

# R2HC: RESEARCH UPTAKE GUIDANCE NOTE FOR PROSPECTIVE APPLICANTS- January 2022

This document aims to set out clearly the expectations of R2HC in respect of research uptake and impact so that prospective applicants can plan for and develop effective proposals and can understand R2HC's support if awarded a grant.

## RESEARCH UPTAKE TIPS & CHECKLIST FOR PROPOSALS

**In your proposals, R2HC expects to see:**

### Evidence of planning for research uptake

- Demonstrate how and when you plan to engage and communicate with the specific stakeholders who will use and apply your research findings to inform health policy, practice and/or programming at local, regional or global level
- Tell us the 'Impact Story': explain how uptake of evidence by your target stakeholders will contribute to specific, realistic impact goals, and expected long-term benefits for people affected by crisis
- Identify a Research Uptake Focal Point with the necessary skills, competency and seniority to oversee strategic uptake and dissemination planning for the study team
- Share evidence of your existing relationships with target stakeholders, and the demand for your evidence, including by providing letters of support
- Describe different types of communication products, languages and channels that you plan to use to communicate evidence to your target audiences,

### Time and resource allocated for:

- Developing a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy
- Regular reflection and monitoring by the team of progress against impact goals and stakeholder engagement to inform participation in R2HC quarterly impact workshops
- Stakeholder engagement throughout the study, led by appropriate team members
- Developing communications materials for sharing evidence with policy and practice stakeholders, particularly after results are available
- Developing a Research Snapshot at grant close

## INTRODUCTION

This document provides R2HC applicants and grantees with advice on shaping their proposals, in relation to research uptake, stakeholder engagement and dissemination of evidence.

For R2HC, it is crucial that all funded work should have a measurable, positive impact on improving the public health response during humanitarian crises. This means that all research should be designed so that humanitarian stakeholders can and will access the evidence produced, understand it, trust it and

be able to apply it to policy and practice. It is also important that, when possible, affected populations, local actors and beneficiaries are also engaged, to enable them to adopt evidence that may benefit their own recovery from crisis. ‘Research impact’ is therefore one of the key criteria assessed by our Funding Committee. There are essentially two elements to assessing impact: firstly, whether the evidence will fill a recognised gap in humanitarian knowledge/respond to humanitarian needs, and secondly, whether the study team has set out a clear plan for delivering impact.

For this reason, it is expected that applicants both demonstrate contextual knowledge and set out clear plans for how research findings will reach key audiences, especially humanitarian practitioners and policy makers. R2HC requests applicants to dedicate a significant amount– in the region of 10% of the project budget, for uptake activities (though this figure is not firmly set– the activities should be in line with audience needs and your impact goals). Research teams will be expected to develop a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy for their research project in the first six months of their grant; this clarifies target stakeholders and how they will be engaged in the findings through communications and knowledge translation activities. As part of R2HC’s support package, tools and resources are provided to support the development and delivery of research uptake and planning for impact.

Below, brief guidance is presented on four critical strands of research uptake and planning –

- (1) stakeholder engagement, (2) capacity–building, (3) communicating research findings, and (4) monitoring and evaluation of research uptake.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. DEFINING AND PLANNING RESEARCH UPTAKE

Uptake includes *all the activities that facilitate and contribute to the adoption and utilisation of evidence by researchers, practitioners and other humanitarian actors*. Uptake is what R2HC expects to eventually lead to research impacting on humanitarian policy, practice, capacity, knowledge and understanding– and then, over time, to contribute to benefits for crisis affected people as humanitarian response is improved in response to new evidence.

This is a long chain of impact, over which grantees may have limited control. We therefore focus here on our expectations of what grantees can and are expected to do, during the grant, to lay the groundwork for long–term impact– and what you can do at proposal stage to reflect your understanding of these expectations.

### FOUR STRANDS OF RESEARCH UPTAKE

Research uptake considerations can be divided into four general activity strands, identified by FCDO (previously DFID). These strands, shown in Figure 2 below, are: **(1) stakeholder engagement**, **(2) capacity building**, **(3) communication**, and the **(4) monitoring and evaluation of uptake**.

While the four strands are described separately, they are complementary to each other and should be considered in parallel. The planning must also take place at an early stage in the project, with adequate resources for planning and delivering uptake considered from pre–start. Of course, while an

<sup>1</sup>[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/514977/Research\\_uptake\\_guidance.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/514977/Research_uptake_guidance.pdf)

uptake strategy should consider all four strands, the relative importance of different strands will differ between projects. Not all activities illustrated will be carried out by all projects, and other activities not shown will be important for some projects.

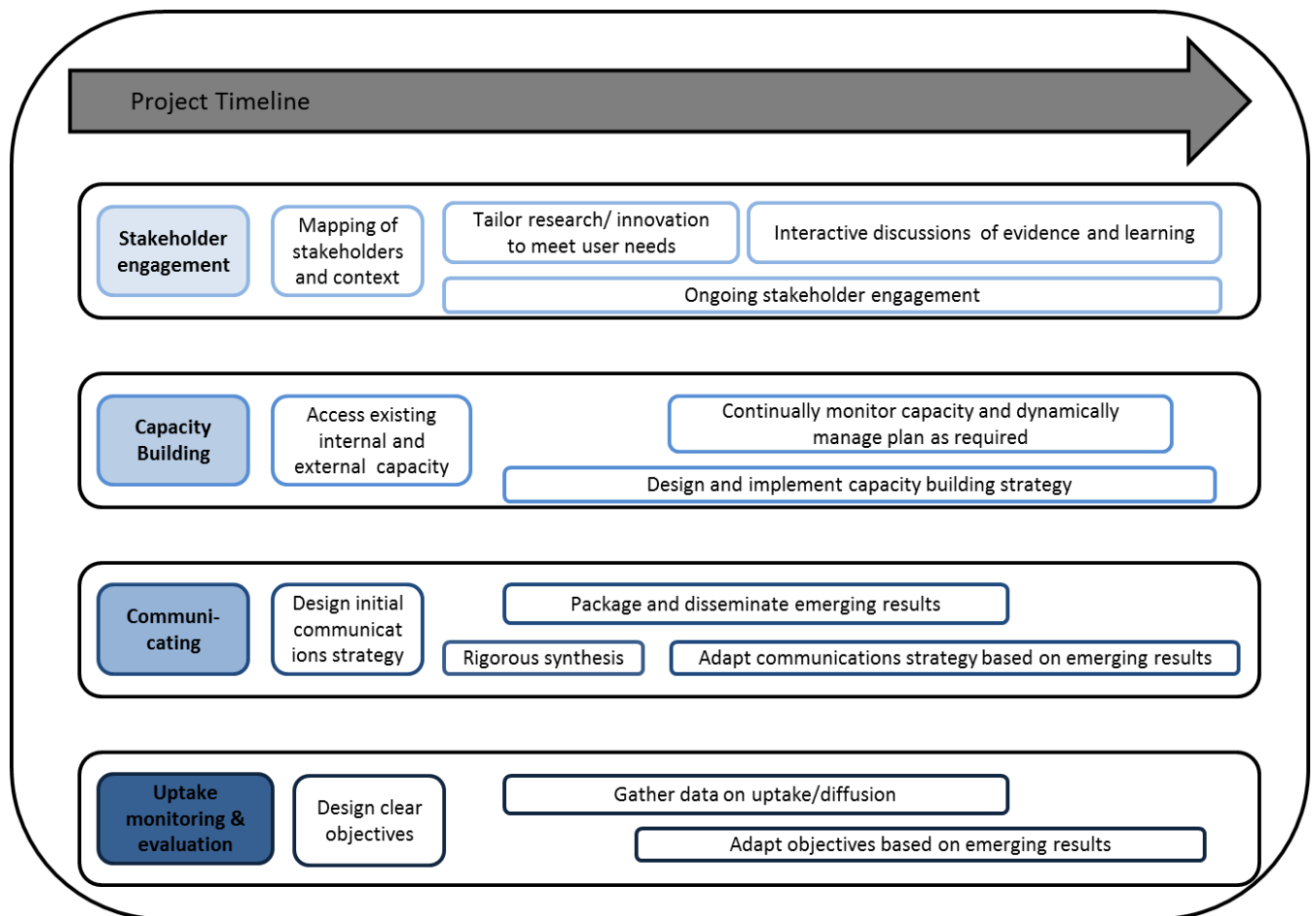


FIGURE 1: Strands of research uptake.

### Considerations for proposals:

- Proposals must demonstrate throughout a focus on delivering uptake and impact, and on planning for uptake and impact.
- All R2HC research teams (led by a Research Uptake Focal Point) are expected to develop and refine a Stakeholder Engagement Plan to deliver uptake in the first six months of the grant.
- Allocate time for engaging with R2HC’s quarterly peer learning Research Impact workshops and other support (including our online course) to refine and update the uptake strategy as required.

- The Research Uptake Focal Point has a critical role in leading and coordinating the strategy's development and delivery and in liaising with R2HC.

## 2. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

When seeking to influence stakeholders' uptake of your research, good evidence is only part of the process – powerful stories and the building of real relationships with stakeholders, invested in from the earliest stages of a project, are also essential.<sup>2</sup> The successful spread of new research and innovation requires a range of relation assistance, including prioritisation from senior leadership; boundary-crossing intra- and inter-organisational interaction; targeted, persuasive communication; and investments in social interaction<sup>3</sup>. This means that determining who to influence, how to influence them and what specific, evidence-driven changes could be made by each humanitarian actor is not an ad-hoc activity that can be done at the end of a project. These relationships take time, patience and often significant commitments of project capacity. For this reason, stakeholder engagement cannot be rushed at the end of research – it must begin early, and continue throughout the life of the research project. Ideally, you will have engaged with and consulted stakeholders in developing your research question and proposal.

### DEMONSTRATING STAKEHOLDER KNOWLEDGE

The health sector of the 'humanitarian system' itself represents a key diffusion audience for the R2HC. However, this system is not a homogeneous body. Ideally, grantees should recognise and engage with official stakeholders where they exist. These will be humanitarian knowledge brokers including those working under the IASC (**Inter-Agency Standing Committee**) and Cluster coordination mechanisms, local government offices, and national government institutions.

Other diverse humanitarian stakeholders could include international NGOs, local NGOs, community based organisations (CBOs), United Nations agencies, the Red Cross/Red Crescent movement, academic institutions, research think-tanks, and inter-governmental bodies. In some humanitarian contexts key stakeholders will be religious leaders or institutions, private companies, small businesses, military and militia groups. Importantly, affected communities themselves represent key stakeholders. They may include the researched subjects themselves who have an essential stake in final communication of research findings.

When mapping stakeholders, it is also important to identify individuals as well as institutions, key groups, structures and processes. In this way, the need to design different engagement approaches for different stakeholder groups will become apparent.

### Considerations for proposals:

- We expect teams to already identified specific target stakeholders and outlined the impact

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<sup>2</sup> STRIVE Research Programme Consortium, London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine: Theory of Change at [strive.lshtm.ac.uk/system/files/attachments/STRIVE%20Theory%20of%20Change.pdf](https://strive.lshtm.ac.uk/system/files/attachments/STRIVE%20Theory%20of%20Change.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Lomas, J. 2008, Formalised Informality: An action plan to spread proven health innovations at [www.health.govt.nz/publication/formalised-informality-action-plan-spread-proven-health-innovations](http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/formalised-informality-action-plan-spread-proven-health-innovations)

goals of the research in their proposals, with a clear, compelling ‘impact story’ that explains how the evidence can contribute to long-term benefits for crisis affected people in a specific context/s.

- We expect to see evidence of the study team’s knowledge of the external context and of the needs/demand for the research by humanitarian stakeholders.
- We expect to see a detailed knowledge of target stakeholders and relevant humanitarian audiences, based preferably on existing relationships and prior engagement.
- We expect teams to allocate time and resource to refine ideas through further development of uptake strategies once grants are awarded, ensuring appropriate approaches for engaging different stakeholders.

## ON-GOING ENGAGEMENT

Once project implementation has begun, engagement with decision-makers, operational agencies, affected communities and other stakeholders can often be neglected until the evidence is ready to be communicated. For your research to have the greatest impact, it is critical that key stakeholders are engaged early and regularly throughout the life of the project. This allows key audiences to continuously advise on implementation, ensuring that challenges do not become problems. This is particularly important in insecure locations. It also maintains stakeholders’ ongoing awareness of the research, so they are more likely to champion the final results.

Grantees can engage with stakeholders by, for example, inviting them to sit on a project advisory team or asking them to attend periodic interactive information sessions. If a project is ongoing during a humanitarian response phase, grantees can attend cluster meetings, share information in standard formats, sit on government panels or join NGO networks. Social media can also be used to remain engaged with stakeholders.

### Considerations for proposals:

- We expect to see proposals allocating adequate time and resource for engaging regular engagement with key stakeholders who are the target users of research evidence, not only at the end of the research study but throughout.
- We hope to see all partners, where appropriate, play a role in supporting the engagement of target stakeholders throughout the study, coordinated and supported by the Research Uptake Focal Point.

## 2. CAPACITY BUILDING

Capacity building for uptake can refer to grantees and their project teams, or the stakeholders that they aim to influence.

### ASSESSING EXISTING CAPACITY

A capacity for uptake may include the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to access, synthesise, use and communicate project results, outcomes and evidence. Researchers may be outside their area

of expertise with regards to communication capacity, particularly when it comes to designing an effective uptake plan. At an early stage, there should be an assessment of communication capacity both internally (i.e. within the project team) and externally (for example, for consultants or expert partners).

An assessment of the capacity of different stakeholder groups to uptake evidence may also need to be considered. Some recent reports suggest that even when information is available, decision makers in humanitarian contexts may not take it up due to a range of reasons that start with not knowing the evidence exists, but may also include a lack of understanding of how to translate it – that is, how to interpret the evidence and apply it. From the beginning, grantees should understand the capacities of their key audiences in order to better influence them.

#### Considerations for proposals:

- We expect to see a consideration of the capacity needs of stakeholders to use and apply evidence in proposals. For example, training workshops or ‘lay person’ guidance materials may need to be produced to enable stakeholders to apply evidence to practice and implementation.
- We expect to see a study partnership with capacities and skills commensurate to the impact goals of the project, including stakeholder engagement, communications, and knowledge translation.

### STUDY TEAM’S CAPACITY: THE RESEARCH UPTAKE FOCAL POINT

To ensure that study teams we fund have adequate capacity for research uptake, we now request that each team includes a Research Uptake Focal Point (RUFPP). Ideally, this would be a separate individual, with dedicated time to develop the Stakeholder Engagement Strategy. In some cases, the PI has the requisite skills and competencies; in such cases we will recommend that additional resource, for example a Communications professional, is appointed to support uptake and dissemination planning and delivery.

#### Considerations for proposals:

- The RUFPP’s CV should indicate appropriate skills and competencies to support the lead researchers in, or lead on themselves, key uptake activities such as knowledge translation; policy engagement; or communications to deliver the uptake goals of the study. They may sit within the humanitarian operational partner organisation, if this will enable them to support uptake of the research findings, or outside it.
- The capacity needs for each study will look different, but we encourage you to identify an individual with the requisite seniority, skills and experience to engage humanitarian stakeholders in research evidence, particularly in relation to your topic of study or the stakeholders you will need to reach.
- RUFPPs should have adequate funded time on the research study throughout, both to effectively lead on the uptake strategy and advise and support your team, and to liaise with R2HC on research uptake grant support activities and wider engagement opportunities.

## 3. COMMUNICATION

Communication is obviously key to uptake. A core aim for R2HC is to increase the effectiveness of humanitarian response through building and strengthening partnerships between researchers and operational humanitarians.

Therefore, R2HC grantees should consider how to synthesise evidence and results in styles and formats that are accessible to both non-experts and non-academics, as well as the academic research community. While peer-review publication remains an important priority, a much broader range of communication outputs than peer-review publications should be considered.

## RESEARCH SNAPSHOTS

A key output which all grantees are required to complete for R2HC is a [Research Snapshot](#), a 2pp summary of research intended to be accessible to a general humanitarian audience. We also encourage grantees to write blogs throughout their study, either for us or for appropriate external sites.

## COMMUNICATIONS OUTPUTS FOR HUMANITARIAN AUDIENCES

Some other examples of communication outputs study teams can use include:

- Policy briefs
- Newsletters
- Websites
- Social media
- Public events
- Press releases
- Mid-term research reports, working papers, and short update pieces
- Individual and group briefings for key decision makers
- Community-level engagement events, such as 'town hall'-style meeting
- Conference presentations and posters

When research is funded by Elrha the lead applicant or focal point will receive an Elrha communication information pack. This pack outlines the obligations and the opportunities for communications that come with the funding. It includes guidelines on blogging, media interaction and photography which should be used for general communications, as well as communications of uptake. This pack can be requested by anyone who would like to use the information to guide their application.

Clearly it is not possible to decide what messages will be communicated before the project is completed. However, communication activities such as publishing in peer reviewed journals, running community meetings or timetabling government briefings need to be included at a project design stage, so that they are properly prioritised and resourced. At initial stages it is also useful to begin identifying 'windows' when stakeholders may be particularly interested in discussing project evidence and implications.

### Considerations for proposals:

- Communications outputs and uptake activities should be planned to meet the needs of various humanitarian stakeholders. We expect to see proposals allocate appropriate resources for appropriate communications products and engagement activities to meet the needs of target audiences, to promote and facilitate evidence understanding and use.
- We hope to see awareness of key external moments which the study communications plan will need to take into account. (EG: an annual cluster meeting).
- Communications materials should go beyond the production of peer-reviewed journal articles and presentation at academic conferences, and should ideally begin early, to sensitise policy and practice audiences to the research.
- We expect sufficient time and resource to be allowed for the development of external-facing materials and delivery of engagement activities *after* final results are available.
- Allocate resource for development of the [Research Snapshot](#) based on final results.
- We encourage communications approaches to be developed in consultation with stakeholders to better understand their needs and appropriate key messages.

## 4. UPTAKE MONITORING AND EVALUATION

### SETTING GOALS FOR MONITORING

All grantees are encouraged to consider from the outset the impact objectives (changes in the external environment) you are trying to achieve through research, and to develop an approach to monitoring and evaluating success in achieving these objectives. We will do this when developing a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and expect to be updated on progress via regular R2HC reporting cycles. Recognising that research impact takes place in a rapidly changing environment which cannot be controlled, our approach is not to rigidly hold grantees accountable for external changes they hope to deliver, but we do expect to see active engagement with the external environment, and a willingness to adapt approaches as you progress, particularly in responses to stakeholder feedback.

It is important to choose outcomes and impacts which can be realistically achieved by the project. The ultimate impact of research uptake may be positive changes of behaviour in a community, changes in the conceptual understanding of partners and peers, changes in policy and so on. However, such impact can be very difficult to measure or monitor, and grantees must understand what kinds of changes they could be accountable for and which results they want to report on. Of course, as you engage with the external environment, your impact objectives may change.

#### Considerations for proposals:

- Allocate a few hours for your team every quarter or so, to take stock of progress and capture information on how you are progressing with influencing external stakeholders and what you are learning; and at 6 monthly intervals allow time for the partners to contribute to reporting on the project's impact.
- Prepare to periodically revise your stakeholder engagement strategy as the research progresses and to keep R2HC updated on any changes.



## EVALUATION

Demonstrating the success of uptake through outcomes and impact can be difficult, not least because the uptake of research can take place some months or years after the research has been completed. In some cases, anticipated results may not occur due to factors outside the control of the research team, and unexpected effects are not unusual in humanitarian contexts. Even when changes in policy or practice happen, they can be difficult to measure and the cause(s) of change can be hard to attribute.

Nevertheless, it is important to evaluate the impact of uptake as far as possible, in order better to understand how and when real evidence contributes to humanitarian response, and to account for all project achievements. In addition to inviting reports on uptake in the closing phases of studies and holding close-out calls with partners to better understand what was achieved and learned through engaging external stakeholders, R2HC conducts case study evaluations of closed grants post 1+ year, to better understand the uptake and impact resulting from research we fund, based on final reports.

### Consideration for proposals:

- Allocate sufficient time for final reporting on the project and for a close-out call with R2HC.

## LEARNING

Learning from evidence is important whether a research project has succeeded or failed, or whether the results were expected or unexpected. R2HC encourages grantees to reflect on the research process and share the learning from their studies with key stakeholders, and to allocate adequate time on studies for the key partners to learn from each other as they go through the research process. It is particularly important for grantees from different countries, research disciplines and professional backgrounds to allow enough time to learn from each other during the research process, as this will likely benefit the eventual research outcomes.

### Considerations for proposals:

- We hope to see adequate time for study partners to meet, reflect and learn from each other throughout the study, recognizing the capacities of all partners.
- We hope to see a commitment to supporting the humanitarian sector to learn from results, whether the research project 'succeeds' or 'fails', through open communications and reflective approaches to engagement.

## CONCLUSION

- R2HC applicants and grantees should consider uptake activities, including stakeholder engagement, communications, capacity building, and evaluation and monitoring of impact, as a critical part of their project, and need to clearly articulate this in their proposals and allocate adequate time and budget.
- Research impact is one of the key criteria assessed by our Funding Committee.
- Support for uptake planning is provided by R2HC through participation in a Research Impact

workshop during the grant. A Stakeholder Engagement Strategy should be produced for each study and you must identify an appropriate Research Uptake Focal Point for your study team.

- If help or support is needed, please do not hesitate to contact the R2HC Research Impact Manager, Cordelia Lonsdale: [c.lonsdale@elrha.org](mailto:c.lonsdale@elrha.org)

## ELRHA RESOURCES:

Conducting research with impact: Five ideas for researchers (Video)

<https://www.elrha.org/researchdatabase/conducting-research-with-an-impact/>