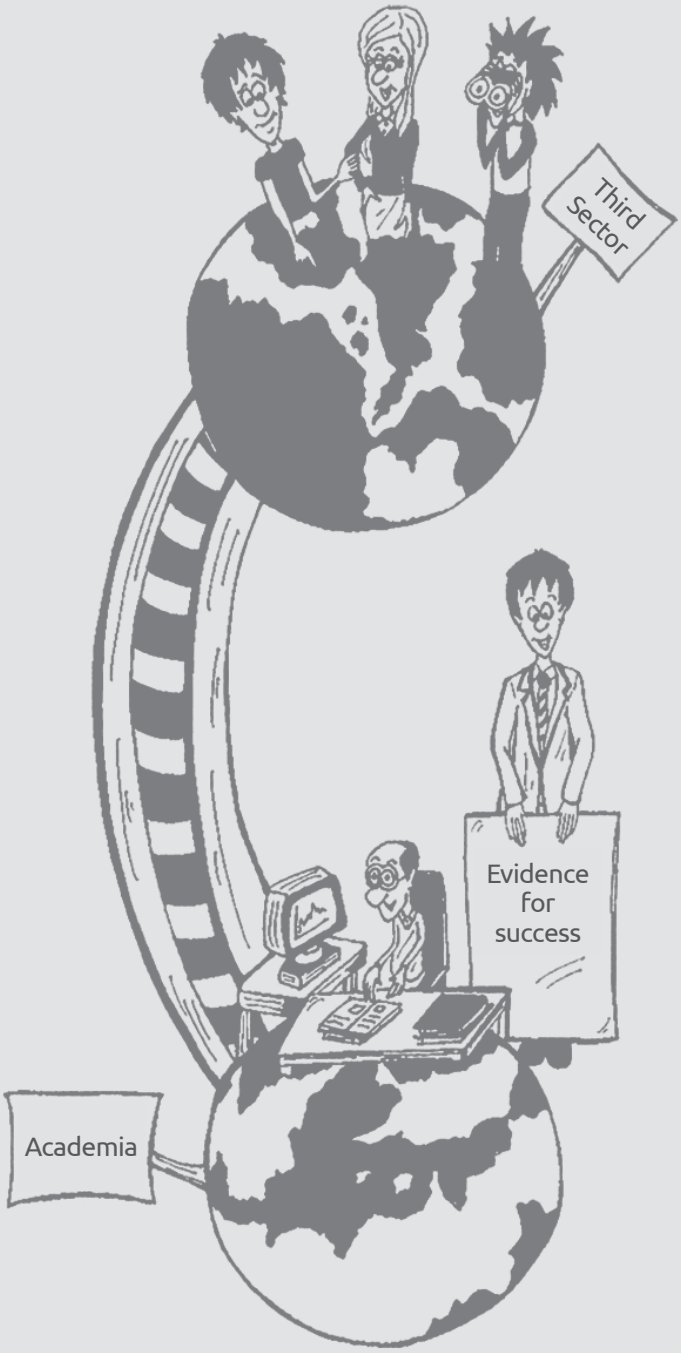
# Collaborating with academics

## An Evidence for Success supplementary guide

March 2016



# Introduction

## Purpose of this document

The 'Collaborating with academics' guide provides practical guidance and resources for third sector organisations to set up effective links with academics to generate and use evidence to influence policy and practice.

### The guide is divided in three parts:

**Part 1:**

- Helps you to understand the benefits to your organisation of collaborating with academics
- Sets out the different ways in which academics and third sector organisations can work together
- Provides an overview of the benefits and challenges for each type of collaboration so you can consider which one will work best for you and your organisation
- Summarises key guidance and tips, in the form of a checklist, to help you to set up, maintain and/or improve collaborations whether you work in the third sector or academia.

**Part 2** provides tips to help you identify the right academic to set up your collaboration.

**Part 3** contains a range of relevant resources and references.

This guide makes use of short In the spotlight case studies to illustrate relevant pieces of advice, drawing from existing good practice, so you can see what successful collaborations look like in the real world.

## Who is this Guide for?

This guide is for anyone in the third sector who wants to link to academics to generate and/or use evidence to improve policy and practice, including:

- practitioners in the third sector
- service managers
- funders and commissioners
- policy makers, researchers and planners.

This guide is aimed at 'learning organisations' who are committed both to sharing their evidence about 'what works', 'what doesn't work' and 'why', and to amending their own practices on the basis of this evidence.

This guide is mainly for the third sector but academics may also find it useful to think about 'why', 'when' and 'how' to collaborate.

# Where this Guide came from: Evidence for Success

In summer 2014, the Knowledge Translation Network[1] published its first resource: 'Evidence for Success: the guide to getting evidence and using it'[2], which provides easy to follow, step-by-step guidance and resources to support organisations to generate and use evidence to influence policy and practice.

Research carried out for *Evidence for Success* identified a need amongst third sector organisations for guidance on how to collaborate with academics to generate and use evidence. This was reinforced in October 2014, when the Scottish Third Sector Research Forum[3] ran an event to explore good practice in collaborations between the third sector and academia. This guide responds to that demand for support.

This guide complements the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships'[4] Manifesto for Partnership Research between universities and other agencies (see **Resources** section).

[1] www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/our-work-partners/knowledge-translation-network

[2] www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/resources/270

[3] www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/our-work-partners/scottish-third-sector-research-forum

[4] www.crfr.ac.uk

# Acknowledgements

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Illustrations provided by Patty Lozano-Casal.

# Part 1:

## Making your collaboration count

## Section 1: Why collaborate?

Collaborating with academics is not the only way to generate and use evidence.

*Evidence for Success* highlights the importance of making the best of the resources you have in your organisation to generate and use useful evidence.

**Collaborating with academics can help you:**

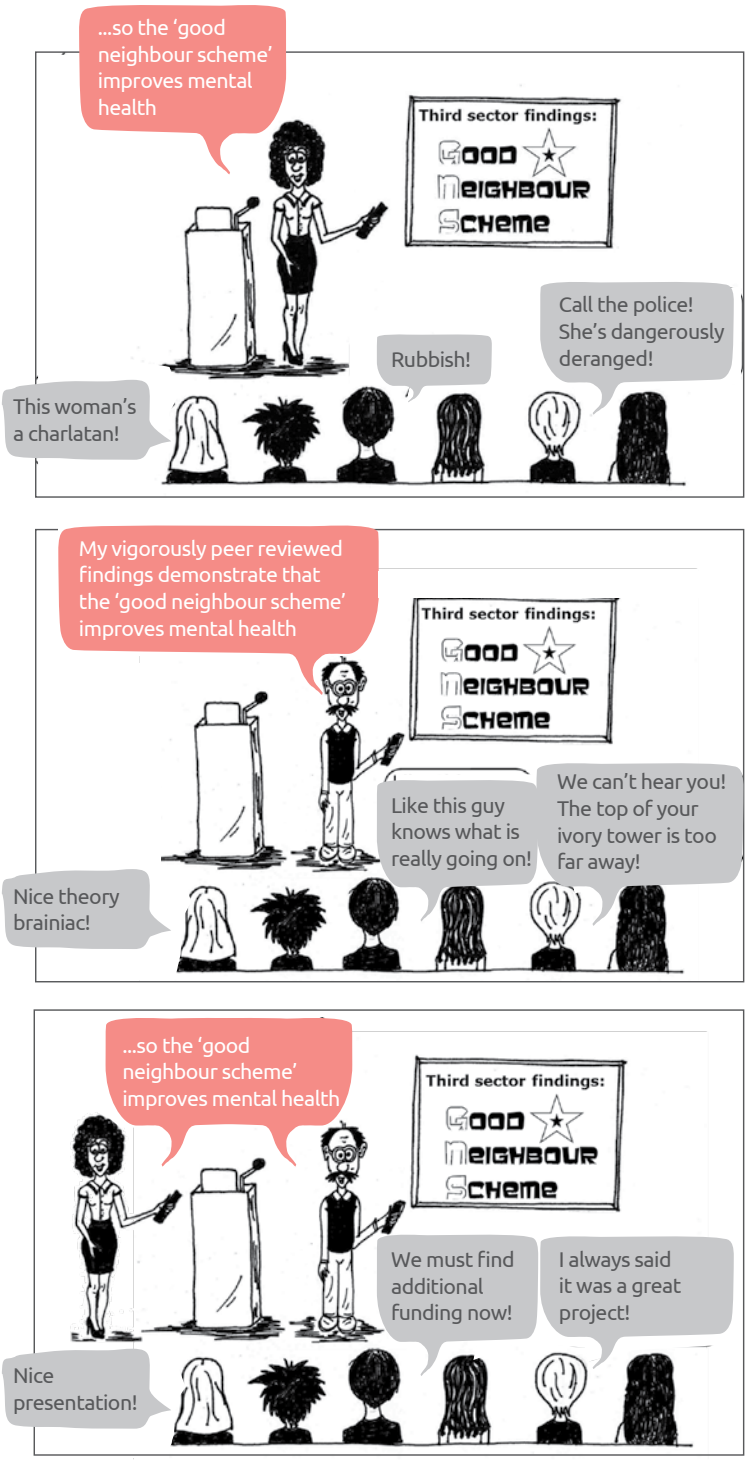
- Increase your skills and capacity to generate and analyse data from your service/project
- Access expert advice on methodology and evidence (which otherwise you might not have had)
- Access funding that you might not be able to access without academic support
- Access a wider evidence base
- Generate new evidence to fill a gap (for yourself or others, including funders)
- Reach new audiences to tell them about your work.

In return, **from the collaboration academics can:**

- Gain insights about your area of work and the needs of the people you work with
- Keep up to date with research in other organisations
- Test the practical application of their research
- Further their institution's outreach mission
- Benefit from a learning experience of working with another sector (you) and different perspectives and skills
- See an increase in the awareness and credibility of their research among practice and policy professionals
- Meet some of the knowledge exchange requirements set out in the Research Excellence Framework (REF)[5]: the new system for assessing the quality and impact of research in UK higher education institutions
- Get knowledge about practical problems, which is useful for teaching
- Be better able to understand the needs of the third sector to make their research relevant.

[5]www.ref.ac.uk

For the purpose of this guide we will assume that, after careful consideration, you have decided that collaborating with academics is the right tactic for you, and you already have in mind an idea for a potential collaboration.




**Collaboration can bring credibility for both parties**

# Section 2: Different levels of involvement

Before getting into the types of collaboration you might want to consider, it is worth thinking about the level of involvement that you are prepared to have or accept. In fact, the level of involvement you select might reduce your options, making it easier for you to choose.

There are many classifications of collaborations in the literature. For the purpose of this guide we will use the following three levels of involvement (Ross et al., 2003):

- **Low:** The academic leads the research and you, the third sector organisation, endorse and provide legitimacy for the evidence
- **Medium:** The academic comes up with the research idea or activityand you, the third sector organisation, provide ideas, information and tactical advice
- **High:** Both the academic and you, the third sector organisation, are engaged significantly in the research and help to shape both the way it is carried out and the outcomes.

Academics are typically seen as holding significant power in cross-sector collaborations, but the third sector also has power because it brings something to the partnership too.

You can discuss and agree involvement from the start. It is important to make clear your expectations of how the collaboration should be framed, and be open to the academics' expectations too.

The diagram below might help you decide about the level of involvement you would like to have. The literature suggests that the more involved non-academic partners (you) are within the research collaboration, the greater the impact of the research within practice and policy settings is.

The final thing to consider is roles and responsibilities within the collaboration (see **'In the spotlight'** example on page 8).

These, together with expectations, should be clarified and agreed from the very beginning. It is a good idea to draw up a 'collaboration agreement' detailing these so you can refer back to it in the future (see **'In the spotlight'** example on page 18).

As your relationship develops, your partnership also has the potential to strengthen and deepen. Start small and grow your collaboration.

## Collaborations between academics and practitioners

Morton (2012) adapted from Martin (2010).

## In the spotlight:

***ChildLine Scotland (CLS) and Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR)***

CLS[6] and CRFR[7] at the University of Edinburgh collaborated on a joint-research project to investigate the nature of calls by children to the ChildLine telephone helpline (Morton, 2012).

The table below sets out how the roles within the partnership were shared by both partners. This table could be used as a tool for negotiating and reflecting on the different roles within any partnership.

It is clear that there was a lot more shared activity between CRFR and CLS than might have traditionally happened. This was important in relation to how the research was, and continues to be, used.

Having both partners involved in developing the research project and securing the funding meant that the research was highly relevant to current policy and practice dilemmas. This also ensured that the research remained grounded in practice issues rather than academic agendas.

Sharing the engagement and dissemination activities increased the reach and credibility of the research. This was mostly due to both agencies being well-known and respected, and the perception of research users that both partners were committed to making a difference.

| Tasks and activities | Traditional role division | CRFR/CLS partnership |
|---|---|---|
| Develop agenda | Varies | Shared |
| Get funding | Varies | Shared |
| Define project | Academics | Shared |
| Collect data/share data | Academics | Academics |
| Analyse data | Academics | Shared |
| Engage stakeholders | Partners | Shared |
| Dissemination and sharing activities | Partners | Shared |
| Continued use | Shared | Partners |

[6]www.childline.org.uk
[7]www.ed.ac.uk

# Section 3: Different types of collaboration

The type of collaboration will depend on the problem you want to solve. Are you wanting to link to an academic to generate or use evidence (new or existing)? Perhaps you want to do both?

The following information can help you identify useful linkages. Even if you are only interested in collaborating to 'generate' evidence, the information about linking to academics to 'use' evidence might come in handy if you want to ensure the evidence you generate is used.

# Collaborating with academics to generate evidence

## Consultancy and training (commissioned or free of charge):

This includes,

- Seeking expert advice/support on specific issues related to monitoring and evaluation, research, data analysis and evidence
- Academics providing your organisation with advice in decision-making processes such as,
  - Funding applications: Can academics help you come up with ideas for your proposal on how to generate evidence to back up your intervention?
  - Interviewing new potential staff: Can academics help you identify people's research and evidence knowledge and skills?

**Check existing evidence before setting up a collaboration**

This type of collaboration is for you <u>if you want to</u>:

- Improve your organisation's skills, knowledge and understanding around specific issue/s, and/or your own
- Tap into a different type of expertise
- Have a sounding board for a new project/ intervention/pilot
- Access a wider evidence base (i.e. secondary evidence)
- Get independent insight into your work and impact
- Generate evidence without having to do the work yourself.

This type of collaboration is <u>useful for</u>:

- Getting help to carry out tasks you/ your organisation might not be able to take forward; for example, in depth follow-up interviews, external evaluation to add to your own self-evaluation, etc.
- Exploring future collaboration opportunities
- Increasing your chances of funding by making your application more credible
- Increasing your awareness and understanding of other research.

Be aware that not all academics will have the skills/knowledge or will want to carry out evaluations. Brokers such as Interface[8] and CRFR can signpost you to potential academics (see **'In the spotlight'** example on page 23).

If you struggle to find an academic to do evaluation with/for you, have a look at Evaluation Support Scotland's[9] consultants database and their related online resources.

[8]www.interface-online.org.uk

[9]www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk

## Joint research:

This includes,

- Getting an academic to do work for/with you (commissioned or free of charge)
- Being part of a consortium with academics that are delivering a research project, at their request or inviting an academic to be part of your own consortium
- Having a researcher working within your organisation such as a student, intern, embedded researcher and so forth.

This type of collaboration is for you if you want to:

- Fill in a gap in the evidence base of your intervention/project
- Generate evidence to satisfy your funders' requirements
- Generate evidence to back up a pilot intervention (i.e. something you/others have never tried before in your context).

This type of collaboration is useful for:

- Building your capacity and skills to analyse data
- Improving your understanding around evidence, including your own
- Being exposed to learning from other styles of research
- Building personal relationships with individual academics.

### In the spotlight

***Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research and Policy (SCPHRP)***

SCPHRP was established in 2008 to encourage and facilitate collaborations between all sectors of the public health community in Scotland. It is co-funded by the Medical Research Council (MRC) and the Chief Scientist Office (CSO) and based within the University of Edinburgh.

Part of SCPHRP's remit is to form collaborations and partnerships with people from policy, practice (healthcare and the third sector) and research to investigate methods for improving the health of the Scottish population and reducing health inequalities.

One of the key ways to achieve this goal is through SCPHRP's 'working group model' that includes different partners in the research process, ranging from designing and carrying research projects to organising training courses and knowledge exchange events. Currently there are four working groups in operation.

Each working group has an early career researcher ('research fellow') attached to them to lead and facilitate the groups' work. Within each working group there are sub-groups, each with a specific focus within the larger life course perspective.

Since it was set up, SCPHRP has organised several knowledge exchange events; applied for (with various partners) and have been awarded research grant funding; helped train non-researchers in research methods, and run networking events linking researchers and non-researchers together.
For more information about SCPHRP visit: www.scphrp.ac.uk

# Collaborating with academics to use your/their evidence

## Dissemination activities:

This includes,

- Events, webinars, podcasts, blogs and vlogs, articles, etc.
- Using academic evidence to complement the evidence you generate to give it more weight; for example, when doing a podcast or webinar, inviting academics to present at an event, or asking them to help you use their evidence.

This type of collaboration is for you if you want to:

- Make your evidence heard; working with academics might increase the weight of your evidence
- Consult on your findings with academics working in your field
- Network with academics that share research interests with you/your organisation
- Tap into a wider audience (more and different kinds of people hear about your evidence)
- Promote your organisation's work
- Identify potential collaborations with academics.

This type of collaboration is useful for:

- Making new connections
- Giving your event and evidence a boost (bringing in an academic to present might give weight and prestige to your event).

## Sitting on each other's groups:

For example, board of trustees, advisory groups, local and national reference groups or review panels.

This type of collaboration is for you if you want to:

- Fill in gaps in your/your organisation's skills, knowledge and expertise
- Bring in a different sectors' perspective; for example, academia's
- Boost your group's reputation
- Increase dissemination opportunities by tapping into academics' audiences
- Deepen relationships with academia.

This type of collaboration is useful for:

- Getting informal advice on your evidence and general work
- Getting to know academics better and establishing long-lasting relationships
- Bringing other evidence to the table (and potentially identifying how any gaps can be filled with new research).

## Participating in forums, networks and communities of practice:

These might be 'getting together' events where organisations share learning, research and evidence on policy and practice developments and/or offer peer support.

Through this type of collaboration you might be able to get academic consultancy/advice, but also use these opportunities as ways to connect with an academic in the first place.

This type of collaboration is for you if you want to:

- Network with academics
- Keep an eye on what is happening in the world of academia
- Identify opportunities to feed your evidence into
- Identify opportunities to link to academics; for example, to speak at an event, write a joint research proposal or carry out research for/with you
- Get informal advice on specific issues.

This type of collaboration is useful for:

- Networking
- Identifying collaboration opportunities
- Exchanging ideas and support.

### In the spotlight

***Scottish Knowledge Exchange Community of Practice (SKECP)***

SKECP is a network of knowledge exchange (KE) practitioners and researchers, who share practice and experience, build peer relationships for information exchange and support, build capacity for knowledge exchange, advance knowledge of KE effectiveness, and share KE events and activities.

Their aims are to increase understanding of best practice in KE, disseminate new evidence to improve practice and develop an environment for people working in KE to share and learn.

It is organised jointly by Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, Centre for Youth and Criminal Justice[10], Evaluation Support Scotland and Healthcare Improvement Scotland[11].

The Community of Practice aims to host four seminars per year, inviting guest speakers on topics relating to KE; this may coincide with publication of recent research, on a key concept related to KE work or on a topic suggested by members. Seminar sessions are also an opportunity for networking, questions and discussion.

The Community of Practice is open to anyone who has a KE or evidence-to-action remit in their job. For further information and/or to join SKECP visit: https://skecp.wordpress.com

[10]www.cycj.org.uk
[11]www.healthcareimprovementscotland.org

In the spotlight

***Scottish Co-production Network (SCN)***

A key role for SCN is bringing people together to share their learning and experiences around co-production. Through local and national events, online discussions and case studies the Network highlights the different work that is being carried out around co-production, often across varying sectors and policy areas.

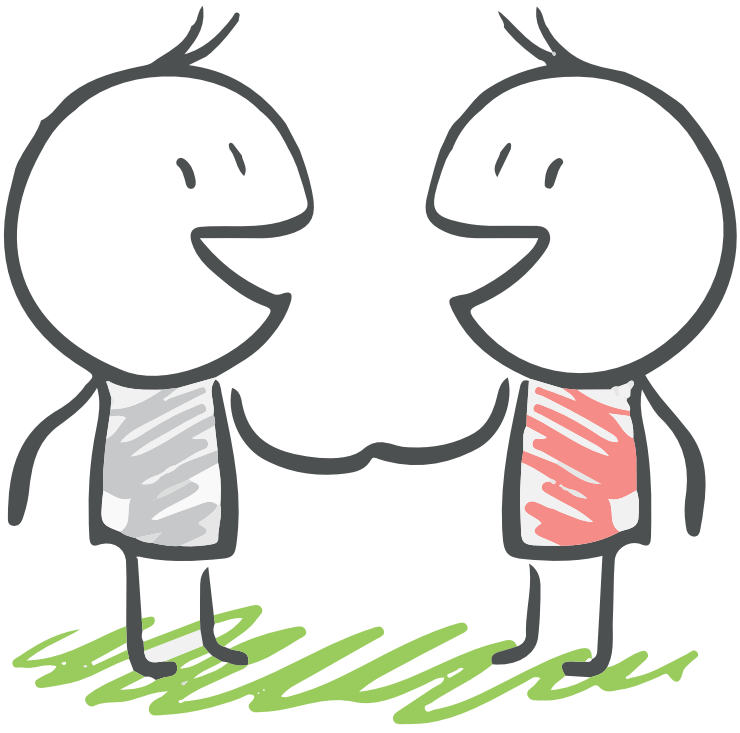
Co-production is underpinned by a common set of values which work across sectors to tie together people's experiences, meaning that even if the details are different there exists a commonality which can be built on to develop further understanding and shared learning.

We have seen this commonality in the links between network members from academia and the public and third sectors. Academics in the network benefit from the chance to attend events where they can meet practitioners, policy makers and other co-producers whom they can then connect with in relation to their own work. They can also hear about and be involved with real examples of co-production, and can discuss the opportunities, barriers and pitfalls of co-production in practice with colleagues.

The network has an important role in disseminating information and highlighting useful research, tools and frameworks which provide the theoretical basis for co-production. The network's website includes links to resources which enable people from the third sector and beyond to access research from universities and other institutions and make connections with academia.

Events are a key part of the network's role and academics have been involved in sessions and workshops around specific topics such as evaluation, where academics play a key role. Wider national events provide opportunities for discussion and interaction on a meaningful level that may not occur without an intermediary facilitator.

The SCN was established in 2011 as a partnership between the Scottish Community Development Centre, the Joint Improvement Team and NHS Tayside. Find out more about the SCN and how to become a member at www.coproductionscotland.org.uk



# Section 4: Getting the best from your collaboration

Working in partnership certainly will benefit you; however, it is helpful to remember that partnerships do not operate in a vacuum and that there might be a number of challenges that emerge throughout the life of the collaboration.

This section highlights some of the challenges that might arise, and solutions to help you overcome/avoid them.

## Level of academic experience needed

There are many universities and academic institutions around so it is important to choose the right academic for your project, both in terms of area of expertise and experience. You don't necessarily need or want the leading professor in your subject field but an undergraduate student may not be experienced enough in research or your subject area to give you what you need.

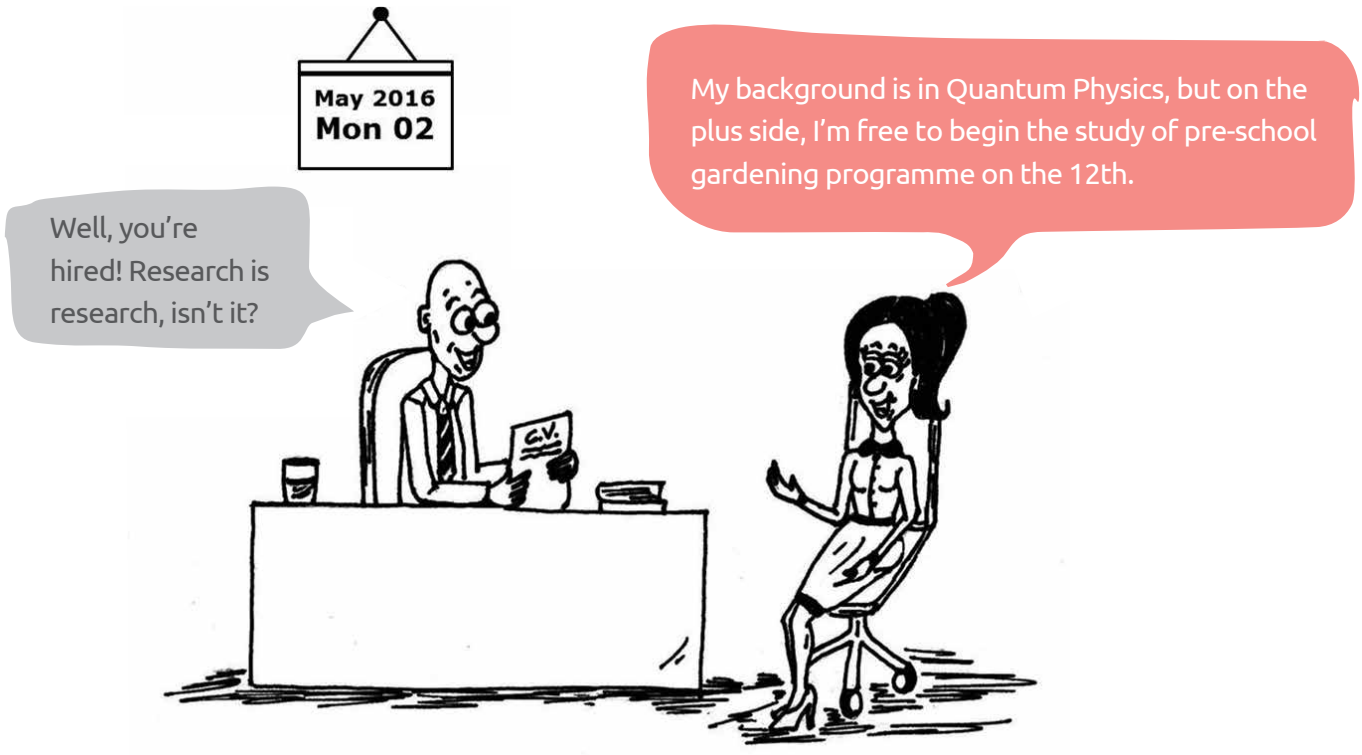
**Solution:** Think about the 'person specification' for the academic you want to collaborate with – in other words, the experience you think they need to have. Seek advice from your stakeholders on who to approach. Also, look out for potential contacts at events.

## Same book, same page?

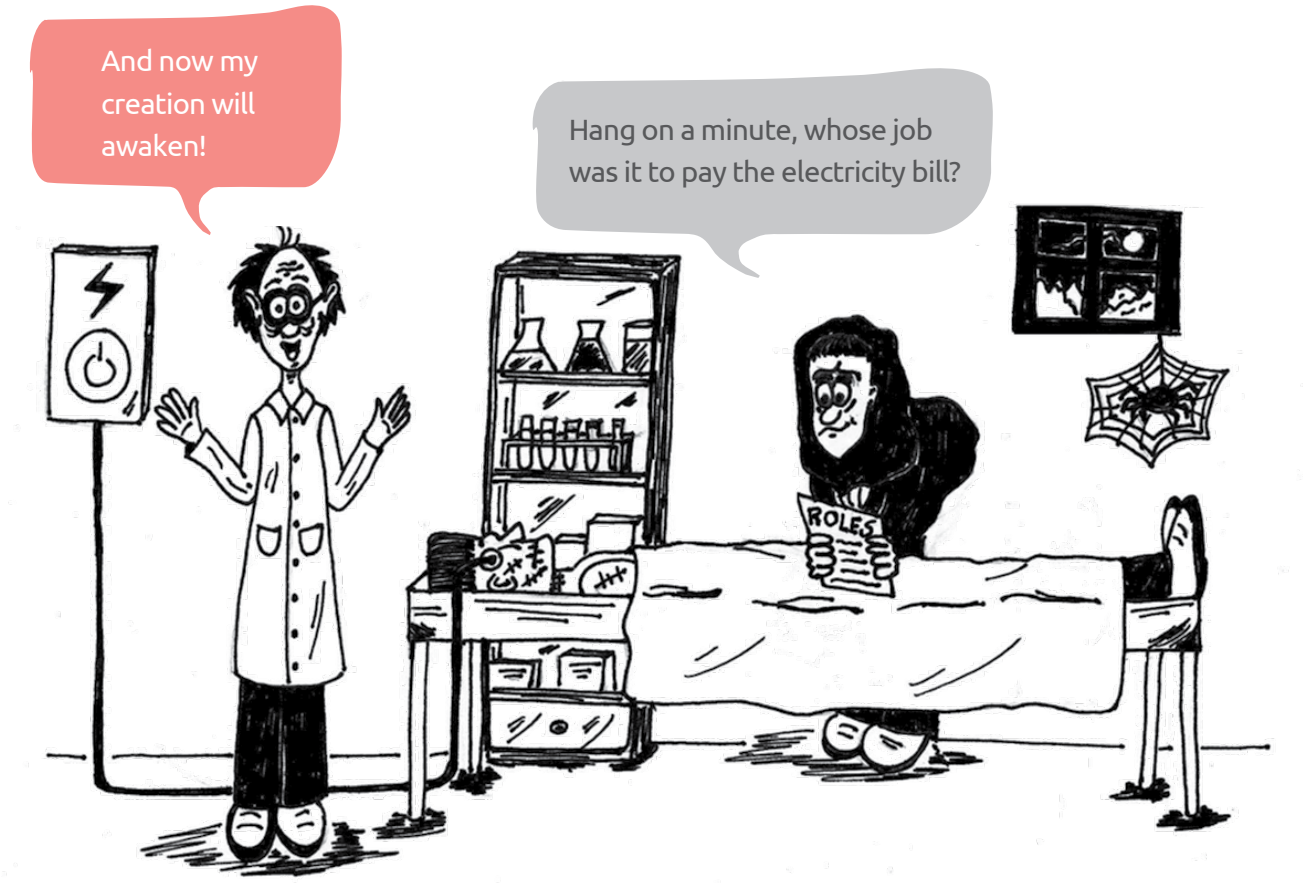
If the academic support you receive is not tailored to your organisation's needs from the start you are likely to be disappointed with the results you get, therefore wasting money and/or other resources.

Issues might also arise if your organisation disagrees with the conclusions drawn by your academic partner, or the academic challenges the evidence you have generated (the latter might not necessarily be a bad thing but it could create tensions in the collaboration).

**Solution:** Setting out the specification of your collaboration from the outset will help ensure that everyone works towards the same goal. Be clear when you first make contact about what you want and what you can offer in return. If you cannot offer much because of constraints be open and honest about it.




**Get the right academic for the job**




**Agree roles and responsibilities early**

Agree:

- Outcomes and outcome measures for the project
- Activities to help you achieve those outcomes
- Roles and responsibilities against the activities – you might want to lead some and support others
- Common language, data confidentiality and ownership of research findings
- Timescales and milestones so you know where you are/should be as the collaboration develops
- How you will critique each other's work in a constructive way
- Who the audience for the work is; this will determine the language and tone needed to disseminate findings.

Remember to be open and honest with each other, disclose any issues as they arise and offer solutions. Keep touching base to help build trust; ongoing communication will help you build a strong collaboration.

## Available resources

Despite perceptions, academics might not always have access to funding. It is important to remember that there is a system around using university funds, which might limit individuals' access to it. No research is free; even if you are not paying for the researcher's time you may have to commit resources to supporting, contributing to, or managing the research.

**Solution:** Regardless of the level of collaboration, even if it is short term, draw up a working agreement so both sides are clear on who is doing what and any resource implications (see **'In the spotlight'** example on page 18). Be ready to discuss what resources you are comfortable sharing and consider ways in which your collaboration might be able to secure any remaining ones. This also helps prevent, or at least manage, misunderstandings along the way.

In the spotlight

***Collaboration Agreement, Imperial College London***

This agreement sets out the responsibilities, roles and rights of collaborating parties working in conjunction with the Imperial College London[12] on a specific research project or set of projects. All parties will be bound by the same terms and conditions, and the agreement will usually set out how the overall project will be managed between the parties. The agreement is often drawn up following a joint award/research funding agreement and the terms of this main award will often be reflected in the collaboration agreement. It may also contain funding terms; for example, transfer of funding from the lead partner to the other collaborators, or the transfer of additional funding from a commercial partner.

A 'collaboration' or 'working' agreement is required for work involving at least one other research partner on a project.

For more information about this and other types of agreements visit: www3.imperial.ac.uk/researchsupportcontractsandip/typesofcontractagreement

[12]www.imperial.ac.uk

## Working styles

Academics without collaboration experience might struggle to understand how their skills may apply in community settings, or that academic approaches need to be adapted for community settings.

**Solution:** Be open to honest conversations and make sure you are all aware of where your strengths and weaknesses lie from the start

## Time demands

Academics are often under pressure to publish research in journals, attend/contribute to conferences, supervise other researchers, and even deliver lectures. On the other hand, you may struggle to find time to step away from project delivery to do some research.

Sometimes collaborations can take longer than expected; for example, when taking part in an advisory group for a one-year project and four quarterly meetings turn into eight as the project is extended for a second year.

There might be specific periods of time in which other priorities will take precedence; for example, when a funding application is due, or when academics have to teach and/or carry out student examinations. You don't want to leave the academic waiting for a response for so long they lose interest, nor do you want to sit around waiting for them to get back to you.

**Solution:** Be clear from the start on what each of you can offer in terms of time, and agree what can be realistically achieved in that timeframe. Follow up verbal contact by e-mail so you have a paper trail and don't forget to provide a deadline to hear back, whenever possible; it'll help the academic (and you) prioritise workload. If conditions change and you can no longer fulfil the original commitment, bring it up as soon as you can and review the collaboration.

**Make sure the research method suits your organisation and service users**

## Approaches to defining and prioritising problems and identifying strategies for solutions

There may be some differences in approach and values between the third sector and academics that you need to make explicit at the start. For example, researchers may prioritise strict adherence to research protocols or tools while a third sector organisation may want to take a more needs-led or flexible approach.

**Solution:** Acknowledge and accept that you come from different angles, which are both valid and useful. Accept that no research can be entirely value-neutral. Have an early discussion about how you usually frame your findings generally, and share examples of reports so you can spot differences and similarities in style.

## Providing feedback and sharing ideas

You might find that some academics communicate for their peers rather than in layman terms. The result? Your evidence and message get lost in translation.

*"The style of interaction associated with conducting academic research may also cause conflicts. Rigorously critiquing the work of others is usually a necessary first step in defining a research question. This style of challenge and counter challenge over ideas may not be comfortable for those outside the academic environment, perceiving it as personal criticisms."*
**Margolis and Runyan (1998)**

**Solution:** Create a safe and honest space where you feel comfortable sharing ideas and constructively critiquing others. It takes time to build trust, but trust is the magic ingredient for effective collaborations so bear that in mind.

Provide thorough briefings to academics on your audience when asking them to present or write to/for them, so they can adapt their communication style; but don't be too prescriptive or you will limit the benefits of getting them involved. Furthermore, when inviting academics to do an oral input such as: a presentation, vlog, podcast or webinar, offer to run a trial with them. These types of collaborations happen in real-time so it is good to be prepared.

## Using information to different timescales

This can be a real problem. Some, if not most, academics might struggle to use results before they are published in peer-reviewed journals. This might lead to a delay in dissemination to the beneficiaries of the research. On the other hand, you might want to set out some recommendations as a result of the research. Academics might struggle with this; they might be seen by their peers as to be over-interpreting results.

**Solution:** Agree from the start how you will disseminate and communicate evidence so there are no surprises at a later time. Drawing up a communication/dissemination strategy can be helpful (see the **Resources** section to find out how to do this).

## Collaboration over, relationship over?

A lot of effort, time and resources might go into setting up collaborations. How can you maintain the relationship with the academic once the work is over so your investment doesn't go to waste?

**Solution:** Invite the academics you worked with to join your mailing list and networks you manage, and catch up regularly either by phone, e-mail or, even better, face-to-face so they can hear about your latest work and you about theirs. Who knows, informal chats might lead to future collaborations.

**Do not let** these challenges put you off from reaching out to academics. Remember that the majority of academics working within social sciences and social policy get into research "to make a difference" (Nutley et al., 2005). Instead, be aware of what could go wrong and collaboratively agree ways around any barriers.

You would be extremely lucky to get your collaboration with academics (or any collaboration for that matter) a hundred per cent right the first time around; in fact, you will likely go through quite a few of the challenges raised in this guide. However, seeing these challenges through can lead to long-lasting, valuable collaborations. Think of collaborating as 'running marathons' rather than 'sprinting'.

There are lots of resources out there with great advice on setting up, maintaining and improving collaborations; you can find some of these in the Resources section of this guide. Getting your collaboration right will take time and effort but when you get there it will be well worth it. So keep trying!

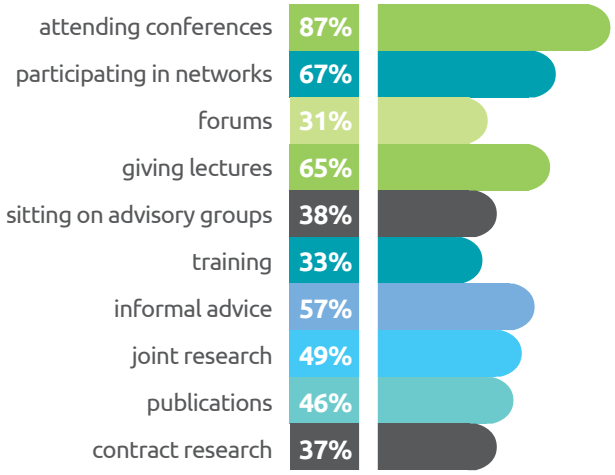
# Part 2:

## Top tips for finding the right academic for your collaboration

You might already have some experience working with academics but perhaps not so much in initiating contact with them? If this is the case, don't worry.

This part of the guide offers you some top tips to identify academics.

Findings from a web-based survey carried out in 2008/9 seeking to identify the types of interactions between academics and other groups indicate that most interactions happen as illustrated in the infographic.




(Abreu et al., 2009).

**Before you approach an academic:**

- Be sure that collaborating with academics is the right tactic for you/your organisation. Do you have enough time/resources to invest?
- Be clear about what you would like to gain from making contact.

**Other things to consider include:**

- Are there particular research topics you would like to put forward?
- Is there scope for a project that could form a placement for an internship or PhD study?
- Are you interested in becoming part of a research advisory group or contributing to a specialised working committee?

Use the advice in the previous sections to hone your thoughts.

## Tip#1: Consider who else in your organisation and networks could help you link to academics

Before you invest your time and resources in finding academic support, consult with colleagues within your organisation. They might have what you need or might know who could help.

Get to know your board of trustees. Is there anyone who works in academia or who has links to academia that you could capitalise on?

## Tip#2: Reach out to others to find the academic you need

There might be many academics working in the field you want to research so you will need to narrow the list down. It might help to:

- Contact any relevant **intermediary/ membership bodies** for that field and ask them for advice. They often network with academics and are aware of who is doing what. For example, Social Enterprise Scotland for social enterprise policy; Volunteer Scotland for volunteering policy; Voluntary Health Scotland for health policy and practice, and Children in Scotland for policy issues that affect children.

  You can use/download the Scottish Charity Register, hosted by the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR), to help you identify the intermediary you need: www.oscr.org.uk/charities/search-scottish-charity-register

- Sign up to **The Conversation**'s mailing list: An independent news website featuring content sourced entirely from the global academic and research community, so you can identify experts in specific fields both at local and national levels: http://theconversation.com/uk/newsletter
- Contact **staff within Universities** that have the role to **broker and foster links** between academics and business/industry/policy sectors. (This activity may also be called knowledge exchange; knowledge transfer; commercialisation/research strategy and innovation; enterprise; public engagement, and so forth). These staff will be able to help you understand how to get involved, and should be able to put you in contact with the most relevant people. For example, the Knowledge Exchange teams within Universities are dedicated to help students and academic staff to identify connections within their organisation, so they are well placed to tell you who is doing research in your area of interest. Getting in touch with **Universities Scotland**, the representative body of Scotland's 19 higher education institutions, might be able to help you identify who to contact: www.universities-scotland.ac.uk
- Contact **Knowledge Transfer Partnerships (KTP)**, a programme funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and designed to help organisations like yours to improve their competitiveness and productivity through the better use of knowledge, technology and skills that reside within the UK knowledge base. There are a number of offices based in Scotland so find out which one is the best for you at: www.esrc.ac.uk/funding/funding-opportunities/knowledge-transfer-partnerships and ktp.innovateuk.org/offices
- Get in touch with **third sector and public sector organisations with a 'broker' role**. Some examples are the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR), Iriss, Interface (see **'In the Spotlight'** example below) and the **Scottish Community Development Centre** (SCDC)[13].

## In the spotlight

***Interface***

Established in 2005, *Interface - The knowledge connection for business* is a central hub connecting organisations of all sizes and from all sectors to Scotland's 23 higher education and research institutes. Interface:

- Provides a central point of access to the knowledge, expertise, services and facilities available from Scottish Universities and Research Institutes
- Provides information on capability and capacity in response to enquiries regarding the specialist expertise that is available in the Universities and Research Institutes including queries on research capabilities, consultancy, access to equipment, facilities and so forth
- Filters and direct enquires to individual research via a named point of contact
- Monitors progress of enquiries until a conclusion is reached, and offers support and guidance throughout the process; for example, on funding options.

You can find more information at: www.interface-online.org.uk

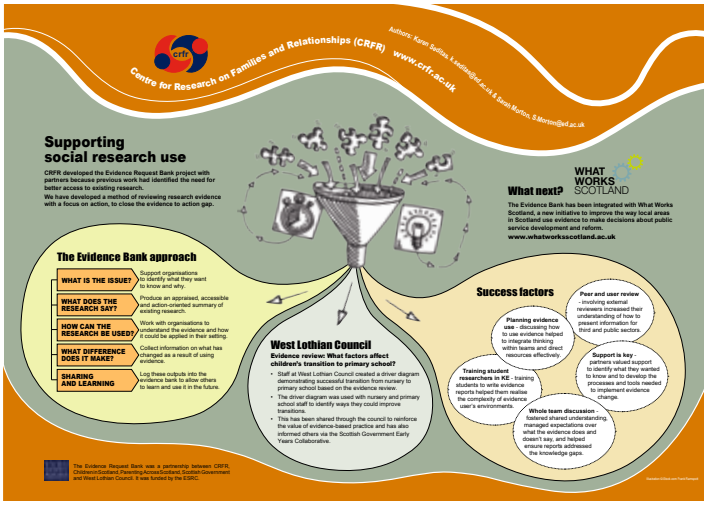
[13]www.scdc.org.uk

## Tip#3: Scope projects related to yours and identify the academic with whom you can discuss links to your work

Spend some time looking on your local university website to find their areas of research. You could look for a link to departments that match your area of work, or link through to research themes or research topics. Have a think about how these research areas could relate to your work. Are there particular projects that are of interest to your organisation? Are contact details for staff working within these research themes supplied?

Having a look at academic papers might also help you identify the lead researcher with expertise in your field area. For example, Social Services Knowledge Scotland (SSKS) is a gateway to a wealth of information and learning materials, including academic evidence and events, to support practitioners in day to day work and in learning.
To access SSKS go to: www.ssks.org.uk

Have you identified a gap in the evidence base for your intervention/service? Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR) and partners have developed the Evidence Request Bank to support better access to existing research. To keep up to date with the Evidence Bank developments register your interest at: www.crfr.ac.uk/projects/current-projects/evidencebank/evidence-bank-form
CRFR produced an infographic that illustrates the method of reviewing research evidence with a focus on action, to close the evidence to action gap, developed by this project.




This infographic can be found at:
www.crfr.ac.uk/assets/KE-posters.pdf

If you are looking for a practical guide on how to go about doing research, the *Research guide for Third Sector Organisations* developed by Dr Roger Courtney for the National Children's Bureau might help (details in **Resources** section).

## Tip#4: Use networking opportunities to spot links to academics

If you and your colleagues attend conferences, collaborative meetings, master classes or groups, take note of the names of academics and researchers who are attending as delegates or who are speaking. These people could either become a contact themselves or may know of others working in the field that they could put you in contact with.

In the spotlight

***What Works Scotland***

What Works Scotland (WWS) is a partnership project that brings together the Universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, other academics across Scotland, and partners from the third sector and public sector to improve the way local areas in Scotland use evidence to make decisions about public service development and reform. WWS is working with specific Community Planning Partnerships involved in the design and delivery of public services to:

- Learn what is and what isn't working in their local area
- Encourage collaborative learning with a range of local authority, business, public sector and community partners
- Better understand what effective policy interventions and effective services look like
- Promote the use of evidence in planning and service delivery
- Help organisations get the skills and knowledge they need to use and interpret evidence
- Create case studies for wider sharing and sustainability.

As the programme progresses, WWS will develop other local and national partnerships within five case study areas and as priority topics are identified. For more information about WWS go to: whatworksscotland.ac.uk

WWS organises regular events to disseminate learning and consult on developments so make sure you sign up to its mailing list to stay updated: whatworksscotland.ac.uk/contact-us

## Tip#5: Use social media to communicate with academics

Follow up on any blogs, magazines/ newspapers articles, journals or tweets you read that link to research findings. Names of potential contacts will be listed and social media can help you connect with them and keep them informed about (and interested in) your work.

Results from a recent research project[14] carried out by Dr Helen Donelan for The Open University investigating how academics are using social media tools to form wider connections indicate that academics use social media to learn from others' work, extend the audience for their work, and create/maintain networks. More at: http://oro.open.ac.uk/42255/1/Donelan.pdf

Don't miss the opportunity to increase your profile in academia by connecting to academics through LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and so forth. The *Evidence for Success* guide offers further advice, so have a read!

[14]Currently going through peer review at the Journal of Further and Higher Education

# Part 3:
## Resources

In this part of the guide you will find additional resources that will come in handy when wanting to collaborate with academics.

*Evidence for Success* includes information about useful resources to help third sector organisations generate and use evidence to influence policy and practice.

## Useful websites:

### Centre for Research on Families and Relationships (CRFR), hosted by The University of Edinburgh

CRFR offers training and support to researchers, practitioners and policy-makers who are interested in evidence-based services and in our knowledge-to-action approach. CRFR also offers resources including infographics.
www.crfr.ac.uk/using-research/knowledge-exchange-training-and-resources

### Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research and Policy (SCPHRP), hosted by the University of Edinburgh

SCPHRP was established in 2008 to encourage and facilitate collaborations between all sectors of the public health community in Scotland. To achieve this they:

- Foster collaboration between government, researchers and the public health community to develop a national programme of intervention development, large-scale implementation and robust evaluation, and
- Build capacity within the public health community for collaborative research of the highest quality, with maximum impact on policies, programmes and practice.
  www.scphrp.ac.uk

### Evaluation Support Scotland (ESS)

ESS is a registered Scottish charity that works with third sector organisations and funders so that they can measure and report on their impact.

Most of ESS's work is done in partnership with the third sector and the public sector. They regularly team up with other evidence champions to build networks that can be used to share knowledge and evidence from the third sector, but also to exchange examples of good practice.
www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk

### Scottish Universities Insight Institute (SUII), hosted by University of Strathclyde

SUII supports programmes of knowledge exchange which address and provide insight on substantial issues that Scotland and the wider world face.

Their programmes break down disciplinary and organisational barriers in bringing together academics from different backgrounds, policy makers and practitioners.

They mobilise existing knowledge in fresh ways through a sustained and collaborative focus on a shared issue, and aim to support decision makers in all sectors of society to be better informed.

Their partner universities are: Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Heriot Watt, St Andrews, Stirling, Strathclyde, and Associate Member Glasgow School of Art.
www.scottishinsight.ac.uk

### The Alliance for Useful Evidence – Evidence Exchange project (2014-present)

Evidence Exchange seeks to work with practitioners and policymakers across the sectors (third, statutory and private) to share evidence across selected social policy themes and to build people's confidence to use evidence.

The project aims to encourage the uptake and dissemination of useful evidence, but also it will explore in practice what are the effective approaches to dialogue and dissemination. Evidence Exchange benefits from the valuable input of academics, civil servants, third sector leaders and funders who are part of the project's Advisory Group from the four jurisdictions in the UK.
www.alliance4usefulevidence.org/evidence-exchange

### The Centre for Service Excellence (CenSE)

CenSE is committed to driving forward high quality research about service management to achieve a real impact on its practice in both public and private sector services. CenSE is also committed to collaborative engagement and co-production between CenSE and service firms and agencies. Its range of activities will include consultancy, mentoring and action research with service businesses and agencies; workshops and seminars; executive education; cutting edge research, and the launch of a flagship M.Sc. in Service Management.
www.research.ed.ac.uk/portal/en/organisations/centre-for-service-excellence(dddefc30-031a-4d45-bc1c-c68294d40b44).html

### The Conversation (funded by The Alliance for Useful Evidence)

The Conversation is an independent news website featuring content sourced entirely from the global academic and research community. It couples academic rigour with journalistic flair to unlock the knowledge of the world's sharpest minds for the general public.
www.alliance4usefulevidence.org/evidence-exchange/manifesto-check and theconversation.com/uk

### The University of Edinburgh's Business School

The University of Edinburgh Business School enjoys a long tradition of teaching and research. The School offers undergraduate, postgraduate and executive education programmes in business and management and provides a platform for research, discussion and debate on a wide range of business issues.
www.business-school.ed.ac.uk/about

## Tools and resources:

### A manifesto for partnership, National Union of Students

This manifesto is an attempt at defining what partnership could mean, as well as explaining why students' unions are so important in creating and maintaining partnership approaches.
www.canterbury.ac.uk/Support/learning-teaching-enhancement-unit/Documents/PIL-Documents/NUS---a-Manifesto-for-Partnership.pdf

### Planning tool to negotiate and reflect on the different roles within a partnership, ChildLine Scotland and CRFR (2012)

| Tasks and activities | Traditional role division | Partnership |
|---|---|---|
| Develop agenda | | |
| Get funding | | |
| Define project | | |
| Collect data/share data | | |
| Analyse data | | |
| Engage stakeholders | | |
| Dissemination and sharing activities | | |
| Continued use | | |

(Morton, 2012) NB: See page 8 for a worked example

### Evidence Bank - a knowledge service which supports evidence into action, CRFR (2013-present)

The Evidence Bank builds on an evidence-to-action model developed by CRFR, which explored ways of supporting services to identify specific gaps in knowledge and consider how evidence could help address them. The processes included providing robust and accessible reviews of diverse evidence, as well as supporting services to plan how to use this evidence in practice.

The model was developed in partnership with children, families, relationship and disability organisations and services in the third and public sectors: www.crfr.ac.uk/projects/current-projects/evidencebank

For case studies of how organisations are using the Evidence Bank go to: www.crfr.ac.uk/assets/ERB-pilot-Evidence-into-Action-case-studies.pdf

### Manifesto for partnership research between universities and other agencies, CRFR (2015)

This infographic sets out steps to take to build an effective research partnership:

Download your copy of the infographic at: https://skecp.files.wordpress.com/2015/04/manifesto.pdf

### Planning Tools: How to write a communications strategy, Overseas Development Institute (ODI)

*"Drawing up a communications strategy is an art, not a science and there are lots of different ways of approaching the task."*

ODI: The UK's leading independent think tank on international development and humanitarian issues, offers a guide with advice on how to write a communications strategy.
www.odi.org/publications/5186-communications-strategy-planning
www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/6369.pdf

### Research guide for third sector organisations, Dr Roger Courtney, National Children's Bureau (2012)

This guide focuses primarily on how to access, gather and analyse evidence in relation to what works (i.e. what produces positive outcomes) for children, young people and/or families.
www.ncb.org.uk/media/858179/research_guide_for_third_sector_organisations.pdf

### Reducing Reoffending Evaluation Pack, Scottish Government (2015)

This resource, developed by analysts in the Scottish Government in partnership with the third sector, provides user-friendly guidance and resources to support practitioners and commissioners on how to use the 5-Step Approach to designing and evaluating criminal justice interventions.

The pack includes guidance on how to review evidence, as well as illustrative examples of logic models, indicators, data collection frameworks and evidence summaries. It helps services and interventions: a) embed robust evidence of 'what works' into practice; b) conduct a logic model evaluation, and c) help commissioners to judge the value of interventions. A summary version of this guidance is also available.
Full resource:
www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00472798.pdf
Quick overview:
www.gov.scot/Resource/0047/00472819.pdf

# References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The **Knowledge Translation Network** (KTN) was established in 2012 in response to an identified need to support the third sector to maximise the impact of the knowledge and evidence they generate by ensuring it reaches Scotland's service providers and decision-makers. Running parallel to the Scottish Third Sector Research Forum (TSRF), the KTN has two key aims: (i) to share learning about effective knowledge translations and (ii) to promote the use of evidence in decision-making.

The **Scottish Third Sector Research Forum** (TSRF) brings together people from the third sector, Scottish Government and other partners to: (i) promote and share research about or from the third sector; (ii) work collaboratively to identify research questions and meet evidence gaps, and (iii) promote the use of research to improve policy and practice.

Your evidence could help us improve this guide further so please share your thoughts with the KTN. Did you find the guidance useful? Do you have any comments on how it can be improved?

If so, please return any comments or queries to: info@evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk

# Collaborating with academics

An Evidence for Success supplementary guide

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