



RIING



Research
Institute
Impact
Narrative
Guide

Do you want to know about context and reasoning regarding the RIING?

You should focus on sections **02 & 03**

Are you a hands-on person and you want to use the tool right away?

Don't lose time and go to section **04 – 08**

Maybe you are reading for a second time, and you just need some bullet points and reminders?

Take a look at some questions and do's and don'ts on sections **09 & 10**

Are you an impact nerd like us?

Take a look at sections **13 & 16** for more content and references.

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The Context

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The impacts of research institutes are defined not only by the outputs they help create, but by their contributions to the environment, values, and culture in which research takes place. This is increasingly recognized in the understanding, communication and assessment of these institutes. In 2024, the Instituto Jurídico de Coimbra (IJ) in Portugal underwent its national assessment for basic research funding - a process increasingly shaped by evolving definitions of research quality, culture, and impact. This experience prompted Fernando Borges to contact Giovanna Lima, creator of the *Researcher Impact Framework* (RIF), to explore scaling the RIF from individual to institutional use. The idea aligned with Giovanna's work at the Trinity College Dublin and Erasmus University Rotterdam, where she had seen how shifting assessment criteria were already influencing institutional narratives. She invited Anabel Sánchez from CREAM in Spain, who was anticipating similar changes in her regional and national assessment. Together, the authors combined their expertise to develop a flexible tool that helps institutions navigate changes in the research system.

The Gap

Research institutes face significant challenges in describing their quality and impact for strategic communication and evaluation processes. The rise of responsible research assessment has made addressing these challenges more urgent, shaped by (inter)national regulations and internal quality assurance requirements. There is a trend towards incorporating more qualitative evaluation methods, with peer review playing a central role, and the need for showcasing impacts through the responsible use of (quantitative) indicators and the recognition of a broader range of research activities and outputs. However, there is a lack of frameworks available to guide research institutes in describing, monitoring or assessing their main contributions, including the activities they undertake, and the evidence that demonstrates the value they bring to the research system and to society.

Our Answer

Inspired by the *Researcher Impact Framework* (RIF),¹ and drawing on our experience in research strategy and impact within research institutes, we introduce the Research Institute Impact Narrative Guide (RIING).

The RIING is intended to be used by those working within research institutes to support exploration and expression of the impact of their activities for multiple audiences by way of crafting self-evaluation narratives that can be used for demonstrating quality and impact, supporting business development and grant acquisition, institutional assessments, among other purposes. While we feel the RIING is needed, we also appreciate that many useful impact related resources exist to help plan, monitor and describe impact across multiple institutional levels. The RIING builds upon this vast body of expertise from which we have benefitted over the years.

We structured the sections of the Guide to be mostly stand-alone, which means we reinforce similar concepts at different points in the document. While the RIING follows a similar structure to the RIF, it adds a fifth impact area focused on the institute itself. Like the RIF, the RIING is designed to be discipline and geography agnostic, which is both a strength and a limitation. We focus on retrospective narratives that capture past activities and achievements, but the guide can also inspire forward-looking planning.

We hope you find this guide useful and inspirational as you prepare to describe the impacts your research institute contributes to creating.

Dr Fernando Borges,
Dr Giovanna Lima, and
Dr Anabel Sánchez

Authors are named alphabetically by surname and have contributed equally to the conceptualisation of the RIING.

The understanding, communication and assessment of research institutes is a complex and multi-faceted process involving periodic evaluations at internal, regional, national, and international levels. These evaluations serve not merely as audits, but as crucial processes that both reflect and actively shape the evolving research culture within these research performing organisations.

Research institutes often struggle to effectively articulate their qualities and impacts for communication and evaluation purposes due to a range of challenges that in our experience can include:

Variability in evaluation contexts

- » Differences in understanding and defining qualities and impacts among interest holders.
- » Diverse (and inconsistent) language and evaluation criteria and standards across national agencies.

Lack of clear guidance and examples

- » Few documented success stories of articulating impact to draw upon
- » Limited availability of models and traditions showing effective practices.

Diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives

- » Different viewpoints of (external) evaluators.
- » Concerns about the responsible use (or misuse) of standardised metrics.

Complexities in data and evidence

- » Balancing qualitative and quantitative data.
- » Difficulties in attributing impact to specific institutional activities.
- » Time lags before impact becomes visible.

Practical and resource-related barriers

- » Limited resources for conducting thorough evaluations.
- » Challenges in deciding what to describe and how best to present achievements.

Adaptation to evolving practices

- » Ongoing need to adjust to changing (best) practices in research assessment.

There is a growing shift in how research institutes are understood and evaluated, moving away from purely quantitative approaches toward narrative self-evaluations and peer review, supported by qualitative and quantitative data for evidence and context. Increasing attention is also being given to the research environment, values and culture², in addition to research outputs. This is aligned with our view that research institutes are more than a sum of their researchers and the research they produce. However, we struggle to identify existing frameworks that can effectively guide research institutes in describing, monitoring or assessing their broader contributions, including the activities they undertake, the impacts they generate, and the evidence that demonstrates the value they add to the research system and to society—and, where such frameworks do exist, their use appears limited or not clearly communicated. The RIING has been developed to address this gap, which we hope will help institutes address the challenges identified above.

Most existing impact-related tools³ are designed for individual researchers or specific research projects. While we see an increasing focus on the institutional level, including the *Impact Strategy Development Toolkit*⁴, these tools are not tailored for research institutes and do not provide a comprehensive overview of activities at research institute level. Other resources that support evidence impact at the unit level, such as the *REF2029 PCE indicators project*⁵ and *QRiH*⁶, do not detail the activities that underpin the suggested indicators. We also see an increase in the availability of narrative focused writing tools, including the *Researcher Impact Framework (RIF)* and the *Impact Narrative Tool*⁷, which offer templates for data gathering, structuring, and tips to enhance the clarity and effectiveness of narratives. However, these tools are primarily focused on the individual level and do not yet address the aggregation of impact at the research institute level.



The RIING aims to support research institutes in identifying, recognising, and valuing a full range of contributions to the research system and society. Within the RIING, institute-level activities and outputs are aligned to their potential relevant outcomes and impact areas, and linked to potential impact indicators, all underpinned by Science Europe values, including collaboration, openness and transparency.

Research institutes can use the RIING to highlight a broad spectrum of impacts using audience-specific, evidence-based narratives that effectively communicate their value and contributions.

Introducing the Research Institute Impact Narrative Guide

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The RIING offers research institutes a structured framework for connecting their values and purpose to the activities they undertake, allowing them to build evidence-based narratives that showcase their contributions, organised across five key impact areas⁸:

- » Generation of knowledge;
- » Development of individuals and collaborations;
- » Supporting the research community;
- » Contributions to broader society; and
- » Institutional sustainability and resilience.

The RIING gives a structure to connect five building blocks to help the institutes craft audience-specific, evidence-based impact narratives:

- » Impact areas;
- » Outcome statements;
- » Institutional activities;
- » Evidence; and
- » Sources.

The evaluation of research performing organisations involves the assessment of entities such as university departments, research centres, and research infrastructures to examine and appreciate their quality, impact, relevance, and productivity. The overarching goal is most often to foster the development and enhancement of research quality and impact, with a growing emphasis on aligning evaluation practices with initiatives like DORA and CoARA that promote a broader and more responsible approach to research culture and assessment.

Key areas of focus include the assessment of institutional activities through accreditation, evaluation of research quality, societal contribution, and viability, with increasing emphasis on the unit's goals and strategies, typically focusing on development and learning, profiling, optimisation, and improvement. Many research performing organisations (RPOs), including universities and research institutes, are actively reviewing and adapting their assessment criteria and processes to align with evolving best practices and responsible research assessment (RRA) principles.

The RIING is designed with research institutes in mind. For the purposes of the RIING, we understand a **research institute** as an organisation (embedded or not in a larger organisation) dedicated primarily to conducting research, often within a specific field or across multiple disciplines, with the goal of generating new knowledge, and addressing societal and/or technological challenges. Unlike other research performing organisations like universities or departments, which combine research with teaching, research institutes typically focus mainly on research activities, fostering collaboration among researchers, providing specialised infrastructure, and supporting long-term projects that contribute to innovation and policy development.

While this is our focus, we understand you may think that using the RIING structure could also be applied to other types of units: departments, thematic programmes, time-bound research units, centers, or networks. Feel free to adapt and adopt, being aware of this original focus may provide limitations for those other uses. For brevity, we use the term ‘institute’ interchangeably with ‘research institute’.

Some RPOs use research evaluations to monitor and allocate funding across their internal research structures, evaluating the performance of groups and distributing budgets among departments and institutes using performance-based funding models. RPOs can also use a contractual component within their internal systems for distributing core research budgets among faculties and/or institutes, helping to ensure that RRA approaches are implemented within diverse governance structures. Funders are also increasingly supporting larger, multi-disciplinary research teams that then respond to expectations and requirements for reporting after funding has been awarded.

Changes in the assessment of research institutes reflect broader shifts in research culture and the wider research system, which is moving toward more holistic and responsible evaluation practises. There is an increased focus on a more diverse set of contributions of research to society; an increased emphasis on shared values between researchers and the communities they work with and a recognised need to acknowledge and value the diverse roles, skills and collaborative efforts of all individuals and team members who sustain research environments. There is also a movement towards open and engaged science and research, the recognition of the importance of the iterative and co-produced nature of impact, awareness of unintended biases in assessment, and the importance of aligning evaluations with an organisation’s overall mission, context, and values.^{9,10,11} Therefore, the RIING is also designed to support this broader movement toward responsible research assessment and to promote the recognition and celebration of diversity within the research system. It is not intended to be used as a ranking, comparative or benchmarking framework between research institutes.

We increasingly recognise that research institutes are one of many underpinning structures that provide the necessary framework, resources, and cultural environment for individual researchers, teams and research projects to achieve their full potential for impact, including beyond academia. These institutional commitments and infrastructures have been identified as a factor increasing the likelihood of research translating into real-world benefits.^{12,13,14,15,16}

The RIING is designed to empower research institutes to reimagine how they understand, describe, monitor and assess the multiple qualities and impacts of their work. It enables researchers and research managers and administrators to strategically position their institutes, strengthening their ability to seize opportunities and contribute effectively to annual reports, newsletters, and formal evaluation processes.

Readers will note that some activities listed in the RIING can also be relevant at other levels of aggregation within institutional assessment. For example, some activities - such as hosting a scientific event - can be undertaken by an individual researcher as well as a research institute. We do not see this as a limitation, but as a reflection of the complexity and collaborative nature of knowledge creation and mobilisation. If an individual researcher led the organisation of the event that enhanced their profile or expanded their collaborations, it could serve as evidence at an institute level of an environment supporting individual development. If, on the other hand, the institution strategically supported multiple such events to foster collaboration and knowledge exchange, this can be used as evidence of institutional-level impact on connectivity and engagement. In other cases still, the research institute interacts with parts of a larger organisation it is embedded in (e.g., a central research office, or a tech transfer office).

Many activities, therefore, can originate at or be led by either an individual, central or at research institute level, and can be used to describe the contributions of multiple levels, depending on their scope, impact, and alignment with the institution's strategic goals and research culture. The institute's narratives should strive to make explicit the contributions of the research institute itself, and how the institute works together with their partners and beneficiaries (e.g., associated researchers and central offices) on some of its impact activities. We encourage readers to take this into consideration when using the RIING.

Following the structure of the RIF, the RIING frames how activities are connected to their outcomes, and proposes a non-exhaustive list of evidence, indicators, and metrics that can be used to support a research institute impact narrative. It is important to remember that any research metrics should be used responsibly, in line with the principles and values of research assessment that underscore the development of the RIING. Institutes should be aware of their context, the potential limitations of metrics, choose the metrics that most accurately represent their achievements, and refrain from using metrics that misrepresent their contributions. In that same vein, both successes and failures should be discussed in narratives, to foster reflection, transparency, and learning. We discuss this later in the document.



Research culture encompasses the behaviours, values, expectations, attitudes, and norms of research communities, influencing career paths and how research is conducted and communicated. This is a concept that can apply internally to institutions but also to the wider research system. Science Europe defines a vision for research culture that prioritises the quality of the research process, scientific autonomy, and the promotion of diversity and inclusion, recognising that these conditions foster a productive research system where all participants are appropriately recognised for their diverse contributions and broad skills are supported in a vision that supports knowledge advancement and the quality and impact of research, for the benefit of all. Values such as Autonomy/ Freedom, Care & Collegiality, Collaboration, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Integrity and Ethics, and Openness and Transparency are central to this evolving culture. Read more at [A Vision & Framework for Research Cultures](#)¹⁷.

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Following the principles of SCOPE¹⁸, the foundation of any institutional narrative should be its institutional values and purpose. These are not included as separate building blocks within the RIING because they are cross-cutting and foundational elements that should permeate their entire narratives: there should be a clear statement of the values that profiles the institute in its narratives. It is also important to make explicit the other institutional strategies, policies, resources, and support systems that facilitate or hinder the institutes' contribution: the narratives should recognise and connect the institute to the context in which it operates. These are essential for understanding successes and failures, and should serve as the foundation upon which the narrative is based.

The RIING is organised around five building blocks of information for crafting an institutional impact narrative. In this section, we present how these building blocks interact and how research institutes can apply them to deliver impact stories. These are: Impact areas; Outcome statements; Activities; Evidence; and Sources.

IMPACT AREAS

This is the main area of impact the research institute is articulating key achievements against. The RIING is compliant with DORA and CoARA principles and uses five impact areas to organise information: 1. Generation of knowledge; 2. Development of individuals and collaborations; 3. Supporting the research community; 4. Contributions to broader society; and 5. Institutional sustainability and resilience.

OUTCOME STATEMENTS

This statement connects the research institute's activities to their outcomes. The evidence and data sources selected should be appropriate to the outcomes intended and impact area described.

ACTIVITIES

These are the activities performed by the research institute. Connecting these activities to outcomes in the impact narrative illustrates the value to partners and beneficiaries aligned with what the institute intended to accomplish in undertaking these efforts.

EVIDENCE

The reach, use, and relevance data in this block capture how the institute's activities and their outputs are (a) reaching and affecting partners and beneficiaries, (b) being shared and used, and (c) the relevance of these activities

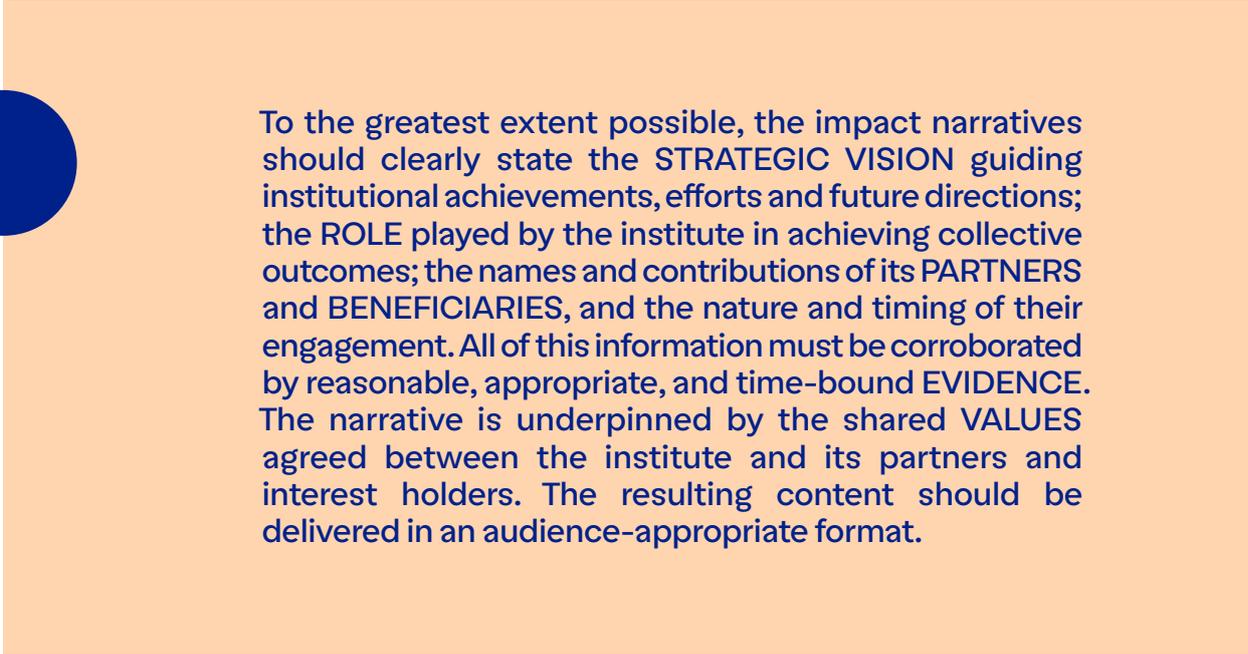
and outputs to partners and other interest holders. It seeks to elicit both qualitative and quantitative data on the ‘so what’ of these activities and outputs performed by the institute.

SOURCES

This section outlines the data sources used to gather the evidence to encourage transparency, reproducibility, and rigour in impact monitoring, communication and assessment. It ensures that the evidence is appropriate, credible and effectively substantiates the articulation of impact.

IMPACT NARRATIVE

The resulting impact narratives highlight the qualities and impacts of research institutes from an institutional perspective, focusing on the aggregation or collective contributions that go beyond the sum of its individual parts. Building on the framework above, the impact narratives illustrate how the values and purpose of the institute as an organisation are reflected across one or more impact areas, or in relation to specific outcomes, grounded in the institute’s activities and supported by evidence of their contributions.



To the greatest extent possible, the impact narratives should clearly state the **STRATEGIC VISION** guiding institutional achievements, efforts and future directions; the **ROLE** played by the institute in achieving collective outcomes; the names and contributions of its **PARTNERS** and **BENEFICIARIES**, and the nature and timing of their engagement. All of this information must be corroborated by reasonable, appropriate, and time-bound **EVIDENCE**. The narrative is underpinned by the shared **VALUES** agreed between the institute and its partners and interest holders. The resulting content should be delivered in an audience-appropriate format.

Through the RIING, we encourage institutes to approach self-assessment and narrative writing as opportunities for reflection and learning. To accurately represent the activities and impacts of research institutes, we reinforce the need to acknowledge that impact pathways are context dependent long-term processes that evolve with time, have cumulative effects, and progress at different speeds and levels of maturity. We view impacts as resulting from processes, which also means we need to monitor the progress of these pathways, reflect on what has worked and what remains a challenge, and plan for future actions. This approach demonstrates an understanding of the evolving and dynamic nature of impact.

Key Achievements in the Generation of Knowledge

The narratives in this impact area aim to convey the role played by the institute in creating and mobilising high-quality diversified research outputs and outcomes. This involves having effective and meaningful mechanisms and processes for supporting robust, open, reproducible, ethical and fair research. The research efforts in an institute could be done in a way that is disciplinary, geographically, or challenge-based. It is important to note that institutes “are focused on modes of knowledge production that may not be as conducive to publishing as to other forms of dissemination, such as informal knowledge exchange (Ponomariov and Boardman, 2008) and patenting (Dietz and Bozeman, 2005).”¹⁹

Outcomes associated with the activities in this impact area can be framed as relevant or contributing to:

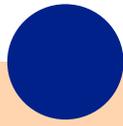
- ▶ Enabling the development of innovative methodologies, equipment, and cross-disciplinary approaches.
- ▶ Mobilising high-quality, diversified knowledge that is ethical, trustworthy, and impactful.
- ▶ Cultivating a robust research culture and networks grounded in openness, transparency, and collaboration, ensuring rigour, integrity, reproducibility, and fairness throughout the entire research process.

Activities and their relevant indicators and sources for Generation of Knowledge may include those connected to:

- ▶ Boosting collective and individual productivity.
- ▶ Expanding institutional capacity for Open Science.
- ▶ Enhancing access to resources and sustainability of research practices.



Research institutes play a crucial role in fostering an environment where knowledge is not only produced and mobilised but also that it is of the highest quality and trustworthiness. This commitment is deeply intertwined with research integrity, ethics, and the practices of reproducibility and Open Science. Institutes are responsible to formulate and endorse principles for research, defining proper behavior, and maximising the quality, reliability, and robustness of research outcomes. The ethical climate within an organisation, defined by its prevailing moral beliefs and practices, significantly influences research conduct, especially when adherence to ethical standards is visibly prioritised. They can reinforce the strength and rigour of scientific results through increased openness at all stages of the research lifecycle. Fostering, enabling and driving Open Science is paramount to create inclusive multilingual scientific knowledge that is openly available, accessible, and reusable for everyone. The *Self-Assessment Tool for The Concordat to Support Research Integrity*²⁰ can be of help for those developing and describing their activities in this area. The *SOPs4RI Toolbox* is a structured collection of easy-to-use Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and Guidelines that institutes can use to develop their own Research Integrity Promotion Plans (RIPPs).



Key Achievements in the Generation of Knowledge

ACTIVITIES

EVIDENCE

SOURCES

Conduct (in-house) publishing activities, including of different types of research outputs (e.g., reusable data, software, protocols, workflows)

- ▶▶ Number, diversity, and relevance of submissions received and outputs delivered
- ▶▶ Downloads and citations metrics
- ▶▶ Testimonials and feedback of reviewers and readers

- ▶▶ Journals and Repository Websites analytics
- ▶▶ CRIS system
- ▶▶ ORCID
- ▶▶ Bibliometric and indexing databases (e.g. Open Alex, DOAJ)
- ▶▶ Publication Facts Label
- ▶▶ Surveys or interviews
- ▶▶ Internal reports or meeting minutes

Establish and maintain an open, interoperable institutional repository

- ▶▶ Number and diversity of items deposited
- ▶▶ Usage and visibility metrics
- ▶▶ Geographic distribution of users
- ▶▶ Number of referrals to repository and its content
- ▶▶ Feedback from researchers on repository utility

- ▶▶ Repository analytics
- ▶▶ Repository network membership (e.g., OpenAIRE)
- ▶▶ User surveys or interviews

Provide and maintain robust, open, and community-managed research infrastructure to conduct research (labs, library, archives, computing systems)

- ▶▶ Availability, diversity, and usage of infrastructures
- ▶▶ Infrastructure mentioned in grant applications or strategic plans
- ▶▶ Testimonials and feedback of users and partners

- ▶▶ Access control systems
- ▶▶ Strategic planning documents
- ▶▶ Annual reports
- ▶▶ User surveys or interviews

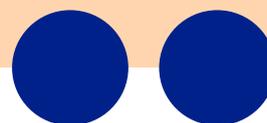
Host open, collaborative and/or multidisciplinary/interdisciplinary scientific events

- ▶▶ Event scale and scope
- ▶▶ Number and diversity of participants
- ▶▶ Views, downloads and mentions of documented outputs
- ▶▶ Testimonials from attendees
- ▶▶ Media coverage or social media mentions
- ▶▶ Follow-up collaborations or joint projects initiated

- ▶▶ Scientific programme and proceedings
- ▶▶ Registration and attendance records
- ▶▶ Media and social media analytics
- ▶▶ Post-event surveys or interviews
- ▶▶ Institutional and partner reports



ACTIVITIES	EVIDENCE	SOURCES
Facilitate Open Science practices (hiring a data steward, provide training, policies and protocols)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number and content of trainings offered » Number and diversity of protocols and practices adopted and implemented (e.g., DMPs, CC-BY licenses) » Testimonials from staff about support received 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Registration and attendance records » Policy documents » Data repositories (e.g., Zenodo, Figshare, institutional platforms) » Staff surveys and interviews
Formalise and enforce ethics, integrity, data management, intellectual property, and security policies and governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number and quality of training delivered » Inclusion of policies in onboarding or orientation materials » Number of IP requests or licensing agreements » Volume and diversity of DMPs and ethics plans submitted and reviewed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Registration and attendance records » Committees internal reports and minutes » Staff surveys and interviews » External audits or accreditation reports
Facilitate the submission and securing of grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Amount and diversity of projects submitted and funded » Number and diversity of units and staff supported » Success rate of supported proposals vs. unsupported ones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Grant submission records » Funder databases (e.g., CORDIS) » Project reports » Staff testimonials or post-submission surveys



Key Achievements in the Development of Individuals and Collaborations

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The narratives in this impact area reflect how the institute values and supports the development of a wide set of skills and competencies in both individuals and teams. They highlight the institute's commitment to providing effective support, people-centred management and supervision, and the promotion of high-quality collaborative research. This includes fostering mobility across careers and sectors and supporting a diversity of ideas, practices, and approaches.

Outcomes associated with the activities in this impact area can be framed as relevant or contributing to:

- ▶ Fostering a culture of reflection and transparency, adapting to context-dependent and often non-linear research processes.
- ▶ Developing attractive, dynamic and diverse career opportunities.
- ▶ Fostering an internal culture of mutual respect, knowledge-sharing, and collective achievement that values collaboration as a key driver of individual and institutional success.

Activities and their relevant indicators and sources for Development of Individuals and Collaborations may include those connected to:

- ▶ Enhancing skills, competencies, and career progression of students and staff.
- ▶ Strengthening interdisciplinary and cross-sectoral research collaborations.
- ▶ Increasing representation and participation of underrepresented groups in research activities.



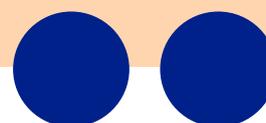
Research institutes play a vital role in the development of individuals by cultivating a supportive and dynamic environment for all staff and research students. This involves recognising and valuing the breadth of activities, practices, and roles involved in research, and actively building and sustaining accessible career pathways for their progression. Institutes provide effective support through people-centred line management, supervision, and mentoring, along with targeted professional and career development opportunities, coaching, and initiatives to support career transitions and mobility. This comprehensive approach to individual development also emphasises continuous learning, self-reflection, adaptability, and the promotion of an inclusive research culture. For reflecting on the diverse skills and competences to be developed by researchers and research managers readers can explore European frameworks ResearchComp²¹ and RM Comp²² respectively.



Key Achievements in the Development of Individuals and Collaborations

ACTIVITIES	EVIDENCE	SOURCES
Develop a training program in research and transversal skills, leadership and management (workshops, events, retreats)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number and diversity of training sessions » Participant demographics » Completion and satisfaction rates » Career progression of participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Attendance lists » Event reports » Participant feedback surveys » HR data » Career tracking records
Establish mentoring schemes for early-career researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Participation and satisfaction rates » Career progression data » Number and diversity of mentors/mentees » Outcomes of mentoring (e.g., publications, grants, career milestones) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Program records » Mentor-mentee testimonials » Annual reports » Career tracking records
Provide seed funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number and diversity of funded individuals and projects » Research outcomes (outputs from funded collaborations, follow-on grants) » Examples of innovations, inter- and transdisciplinary engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Call documents and analytics » Internal funding records » Project reports » Staff testimonials or post-submission surveys » External recognition or awards
Support for student-led activities (publications, events)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number and diversity of initiatives » Student research outputs » Participation and visibility in institutional or external platforms » Testimonials from students about empowerment and support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Activity records » Registration and attendance lists » CRIS system » ORCID » Surveys or interviews » Event reports » Reflection journals

ACTIVITIES	EVIDENCE	SOURCES
Promote inclusive and equitable initiatives supporting underrepresented groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Release and adoption of EDIB and related plans » Participation rates of underrepresented groups » Staff perception of inclusivity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » EDIB monitoring data » HR demographic data » Staff and student surveys » Evaluation reports » Feedback from advisory boards or equity committees
Structure and implement career development review processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number and diversity of supervisors trained » Number of development plans developed and reviews conducted across departments, roles, and career stages » Case studies of changed career progression 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Review templates » HR statistics on promotions and mobility » Feedback surveys » Staff interviews or focus groups
Support researcher mobility and host visiting researchers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number and diversity of visiting and hosted researchers » Number and diversity of institutions and countries involved » Outcomes of mobility program (joint outputs, collaborations) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » HR statistics on mobility and hosting » Visitor agreements » Collaboration reports
Establish (supervision) quality awards or recognition programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Number and diversity of awards submitted and granted » Visibility and recognition of best practices » Feedback from staff, advisory boards or academic committees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Award records » Testimonials and survey results » HR or academic development reports » Programme review committee minutes



Key Achievements Supporting the Research Community

This impact area provides research institutes with the opportunity to demonstrate how they contribute to the broader knowledge system, extending benefits beyond their own institution. Contributions may include advancing disciplinary fields, informing research policy, supporting research exchanges and strengthening research infrastructures. It recognises the institute’s engagement with the wider system, fostering the exchange of practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond their immediate research environments.

Outcomes associated with the activities in this impact area can be framed as relevant or contributing to:

- ▶ Building a more supportive, effective and connected national and international research landscape.
- ▶ Advancing quality, transparency and accessibility of disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge systems.
- ▶ Addressing systemic inequities within the research community.

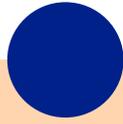
Activities and their relevant indicators and sources may include those relating to:

- ▶ Strengthening collective learning and capacity.
- ▶ Promoting responsible research assessment and practices.
- ▶ Expanding the institute’s role as a connector.



This impact area captures how a research institute commits institutionally to the broader scientific system. This could include facilitating and formally recognising and valuing activities for staff to engage in academic citizenship activities that sustain academic life²³, such as enabling peer-review activities, serving on juries, and taking on leadership positions within external networks. Beyond this, though, this area in the RIING highlights the institute's own responsibility to nurture the conditions for the research endeavour at a systemic level, demonstrating the institute's dedication to influencing research policies and procedures and steering its priorities within local, regional, and global systems. By exchanging practices and experiences to enable mutual learning within and beyond their immediate environments, and supporting the development of innovative methodologies and approaches, the institute positions itself as an active participant whose contributions are geared toward the development and improvement of the entire research community and system. In Europe, this is particularly done via the implementation of the European Research Area (ERA)²⁴.





Key Achievements Supporting the Research Community

ACTIVITIES

EVIDENCE

SOURCES

Advocate for the wider research system (organise events, publish position papers, meet with policy makers)

- » Number and scope of advocacy actions led or contributed to
- » Visibility of advocacy efforts in media
- » Examples of successful policy influence

- » Public documents (letters, manifesto, policy briefs, position papers, etc)
- » Meeting minutes
- » Media coverage or social media analytics

Endorse and implement movements on research integrity, Open Science, inter- and transdisciplinarity, research assessment (e.g., UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science, DORA/CoARA, and Barcelona Declaration)

- » Number of policies revised and adopting shared principles
- » Number of communications and events promoting movements
- » Certification through external means (e.g., Concordats, Athena Swan, Carnegie Classification)
- » Testimonials from staff and leadership on institutional commitments
- » Case studies of changed practices

- » Institutional policy documents
- » Training registration and attendance
- » Internal newsletters, websites, or social media analytics
- » Annual reports
- » Public statements or press releases
- » Staff surveys and interviews

Participate and structure networks and umbrella associations (institutional participation, peer learning mechanisms)

- » Number and diversity of memberships or positions held
- » Number and diversity of collaborative outputs
- » Reflections from staff on learning and collaboration outcomes

- » Membership records
- » Governance documents
- » Meeting minutes
- » Networks' reports and website
- » Testimonials from network partners

Encourage and value peer-review activities, expert and jury participation

- » Number and diversity of peer-review contributions
- » Recognition of reviewer activities
- » Number and type of jury participation (PhD, hiring, grants, awards, etc.)

- » Peer-review records
- » Reviewer acknowledgements
- » Annual reports
- » Letter of participation
- » ORCID



ACTIVITIES

EVIDENCE

SOURCES

Host or contribute to observatories and monitoring initiatives (send representatives and/or data, set standards, agree on indicators, reply to questionnaires)

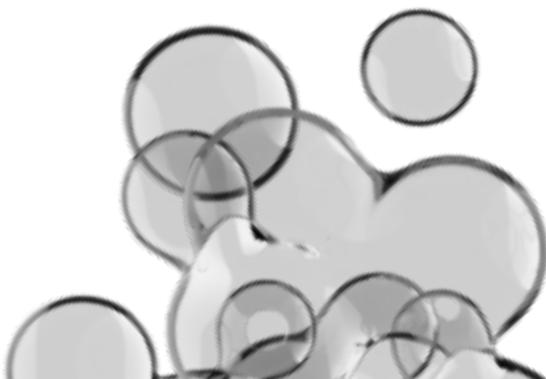
- » Number of institutions and users accessing observatory outputs
- » Testimonials from users or contributors
- » Visibility in media, policy documents, or sector communications
- » Inclusion in national or international monitoring frameworks

- » Website analytics
- » Surveys and interviews
- » Media and social media analytics
- » Institutional reports or evaluations

Support capacity building in under-resourced institutions or regions

- » Number and diversity of capacity-building programs or initiatives delivered
- » Number and diversity of individuals and institutions or regions supported
- » Visibility of initiatives in institutional or external communications
- » Testimonials from partner institutions and participants

- » Training attendance and registration reports
- » Feedback forms
- » Project reports or evaluation summaries
- » Surveys and interviews with participants and institutional partners



Key Achievements in Contributions to Broader Society

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The narratives in this impact area seek to demonstrate the diverse ways in which the institute contributes to society, including fostering a societal impact culture in the institute^{25,26}. They should highlight how the institute supports, enables and drives research effects beyond the scientific community. Recognising that societal impacts are highly context dependent, the narrative should also consider the pathways through which impact occurs, especially as most societal impacts extend beyond the institute's sphere of control. Additionally, they should show how the institute addresses potential negative impacts ("grimimpact"²⁷) and fosters a culture of reflection and transparency to learn from both successes and less successful endeavours in engaging with broader society.

Outcomes associated with the activities in this impact area can be framed as relevant or contributing to:

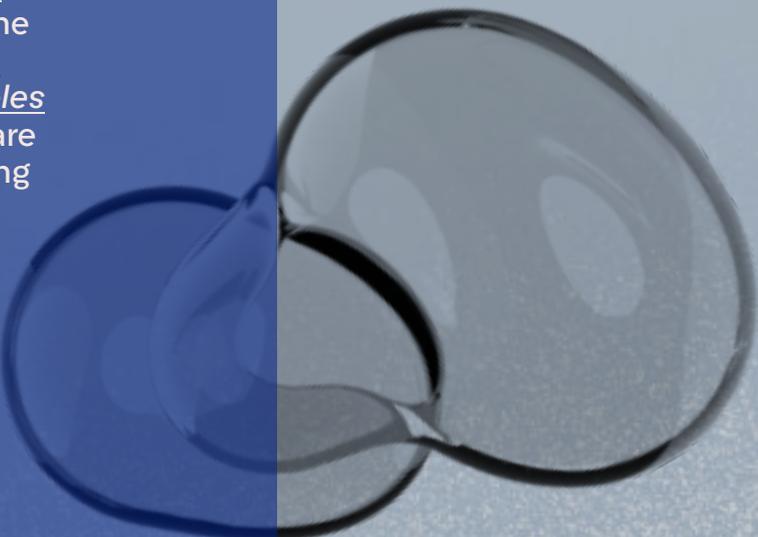
- ▶ Increasing public understanding of science and societal issues, fostering meaningful public dialogue and participation in research.
- ▶ Facilitating societal innovation and problem-solving.
- ▶ Shaping evidence-informed policy-making and professional practice at local, national, and international levels.

Activities and their relevant indicators and sources may include those relating to:

- ▶ Promoting open, participatory, and accessible research.
- ▶ Encouraging responsible commercialisation and industry collaboration.
- ▶ Embedding a culture of reflection, transparency, and ethical responsibility.



The research community increasingly recognises its roles beyond the scholarly community, contributing to society through inclusive, transparent, and ethically grounded practices. Concepts like Open Science and engaged research are fundamental in this space. They advance that scientific knowledge should be accessible and that its production is inclusive, equitable, and sustainable: rather than conducting research for communities, it is advanced *with* them. These practices democratise knowledge, combat misinformation, build trust, and enhance public understanding of science, while also enriching the research quality and impact. People and purpose-oriented values and principles should underpin these approaches, to ensure they are mutually beneficial and reciprocal, avoiding extractivist practices. The UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science ²⁸, the University of Oxford Responsible Knowledge Exchange, Engagement and Impact (RKEEI) Framework ²⁹, the Campus Engage Engaged Research Framework ³⁰, and the CARE Principles for Indigenous Data Governance ³¹ are relevant resources for those reflecting on their institutes' contributions to society.





Key Achievements in Contributions to Broader Society

ACTIVITIES

EVIDENCE

SOURCES

Promote participatory research (e.g., action research, citizen science) while ensuring research outputs are geared for public benefit

- » Participation levels
- » Diversity of societal groups engaged
- » Reflections on mutual learning
- » Examples of co-created knowledge or shared decision-making
- » Uptake and reuse of outputs

- » Event reports
- » Participation figures
- » Participant surveys and interviews
- » Publications and reports
- » Usage/download statistics

Promote social innovation projects addressing societal challenges (host info sessions, broker partnerships, showcase benefits)

- » Number and scope of projects
- » Diversity of sectors or communities involved
- » Examples of co-creation, participatory design, or mutual learning
- » Societal outcomes achieved, innovations adopted, targets improved, and reflections on them
- » Endorsements from community leaders, funders, or policymakers

- » Project reports
- » Surveys and interviews
- » Impact case studies
- » Strategic planning documents
- » External evaluations reports
- » Letters of support

Lead or support science communication and expert contributions (public engagement, media), and consultations on sensitive or emerging issues

- » Number and types of contributions
- » Audience reached
- » Visibility in media outlets, institutional communications, or public platforms
- » Feedback and impact of engagement

- » Event and media participation records
- » Audience reach data and sentiment analysis
- » Feedback or consultation outcomes
- » Case studies of resulting actions or policies

Broker and facilitate expert contributions to policy (advisory roles to government and public bodies)

- » Number and diversity of roles and policy contributions
- » Invitations to advisory panels
- » Citations in policy documents
- » Reflections on the collaborations
- » Examples of improved public services or governance outcomes

- » Policy briefs
- » Internal records and meeting minutes
- » Media coverage
- » Bibliometric databases (e.g., Overton, Altmetric, Dimensions)
- » Strategic documents or partnership agreements



ACTIVITIES

EVIDENCE

SOURCES

Coordinate collaborations with schools and educational/community outreach and/or with NGOs, cultural institutions, or civic organisations.

- » Number and diversity of collaborations and participants
- » Repeat collaborations or long-term partnerships
- » Outcomes for participants and communities
- » Reflections on mutual benefits

- » Partnership agreements or programme records
- » Project or evaluation reports
- » Interviews with partners and beneficiaries
- » Letters of support

Define internal evaluation mechanisms for potential "grimpect" (negative societal impact)

- » Number of assessments conducted
- » Number of staff trained
- » Number of units applying tools and adopting policies
- » Examples of mitigation actions implemented
- » Reflections from staff on lessons learned

- » Grimpect assessment reports
- » Ethical review documentation
- » Training registration and attendance and feedback forms
- » Internal newsletters, websites, or intranet analytics
- » Policy documents and research guidelines
- » Staff surveys and interviews

Promote commercialisation and industry collaborations

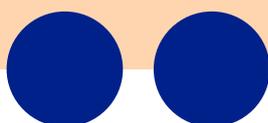
- » Number and diversity of industry collaborations
- » Number, diversity and scope of products, services, or processes co-developed
- » Number and diversity of beneficiaries of internships, placements, or joint training programs delivered
- » Reflections on knowledge exchange experiences
- » Examples of societal and economic impacts

- » Partnership agreements or programme records
- » Participant surveys and interviews
- » Training registration and attendance and feedback forms
- » Impact case studies or evaluation reports

Implement a structured impact strategy with funding, leadership, workload integration, clear goals, and evidence mechanisms

- » Coverage of units, teams and projects with impact goals and plans
- » Examples of staff with impact-related responsibilities
- » Visibility of impact strategy in internal communications
- » Alignment of strategy with reported outcomes

- » Partnership agreements or programme records
- » Strategy documents and governance records
- » Staff surveys and interviews
- » Evaluation reports
- » Internal newsletters, websites, or intranet analytics
- » Impact tracking tools (e.g., Grow Impact, OutNav)



Key Achievements in Institutional Sustainability and Resilience

The narratives in this impact area aim to demonstrate how the institute aligns its practices with its strategic plan and mission, sustainably manages its resources and responsibly allocates the necessary resources to achieve its organisational objectives. They can also highlight the institute's capacity to adapt to evolving opportunities, respond to challenges, and continuously review and improve its policies and practices. Additionally, the narratives demonstrate how the institute fosters a research environment that is accessible, inclusive, and collegial, promoting equity and a sense of belonging for under-represented and minoritised groups.

Outcomes associated with the activities in this impact area can be framed as relevant or contributing to:

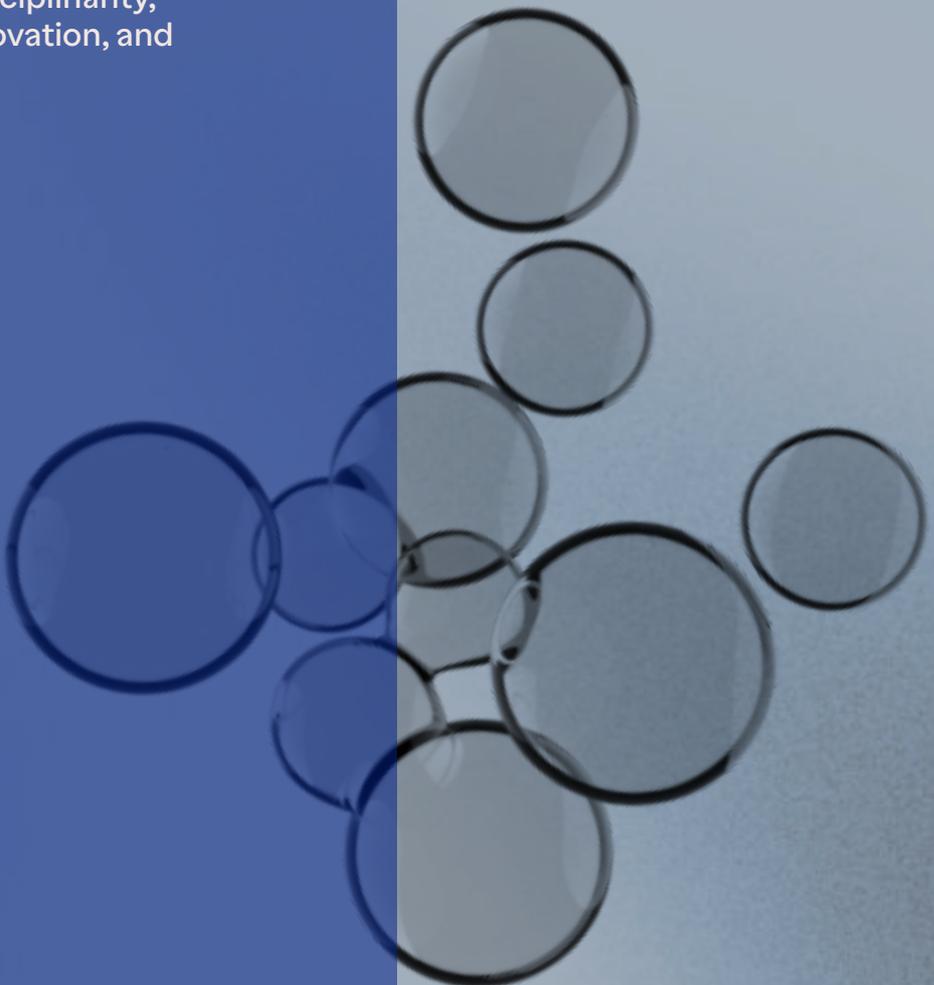
- ▶ Enhancing trust from staff, funders and partners.
- ▶ Improving resilience to external shocks.
- ▶ Fostering an inclusive, accessible, and supportive research environment.

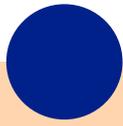
Activities and their relevant indicators and sources may include those relating to:

- ▶ Ensuring long-term financial resilience and strategic resource allocation.
- ▶ Embedding socio-environmental responsibility and sustainability.
- ▶ Enhanced transparency and accessibility of institutional knowledge.



Good governance, institutional sustainability and resilience entails aligning practices and policies with strategic plans and missions; effectively managing resources to address evolving demands and competition for funding; and demonstrating agility in adapting to new opportunities and challenges. This includes investment in people and infrastructure, reflecting meaningfully on progress and incorporating lessons learned into future plans, and creating and maintaining a supportive and respectful environment. The *6i Model for Strategic Governance and Management*³², initially developed for universities, can be a good way for institutes to reflect on how to integrate six core dimensions: internationalisation, interdisciplinarity, intersectorality, impact, innovation, and inclusion.





Key Achievements in Institutional Sustainability and Resilience

ACTIVITIES

EVIDENCE

SOURCES

Adopt strategic financial management (risk management, diversification of funding sources)

- » Risk mitigation measures taken
- » Number and diversity of funding sources
- » Audit outcomes and compliance ratings
- » Staff testimonials on reduced stress due to financial stability

- » Internal policy documents
- » Grant records and donor reports
- » Audit or Annual report
- » Staff interviews and surveys

Establish transparent governance structures and decision-making processes

- » Examples of participation in decision-making processes (e.g., committee membership, policy consultations)
- » Examples of transparency and accountability in decision-making (e.g., publication of meeting minutes, open-access policy documents)
- » Staff and partner confidence levels

- » Governance policies
- » Meeting minutes
- » Audit or Annual report
- » Staff surveys and interviews

Regularly review and update institutional policies and practices to align with recent system developments

- » Number and scope of policy updates
- » Policy review schedules
- » Visibility of shared templates and guidance documents
- » Examples of alignment with best practices
- » Staff and partner confidence levels

- » Policy documents
- » Audit or Annual report
- » Internal newsletters, websites, or intranet analytics
- » Staff surveys and interviews

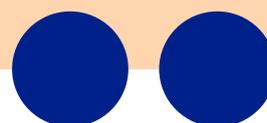
Adopt socio-environmental sustainability initiatives

- » Description of environmental policies enforced
- » Environmental outcomes (e.g. reduced CO₂ emissions, energy use, waste generation)
- » Examples of environmental impact mitigation taken and practices implemented
- » Staff engagement levels with sustainability initiatives

- » Sustainability reports
- » Certifications (e.g., My Green Lab)
- » Environmental impact assessments
- » Staff surveys and interviews



ACTIVITIES	EVIDENCE	SOURCES
Invest in improving working conditions (flexible working practices, support structures for well-being and safety)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Coverage of well-being programmes and initiatives across roles and career stages » Visibility and adoption of practices and initiatives » Staff satisfaction, well-being, and engagement rates » Certification through external means (e.g., Athena Swan) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Working policies » Staff satisfaction surveys » Program participation records » Internal newsletters, websites, or intranet analytics » Well-being survey results » Case studies » Awards and certificates
Implement strategic personnel planning (offer support for mobility, facilitate integration, provide permanent positions)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Coverage of units, teams and projects with personnel planning » Coverage of initiatives for staff mobility, integration, and career stability » Staff testimonials on improved career progression and job security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Annual report » HR guidelines » Personnel records and analytics » Mobility programme records » Performance evaluations » Staff surveys and interviews
Establish regular communication and engagement with internal and external community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Examples of channels used and engagement levels » Inclusion of engagement metrics in strategic planning or institutional reporting » Feedback from researchers, staff, and community members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Newsletters, websites, and social media analytics » Meeting minutes » Annual report » Staff surveys and interviews
Manage institutional records lifecycle (institutional memory, archive policies, transparency, file management, accessibility, reliability)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Inclusion of knowledge management in strategic plans or funding proposals » Examples of knowledge management policies or frameworks adopted » Examples of cross-institutional sharing of practices or toolkits » Staff feedback on access to institutional knowledge (e.g. onboarding, collaboration) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Governance documents » Annual report » Staff surveys and interviews



Using the Guide

The RIING is designed for practical application supporting institutes when they need to share their narratives, for example, when seeking or reporting on funding, undergoing external evaluations and assessments, reflecting on research outcomes, or receiving recognition for their achievements.

Potential drivers for using the RIING include:



The RIING can be applied in response to any such drivers for sharing impact stories. Identifying the purpose or the story's driver at the outset of using the RIING is fundamental, as this will help define the target audience for the impact narrative. Once the audience is clear, the institute can then determine the data (key dimensions and most appropriate evidence points) and format needed to deliver a tailored, audience-specific response.

Different audiences will be interested in different perspectives of achievements and impacts, with their own priorities and preferred language. Knowing such preferences allows the institute to apply the RIING in context. By mapping their impact onto the impacts that matter to that specific audience, the institute can identify the key impact messages and the evidence that credibly corroborates the impact story. It is important though to keep consistency across narratives, as inconsistencies may be perceived negatively as opportunistic rather than audience-aligned. Institutes are encouraged to reflect on the maturity level of its activities, and across time report on how they evolve, including in its size and scope.

Understanding the driver and recognising the audience for the impact narrative allows for a full characterisation of the impact story opportunity being presented. Institutes should make sure they are aware of their audiences' requirements. For example, in some cases, using the wrong metrics can mean an application can be disqualified, and inappropriate language can hamper trust and understanding.

The RIING is concerned with the entire process of constructing an institute's impact narrative, including its contextualisation, identifying the underpinning evidence, and crafting the narrative itself. The RIING is deliberately broad and flexible to take into account the diversity of contexts and how institutes may benefit from its use. Please approach the RIING with such flexibility, and feel free to associate different activities with different impact areas.

Using the RIING to write audience-specific, evidence-based impact narratives

WHY?

Understand the narrative driver

WHO?

Recognise the audience, their priorities, preferred language, and desired format

WHEN?

Identify why this impact narrative needs to be crafted now

WHAT?

Define contributions and gather evidence on the impacts that matter using the RIING

HOW?

Craft your credible evidence-based, audience-specific narrative

Recognising the Opportunity for Impact-centred Institutional Narratives

Institutional story opportunities present themselves in both formal and informal moments for overviews and descriptions of an institute, including in open-ended communications. The RIING aspires to inspire institutes, at every appropriate opportunity, to describe not only what was done but also why it matters to others in that research field, the wider research community, societal partners, and other key interest holders.

EXAMPLES OF SUCH OPPORTUNITIES INCLUDE:

- ▶ Evaluation criteria: “Quality, merit, relevance, level of collaboration, and internationalization of R&D activity carried out in the evaluation period, measured by international standards, considering the originality, consistency and rigor, the relevance of the results, their dissemination, the participation in advanced training and the development and consolidation of careers, the hosting conditions for researchers and the contribution to the promotion of scientific and technological culture”³³ - Portuguese R&D Units Evaluation 2023/2024, Evaluation Guide
- ▶ Self-evaluation frameworks: “The self-evaluation takes the overall shape of a coherent narrative argument on the aims and strategy of the research unit as well as its results, supported by robust data.” - Dutch Strategic Evaluation Protocol, 2021-2027³⁴

Informal opportunities include milestones such as annual reports, anniversaries, major project completions, or leadership transitions, and when engaging with philanthropic donors or partners. More formal opportunities include reporting to the institute’s Board or their host University, and when going for external review.

Most formal reporting or funding opportunities, like institutional project proposals, will include guidance on how to structure narrative statements, which should be followed closely. However, there may be instances where the request does not explicitly indicate that the focus should be on collective institutional impact. In such cases - particularly when the emphasis is placed on “significant academic contribution organisations” - research institutes can still use the opportunity to highlight their institutional role in enabling, facilitating, or supporting these achievements. This includes showcasing how the institute’s infrastructure, policies, collaborations, and strategic initiatives contributed to the success of individual or group efforts, thereby reinforcing the broader value and impact of the organisation.

Evidencing Research Institutes Impact Narratives

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The RIING includes possible evidence types and sources for reach, use, relevance, and impact. The evidence types and sources should demonstrate that the activity has been valuable and generated benefits for researchers, the larger academic community, and/or external partners and interest holders. A diverse approach to evidence types and sources is expected and encouraged. The data always depends on what you are trying to highlight. Therefore, you should start with your value and purpose, why you are writing the narrative, and then define evidence that is appropriate.

SCOPE³⁵ can serve as a foundational framework for research institutes to effectively craft their institutional narratives using the RIING by emphasizing a values-first approach to self-assessment and communication. The acronym SCOPE represents the five stages of the framework: **START** with what you value, **CONTEXT** considerations, **OPTIONS** for evaluating, **PROBE** deeply, and **EVALUATE** your evaluation.

By integrating SCOPE's principles, particularly its values-based foundation and emphasis on responsible, reflective assessment, research institutes can leverage the RIING to construct comprehensive, authentic, and impactful narratives that truly represent their contributions to the research ecosystem and society aligned with their own communities' vision and ambitions.

The evidence sources suggested in the RIING include free online sources (such as Open Alex and Google Scholar), paid tools which can be accessed freely via other platforms (such as Altmetric, OutNav), and, most importantly, numerous sources that relate to tailor-made resources, including for example training and event registration and attendance reports, staff and participants surveys, programme and annual reports. This kind of “owned data” refers to evidence that institutes should be striving to capture (actively and spontaneously) from their staff, key partners and beneficiaries before, during, and after an activity.

We recognise that many uses of the RIING are connected to retrospective impact analysis (e.g. external reviews and funder reporting). Nevertheless, the gathering of impact-relevant evidence can be, and ideally should be, integrated into activities and projects to streamline efforts. Institutes have different approaches to gathering this impact-related evidence along the way. Some use bespoke spreadsheets, institutional systems or paid impact evidence repositories.

When writing the institute’s narrative, make sure that its evidence is used throughout. Incorporate and illustrate your points with graphs, infographics, tables to make it easier for the reader to understand and visualise achievements and trends. If you can’t add these to your narrative, have it as an appendix. Remember to always explain to the reader the “Why” and the “So What” of any data-driven visuals: highlight why this data is important and what trends this evidence is showing. Metrics should always be chosen carefully and be contextualised.

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Audience-specific evidence-based institutional narratives are a structured approach for research institutes to articulate their contributions and significance, highlighting the value of their infrastructure in supporting both research and researchers. They aim to demonstrate the value a research institute brings to the research system and society by connecting its activities and outputs to their outcomes and impact areas. Narratives can be strengthened by reflecting the different stages of activities' impact pathways, acknowledging activities that are in early development, those that have yielded initial outcomes, and those pursuing longer-term, potentially more transformative goals.

The RIING Impact Narrative serves to show research institutes' impact from an institutional perspective, focusing on the aggregation or collective construction done, going beyond the sum of its parts. The impact narrative articulates how the values and purpose of the organisation is expressed in one or more impact areas, or in relation to a specific outcome, grounded in activities implemented by the research institute, with evidence of its benefits.

To the greatest extent possible, the impact narrative should clearly state the STRATEGIC VISION guiding institutional achievements, efforts and future directions; the ROLE played by the institute in achieving collective outcomes; its PARTNERS and BENEFICIARIES, and the nature and timing of their engagement. All of this information must be corroborated by reasonable, appropriate, and time-bound EVIDENCE. The narrative is underpinned by the shared VALUES agreed between the institute and its partners and interest holders. The resulting content should be delivered in an audience-appropriate format.

The model is the same for all five impact areas, with the institute selecting an activity, the evidence that corroborates its impact, and summarising it in an impact narrative focused on the outcomes of activities rather than the activities themselves. A well-structured narrative thread or arc guides the reader through the institutional impact story by clearly connecting activities to their intermediate and ultimate outcomes. This approach helps demonstrate how specific actions contribute to broader goals over time, offering a coherent and compelling account of institutional progress.

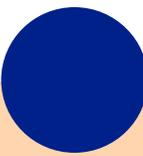
Adopters of the RIING may choose to group impact areas when articulating their institutional narrative, particularly when activities or outcomes intersect across domains. Bundling impact areas can be an effective strategy to demonstrate the interconnected nature of institutional contributions and build comprehensive and concise impact narratives, especially when:

- ▶ A single activity or initiative contributes to multiple impact areas;
- ▶ Outcomes are synergistic, reflecting a broader institutional strategy or value;
- ▶ Evidence supports a cohesive narrative that spans more than one domain.

When bundling impact areas, institutes should ensure that the narrative remains clear, focused, and evidence-based, with explicit reference to the shared values, strategic intent, and collaborative achievements that underpin the impact. This approach allows for a more holistic representation of institutional influence while benefitting from the RIING's structured model. By combining a strong narrative arc with thoughtful grouping, institutes can present their impact in a way that is both strategic and accessible, making it easier for diverse audiences to grasp the significance and interconnectedness of their contributions.

Choosing different types of narrative for different types of audiences for a research institute is a crucial aspect of effectively communicating its value and impact. The approach is fundamentally about tailoring the story to resonate with the specific audience. Different audiences have varying priorities and interests regarding research outcomes and impacts, as well as preferred language and values. For a specific audience, choose the activities and demonstrated outcomes that are most relevant to them and clearly identify the beneficiaries within that audience. For example, funders might be interested in the recognition of a broader range of contributions, fairness, and flexibility, while policymakers might prioritise evidence on how the institute informs clinical guidelines or supports cost savings or influences policy directly. The general public might be more interested in contributions to broader society or addressing societal challenges.

Understanding the preferences of each audience allows the institute to focus the narrative on the perspectives of achievements and impacts that matter most to that audience. The institution's own values, such as autonomy, openness, transparency, equality, diversity, inclusion, and collaboration, should permeate the narrative, but their presentation may be framed differently depending on the audience.



KEY TERMS IN RIING

- 1. PARTNERS AND BENEFICIARIES:** those who engage with, contribute to and benefit from or are (positively) affected by the institutional activity and its outputs.
- 2. REACH:** the extent, spread, breadth, and/or diversity of the beneficiaries of the institutional activity and/or its impact.
- 3. USE:** the adoption of scholarly outputs in further activities by beneficiaries.
- 4. RELEVANCE:** the importance or significance of the activity and of the reach and use of outputs by beneficiaries, including any outcomes for beneficiaries.
- 5. OUTCOME:** the short-term changes or contributions resulting from institutional activities.
- 6. IMPACT:** the longer-term changes, benefits, or values of the activity or outcome for beneficiaries and the consequences of the outcomes.

The RIING aligns with institutional evaluation processes, such as the Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP)³⁶ and the Research Excellence Framework (REF) 2029 People, Culture and Environment pilot³⁷, which aim for organisational learning and strategic development, and emphasise that self-evaluation reports should allow space for reflecting on past periods with honesty, demonstrating a willingness to learn from experiences as a measure of both indicators of rigour and strategic insight. By openly addressing difficulties, institutes show a commitment to understanding their mission and impact rigorously, regardless of the outcome. Discussing challenges can demonstrate reflection and transparency, contributing to a culture of learning. However, the appropriateness of discussing failures depends heavily on the audience and the context of the narrative (e.g., a formative self-evaluation versus a public communication).

We encourage institutes to discuss distinct degrees of both success and failure³⁸, to describe both normal and extraordinary impacts³⁹, and also address challenges and failures, going beyond non-controversial positive impacts and investigating instances in research misconduct and failures in interest holder engagement, among other grim impacts⁴⁰. Less successful (impact) endeavours are valuable for learning and development, and we hope a culture of reflection and transparency will enable institutes to have open and honest discussions about them in narratives. Narratives could include what indicators were used or intended, what evidence was gathered, and what the data revealed about the challenges or lack of desired outcomes. This demonstrates a commitment to learning and a rigorous approach to understanding the institute's mission and impact, regardless of the final result.

By incorporating challenges and learning, narratives shift away from purely results-based accounts toward a more comprehensive evaluation of the research system, including its processes, culture, and capacity to adapt. Addressing failure and negative impacts in audience-specific, evidence-based narratives enhances credibility, supports continuous improvement, and aligns with evolving expectations for responsible research assessment worldwide.

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The RIING, inspired by the Researcher Impact Framework (RIF), positions values as both cross-cutting and foundational. In the narratives readers are building using the RIING, we hope institutes can show how their values are influencing all aspects from processes and activities to management and governance. These values are institute and context-specific and are not to be inherited.

The RIF explicitly takes a “values-enacted approach” inspired by the HuMetricsHSS Values Framework. HuMetricsHSS offers a values-enacted, process-oriented approach to scholarly production, decision-making, and evaluation⁴¹. The RIING builds on this, and incorporates the additional values⁴² and vision framework⁴³ from Science Europe which includes values similar to those like HuMetricsHSS, namely Autonomy/Freedom, Care & Collegiality, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion, Collaboration, Integrity & Ethics, and Openness & Transparency. For the RIING, incorporating values means demonstrating how the institution’s actions align with its stated principles and contribute to a healthy research ecosystem.

- ▶ **Autonomy/Freedom**, the self-governing nature of research
- ▶ **Care & Collegiality**, the need for research processes, activities, and the research community to care for and nurture the ecosystem that research exists within
- ▶ **Collaboration**, the importance of promoting co-operation between people, within and across disciplines, for the research process in general and with society, where relevant
- ▶ **Equality, Diversity & Inclusion**, the importance of supporting a diversity of social categories, experiences, competencies, and merits of individuals within the research community as well as the research inputs and outputs
- ▶ **Integrity and Ethics**, to maintain and improve reliability, honesty, respect, and accountability in the research domain
- ▶ **Openness and Transparency**, the need for all aspects of research to be shared and accessible for examination, re-use, and extension and the necessity that the research process is appropriately explained and justified

You can read more at their publication *Position Statement ‘A values Framework for the Organisation of Research’*.⁴⁴

Reflective Questions when Using the Guide

1. Have you reflected on what research outcomes and impacts matter to the institute, others in its field, the wider research community, its societal partners, and other key partners and interest holders?

2. Are you aware of how others benefit from your institute's activities?

3. How are you engaging with the beneficiaries of your institute?

4. Can you identify how you and others in your field understand and value the activities you do?

5. Are you capturing evidence of the reach, use, and relevance of your institutional activities?

6. Are the data points you are using relevant and compliant with the needs and expectations of your audiences?

7. How have you reflected on your progress and how has this learning been incorporated into your future plans and strategic priorities?

8. Have you considered how communicating your impact now may provide better positioning for the next time you pursue a relevant opportunity?

Do's and Don'ts for Research Institutes



DO

DO focus on the role of the institute in achievements

DO focus on what benefit the institute has ultimately enabled, not only its activities

DO share challenges and lessons learned

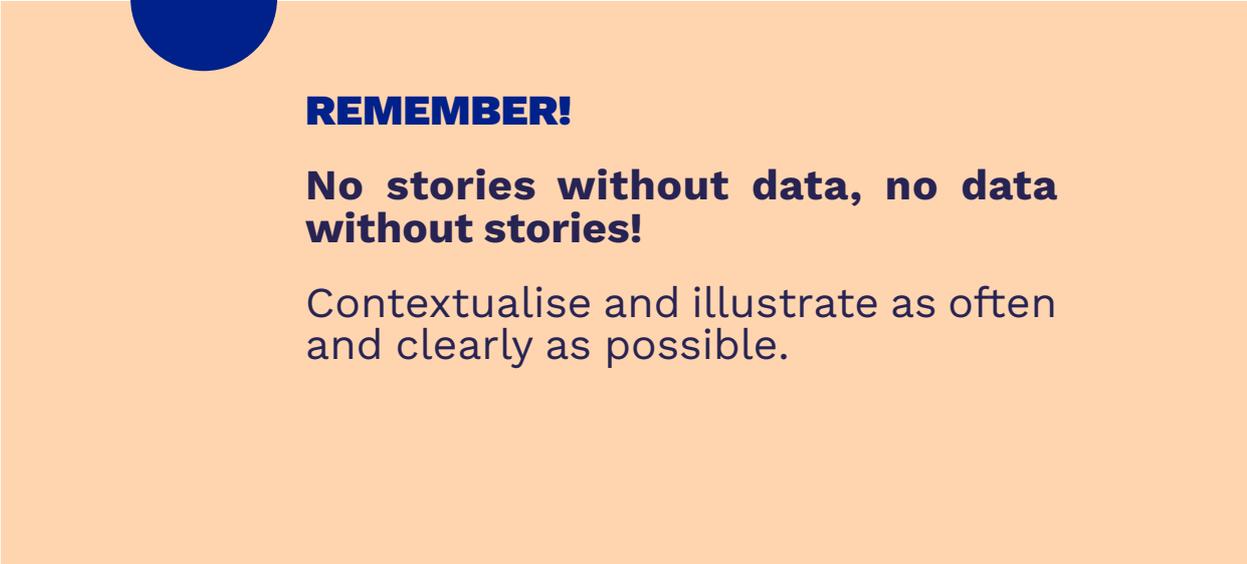
DO celebrate results while evidencing it with data



DON'T

DON'T exaggerate the role played by the institute

DON'T use the same narrative for all audiences



REMEMBER!

No stories without data, no data without stories!

Contextualise and illustrate as often and clearly as possible.

A Final Note from the Authors

Our starting point for the RIING was the recognition that traditional approaches and metrics used to evaluate research institutes do not capture the full range of contributions made by research institutes.

We were inspired by the Researcher Impact Framework created by Giovanna Lima and Sarah Bowman during their time at Trinity College Dublin. They provided the community with an approach to narratives that is based on five building blocks, anchored in the scholarly activities researchers do.

In their words,

“The RIF aims to support researchers in identifying, recognising, and valuing the multiple activities of academic life. ... Researchers can utilise the RIF to showcase a broad spectrum of impacts using audience-specific, evidence-based narratives.”

The RIING builds on the RIF by focusing on the activities that research institutes do, which often differ from those performed by individual researchers. Many of these activities are undertaken by professional staff, in roles that include research managers, administrators, data stewards, lab technicians, grant advisors, knowledge brokers, among others. The RIING helps demonstrate how the institute’s impact extends beyond the contributions of its academic staff, highlighting work that is often overlooked or insufficiently documented and recognised.

It is essential to note we understand knowledge production and mobilisation as a collective endeavour that operates as a complex interconnection of relationships and requires teamwork, partnerships, and connected actions. This collaborative system explicitly includes all participants in the research endeavour, recognising diverse contributions from all, including roles such as research managers and administrators, technical staff, and knowledge brokers, whose vital work must be acknowledged to underpin a healthy knowledge system.

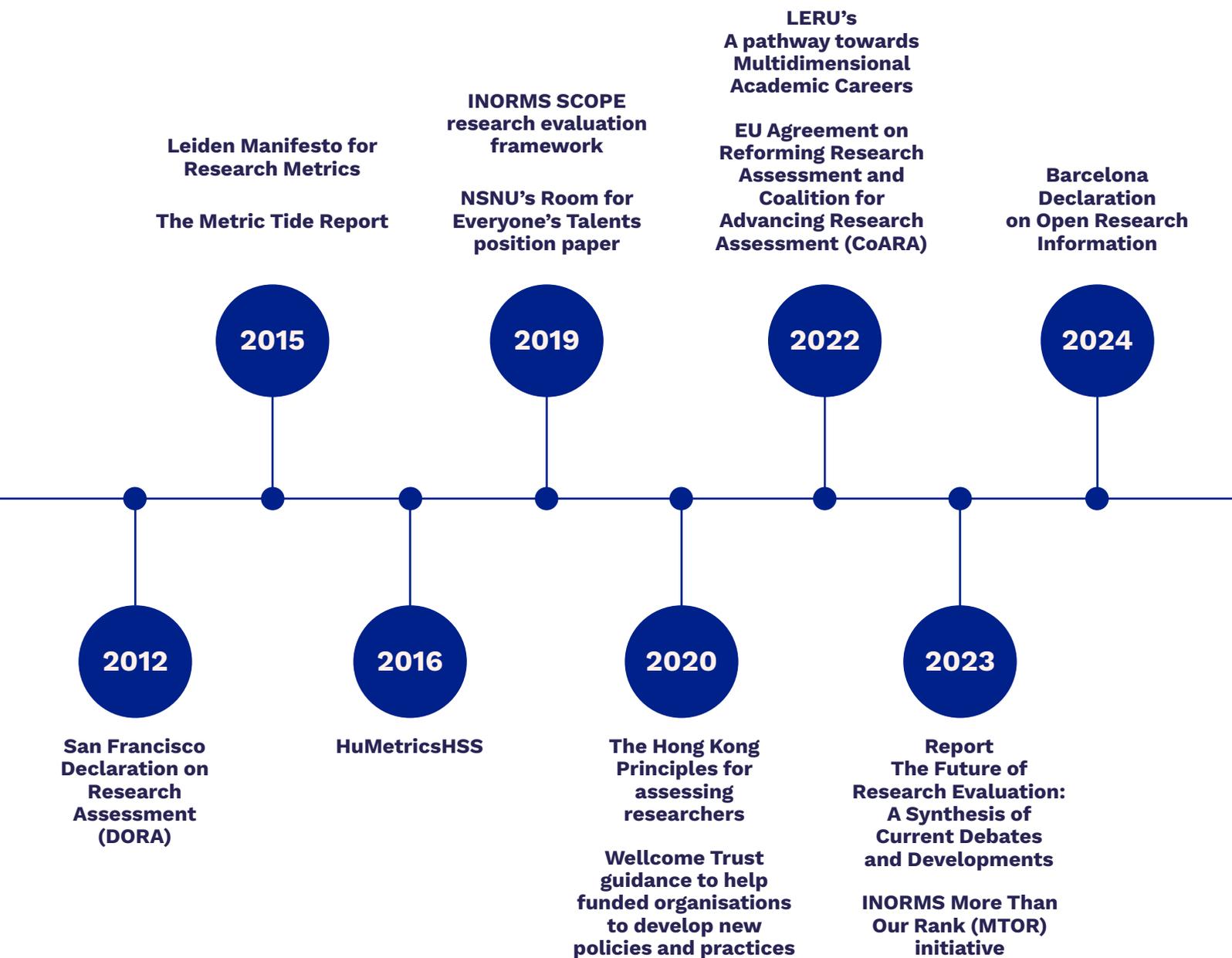
RESEARCH IMPACT COMMUNITY

This work stems from the relationships established by the authors that have been facilitated by the wonderful research impact community we are all part of. The authors are grateful to their own institutions that provide the space and opportunity for us to contribute to this community and allow these connections to flourish.

The *Research Institute Impact Narrative Guide* was open for feedback and consultation. We appreciate the support from colleagues who participated in a meeting with the research managers and administrators of University of Coimbra and in our session on the Research Impact Summit in November 2025, and especially those who provided feedback via email. We would like to acknowledge and especially thank the support of the following colleagues: Bianca Lanhgout-van den Bulk, Caitriona Curtis, Danyela Rascon, David Phipps, Djenisa Rocha, Esther De Smet, Isabel Neves, Karina Kössler, Mariela Miranda, Monica Mulrennan, Rita Farinha, Tanja Strøm, and Tatiana Aad. Any errors or omissions remain our own.

Research Assessment

Successive waves of scholarship and advocacy over the past decade have questioned methodologies, systems, and cultures of research and research assessment. The main national and international initiatives influencing the changing landscape in research assessment that research institutes should be aware of include:



The emerging responsible research assessment (RRA) is now shifting from describing problems towards designing and implementing solutions (Curry et al., 2020). There are five identified global values of RRA (UK Research and Innovation, 2021):

- ▶ **ASSESSMENT SHAPES CULTURE:** Research assessment and what the community values influence how research is performed.
- ▶ **DIVERSITY CREATES EXCELLENCE:** The definition of research excellence needs to be broad and encompass perspectives and experiences from people of all backgrounds.
- ▶ **FOSTERING A HEALTHY SYSTEM:** Funders should employ clear criteria, relevant indicators, and regular self-evaluation.
- ▶ **RESEARCH IS GLOBAL:** Funders' assessment approaches must be mindful of local context, culture, language and unintended consequences which can impact other countries.
- ▶ **STAKEHOLDERS ARE VITAL IN ENACTING CHANGE:** All stakeholders should collaborate to develop and evaluate RRA and resist shifting onus to other parties.

Additionally, there are “heightened expectations and emphases on strategic, challenge or mission-oriented research; open scholarship and data; ethics, integrity and reproducibility; interdisciplinarity, collaboration and team science; and the need for greater diversity and inclusion.”⁴⁵ The RIING is in dialogue with these initiatives and practically suggests ways institutes can respond to new requirements, especially on moving away from inadequate metrics of success.

Contextual or Narrative-based CVs

The RIING broadly adopts the four main pillars of the Royal Society’s *Résumé for Researchers (R4R)* to group relevant societal outcomes and their associated scholarly activities. The R4R is a narrative-based document that is focused on four key questions:

“How have you contributed to the generation of knowledge?

How have you contributed to the development of individuals?

How have you contributed to the wider research community?

And how have you contributed to broader society?”⁴⁶

The R4R is part of recent developments in research assessment, promoting the use of contextual or narrative-based CVs. This new CV format provides a structured, qualitative description of a researcher’s contributions and achievements that reflect a broad range of relevant skills and experiences. The format is being piloted and adopted by national research funders. The Dutch Research Council, Health Research Board Ireland, Luxembourg National Research Fund, the National Institutes of Health in the United States, Science Foundation Ireland, the Swiss National Science Foundation, and UK Research and Innovation are among the first funding organisations to pilot or implement narrative CV formats.⁴⁷ Each adopting organisation is developing its own version of what a contextual or narrative CV model looks like, adapting the format to their specific needs and contexts.

In the RIING, the adoption of this structure is intended to help institutes frame and contextualise the contribution of institutional activities. The R4R has been developed for the individual level, and it is expected that the assessment of institutes will follow a different frame or structure. Still, we feel the R4R is helpful in centring the main outcomes and impacts that research institutes are trying to achieve. Institutes are encouraged to use the relevant inspiration and illustrative points in the RIING to their benefit and utilise the RIING building blocks as needed to craft their self-assessment statements to support applications for institutional reviews, quality assurance exercises, among other moments.

Impact Frameworks

The RIING joins a suite of other impact frameworks that have been developed by research performing organisations, funding agencies, and national research impact assessments around the world. The existing frameworks are concerned with assessing research impact for different institutional purposes and have different units of analysis (e.g., research projects, discipline, or School level). Reed et al.⁴⁸ summarises methodologies used in the evaluation of research impact, which is what many frameworks are hoping to achieve.

The RIING has been developed to help research institutes explore and express the impact of their activities for multiple audiences, not evaluate it. Our definitions and applications are broader and discipline agnostic to allow for the different contexts institutes may find themselves in. The scope of the RIING presents some challenges.

The main challenge is ontological. Some impact frameworks do not value processes leading to impact, only its outcomes. In these approaches, for example, “reach is not impact” as reach is only a pathway to impact, i.e. a way for the change to happen, but not the change itself. When faced with those frameworks, researchers can focus on the Use and Relevance of their achievements, with less emphasis given to Reach. Researchers interested in Reach can benefit from the literature on “productive interactions” (e.g., Benneworth, P. et al., 2022; Díaz Mariño et al., 2021; Spaapen & Drooge, 2011).

Another important challenge is definitional. The concepts and language we suggest are built upon multiple sources and do not adhere to one single understanding of impact. The RIING language will be different to that used by other frameworks. The RIING may also include evidence points not allowed by other frameworks. That is expected. Flexibility, adaptability, and audience awareness are essential when using the RIING.

Institutes can find interesting inspiration by studying other frameworks as they may provide useful examples of how to frame or evidence an institutional narrative, including the UK’s Research Excellence Framework (REF) database (the system for assessing the quality of research in UK higher education institutions by the government). Institutes can, for example, search the REF *Environment database* at <https://results2021.ref.ac.uk/environment>. For REF 2021, ‘environment’ means the environment for supporting research and enabling impact within each submitting unit and is assessed against two criteria: vitality and sustainability.

Another useful tool is the *Research Infrastructures’ Impact Assessment Toolkit and Guidebook*⁴⁹, available at <https://ri-paths-tool.eu/en>, which in a similar vein to the RIING, helps infrastructures map their potential impact pathways and what arguments and data can be used to showcase those impacts. Users of the RIING may benefit from the clear connection between impact areas and the different activities institutes perform, while consulting the RI-PATHS Tool will be useful to explore different outcome statements and a long list of indicators at <https://ri-paths-tool.eu/en/indicators>.



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All references and resources were available in November 2025. While we tried to use persistent identifiers where possible, it may be the case that some of the links are no longer available after this date.

We have made use of Microsoft Copilot and Google NotebookLM to assist in summarising documents, and rephrasing and improving the clarity and conciseness of concepts and paragraphs. ChaptGPT helped us with ideas for what to name our guide.

