

How can research funders make the most of the knowledge they already have?

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How can research funders make the most of the knowledge they already have?

Discussing a new project to mobilise research based knowledge for public health, Liz Such, Andy Tattersall, Joe Langley and Fiona Marshall outline how local government, civil society groups and researchers can collaborate in mutually beneficial ways to unlock the impact of existing research.

The National Institute for Health and Care Research ([NIHR](#)) is the UK Government's major funder of public health research. The mission of the NIHR is to improve the health and wealth of the UK, as such they produce large volumes of research. However, nationally commissioned research that generates societal impact is not a given, nor is the guarantee that it directly addresses urgent problems, such as health inequalities.

Research funders, such as NIHR, have historically been good at producing new knowledge that targets specific issues and communities. However, more needs to be done in mobilising existing knowledge and working with these communities to create networks of research producers and users. This is the focus of [KNOW-PH](#) (Knowledge for Public Health), a NIHR funded collaboration between the universities of Nottingham, Sheffield University, Sheffield Hallam, Doncaster Council and the charity [AFRUCA](#). By bringing together researchers, local government, and civil society groups, KNOW-PH is attempting to build a network that links research to those who need it at local and national scale.

Collaborating with members of the public, local government and creative partners are well trodden 'pathways to impact'. However, by creating new kinds of links and interactions between groups who need research and a large database of existing knowledge, we hope to both find more instances where 'off the shelf' research will be useful and to highlight gaps where more work from NIHR can be done. The project therefore aims to act as a bridging exercise for a large body of research, where [co-production efforts have fallen short](#), or not been realised, or which have not benefited from a focused [communications push](#).

The quick-slow approach to knowledge mobilisation

The programme has two arms, one focuses on responding rapidly to evidence needs and will work with local and national government. These projects run from 3-6 months and the focus of the work is directed by the partnerships. The second arm is focused on deep co-production, which involves working closely with local government partners over an extended period of time. Co-production from the start is key and that involves an ongoing two way dialogue between the project team with policy makers and local communities.

Local Authority Reference Group (LARG)

At a time when local authority budgets are strained, new and existing research evidence offers solutions to endemic and often overlooked problems. This project offers a bridge between NIHR research and those working for public health and local councils. Working in collaboration with KNOW-PH, the LARG brings a collective wisdom as to which health-related issues are priorities in their parts of the UK. It is a platform for discussion and knowledge sharing where important feedback is captured by those at the forefront of local and public health decision making. It also allows those working in local authorities to meet and share their priorities, ideas and concerns relating to health inequalities.

Public and Community Engagement Group (PACE).

Many academic-public relationships have resulted in missed opportunities. In some cases academics parachute into communities, often several times over a short period, with little consideration to the impact on these groups. Our collaboration attempts to address these issues by working as equals with AFRUCA, which works with black and minority ethnic communities. We chose AFRUCA because it works directly with communities who often bear the brunt of societal and health inequalities. The team holds weekly meetings with AFRUCA and members of the PACE group help shape the direction of travel from the start of our projects to the end. Their insights offer a view from the ground most academics will never experience and help identify inequalities many people face with everything from living standards to healthcare needs.

Creative partners

The LARG and PACE are instrumental in shaping the focus of this work, but the third group of collaborators will help craft the results of our research and conversations. Working with external partners Cardboard Citizens, Nifty Fox and Optical Jukebox brings a highly inventive and creative element to this work. Alongside traditional research outputs, such as reports and presentations, these partners will supplement in-house content such as blogs, podcasts, infographics and animations with a variety of novel and engaging materials and activities. Incorporating everything from bespoke graphics, Lego Serious Play, videos, live theatre and art.

The communications aspect of this work is integral to the project and is possible due to a notable part of the funding being applied to dissemination activities. As the communications lead for this project wrote for this blog, [incorporating funding](#) for these activities within research bids is now vital. Similarly, the communication plan for this work is being driven from within the group from the start, rather than as an external produced tack on at the end of the project.

The programme is in its first third of a three year timeline, with much of the initial work building the foundations for what will follow. Relationships take time to form, there is much evidence to sift and opportunities to build a genuine legacy for this kind of approach to knowledge mobilisation. Whilst these foundations continue to be shaped and settle down, the rapid work goes on and is unearthing areas where change can happen now. We hope in future to explain how this dual approach to research, communication and engagement can produce benefits for all involved, produce a more stable infrastructure for knowledge mobilisation and help tackle inequalities within society.

<https://www.know-ph.ac.uk/>
[KNOW-PH Figshare collection](#)

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