University of Dundee

IKT for Research Stage 1

Fang, Mei Lan; Battersby, Lupin; Cranwell, Marianne; Cassie, Heather; Fox, Moya; Sterlini, Philippa

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An Integrated Knowledge Translation
Toolkit for Open Research

IKT for Research Stage 1: Partnership Building

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Background

In 2020, the University of Dundee initiated the development of an Open Research strategy. As part of this initiative, in February 2021 the University's Library and Learning Centre together with Open Research Champions from the Schools of Health Sciences and Dentistry, formed an Open Research Working group. To build on the University's Open Research policy and infrastructure, the purpose of the group was to facilitate ongoing research and development of best practice approaches for our interdisciplinary environment to make outputs, data and other products of our research publicly available.

Through informal consultations with academic staff and students, the Open Research Working Group found that:

→ access and reach of research findings can be amplified through effective knowledge mobilisation, and stakeholder and patient and public involvement; and

→ there was a need for guidance and resources on how-to implement knowledge mobilisation activities with and for stakeholders throughout the entire research process – from proposal development to project completion.

In June 2021, the Open Research working group, in partnership with Simon Fraser University's Knowledge Mobilization Hub began the development of an Integrated Knowledge Translation (IKT) Toolkit, with funding support from the University of Dundee's Doctoral Academy and Organisational Professional Development. IKT is an approach to knowledge translation that emphasises working in an engaged and collaborative partnership with stakeholders throughout the research cycle in order to have positive impact.

The aim was to co-produce evidence-informed, best practice learning materials on how-to:

→ maintain ongoing relationships between researchers, community stakeholders and decision-makers in research development and implementation; and

→ facilitate an integrated, participatory way of knowledge production whereby researchers, practitioners and other knowledge users can collaborate to co-generate new and accessible knowledge that can be utilised in contexts ranging from supporting community development to policy guidance for practice.

The IKT Toolkit was informed by a focused evidence review and synthesis of published peer-reviewed and grey literature and consists of eight knowledge briefs and a slide deck co-produced for use in any discipline or sector. Each knowledge brief provides practical guidance and resources to support an IKT process in each of eight key research stages: (i) Partnership Building; (ii) Generating Priorities and Ideas; (iii) Proposal development; (iv) Study Design; (v) Data Collection; (vi) Data Analysis; (vii) Reporting and (viii) Dissemination.

The current knowledge brief provides IKT guidance on Research Stage 1: Partnership Building.

What is partnership building in relation to IKT in research?

Partnership building is the first step in developing research in many disciplines and is about working together in teams comprised of people who are interested in or are affected by the research problem at hand (Fang, Grigorovich, et al., 2021; Holmes et al., 2017; Jull et al., 2017; Malla et al., 2018; Powell et al., 2013). Often, these consist of individuals who live and work in the community of interest and are situated outside of academia. Ideally, partnership building occurs at the project outset and is crucial in ensuring that knowledge generation and exchange occurs throughout the entire research process. The most critical, yet fundamental aspect of partnership building is working with diverse stakeholders across disciplines, sectors, and communities to generate new ideas and skillsets. The goal is to ensure that any new knowledge generated is grounded in local perspectives and co-produced with the people most affected by the intended outcomes (Locock & Boaz, 2019). Boxes 1 and 2 presents key principles and a checklist for how to do effective IKT in Research Stage 1: Partnership Building.

BOX 1: IKT Principles for Research Stage 1 - Partnership Building

1   Partnership working is fundamental to IKT research (Banner et al., 2019).

2   Conducting research in partnership with people who live and work in the community is of critical importance for: defining and refining the research questions, deciding on the methodology, collecting and analysing the data, interpreting the findings, implementing and disseminating research results (Harrison & Graham, 2021).

3   Research-stakeholder collaborations in research partnerships can be different across disciplines, sectors and organisations and may vary from very little involvement to full and equal involvement by all stakeholders (Malla et al., 2018; Powell et al., 2013).

4   Working with partners to establish a clear vision for the project is vital, alongside thoughtful allocation of resources and central leadership (Holmes et al., 2017; Jull et al., 2017).

5   Adopting participatory research approaches can enhance impact and opportunities for people most affected by the research outcomes (Estabrooks et al., 2019; Jull et al., 2019).

BOX 2: IKT Checklist for Research Stage 1 - Partnership Building

1	Have you identified and sourced the expertise needed to develop and implement this research?	Yes	No
2	Does your project team feel complete and comprehensive?	Yes	No
3	Have you considered who is currently not part of the project team but should be?	Yes	No
4	Did you develop your research questions with diverse stakeholder groups?	Yes	No
5	Do you have team members who are not part of the academic community?	Yes	No
6	Do you have team members who are directly impacted by the research and its outcomes?	Yes	No
7	Have all partners discussed and agreed how they would like to be involved at all stages of the research?	Yes	No
8	Has a mobilisation plan been developed in conjunction with partners?	Yes	No
9	Are you using accessible methods to both communicate information and co-create knowledge with your partners?	Yes	No
10	Are you clear on what impact means to your partners and how impact will be assessed and tracked?	Yes	No

How can partnership building be enhanced by applying IKT mechanisms and activities?

Developing new ideas and community solutions together with a diverse group of individuals requires strategies that are useful and relevant to practice (Fang, Grigorovich, et al., 2021). Engaging with the right stakeholders will ensure that the outcomes are relevant to the real world (Wada et al., 2021). Partnership building as part of IKT facilitates an iterative and interactive process, resulting in new knowledge that is derived from both scientific studies and everyday experiences (Fang, Grigorovich, et al., 2021). Boxes 3 and 4 offer case examples of effective IKT implementation in Research Stage 1: Partnership Building. Key messages from each case example are highlighted in bold.

BOX 3: Case example 1 – Community planning with low-income older people

Participatory research that focused on understanding low-income seniors' experiences of transitioning into new homes (Fang, Sixsmith, et al., 2021). **Partnerships were established at the project outset with stakeholders who had a personal stake in the outcome**, including older people, the building management, developer, architect, municipal government and local community organizations. **Partners were involved across all the different stages of the research project**, contributing ideas and solutions for enhancing social participation in the new build to prevent loneliness and social isolation. A series of community consultations using innovative community-based methods were applied and were helpful for identifying the older peoples' housing, home and social support needs. Project findings enabled older tenants to gain easier access to health and supports 'in house' and in the community through the identification of service gaps that were subsequently addressed. This research brought to the foreground the lived experiences of older people and community stakeholders which shaped resulting formal and informal support that fostered meaningful home environments for low-income seniors. **Guided by the principles of a participatory research approach, older peoples' perspectives were heard and enabled.** Older peoples' role as active 'place-makers' in the community planning and development process attracted substantial media attention towards the need for more affordable housing for independently living seniors.

BOX 4: Case example 2 – Homebound patients with heart failure: an academic-practice partnership

Echevarria and colleagues' knowledge translation project involved an academic-practice partnership which undertook an action-oriented research approach exploring barriers that impacted the management of people who were homebound having previously experienced heart failure (Echevarria, 2016). Their partnership building strategy, which was the first phase of this knowledge translation project, focused on education and orientation to the project. **Working collaboratively on the research problem area of focus and instilling project ownership are important features of an action-oriented research approach** – also known as community-based participatory action research (Jagosh et al., 2015). As part of education and orientation, the research was introduced as a collection of methods or strategies that pursued action or change whilst attempting to explore and seek understanding of the phenomenon—barriers that impacted the management of homebound patients with heart failure. Team members were presented with a key principle of participatory and action-oriented research which emphasised **providing a space whereby individuals and groups with divergent perceptions and interpretations find common ground together to co-construct ideas and solutions**. This partnership building strategy enabled the co-development of an agenda for key research actions. A key outcome was an enhanced understanding of the project that enabled buy-in from all team members and partners.

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Resources

1. NIHR Evidence - Informative and accessible health and care research: **evidence.nihr.ac.uk**
2. Transforming Evidence: **transforming-evidence.org**
3. Scottish Policy and Research Exchange: **spre.scot**
4. Rethinking Research Collaborative rethinking: **researchcollaborative.com**

Contributors and Contact Information

Academic Team

Dr Mei Lan Fang is the Project Lead and Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in the School of Health Sciences at University of Dundee, Dundee, Scotland, United Kingdom

Dr Lupin Battersby is the International Project Co-Lead and Knowledge Mobilization Officer in the Knowledge Mobilization Hub at Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, BC, Canada

Marianne Cranwell is the Lead Researcher and PhD Student in the School of Education and Social Work at University of Dundee, Dundee, Scotland, United Kingdom

Dr Heather Cassie is a Project Co-Investigator and Baxter Fellow in the School of Dentistry at University of Dundee, Dundee, Scotland, United Kingdom

Dr Alex Gardner is a Project Co-Investigator and Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in the School of Dentistry at University of Dundee, Dundee, Scotland, United Kingdom

Dr Jenna Breckenridge is the Project's Knowledge Mobilisation Expert Informant, and Lecturer (Assistant Professor) in the School of Health Sciences at University of Dundee, Dundee, Scotland, United Kingdom

Library and Learning Services Team

Moya Fox is a Project Co-Investigator and Senior Research Support Officer (Research and Resources) in the Library and Learning and Centre at the University of Dundee, Dundee, Scotland, United Kingdom

Philippa Sterlini is a Project Co-Investigator and Research Support Officer (Research and Resources) in the Library and Learning and Centre at the University of Dundee, Dundee, Scotland, United Kingdom

Dr Thomas Curtin is a Research Publications Support Officer in the Library and Learning and Centre at the University of Dundee, Dundee, Scotland, United Kingdom

Further information

For more information about the IKT Toolkit and University of Dundee's Open Research Working Group please contact Dr Mei Fang at **mlfang@dundee.ac.uk**

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Notes and reflections