Exercise/Framework

Develop your project plan (including timetable of key milestones). Figure 2 provides an example of how it may look:

Figure 2

Objectives	Resources/ inputs	Activities	Outputs	Knowledge translation/ dissemination	Research utilisation (expected/ desired)	Outcomes (expected/ desired)	Outcomes (actual)	Impact* (expected/ desired)	Impact (actual)
Objective 1	Include financial and non-financial resources needed			Include any formal and informal dissemination plans or suggestions for how the research knowledge	Record here all the ways that the research knowledge could be utilised by different stakeholders				
Objective 2									
Objective 3									

*consider social, economic and environmental impacts as part of this.

✔ Stage 1 checklist

- ○ Key gaps in existing knowledge identified
- ○ Possible ongoing, similar research identified
- ○ Explicit aims and objective(s) defined
- ○ Outputs, outcomes and impact identified
- ○ Initial stakeholder analysis conducted
- ○ Potential resource implications identified

Toolkit Stage 1
Defining the problem

This stage of the toolkit is designed to guide you through the process of defining the problem; exploring the existing evidence; mapping the changes you would like to happen in order to help you clearly define or understand your research questions.

Key steps

- Define the specific problem the research project is to address
- Evaluate the existing evidence to identify the gaps in knowledge
- Define your aims and objectives
- Identify your key stakeholders
- Calculate potential resources required (including non-financial)

Theory

Through improving your understanding of the issues you are seeking to address, you can make an important contribution to creating an environment where existing knowledge, policy and practice can be challenged and discussed more fully.

Evidencing the need for the new knowledge to be produced, and systematic pre-planning of the research project, are both key to getting the most value and impact from your research project. Clarification of your long-term goals, indicators of success and the actions needed to achieve those goals will help you to define the aims and objectives of your research project as precisely as possible.

In order to create a comprehensive picture of progress, impact and achievements throughout the research/project process, you will need to record these within some sort of project plan. For example, developing a framework such as a **Theory of Change**[1] or a **Logic Model**[2] at the beginning of your research project helps you carefully think through how your research project will work. In terms of generating impact, it will help you to plan and track the different potential ways that the research outputs can be used and the processes involved in the translation of the research knowledge and evidence to create impact (Stage 4 of the toolkit covers building, translating and transferring relevant key messages to your target audiences). It will also help you build measures of eventual impact.

1 Theory of Change is an established approach for strategic planning and was defined by Weiss (1995) as a method of articulating the short to mid-term changes and small steps that need to happen to reach the desired longer-term outcomes or change.

2 For detailed information on the origins of program logic modelling see *The W. K. Kellogg Foundation Logic Model Development Guide* or *The W. K. Kellogg Foundation Evaluation Handbook* www.wkkf.org

Things to consider

What is the problem you want to address?
What exactly are you trying to achieve through this research project?
How does this relate to your organisational (and/or programme level) objectives?

What do you already know about the problem and where are the **gaps in existing knowledge**?

Use web and/or literature searches and consider organising a **stakeholder network** or meeting in order to investigate and understand all possible gaps in knowledge and the type of evidence required from the research. This will also provide an opportunity to gauge the level of 'research receptivity' amongst the target audiences and relevant communities, ie the capacity or willingness to use the research or implement the findings.

If there is any other, **similar research activity** happening locally that could either inform your research project, answer some of your questions or complement your research project? It would be worth finding out whether it would be mutually beneficial to combine your findings (for example, to corroborate and 'add weight' to the evidence produced).

What is the **political context** within which your research findings will be received? What are the current or likely developments in the field or policy arena? Formal or informal **horizon scanning** is an important consideration for any research project manager. Tools to help you with your horizon scanning can be found at **hsctoolkit.bis.gov.uk/The-tools.html**.

Make sure that your research project **aims and objectives** are explicit (ie specific and measurable).

What will be the **specific outputs and related outcomes** of the research project?

Thinking about **impact**:

What **type** of impact are you aiming for?

- Do you want the research to directly contribute to change in policy and/or practice? *(ie instrumental impact)*
- Do you want the research to raise awareness and/or contribute to the working knowledge of practitioners? *(ie conceptual impact)*
- Do you want the research to confirm or legitimise existing policy or knowledge? *(ie symbolic impact)*
- Do you want the research findings to help build capacity within the sector? *(ie capacity-building impact)*
- Do you want changes to happen (eg in stakeholders' knowledge, skills or attitude) as a result direct result of either taking part in the research process or knowledge exchange activities? *(ie process impact)*

Where do you want to make an impact?

- Locally/regionally?
- Nationally?
- Internationally?

What **level** of impact are you aiming for?

- Individual and/or organisational?
- Operational and/or strategic?

Who do you want the research findings to benefit?

- Service users? Practitioners? Service providers? Service commissioners? Policy-makers? Other agencies

When do you want to make the impact? At what stage in the policy-making or practice development process?

- Agenda setting stage?
- Development stage?
- Implementation stage?

Resources

It is important at this stage to work out the resource implications for the whole of your research project. Record all the inputs you think you will need, including non-financial resources (such as time of research project manager or admin staff, or anticipated time and information needed from advisory or steering group members etc), not forgetting to factor in the resources required for developing and disseminating the research outputs and other knowledge translation activities (see Stage 4).

Helpful hints and possible pitfalls

Thinking through the whole research project cycle (including evaluation) and developing a comprehensive project plan (including a timetable of key milestones) at the beginning of your research project.

Exercise/Framework

There are a number of different frameworks available that can be used or adapted to help you plan (and evaluate) your research project including:

Logic model

A logic model is a systematic and visual way to present and share your understanding of the relationships among the resources you have to operate your program, the activities you plan, and the changes or results you hope to achieve.

www.wkkf.org/knowledge-center/resources/2006/02/WK-Kellogg-Foundation-Logic-Model-Development-Guide.aspx

Theory of change

Backwards mapping requires planners to reason backwards from the long-term goal through the intermediate and early-term changes necessary to reach the goal. This process creates a set of connected outcomes known as a 'pathway of change'. A pathway of change graphically represents the change process as it is understood by the initiative planners and forms the skeleton around which the other elements of the theory may be developed.

www.theoryofchange.org/about/how-does-theory-of-change-work

Impact map

Impact mapping is a tool that can be used to describe what you will be looking for, as well as the evidence that tells you if what you have been doing has made a positive difference. For an Impact Map template visit

www.proveandimprove.org/myimp/index.php

Gantt chart

A Gantt chart is a useful way of showing activities (tasks or events) displayed against time. On the left of the chart is a list of the activities and along the top is a suitable timescale. Each activity is represented by a bar; the position and length of the bar reflects the start date, duration and end date of the activity

www.gantt.com

For the purposes of the assessment of the Northern Rock Foundation's research/project approach, we used a traditional logic model in order to capture the logical flow between the research project objectives, inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact. We then adapted the logic model to incorporate two further components in order to record the more detailed information on all the different possible ways that the research outputs had been used and the processes involved in the translation of the research outputs. Capturing this information within these additional parts of the logic model were essential for understanding the complex processes involved in the dissemination and research utilisation effort (see Figure 1).

Figure 1