Waipapa Taumata Rau
University of Auckland

How to Plan your Research for Real World Impact

30 July 2026

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Karakia timatanga

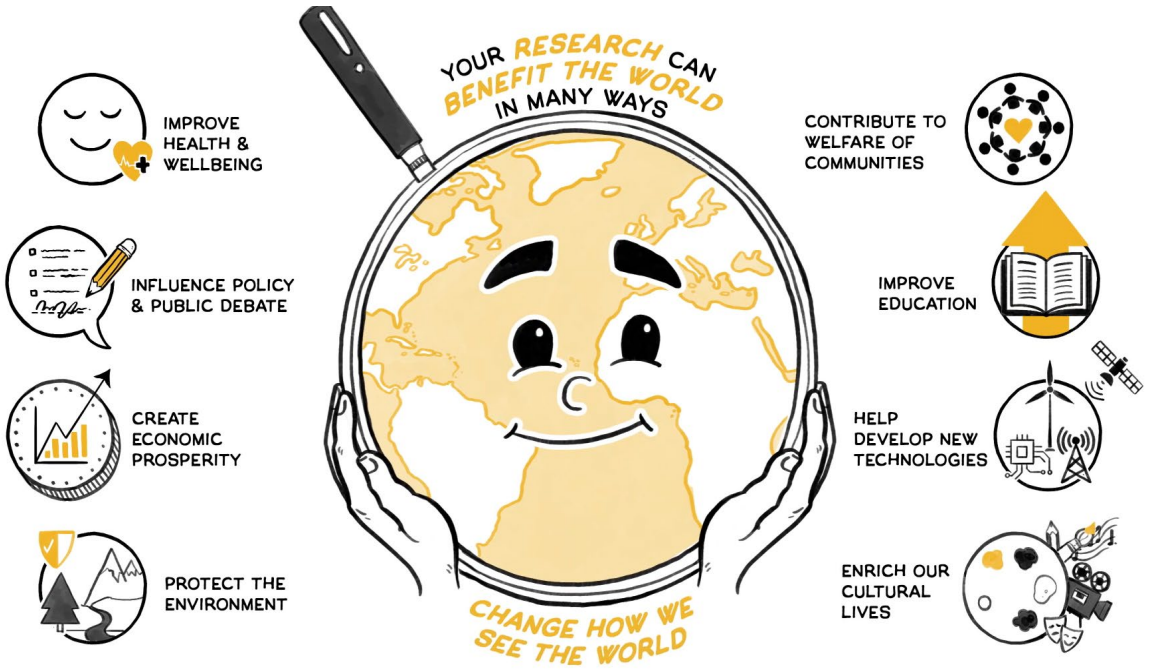
Today's agenda

- Karakia timatanga
- What is research impact?
- Why is it important?
- Mapping pathways to impact
- How to begin planning for impact
- What next?
- Karakia whakamutunga

What is research impact?

So, what is research impact?

The University of Auckland defines research impact as: The contribution of research and creative practice to positive change in society, culture, the environment, or the economy, usually arising through productive, respectful, and sustained dialogue between researchers and the wider world.

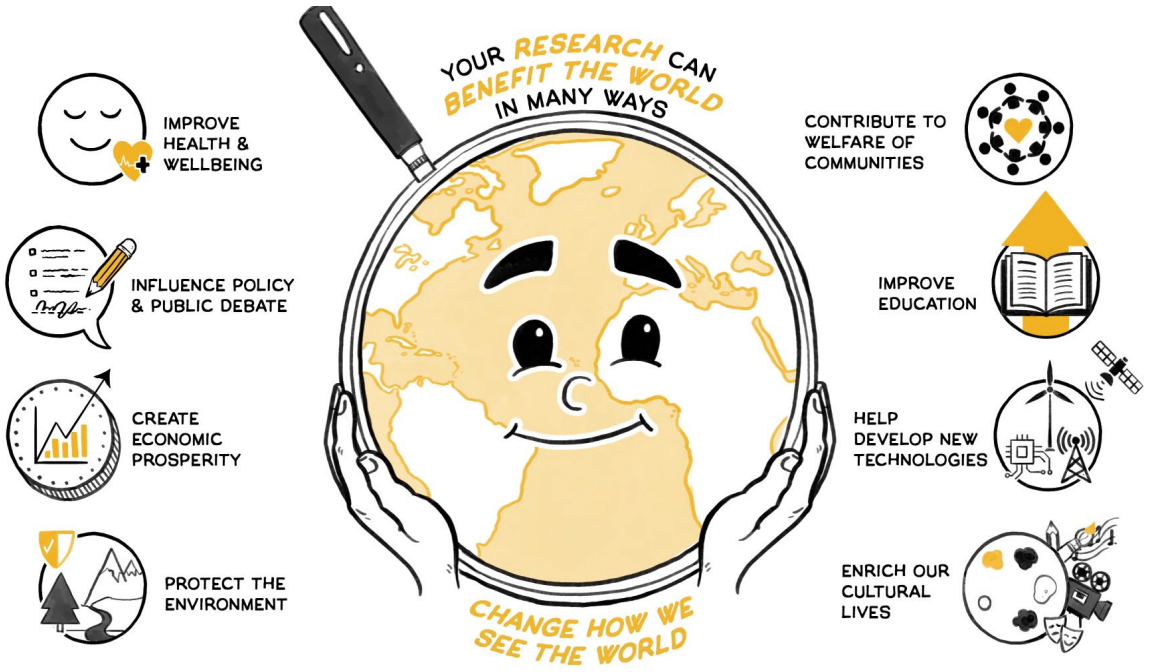


Source: *University College Dublin*

So, what is research impact?

MBIE: A change to the economy, society or environment, beyond contribution to knowledge and skills in research organisations.

HRC: The direct and indirect influence of excellent and innovative research on individuals, communities or society, including improvements to health and other social, economic, cultural or environmental benefits for New Zealand.



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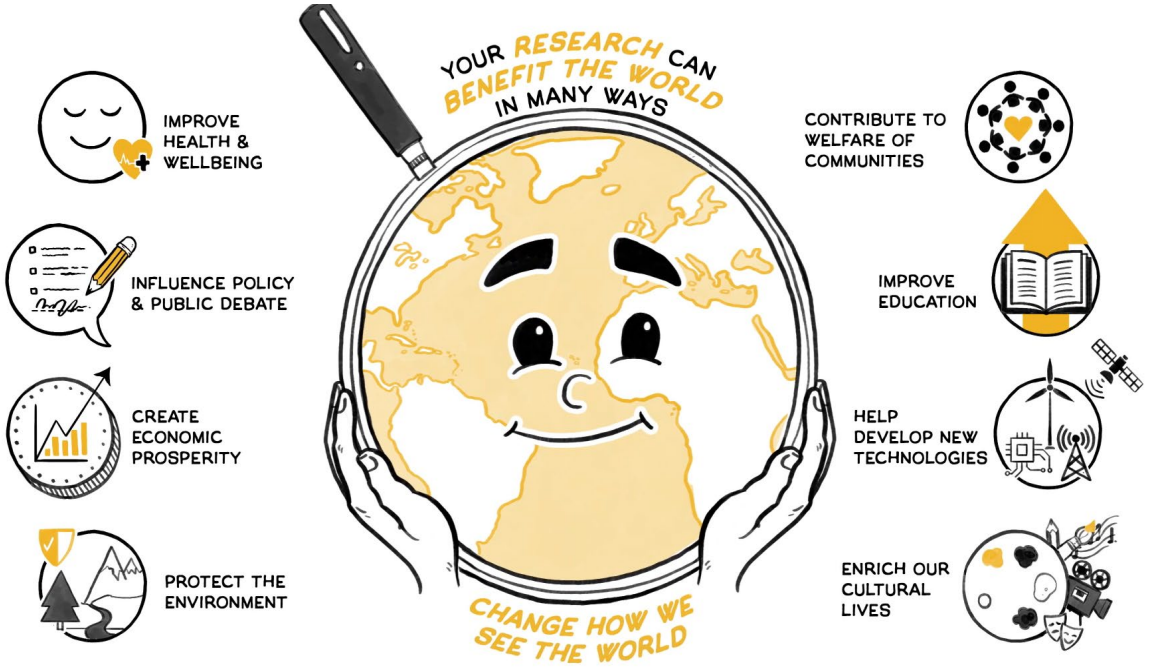
So, what is research impact?

Research impact is about working towards solving wicked problems, benefiting our communities, making a difference in people's lives, and creating **real-world change beyond academia.**



Source: *University College Dublin*

What types of impact are there?

Understanding and Awareness: Increased understanding and knowledge of an issue.

Attitudinal Change: A change in attitudes, typically of a group, towards a new attitude that benefits them or others.

Health and Wellbeing: Improvements in public or individual health, including emotional or physical health outcomes.

Cultural Change: Changes in the prevailing values, attitudes, beliefs, discourse, and patterns of behavior.

Environmental: Benefits for conservation, biodiversity, ecosystems, and physical landscapes, including actions to mitigate climate change and benefits for humans.

Policy: Contributions to new or amended laws, regulations or other policy mechanisms.

Capacity or Preparedness: Enhanced skills, resources, or infrastructure to cope with change and negative effects.

Social: Benefits to specific social groups or society not covered by other types of impact, and broader societal changes such as improved education access or human rights.

Economic: Monetary benefits arising from research, either through money saved, costs avoided, increases in profit or funding, or the creation of new businesses or technologies.

Decision-Making & Behaviour Change: Whether directly or indirectly, research can inform a wide range of individual, group and organisational behaviours and decisions leading to impacts that go beyond the economy, environment, health and wellbeing, or policy.

Source: *Fast Track Impact*

Prospective vs. retrospective impact

Prospective (future) impact:

- Impacts that your research has the potential to make.
- Future-focused.
- Plans and pathways.
- Often seen in funding applications.

Retrospective (past) impact:

- Impacts that have already occurred.
- Evidence-focused.
- Narratives and examples.
- Often seen in promotion applications, case studies, award applications, and narrative CVs.

What positive change could this research contribute to, and how might that happen?

What changed, and what evidence do we have that our research contributed to that change?

Why research impact is important

The value of research impact:

- Benefiting society: Undertaking research that addresses societal issues and inequities.
- Making research more relevant: By bridging the gap between research and public knowledge, research can address community needs more directly.
- Accountability: Public funders need to demonstrate the value of research supported by taxpayer investment (exchequer sources).
- Stakeholder understanding: Showing how research creates value helps secure buy-in, support, and uptake from a wide range of stakeholders.

Why research impact is important

What it means for you as a researcher:

- Supports future funding: Funders are more likely to invest in work that delivers clear benefits to Aotearoa New Zealand.
- Enhances institutional reputation: Demonstrating impact helps your institution attract more funding, students, and partnerships.
- Strengthens your track record: Evidencing past impact contributes to successful applications and academic recognition.
- Enables truly collaborative research: Impact-focused research is done with, not on, communities — prioritising areas of greatest need or concern.
- Encourages holistic approaches: Especially in areas of emerging strategic, cultural, societal, or economic importance.

Why planning for impact matters

Without a clear plan, research impact is often left to chance — uncertain, unpredictable, and sometimes never realised.

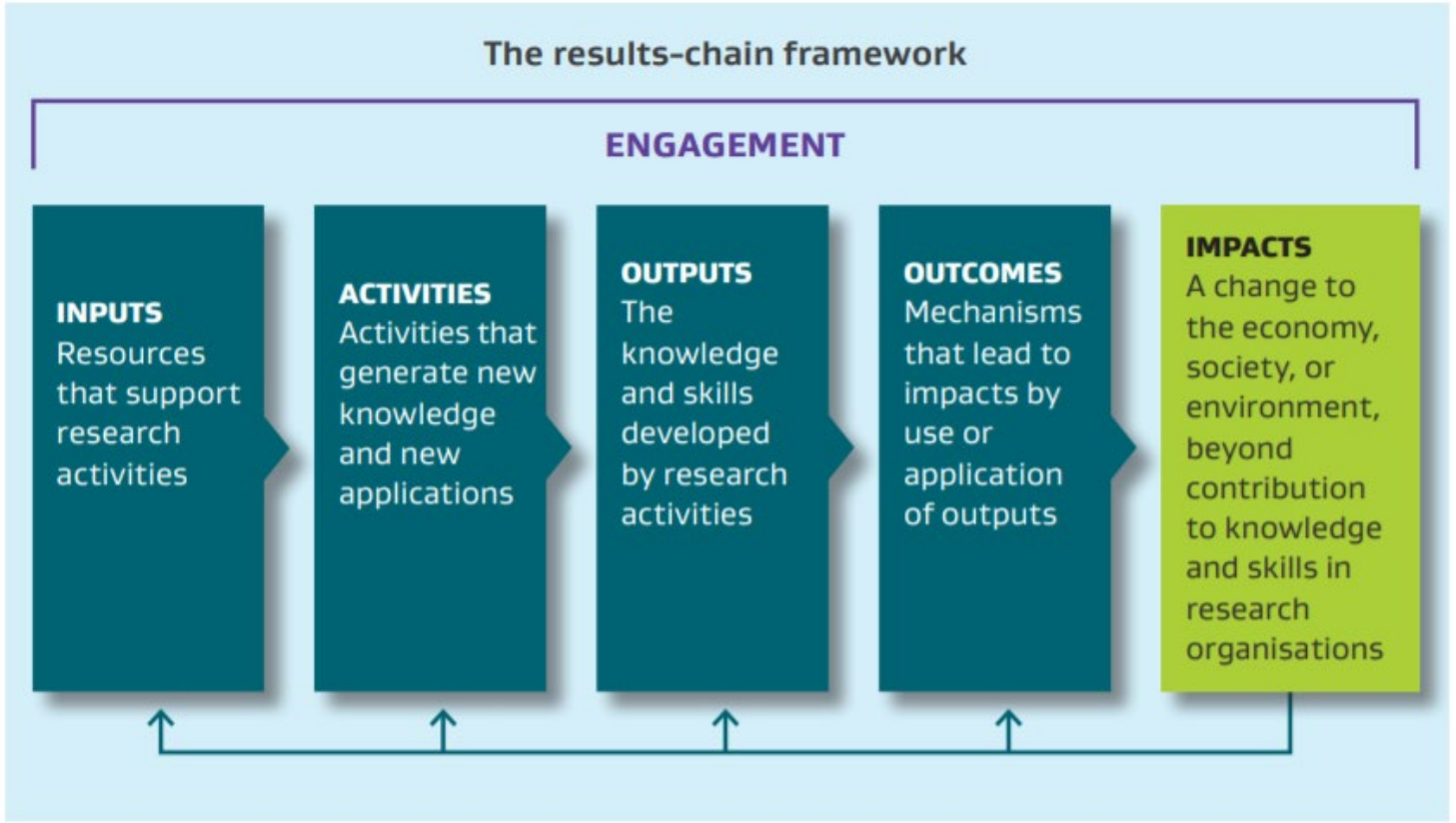
Planning for impact helps you to be intentional about your goals, identify who to involve and when, and track whether you're making a difference.

"I see journal articles, patents, legal fees and then... nothing."

Mapping pathways to impact

The results-chain framework

- Research impact is a shared endeavour across many actors, and progress is often convoluted and unpredictable.
- Defining a ‘line-of-sight to impact’ can help researchers and institutions articulate their part in this shared endeavour.
- Engagement is essential at multiple stages and can shape, accelerate, or redirect the pathway to impact.



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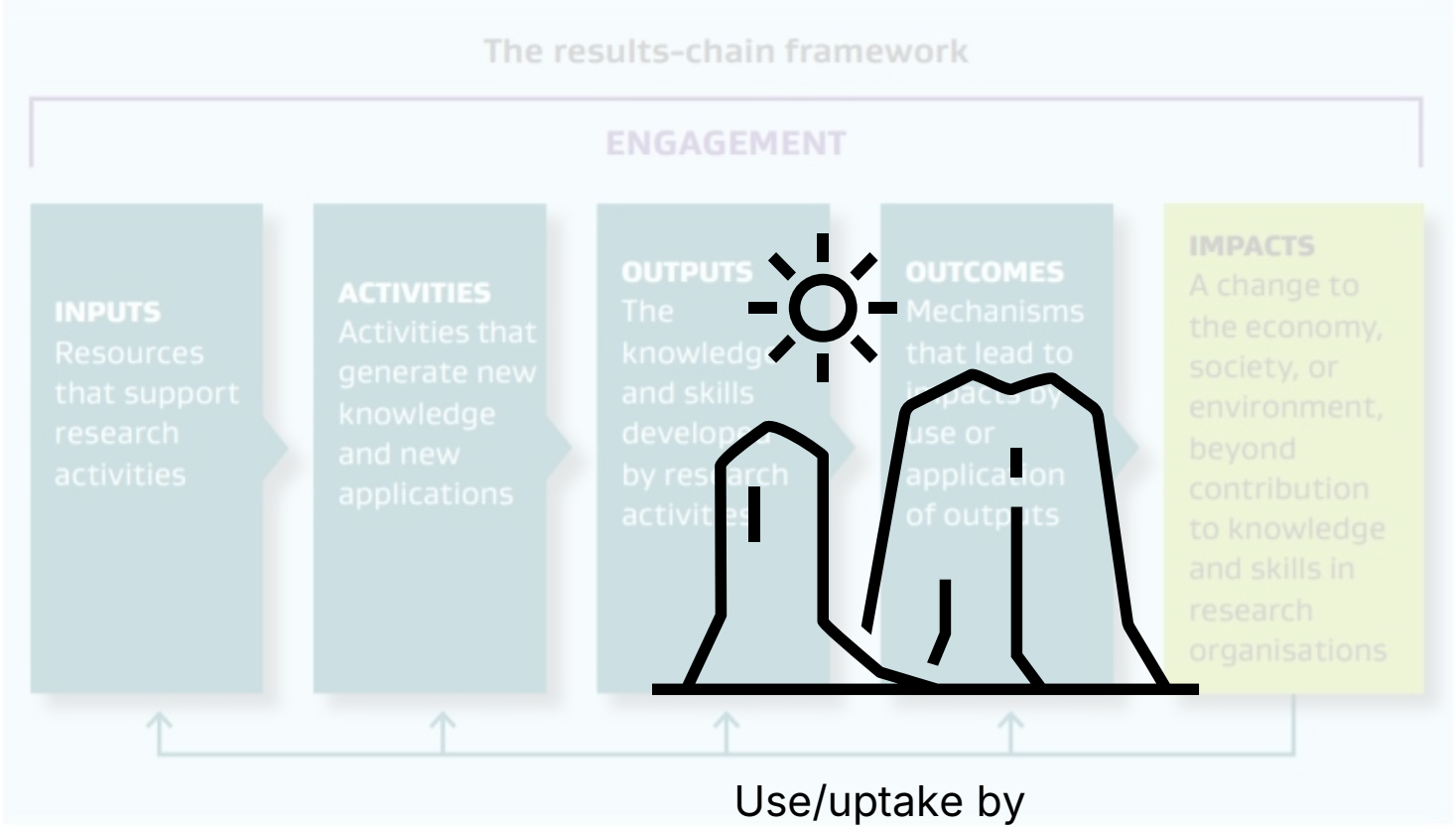


WHY?....THE RESEARCH 'VALLEY OF DEATH'

iPEN
Turbocharging Impact

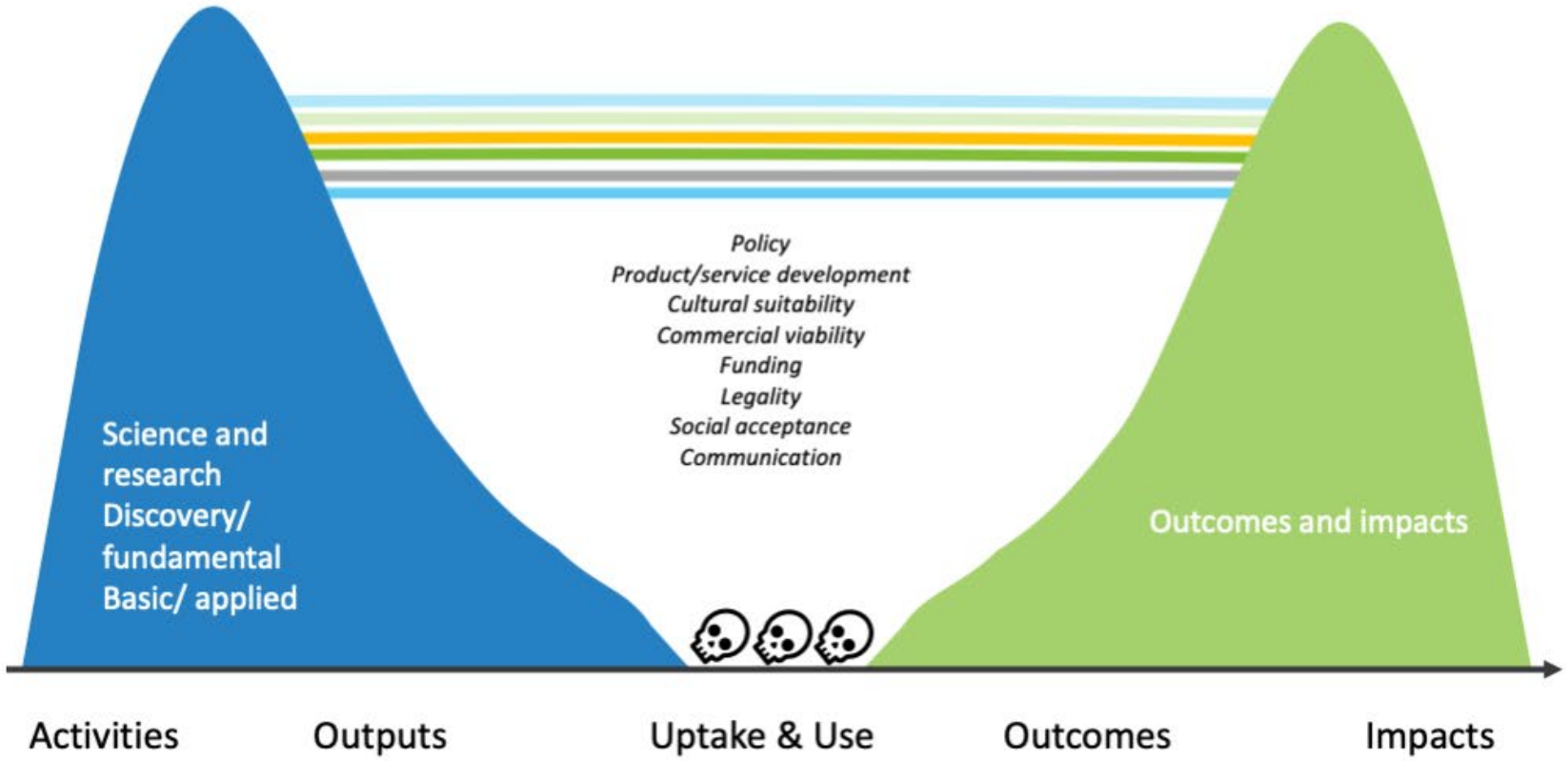
Failings most frequently manifest between dissemination of research findings/distribution of outputs and sufficient adoption and implementation to lead to desired outcomes

ESCAPING THE VALLEY OF DEATH

'Stronger bridge' from activities & outputs to outcomes

iPEN
Turbocharging Impact

Research and science discoveries contribute to outcomes and impact occurs **VIA <u>ONE OR SEVERAL</u> PATHWAYS**



IMPACT PATHWAYS:

Getting from outputs to outcomes

UNDERPINNING PATHWAYS

No impact pathway will proceed without the requisite combination of knowledge, and capability that underpins its progress

KNOWLEDGE
The constantly evolving body of knowledge underpinning other impact pathways. Includes validation of research and contribution to the wider body of knowledge.

MĀTAURANGA MĀORI
Māori knowledge, representing a holistic, dynamic and a continually evolving body of knowledge initially encompassing Te Ao Māori – Māori worldview and perspectives – and the tikanga (cultural practices) that reflect maintain and build this knowledge.

CAPABILITY, RELATIONSHIPS & INFRASTRUCTURE
Other typical 'inputs' required (at individual, team, organisational, and the system levels) that, combined with knowledge, enable impact pathways to progress

Feedback loops with underpinning pathways

POLICY PATHWAY
Leads to changes in policy – strategic, operational or its implementation. Generally led by the public sector.

PRACTICE PATHWAY
Leads to changes in sector, industry and business practice. **This pathway can occur in both public and private settings.**

PUBLIC AND THE COMMUNITY PATHWAY
Leads to changes in communities and the public in their knowledge & awareness, attitudes, and behaviour.

COMMERCIALISATION PATHWAY
Leads to new or improved products, services or processes available in the market.

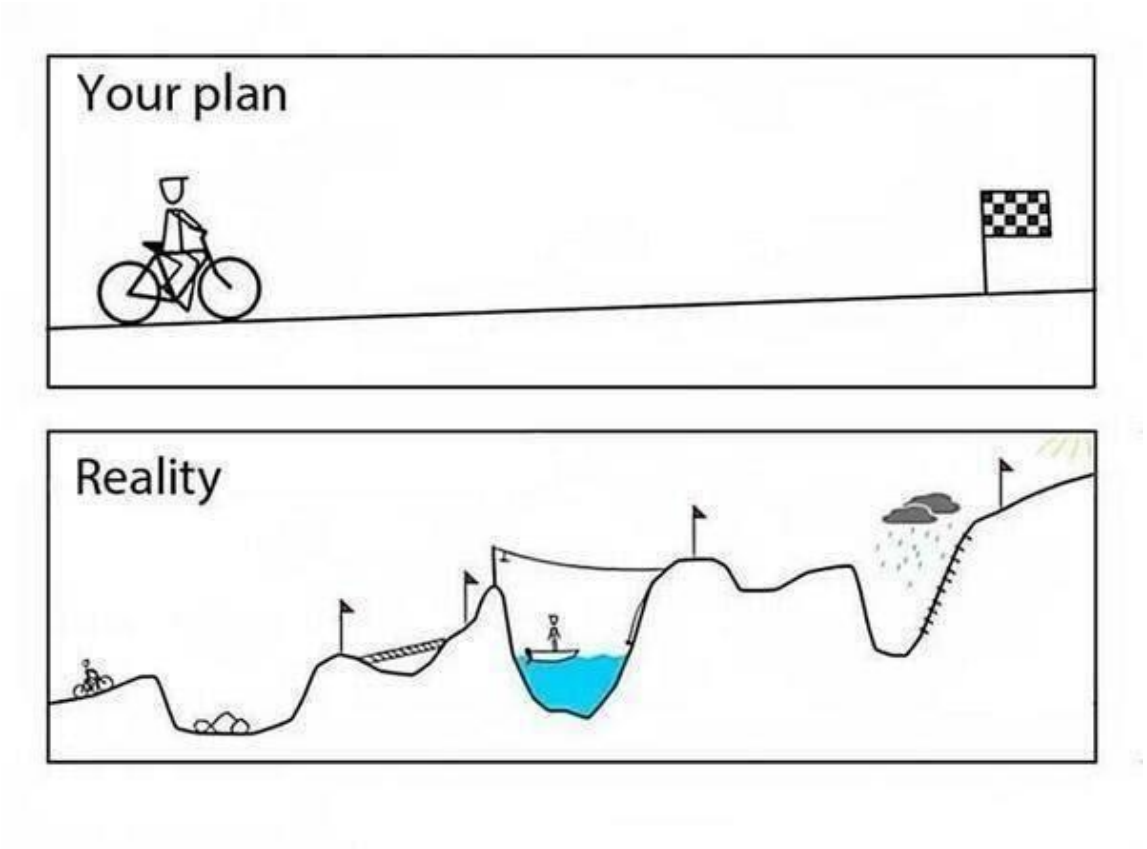
KAUPAPA MĀORI PATHWAY
Working as, by, and with Māori. This pathway is informed by tikanga Māori.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACTS
Social, cultural, economic, environmental
THE CHANGES WE WANT TO SEE HAPPEN

Planning for impact

The planning process

- Identifying the research need
- Defining your (potential) impact
- Mapping your stakeholders
- Prioritising your stakeholders
- Developing engagement plans
- Piecing together your implementation plan



As a CHANGE AGENT you can't make change happen but you CAN create an ENVIRONMENT that increases the odds.

HENRIK KNIBERG #ALI2015

Identifying the research need

Research Need = Problem/Gap + Significance + Evidence

- What problem, challenge, or opportunity does your research address?
- What knowledge is currently out there? How is your research different?
- What is the magnitude of this issue?
  - How many people are affected, who is affected, and where is it felt?
- How can your research contribute to understanding or solving this problem/issue?
- What new information or perspective will it bring?
- Why does this matter to stakeholders, communities, or society?
- How can I evidence that this is a real need?

Defining your (potential) impact

Defining potential impact is about turning a problem into a tangible, meaningful benefit that is specific, significant, and achievable.

Once you have defined this, you can begin creating an impact goal.

- A helpful way to define your potential research impact is to ‘flip’ your identified research need on its head.
- For example, if the problem is frequent flooding in a particular urban area, the research solution might be to design eco-friendly stormwater management systems.
- Think about would indicate that change has happened and that your research has made a difference? What observable changes might you see? How could you evidence this?
- The potential benefits here could be decreased property damage (economic), improved public safety (societal), or healthier urban ecosystems through reduced pollution and enhanced water quality (environmental).

Creating an impact goal

Impact goals should be **SMART.**

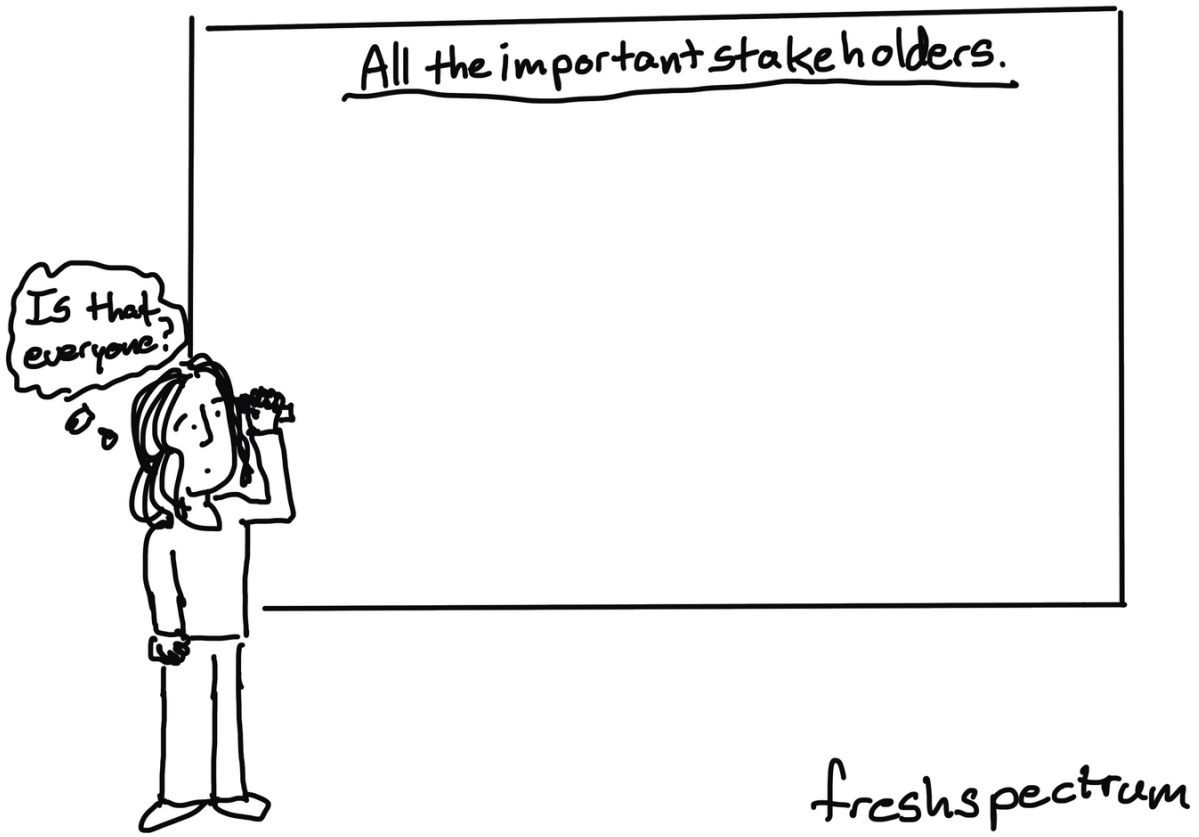
Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound.

- **Specific** – Be specific about the extent of your potential impact
- **Measurable** – What evidence/indicators will prove you're making progress
- **Achievable** – Make sure you can reasonably accomplish your goal given your resources and any constraints
- **Realistic** – Be realistic about what might be able to occur within your sphere of influence. Evidence of an impact plan will help your credibility
- **Time-bound** - consider how long it will take to achieve your impact goal. This may be by the end of your research project, or in twenty years' time! You can build in milestones to keep on track.

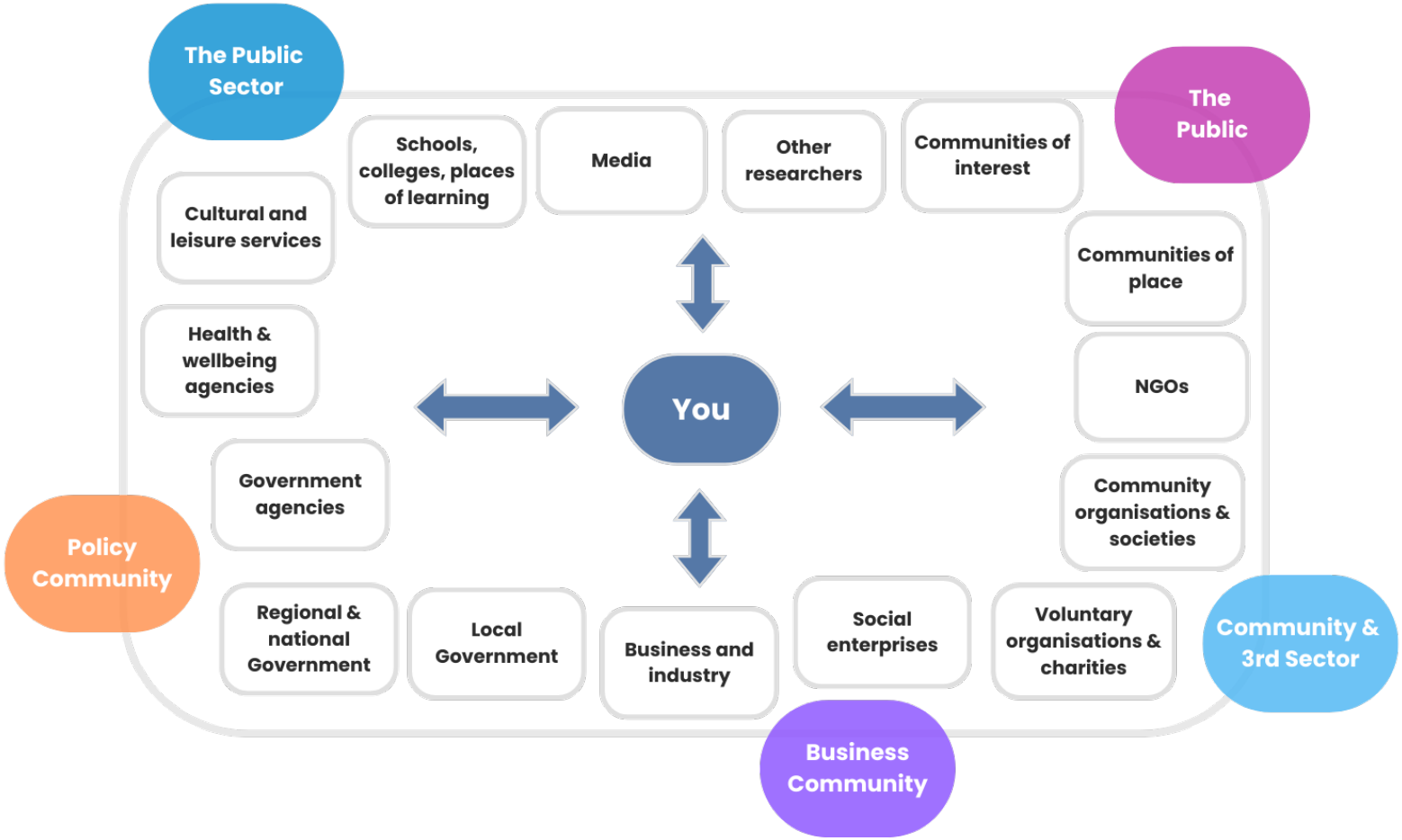
Mapping your stakeholders

Stakeholder mapping can help you to identify which individuals, communities, and organisations have a stake (or an interest) in your research.

These can include those who will be directly affected by your research, or those who will be able to influence the impact of your research.



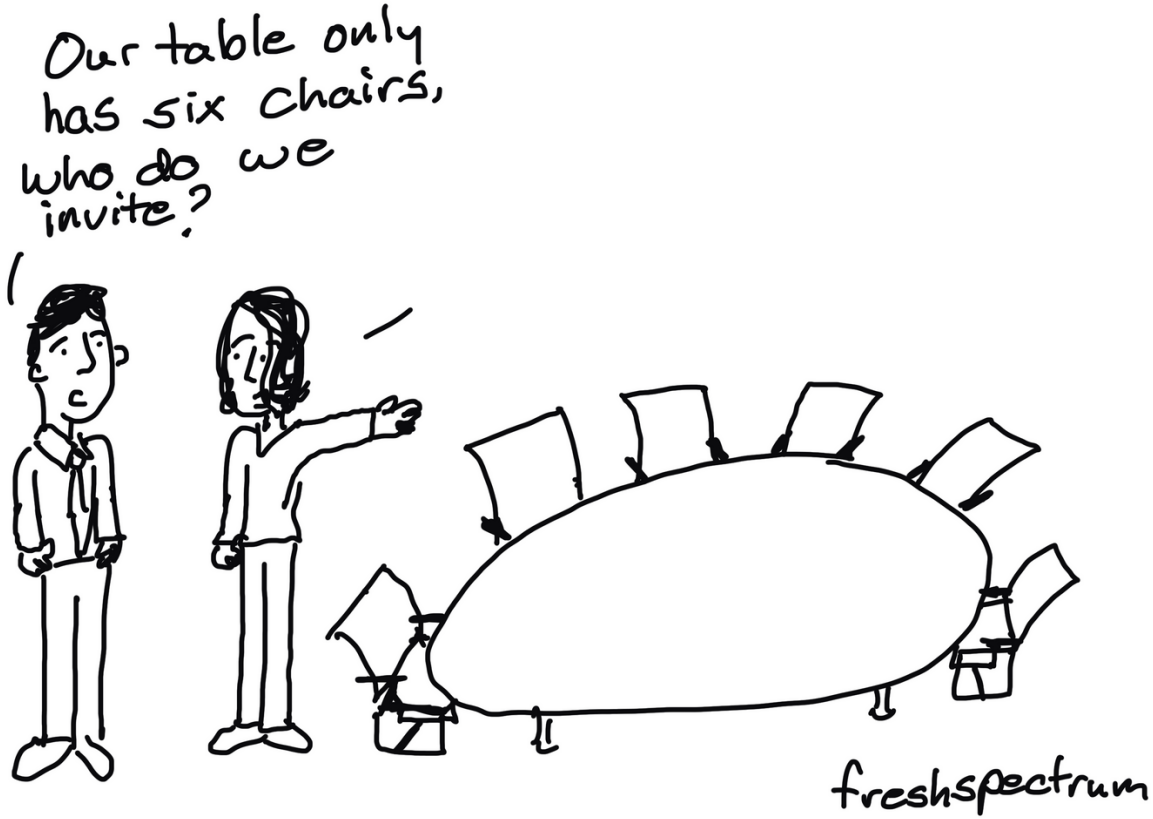
Stakeholder mapping



Prioritising your stakeholders

As you map your stakeholders, you might find yourself already starting to prioritise them. For each, consider two questions:

- How much interest do they already have in your research?
- How likely are they to support or align with your findings?



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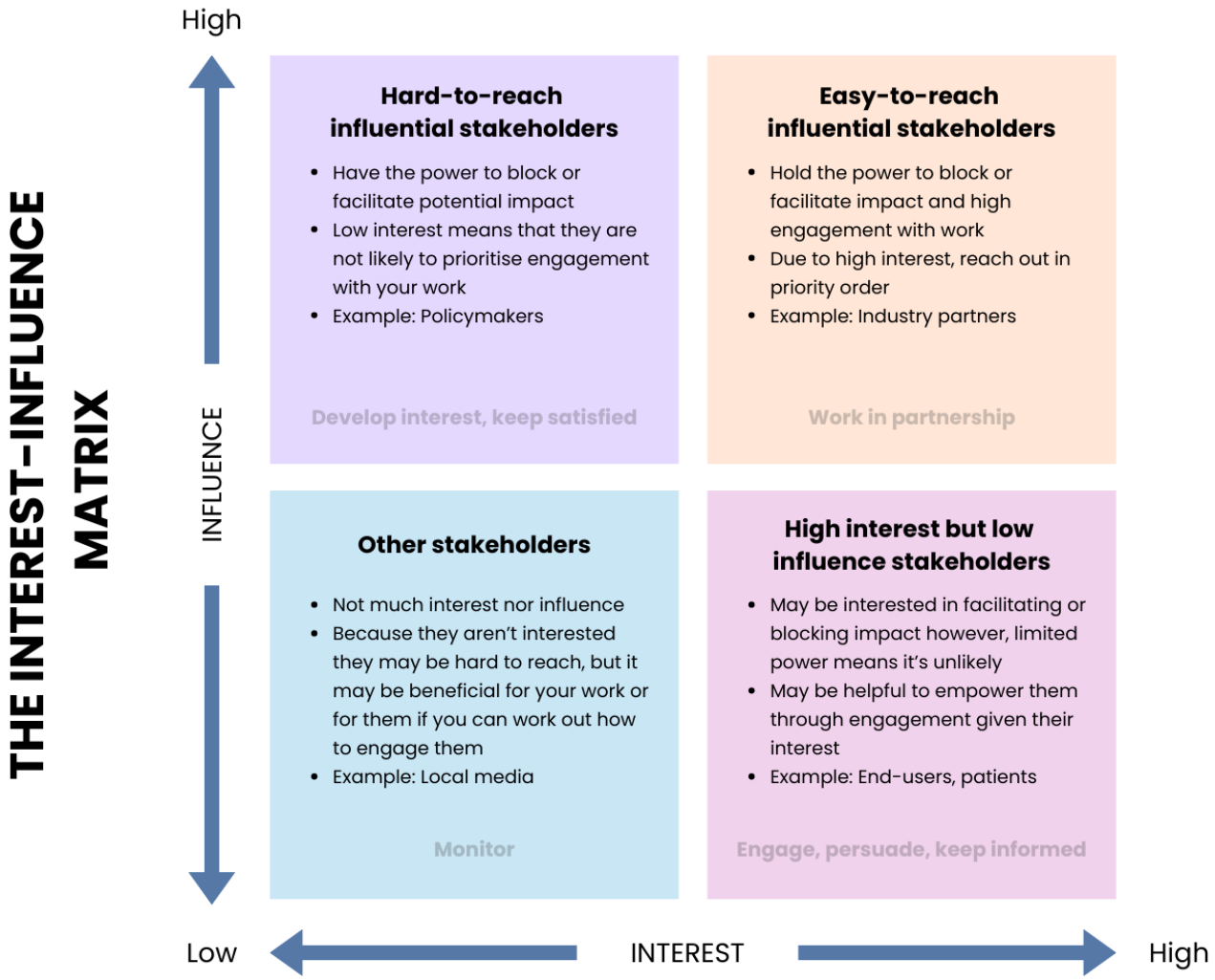
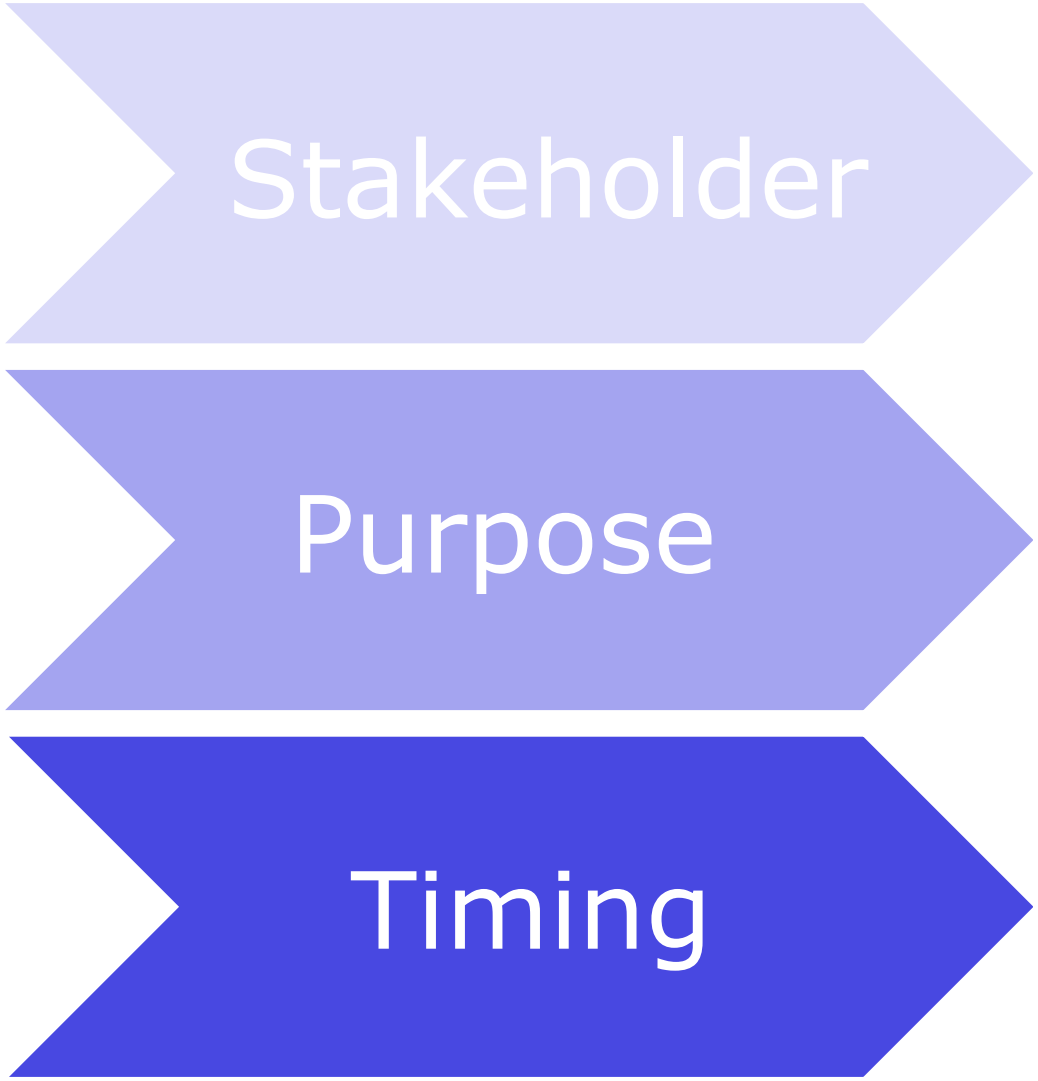


Developing an engagement plan

- Now that you know who you want to engage with, it’s time to think about why.
- Engagement is a two-way conversation, which means that the relationship should be mutually beneficial.
- Think about why your stakeholders might want to work with you, why it would be beneficial for them, and when the best time to do this would be.



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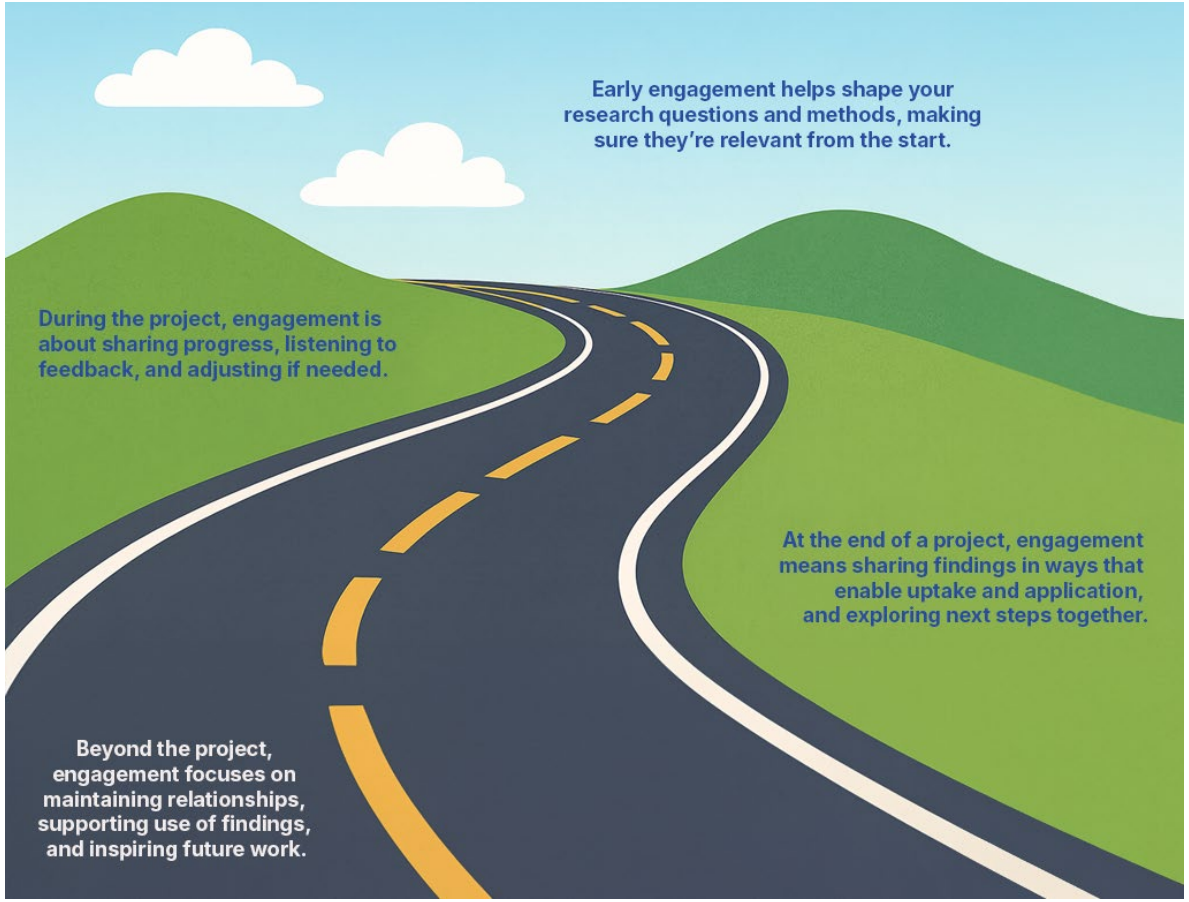
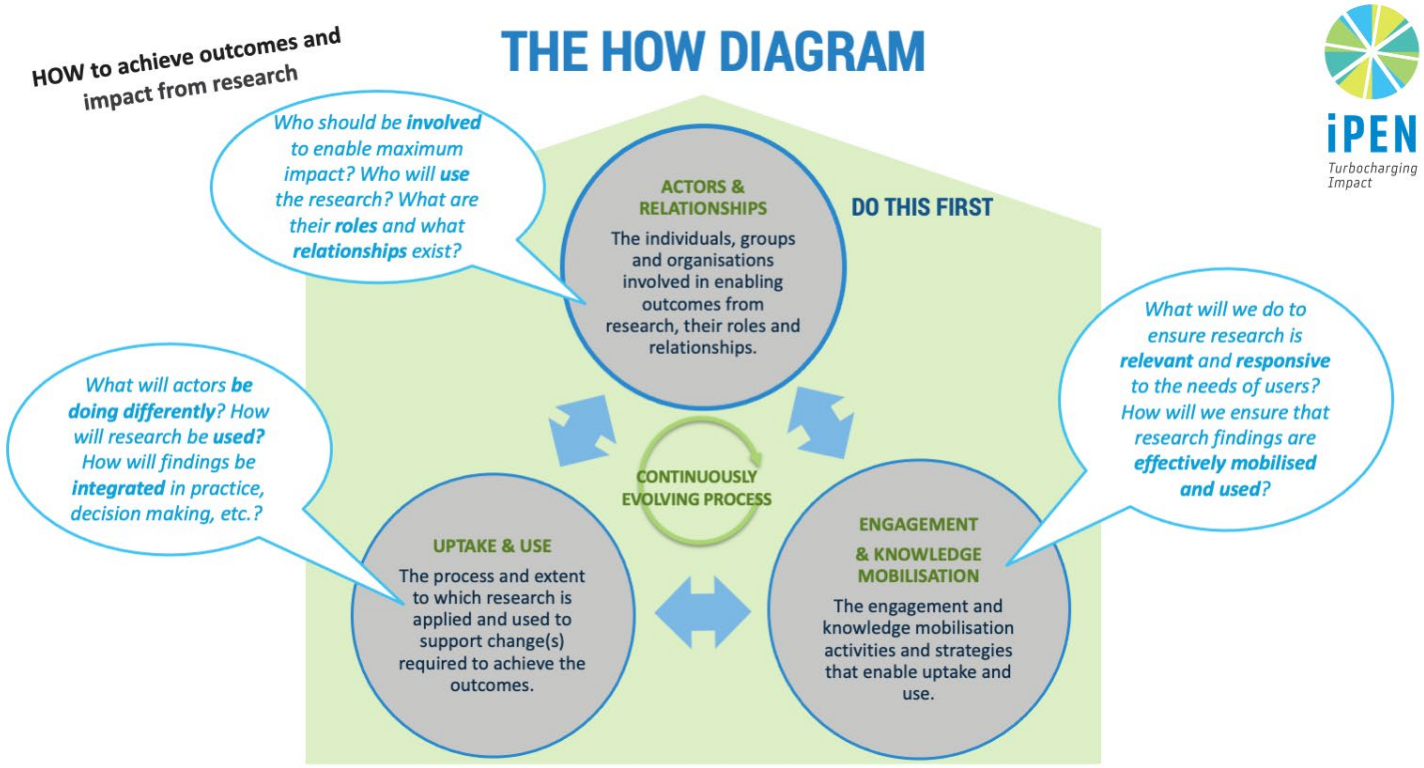


The how diagram



Brainstorming engagement activities

Activities

Co-design Workshops	Project Advisory Board	Secondments
Public Events	Stakeholder conferences	Community hui
Webinars	Policy dialogues	Training events

Outputs

Policy briefing	Toolkit	Social Media
Media release	Videos	Prototypes
Datasets	Methods & processes	Reports
	Guidelines	

Piecing together an implementation plan

Stakeholder → Purpose → Timing → Activity → Output

5 *Create an engagement plan.*

Stakeholder(s)	**Timing**	**Purpose**	**Activity**	**Potential challenges/ barriers to engagement**	**Budget**	**Responsibilities/ Expertise**
Chartered Association of Building Engineers Building contractors	*End year 5*	*To upskill building contractors in new best practice*	*Training workshop x3*	*Time constraints, potential reluctance to adopt new technologies or methods*	*$5,000 per workshop*	*Organise workshops, ensure high-quality trainers, coordinate with Geoff to align content with industry standards*
National and local govt agencies Iwi reps Industry experts	*Every 6 months over project duration*	*Co-design initial project. Provide feedback on direction of the project*	*Stakeholder advisory group*	*Differing priorities or interests, travel constraints*	*$4,000 per year (every other meeting in person – allow for travel and catering)*	*Ensure alignment of project goals, manage communication between meetings, and follow up on action points*

Some final things to consider

- **Roles & responsibilities –** Who leads engagement and stakeholder relationships?
- **Expertise –** What skills or external support are needed?
- **Budget & resources –** What funding, time, and resources are required?
- **Timeframes –** What are the key milestones and check-in points?
- **Risks –** What could go wrong, and how will you mitigate it?
- **Evaluation –** How will you measure and evidence impact?

Support and resources

Karakia whakamutunga