Engaging and Assessing Impact: Moving Forward

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We will cover....

• Challenges of measuring impacts in non-academic engagements
• Some examples of methods used to capture impacts
• 2 case studies highlighting challenges – measuring government impacts; measuring impacts of festivals and activities
• Opportunity for you to share your experiences
Challenges of measuring impact

• What is impact?
  – societal, economic, academic, phenomenological, skills... others?

• No easy ways to measure/no one method

• Does everyone ‘buy in’ to the importance?

• But... of course it is best to think about it earlier rather than later
Some challenges of measuring impact

1. What method is best to use?
2. Audience/users – are they clear?
3. Time lag
4. Difficult to see direct links (evidence)
5. Depth of engagement undertaken
6. Depth of evaluation to be done
Some work ESRC undertaking....

- Pathways to impact
- Forms, forms, forms....
- Asking both researcher and ‘user’
- Economic valuation
- Encouraging knowledge sharing

thinking about it up front
they only lead so far
compelling stories
savings or money made?
robust methods
Policy News Services

Socio-economic and Humanities Research for Policy
News Alert Service

Science for Environment Policy
DG Environment News Alert Service
• 3 year project funded under Framework 7
• Monthly news service plus training package for researchers
• 9,000 subscribers
• Communicate EU funded research to policy makers
• External evaluators (partners in the project)
• Funded by Directorate Generale, Environment, currently in 2nd contract period
• Weekly service, plus additional journalistic materials (e.g. Policy briefs)
• 13,000 subscribers
• Internal and external evaluation
• Action research project about to begin (funded separately)
What impacts could we expect?

Greater awareness of research covered in the services
- Web analytics
- Researchers contacted by policy makers
- Policy makers claim the service alerts them to information

The services are valued information sources
- Policy makers subscribe to the service voluntarily and do not ‘unsubscribe’
- Policy makers report that the service is useful and valued
What impacts could we expect?

News service causes policy makers to discuss and think about research findings

- Interviews with policy makers about the impact of the service
- Requests for information from policy makers

Research findings clearly and strongly embedded in new or revised policy

- Identify relevant policy documents and scrutinise for reference
What kinds of evidence?

- Anecdotal
- Project journals
- Analytics
- Data collected from target group (e.g. surveys and interviews)
Key Challenges

• Finding the right people to capture information from and incentivising them to participate in evaluation.
Capturing the Impacts of the ESRC Festival of Social Science

ESRC Festival of Social Science

- Running for almost 10 years
- Has a variety of aims including to encourage social science researchers to engage with a non-academic audience, and promote and increase awareness of the social sciences and ESRC’s research
- Can apply for up to £2k support
- Events have steadily increased, 80 in 2006 to over 130 in 2011
- Well evaluated in situ (mapped to logical framework, questionnaires on the day, feedback from ESRC staff and organisers, media monitoring)

  ...but what about longer term impacts???
We aimed to:

• Examine the experiences, perceptions and evidence of impact amongst audience attendees and organisers of events at the Festival of Social Science.

• Assess other relationships to impact via consideration of prior Festival evaluations and interviews with Festival organisers.

• Identify impacts of the Festival on academics and attendees with regards to recommendations for future Festivals, training, support and evaluation.
Methods

1) Previous evaluation reports (2006 – 2010)
2) On-line questionnaire for organisers (75), and attendees (34)
3) 15 interviews with organisers
4) 3 interviews with ESRC staff
Key Impacts

• Over the last 5 years, the Festival of Social Science has reached over 43,000 attendees.

• Attendees follow up events at the Festival of Social Science with actions, including passing on information, finding out more about topics covered and using information personally. Under 10% of attendees carry out no actions following the event.

• Retrospectively there are a wide variety of impacts on organisers, including the generation of media interest, development of further research, and a wide variety of new (and re-established) partnerships, both internal and external.
Key Issues in Capturing Impact

• Impacts (some longer term) are implicit within evaluation data, a retrospective review can assist in highlighting them

• Attendees and organisers were receptive one/two years after the event but could be better briefed to engage at a later date

• Qualitative elements can assist in capturing the ‘anecdotal’
'When you actually get out with a group of young people they are full of surprises. So one of the key things that came out of it for me was to see their enjoyment, to be out of the classroom... In the first year we had BBC Breakfast Time come out and film. ... It was very exciting for them and we’ve stimulated quite a lot of interest since, in different levels of press.'

‘It’s connected us up with a lot more people...I am often discussing it and often discussing ideas with people all over the place...can we do this, has that been done before, all these kind of things.’

‘It's good to see how people respond to it......It was just having that sense of connection and knowing that people were interested.’
Challenge: Eliciting responses from participants after a period of time
Considering one of 3 opportunities for engagement discuss in your groups the following points

• What impacts might be possible from engagement of this type?
• How might these be evidenced/measured/captured?
• What types of problems and opportunities might arise in capturing this?
• POLICYMAKERS

• FESTIVALS/EVENTS

• PARTICIPANTS IN A RESEARCH PROJECT