more information available:
https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/default/files/May%202018/document/pdf/choosing_appropriate_designs_and_methods_for_impact_evaluation_2015.pdf?acsf_files_redirect

An evaluation is likely to have elements of each of these evaluation questions and a package of methods will be needed to answer them. For example, an evaluation informing whether to continue funding for a programme will need to include descriptive questions (about what has happened), causal questions (about the role of the programme in producing observed changes) and evaluative questions (about whether the programme has been a success overall, and whether the costs and benefits justify continuation).

How to plan the impact?

Think about your audience when you are writing the impact. If you are writing an impact statement for people who are not researchers in your field, try to focus on how the research will benefit them and please avoid excessively expert or technical language. Always, remember that your readers may not be experts on your area. Your impact statement needs to convince them that your work is important and differentiator, even if they do not know all the terminology you use daily.

A major challenge when planning the impact is to tell what really counts and not what is easy to count. Use numbers to describe the impact of your work (whenever is possible). Numbers help them to understand the importance of your work. Keep the impact concise and consequential. Check the impact statement, and have someone else proofread it, to avoid unnoticed mistakes or typos.



After the detailed information on this guide you are fully prepared for the build on your project impact.

Please be aware that funders are looking for ambitious projects and those that create impact in both academia and society.

Good work.

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