



## Introduction

This document is based on a series of good practice examples identified in the evaluation of the Big Lottery Fund’s Research Grants Programme. It includes examples about what has worked for other projects and is designed to help organisations with dissemination activities. Other guides in this series address good practice in relation to user involvement and partnership working.

## What is dissemination?

Dissemination is the process of communicating your research findings to stakeholders so that the evidence can be used to lead to change. It is important to consider how you will disseminate findings from the planning stages of your project and not leave it until the research has been completed. Dissemination should be an on-going activity that happens

throughout the lifetime of a research project, which is illustrated below.

Just as there are different ways of doing research, there are different approaches to dissemination. Getting dissemination right is important because it is the main way that your project will communicate with the outside world. BIG places a lot of emphasis on research being widely known, understood and influential on policy and practice.

## Approaches to dissemination

Different types of approaches to dissemination are appropriate for different audiences. It is important to think about creative approaches to dissemination the beginning of the project. The table below illustrates some examples of dissemination approaches based on findings from the evaluation.

Intended impacts	Effective approaches to dissemination
<p><b>Changing policy</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Lobby influential individuals through conferences, seminars or meetings.</li> <li>▶ Invite a policy champion to join the research steering group. These people could help you access networks of specialists, or provide contact details of key people involved in your area of policy.</li> <li>▶ Write press articles for publications that are read by policy-makers. Universities often have an external communications department with someone who can help you draft a press release. Alternatively you can get tips on writing a press release from <a href="http://www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Press-Release">www.wikihow.com/Write-a-Press-Release</a>.</li> <li>▶ Send targeted mailings containing relevant findings and recommendations. These could be in the form of a newsletter, letter or leaflet.</li> <li>▶ Visual and multimedia formats such as DVD’s can enhance the impact of research findings and help to communicate the voices of real people. However, the costs associated with multimedia production can be higher than other methods of dissemination.</li> <li>▶ Include case studies in the research that can help to bring the findings to life.</li> </ul>

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<b>Changing practice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Good practice guides based on findings from the research can help to influence practice. The guides can be posted on websites, or sent out through mailings or existing networks, Guides should be succinct and accessible to the audience.</li> <li>▶ Seminars and training events for practitioners are an effective way of communicating research findings. The events should include time for participants to share their ideas about the subject area. Organising events can involve a considerable amount of time and financial resources so they should be planned carefully.</li> <li>▶ Newsletters, websites and direct mailings can help to influence practice. The content should be brief and focus on the areas that are relevant to the audience.</li> </ul>
<b>Contributing to an evidence base</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Peer-reviewed journals and conference abstracts can help to influence the evidence base. Research partners should be able to provide advice about the process for getting an article published in a journal. The process for publishing a journal article can sometimes take up to two years and many journals will not accept articles that have been published before in any format.</li> <li>▶ Articles in specialist press or newspapers can help to raise the profile of your research amongst specialists. Raising awareness of your research in the media can be challenging, but it can help to significantly increase the profile of the findings.</li> <li>▶ Presentations or stands at conferences and events are an effective way of getting your research to contribute to the evidence base.</li> </ul>
<b>Informing stakeholders of progress</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Regular newsletters detailing progress with the research can be distributed to stakeholders to help maintain interest. The newsletter could either be in the form of an email, website page or posted to stakeholders.</li> <li>▶ Conferences or events can provide an opportunity to update stakeholders with progress. You can also use conferences or events to get feedback about your research and discuss findings.</li> <li>▶ Meetings with key stakeholders are a useful way of keeping them informed and engaged with the research.</li> </ul>

### Case study

A BIG research project aimed to have a major impact on a specific area of policy and focused its dissemination activities on lobbying. The project sought to engage the media and policy-makers early on and throughout the research, targeting communications at specific audiences in order to maximise impact. This enabled the organisation to drive debate and raise the profile of the issue so that when the project reported its findings, it did so to an informed and motivated audience.

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## Points to consider

### Dissemination plan

The dissemination plan should also be linked to the project aims, to ensure dissemination methods are appropriate to the outcomes of the project. You should draft a dissemination plan at the beginning of the research to identify the audience, method and the timing of dissemination. The evaluation of the Research Grants programme found that it was helpful for projects to draw up a timetable of important events for dissemination. This included the dates of conferences related to the subject of the research and details of when interim findings would be produced. It is important to review your dissemination plans on an ongoing basis to ensure that you are targeting the right audience with relevant findings. It is also helpful to take into account any external developments related to the subject of your research and consider how you will address them in your dissemination plan.

### Engage stakeholders

Take steps to engage key stakeholders at the beginning of your research. You should highlight the relevance of your research to stakeholders and consider their interests, motivations and priorities. It is also important to work out how you will tailor your research outputs to different stakeholder groups. The evaluation of the Research Grants programme found that including details of relevant recommendations or implications for stakeholders is an effective approach for engaging them.

Stakeholders should be kept up to date with progress and interim findings throughout the research as this will help to maintain interest in the findings. The evaluation of the Research Grants programme found that some projects engaged stakeholders in research steering groups that met regularly to discuss findings and plans for dissemination. The groups were also able to provide expert advice that added value to the research findings.

## Case study

One project was acknowledged in a peer review process as being 'world class'. The findings generated by the project led to significant clinical advances in the field of genetics. The success of this research project can be attributed to the close links that the organisation maintained within the scientific community, and this network ensured that the findings were disseminated to interested parties.

### Budgeting for dissemination

It is important to carefully consider your budget for dissemination at the planning stage of the project. There is a wide variety in costs for different approaches to dissemination. For example, DVD's or training programmes tend to be expensive, whereas electronic newsletters or letters can be cheaper. Costs associated with dissemination activities need to be understood at the outset of a project to avoid budgeting problems later on. If you decide to make changes to your dissemination approach once your project is underway, make sure that you revise the costs accordingly and understand any implications that it may have on your overall project budget.

Some organisations have faced budgeting challenges when their research gained a greater level of attention and profile than they had originally anticipated. This resulted in the projects completing additional dissemination activities. This risk has been addressed by some projects through incorporating the cost of continuous dissemination in their original budget as they saw it as an integral part of their work.

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## Disseminate findings regularly

Disseminating findings regularly in a variety of ways can help to maintain stakeholders' interest in the research and keep it on their agenda. Research is likely to have more influence if stakeholders are kept up to date throughout the process.

The evaluation of the Research Grants programme found that projects that had the most impact were generally ones that used continual dissemination throughout the lifetime of the research.

Continual dissemination not only ensures stakeholders are kept updated about the developments throughout the research, but also helps project to maintain greater control of budgets and resources associated with dissemination. Projects undertaking continual dissemination reported that they were better able to monitor the financial and resource cost of dissemination alongside other areas of project delivery and make adjustments as appropriate.

### Case study

One research project had limited resources available for dissemination. The project overcame this problem by establishing contact with nationwide stakeholders who helped them to disseminate to national and international audiences by cascading findings through existing networks.

## Changing policy and practice

If your research relates to an evolving area of policy or field of research, it is worth building some flexibility into your dissemination strategy to allow for emerging developments. This means leaving some aspects of your dissemination activity open so that you can respond to changing priorities.

## Tailor findings to the audience

The audience for your research is likely to be more receptive to the findings if you highlight how they are relevant to them. It can be helpful to have a standard letter or email with findings that can be customised to include specific information that is relevant to different stakeholders.

## Communication skills

Communicating research findings with different audiences is an important skill. It is vital that some staff within the research partnership have the appropriate skills to disseminate the research findings effectively. It is important to remember that to disseminate successfully, you need to have clear and relevant findings to report.

### Case study

Medical projects can often be technical in their language and approach. This can present challenges when it comes to disseminating findings to the public. To overcome this challenge, one project brought the research partners and beneficiaries together in order to understand how to make the findings of the research more accessible. When it was time to disseminate the findings, the grant holder used this audience insight to adapt its messages to its audiences, and involved research partners and beneficiaries at dissemination events.

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## Further information

For further guidance on identifying and working with a research partner, please visit the Research Programme website at: [www.bigresearchprogramme.org.uk](http://www.bigresearchprogramme.org.uk)

The list below provides some further links to information about dissemination:

- ▶ **Third Sector First (2007) Research programme guidance notes. Designing and Managing Research**, London, Big Lottery Fund
- ▶ **Big Lottery Fund, Reaching wider audiences, reaching the right audience: Approaches to dissemination:** [http://www.the-sra.org.uk/documents/pdfs/sra\\_annual\\_conference\\_2007\\_presentations/baileycheshirehulme.pdf](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/documents/pdfs/sra_annual_conference_2007_presentations/baileycheshirehulme.pdf)
- ▶ **Research Councils UK (RCUK) Position Statement on dissemination:** <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/cmsweb/downloads/rcuk/documents/2005statement.pdf>
- ▶ **Big Lottery Fund, Ten top tips for influencing policy and practice:** [http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/qa\\_top\\_tips?dynamic=prog&id=88772&regioncode=-uk&progStatus=open&progpaged=88772](http://www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/qa_top_tips?dynamic=prog&id=88772&regioncode=-uk&progStatus=open&progpaged=88772)
- ▶ **Medical Research Council (2000), Good Research Practice. London:** Medical Research Council
- ▶ **The Wellcome Trust Research Guide:** <http://www.wellcome.ac.uk/About-us/Policy/Policy-and-position-statements/WTD002753.htm>
- ▶ **The Joseph Rowntree Foundation Evaluating and Fine Tuning Communication Strategies:** <http://www.efc.be/ftp/public/pippip/siena2004/jrf.pdf>