

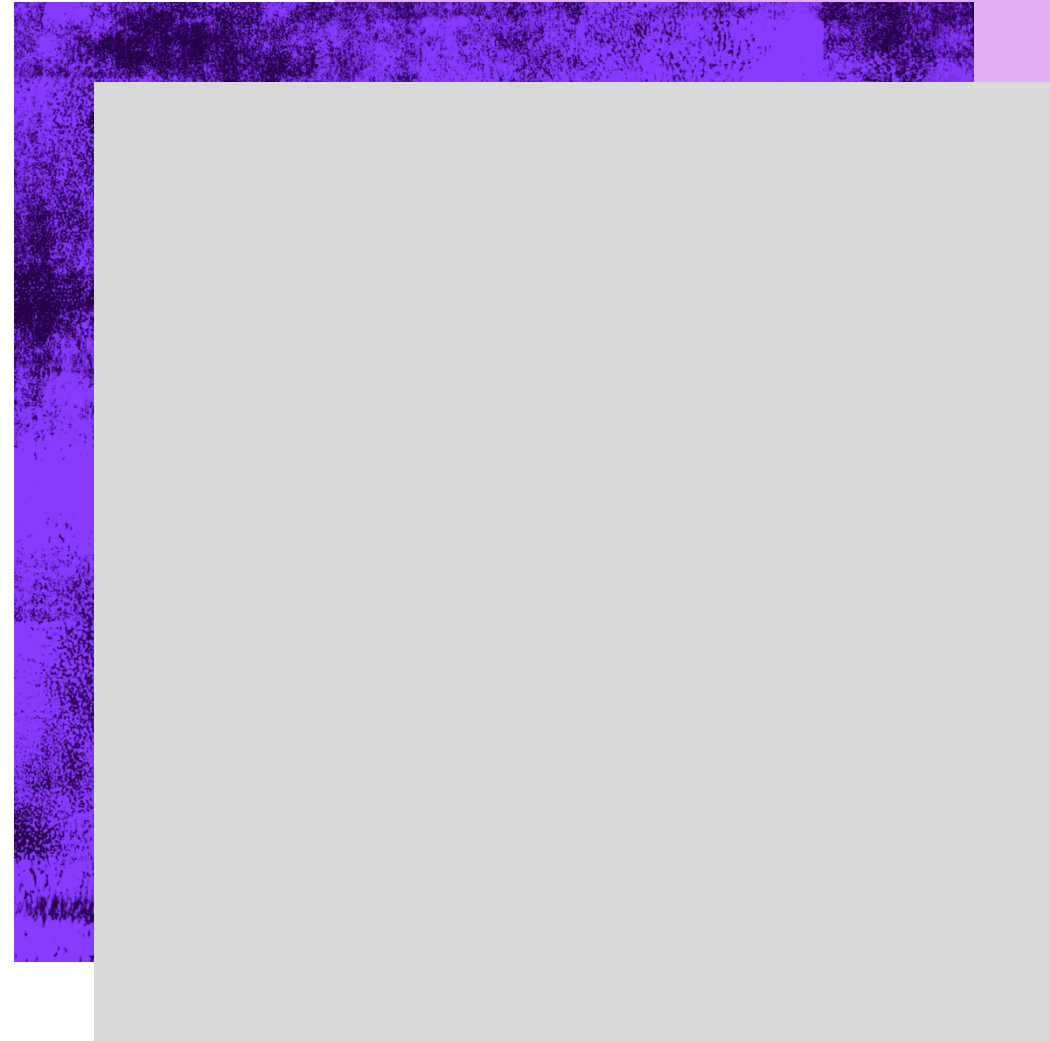
Impact, Indicators & Theory of Change

Strengthening capacity to articulate
impact, design indicators, and build a
Theory of Change



Presenter Biography

Dr Navidreza Ahadi



Session Objectives

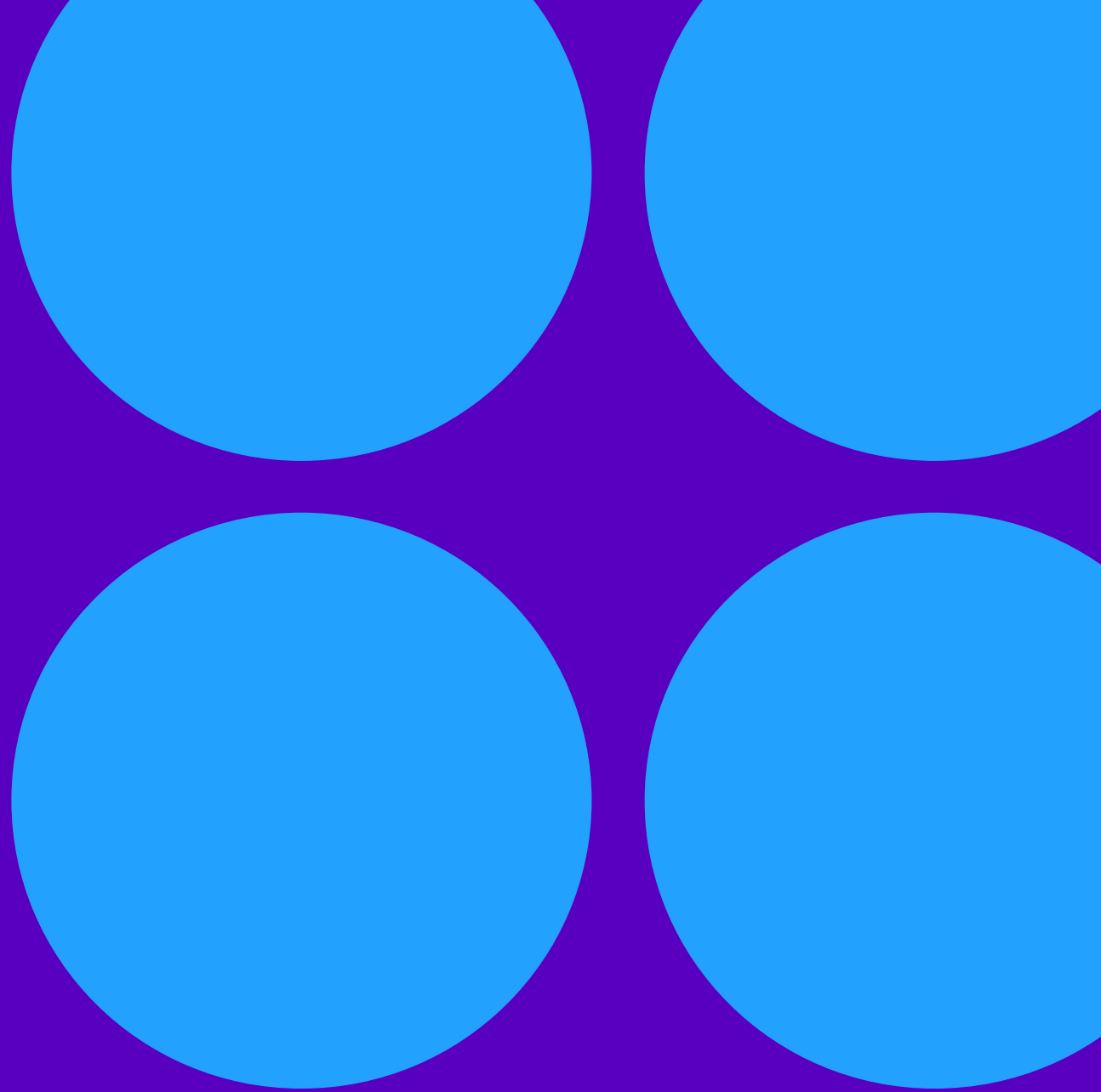
- ⌘ By the end of this session, you will be able to:
- ⌘ Define “impact” for UK & international funders
- ⌘ Understand Theory of Change fundamentals
- ⌘ Distinguish outputs, outcomes & long-term impacts
- ⌘ Design measurable indicators including gender/EDI disaggregation
- ⌘ Understand basic Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) principles
- ⌘ Build a Mini Theory of Change using a structured template

Warm-Up Activity (5 minutes)



- ❖ *“When funders say ‘impact’, what do they mean?”*
- ❖ Discuss with a partner
- ❖ Share one idea with the group

Outputs,
Outcomes and
Impact



Outputs Defined

What they are:

- ⌘⌘The **tangible products** your research delivers.
- ⌘⌘Evidence of progress and stepping-stones towards outcomes and impact.
- ⌘⌘Show funders your project is **concrete, realistic, and achievable**.

Common types of outputs

- ⌘⌘**Academic:** peer-reviewed articles, conference papers, open datasets.
- ⌘⌘**Policy & Practice:** policy briefs, toolkits, guidelines, evidence summaries.
- ⌘⌘**Public Engagement:** workshops, exhibitions, media content, websites.
- ⌘⌘**Technical & Innovation:** software, prototypes, models, new methods.

Outcomes Defined

Outcomes go beyond deliverables; they are the real-world changes that result from your research being used. They show how outputs are translated into knowledge, practice, or societal shifts.

Types of Outcomes

- ⌘ **Academic:** advances in theories, methods, or research capacity
- ⌘ **Policy & Practice:** adoption of evidence in guidelines, standards, or industry best practice.
- ⌘ **Societal:** increased awareness, behaviour change, improved health, sustainability, or wellbeing.
- ⌘ **Economic & Technological:** new processes, products, or efficiencies; spin-outs; enhanced competitiveness.

How to demonstrate strong outcomes

- ⌘ **Be Specific:** articulate clearly what will change.
- ⌘ **Identify Beneficiaries:** explain who benefits (e.g., patients, engineers, policymakers, industry).
- ⌘ **Show Sustainability:** outline how outcomes will persist or scale after the project ends.



Impact Defined

The long-term, lasting change your research enables. Goes beyond academia, shaping policy, practice, economy, technology, society, and environment. Funders see impact as the ultimate return on investment.

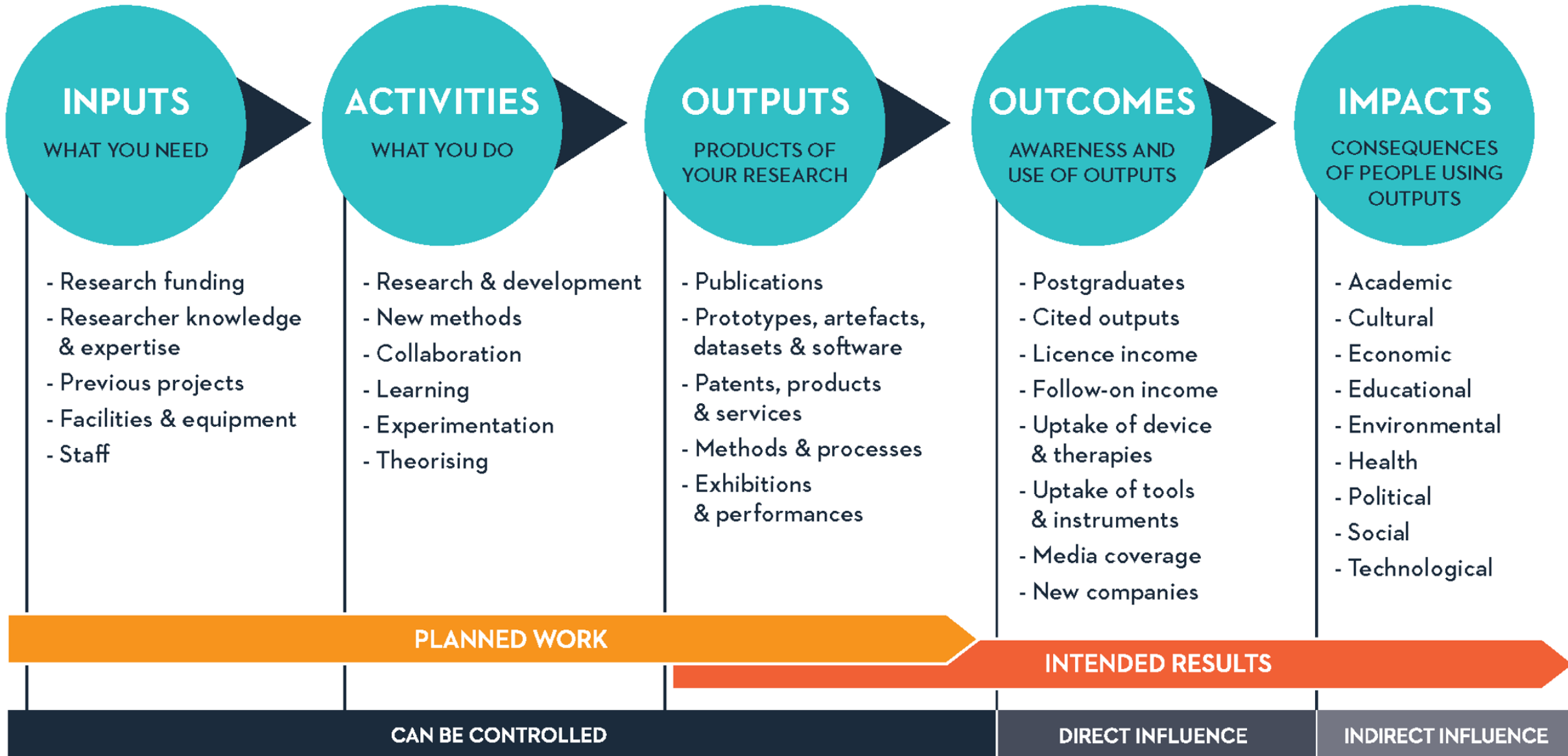
Types of Impact

- ⌘ Policy & Governance: legislation, regulations, or strategy shaped by evidence.
- ⌘ Societal & Health: improved wellbeing, sustainability, equity, or public understanding.
- ⌘ Economic & Technological: new products, services, start-ups, or efficiency gains.
- ⌘ Cultural & Environmental: shifts in cultural practice, conservation, or environmental benefits.

How to measure Impact

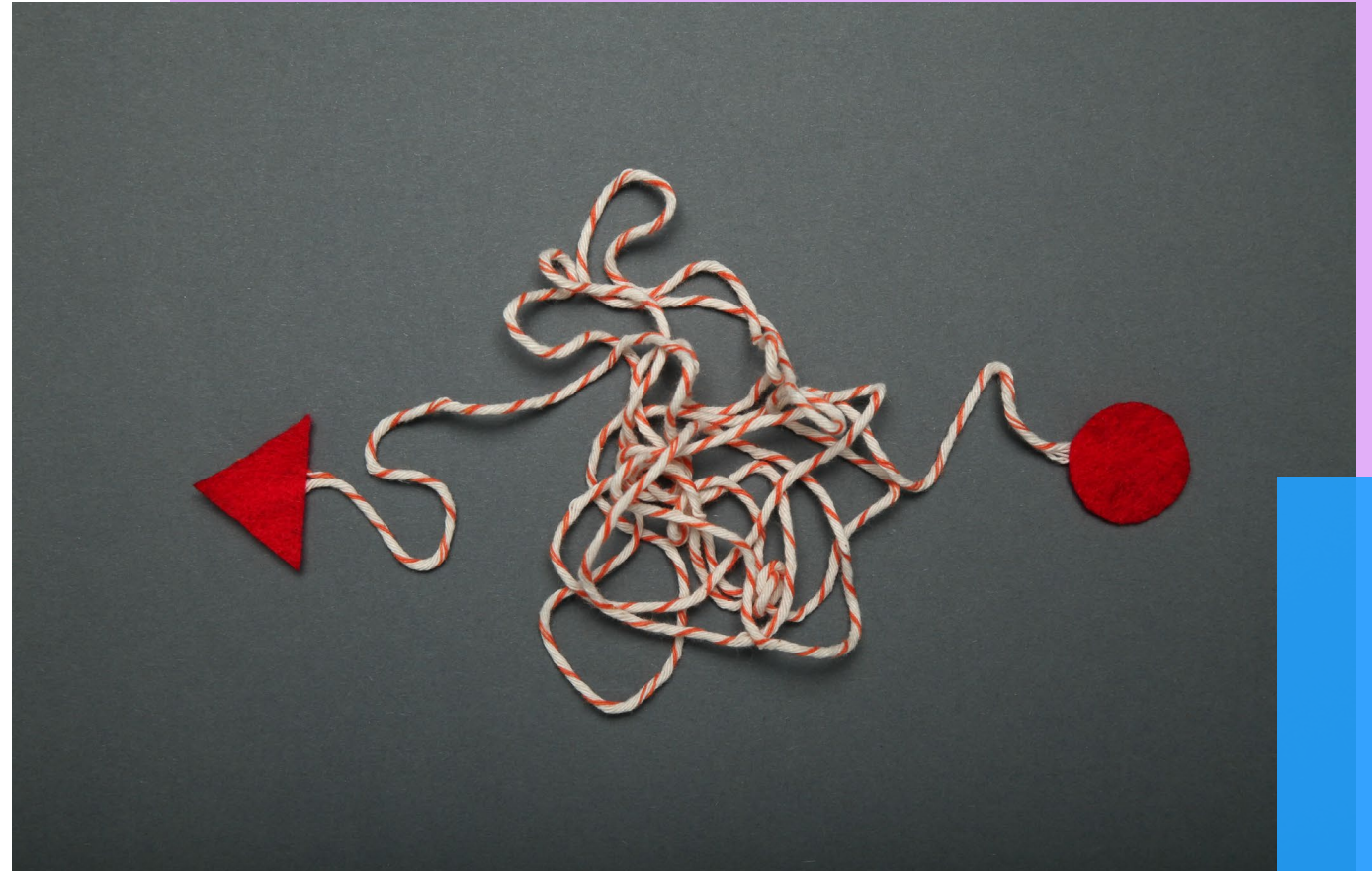
- ⌘ Indicators: adoption rates, citations in policy, usage statistics, media reach, training uptake.
- ⌘ Evidence of change: case studies, testimonials, new standards or guidelines referencing your work.
- ⌘ Timeframe: clarify what's achievable in-project vs. longer-term legacy.

Strong proposals show not just what impact looks like, but also how it will be evidenced. Proving credibility and accountability.

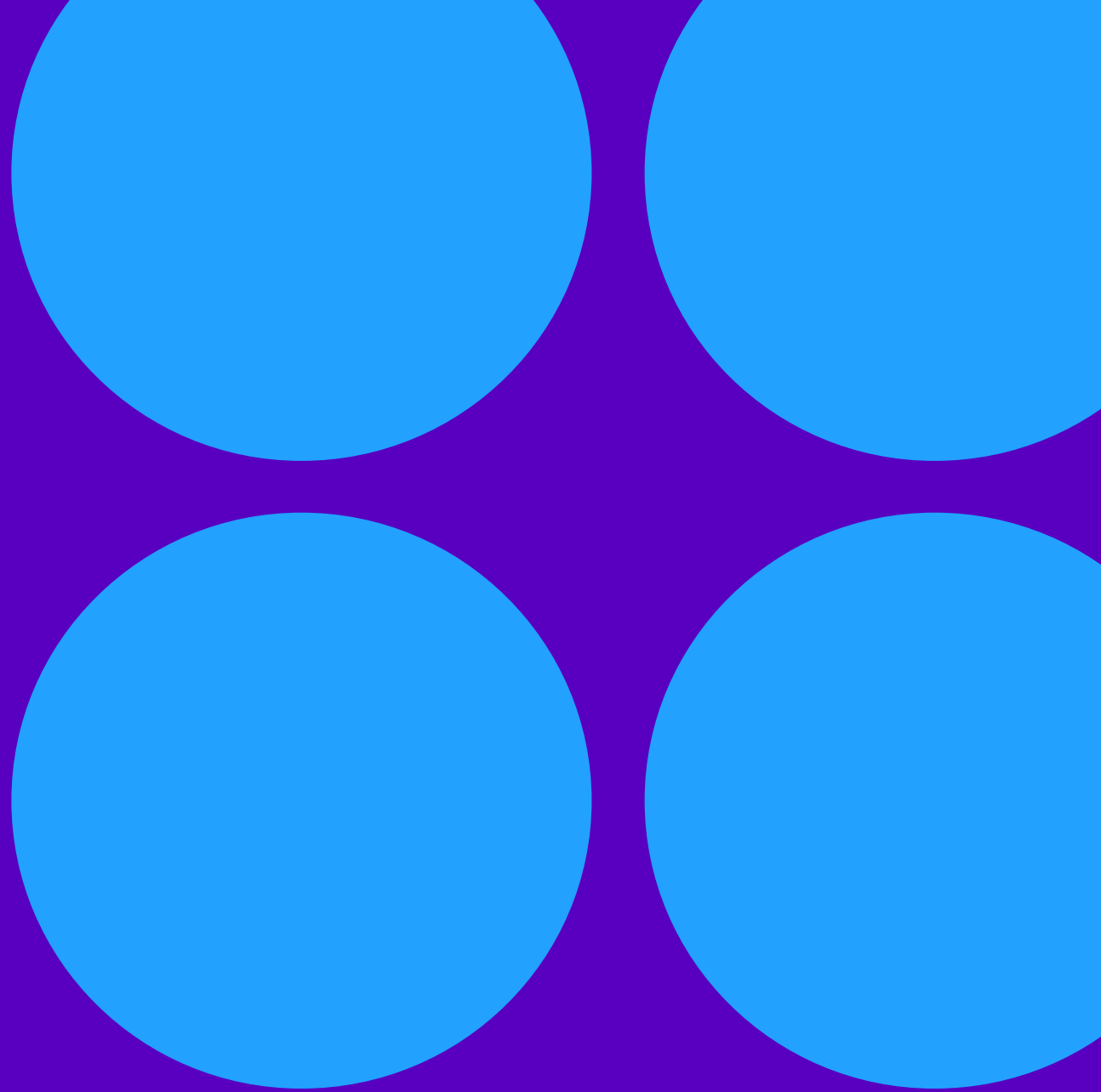


Why These Distinctions Matter

- ⌘ Realistic pathways
- ⌘ Feasibility
- ⌘ Applicant's understanding of change
- ⌘ Credibility of impact claims.
 - Over-claiming results in weak proposals
 - Under-claiming results in missed opportunities



Theory of Change(ToC) Fundamentals



Avoid the “Blank Page” Trap

- ❖ Don't just start writing. Many applications fail because they lack a plan.
- ❖ Funders look for clarity and alignment:
 - Research question is clearly defined.
 - Objectives link logically to methods and outcomes.
 - Pathways to impact are explicit.
- ❖ Use frameworks like Theory of Change to organise ideas before drafting.
- ❖ **Structure first**, writing second = stronger, more competitive proposal.



Strong Research Idea

- Clear research question
- Original and significant
- Robust aims and objectives
- Appropriate methodology

Strategic Fit

- Aligned with funder priorities
- Timely and relevant
- Policy or practice aligned
- Contributes to strategic goals (e.g. EDI, RRI, sustainability)

Fundable, High-Quality Proposal

Deliverability & Impact

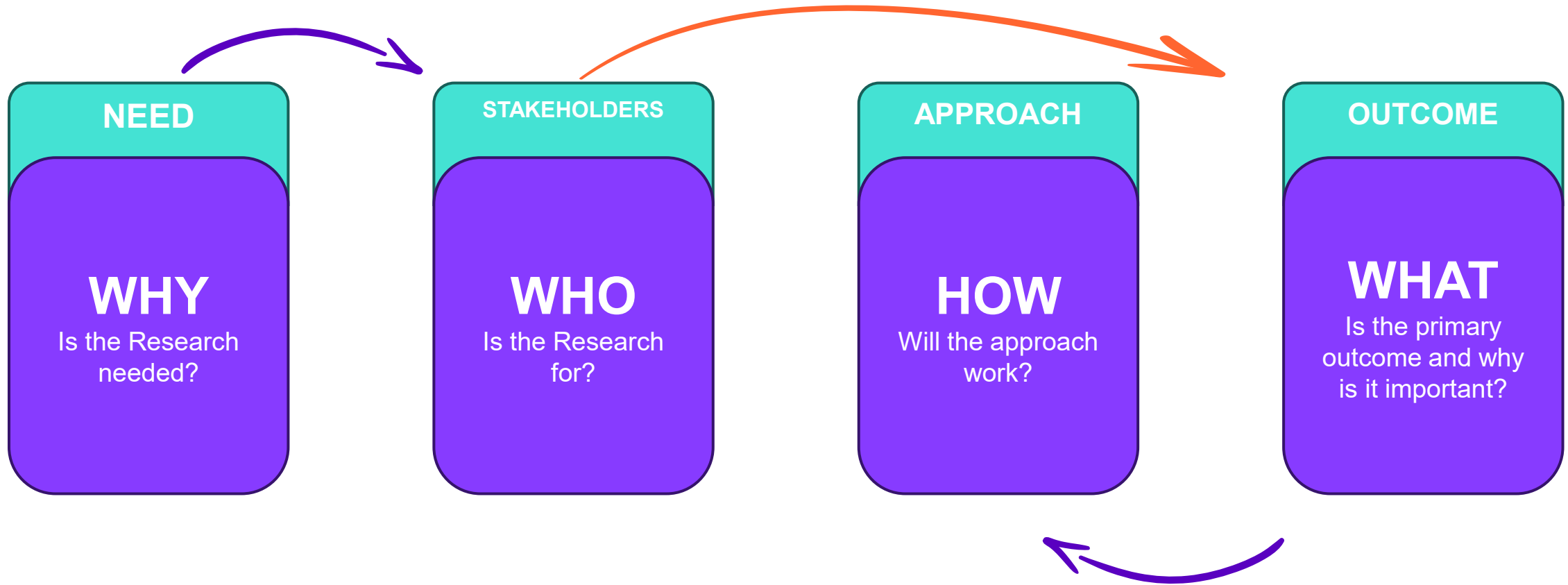
- Feasible project plan
- Skilled, well-structured team
- Clear outputs and meaningful outcomes
- Stakeholder engagement
- Risk management
- Demonstrated impact pathway

Begin with the Theory of Change

The Theory of Change should be your starting point. It helps answer essential questions:

- What is the **final goal** of my research?
 - Why is it **important** and **needed**?
 - How will my research have a **wider impact** beyond academia?
 - How will I **engage stakeholders** throughout the project?
 - What is my research **approach** and **methodology** for achieving these goals?
- ❖ A well-developed Theory of Change provides the foundation for a solid plan, aligning your project's goals, strategy, and methods.
- ❖ This framework ensures your proposal is coherent and demonstrates a clear path from research concept to impact.

Theory of Change In Practice



WHY – Originality

⌘ What makes this research new and different?

⌘ Push boundaries

- Your research should tackle a novel, underexplored, or emerging area.
- Show how it moves the field forward.

⌘ Funders want innovation

- Projects should challenge existing knowledge and offer new insights or methods.

⌘ Showcasing originality

⌘ What's missing, overlooked, or not working in current research?

- How does your approach, method, or perspective add something new?
- Why does this originality matter for the field, society, or practice?

WHY – Significance

❖ Why does this research matter?

- Define the problem or gap
- Be clear about what isn't working, missing, or underexplored.
- Place your project within the wider research and societal landscape.

❖ Show why it matters

- Explain the consequences of not addressing this problem.
- Link to pressing scientific, technological, or societal challenges.

❖ Identify beneficiaries

- Who will gain from the research? (e.g., researchers, industry, policymakers, practitioners, communities).
- Be specific — not “everyone” but the stakeholders most affected.

WHO – Stakeholders and Beneficiaries

Funders want to see who will benefit, why they matter, and how they are engaged.

- ⌘ **Relevance:** Shows your research is grounded in real-world needs, not just academic curiosity.
- ⌘ **Credibility:** Demonstrates that the right people are involved, which reassures funders about feasibility and uptake.
- ⌘ **Impact:** Stakeholders amplify dissemination, adoption, and long-term change.
- ⌘ **Co-creation:** Early engagement with stakeholders can shape better research questions and methods.
- ⌘ **Sustainability:** Projects with well-identified stakeholders are more likely to deliver outcomes that last beyond funding.

A well-defined stakeholder map strengthens your case for funding by connecting ideas to people and impact.

WHO – Stakeholders and Beneficiaries

Funders want to see who will benefit, why they matter, and how they are engaged.

- ❖ **Primary stakeholders:** Directly engaged in the research (e.g., research participants, partner institutions, industry collaborators).
- ❖ **Secondary stakeholders:** Those who will use or be influenced by findings (e.g., policymakers, practitioners, patient groups, NGOs).
- ❖ **Academic beneficiaries:** Researchers who will build on your findings, future PhDs or postdocs supported by your project.
- ❖ **Non-academic beneficiaries:** Communities, industry sectors, regulators, or the wider public.

Identifying “who” ensures your project connects to real needs and strengthens its case for funding.

LOW INTEREST

HIGH POWER



**LOW INTEREST
HIGH POWER**

Examples include regulatory bodies, local authorities and government agencies

**HIGH INTEREST
HIGH POWER**

Examples include key decision makers or major investors



HIGH INTEREST



**LOW INTEREST
LOW POWER**

Examples include general public or groups who might be affected by the project but do not have direct involvement

**HIGH INTEREST
LOW POWER**

Examples include community groups, NGOs other academics and research subjects



LOW POWER

WHAT – The Aim of Your Research

The WHAT section of your Theory of Change describes the substance of your research the results it will generate and the meaningful change these results aim to achieve.

⌘ Aim (Long-Term Impact)

- What long-term benefit or improvement will your research contribute to?
- This is the highest-level change — societal, sectoral, environmental, policy, or practice-based.
- It should reflect the core purpose of the research, *beyond academia*.

⌘ Outcomes (Medium-Term Change)

- What behaviours, decisions, practices, or conditions will change because your research is used
- Outcomes show that your findings have been taken up, applied, or acted upon by stakeholders.

⌘ Outputs (Immediate Products)

- What tangible products will your research deliver?
- These are the deliverables that enable outcomes — such as evidence, tools, methods, resources, or datasets.

HOW – Building a Strong Project Plan

A strong plan connects activities, outcomes and stakeholders, showing funders how your research will achieve impact during and after the project.

Key elements

- ❖ **Clear Phases & Milestones:** break the project into stages with achievable, time-bound goals.
- ❖ **Work Packages:** structure tasks into units that deliver specific outputs and feed into outcomes.
- ❖ **Stakeholder Engagement:** show when and how stakeholders will be consulted, co-create, or apply findings.
- ❖ **Outcome-Driven Planning:** ensure activities are explicitly linked to short-term outcomes and long-term impact.
- ❖ **Risk & Mitigation:** identify potential barriers (e.g., recruitment delays, technical challenges, partnership risks) and how you will address them.

A credible project plan demonstrates that your research is achievable, well-managed, and strategically aligned to deliver change.

HOW – Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI)

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) strengthens research by broadening perspectives, improving quality, and ensuring fair access. Funders increasingly expect proposals to demonstrate inclusivity and social responsibility.

Key considerations

- ⌘ **Research Design:** build in diversity of participants; avoid bias in methods, sampling, and data interpretation.
- ⌘ **Team Composition:** ensure inclusive recruitment and representation; value contributions across disciplines and career stages.
- ⌘ **Stakeholder Engagement:** include voices from different communities, sectors, and user groups.
- ⌘ **Impact & Accessibility:** share findings in accessible formats (open access, plain language, multiple channels).

Embedding EDI throughout your project makes research **more rigorous, more relevant, and more fundable.**

Barriers, Threats & Opportunities: Thinking Strategically

Barriers

- ⌘ Structural or systemic factors that could limit success or scalability, even if your research is strong.
- Restricted access to data, participants, or infrastructure
- Institutional or disciplinary constraints

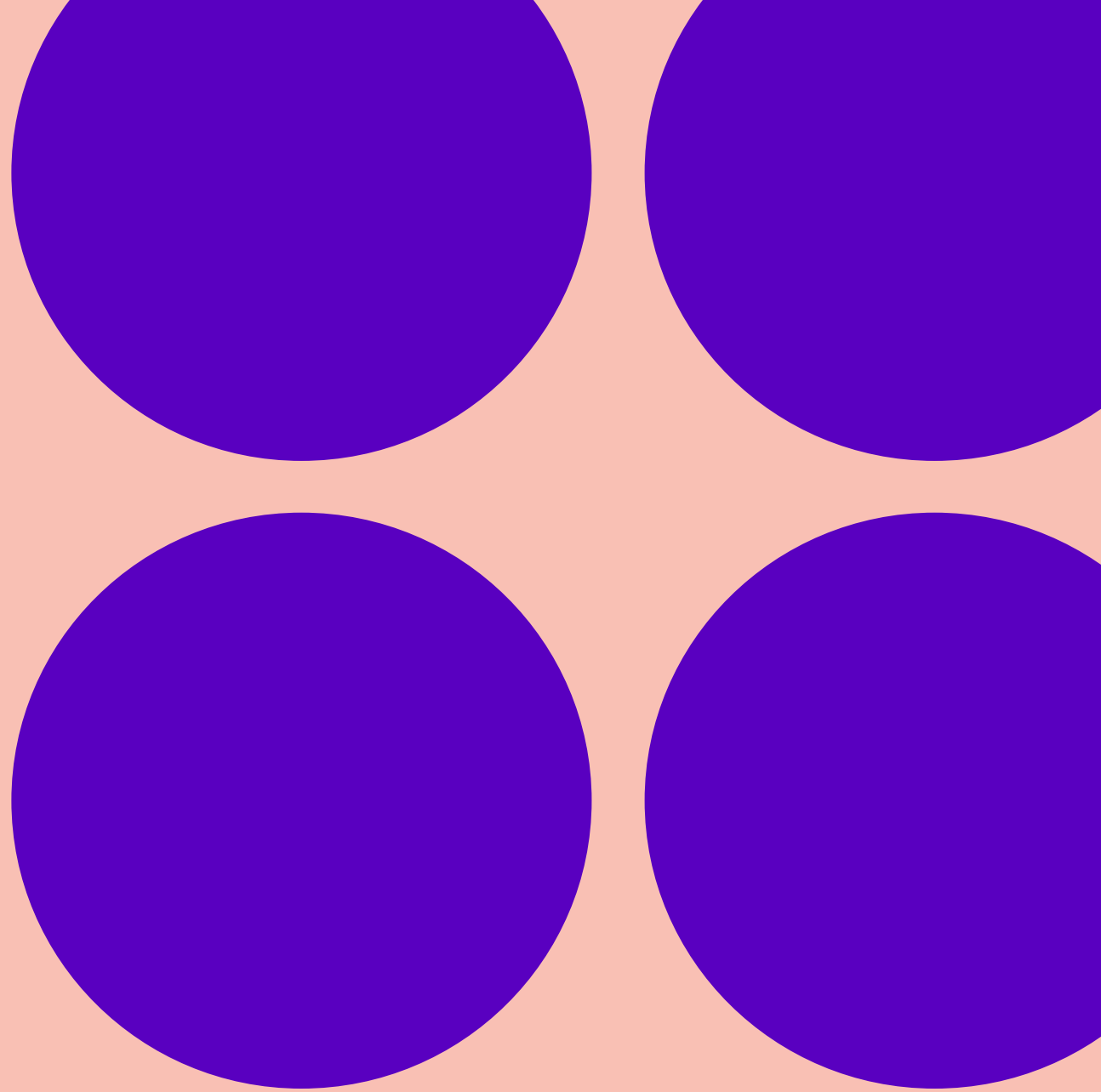
Threats

- ⌘ Project-level risks that could disrupt delivery.
- Recruitment or retention challenges
- Delays due to resourcing, ethics, or approvals

Opportunities

- ⌘ External factors that could increase project value and visibility.
- Alignment with emerging policy priorities or global agendas
- Timeliness, for example, linking to public, industrial, or political interest

Impact Indicators



What Are Impact Indicators?

Impact indicators measure whether, how, and to what extent your research creates real-world change. They capture:

- ⌘ Adoption (use of findings, tools, methods)
- ⌘ Influence (policy, sectoral, organisational)
- ⌘ Behavioural or practice change
- ⌘ Capacity or capability shifts
- ⌘ System-level outcomes

Impact indicators ≠ output metrics. They measure change, not activity.

Why Your Research Needs Impact Indicators

Impact indicators allow you to:

- ⌘ Demonstrate **the pathway from research to benefit**
- ⌘ Provide **credible evidence** of influence and uptake
- ⌘ Show alignment with **UKRI, Wellcome, British Council, and international donor** requirements
- ⌘ Strengthen your Theory of Change
- ⌘ Avoid claims without proof (so called “impact inflation”)
- ⌘ Build an evidence base for future

Categories of Impact Indicators

1. Practice Indicators

- Uptake of new methods, guidelines, interventions
- Implementation fidelity measures

2. Policy Indicators

- Citations in strategic documents
- Changes in funding/programmes
- Regulatory or guideline updates

3. Behavioural & Knowledge Indicators

- Changes in stakeholder decision-making
- Measured behaviour adoption rates

4. Economic & Innovation Indicators

- New products, prototypes, licenses
- Cost savings, efficiencies

5. Societal & Wellbeing Indicators

- Changes in health, environment, education
- Quality-of-life metrics

Indicators That Demonstrate Influence, Not Activity

Examples of weak indicators (avoid):

- ❖ *“Number of workshops delivered”* - Counts delivery, not whether anyone used the learning or changed practice.
- ❖ *“Number of reports published”* - Measures production, not whether the reports influenced decisions or actions.
- ❖ *“Website hits”* - Indicates interest, not understanding, uptake, or impact on behaviour or policy.

Examples of strong indicators (use):

- ❖ *“% of local government staff applying the new process after training”* - Shows actual **behaviour change** and application of knowledge.
- ❖ *“Policy X revised citing project findings”* - Demonstrates **direct influence** on policy and decision-making.
- ❖ *“Prototype adopted by two industry partners within 12 months”* - Shows **real-world uptake**, value creation, and early-stage impact beyond academia.

Designing Indicators for UKRI/International Bids

Funder expect:

- ⌘ Track fairness of benefit distribution
- ⌘ Ensure outcomes do not reinforce inequity
- ⌘ Capture accessibility and inclusion in adoption
- ⌘ Explore intersectional patterns in impact (e.g., gender× region)
- ⌘ Be grounded in local context (here, Thailand & SE Asia)

Examples:

- ⌘ “Adoption rates of the intervention across gender and rural/urban settings”
- ⌘ “Accessibility improvements for underrepresented groups”

Indicators & EDI: Beyond Disaggregation

Funder expect:

- ❖ **Direct alignment with your Theory of Change:** Indicators must measure the specific changes in your pathway, not generic activity metrics.
- ❖ **Evidence of use, uptake, or influence:** Funders want to see whether research is being applied, adopted, or informing decisions, not just disseminated.
- ❖ **Indicators that are realistic within the project horizon:** They should measure short-to-medium-term change, not distant impacts that cannot be evidenced.
- ❖ **Clear data sources and methods:** Indicators must state who collects the data, how, and at what point, otherwise funders see them as speculative.
- ❖ **Integration of EDI considerations:** Indicators should capture distribution of benefits, not just overall change (e.g., differences across gender, region, socioeconomic status).
- ❖ **Credible contribution, not overstated attribution:** Funders expect indicators to show your project's contribution to change, without implying unrealistic causality.

Advanced Indicator Pitfalls to Avoid

- ⌘ **No viable data source:** Indicator cannot realistically be measured (access, cost, politics, reliability).→ Looks rigorous but cannot be evidenced.
- ⌘ **Weak proxy indicators** Measures activity or engagement (attendance, downloads) instead of change. Shows reach, not influence or behaviour change.
- ⌘ **Over-ambitious long-term indicators:** Impact is too distant to measure within the project timeframe. Leads to unrealistic claims and weak credibility.
- ⌘ **Indicators that assume causality:** Implying “research caused X” when only contribution can be shown. Funders expect credible contribution, not attribution.
- ⌘ **Effort-based, not change-based measures:** Counting workshops, meetings, or participants. Tracks delivery, not outcomes or impact.
- ⌘ **No EDI or distributional lens:** Averages hide inequalities or uneven benefit. Funders expect gender-/region-/SES-sensitive indicators.
- ⌘ **No baseline or target:** Impossible to demonstrate improvement without a starting point. Prevents meaningful monitoring.
- ⌘ **Too many indicators:** Over-complex frameworks become unmanageable. Better: fewer, high-quality, ToC-aligned indicators.

IRS Indicators

The IRS indicator model aligns with leading academic definitions of research impact, drawing especially on::

- ❖ **Influence:** how the research shapes policy, practice, industry or public behaviour
- ❖ **Reach:** the breadth and range of stakeholders affected
- ❖ **Significance:** the depth or importance of the change created

These dimensions reflect global impact assessment standards, including those discussed in Penfield et al. (2014), Research Evaluation, which analyses how the **UK Research Excellence Framework (REF)** evaluates research impact through **reach and significance**

Influence

- ❖ *Research cited in national policy guidance*
- ❖ *Organisation changes its procedures based on findings.*

Reach

- ❖ *Adoption across multiple regions / sectors*
- ❖ *Uptake by diverse stakeholder groups beyond academia*

Significance

- ❖ *Demonstrable improvements in outcomes (e.g., health, safety, environment)*
- ❖ *Strong evidence of tangible benefit or reduced harm*

Where Indicators Belong in Your ToC

Indicators measure the **WHAT**. The changes you expect your research to produce:

⌘ Outputs

⌘ Outcomes

⌘ Long-term Impacts

⌘ They do not measure the WHY or WHO. They evidence whether your WHAT has been achieved.

WHAT Element	What It Describes	What Indicators Should Measure	Example indicators
Output	The immediate products of your research	Quantity, quality, completion, and accessibility of outputs	• Number of resources/tools produced • Participation rate in training/events
Outcome	Changes in behaviour, knowledge, decisions, or practice	Evidence of uptake, adoption, or use	• % of participants applying new skills • Number of organisations adopting recommendations
Impact	Long-term, system-level change	Depth, breadth, significance of benefits created	• Improvements in service quality or performance • Policy or practice change sustained over time

Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) Basics

Monitoring

Ongoing, systematic tracking of:

- ❖ Implementation of activities
- ❖ Delivery and quality of outputs
- ❖ Early signals of outcomes emerging

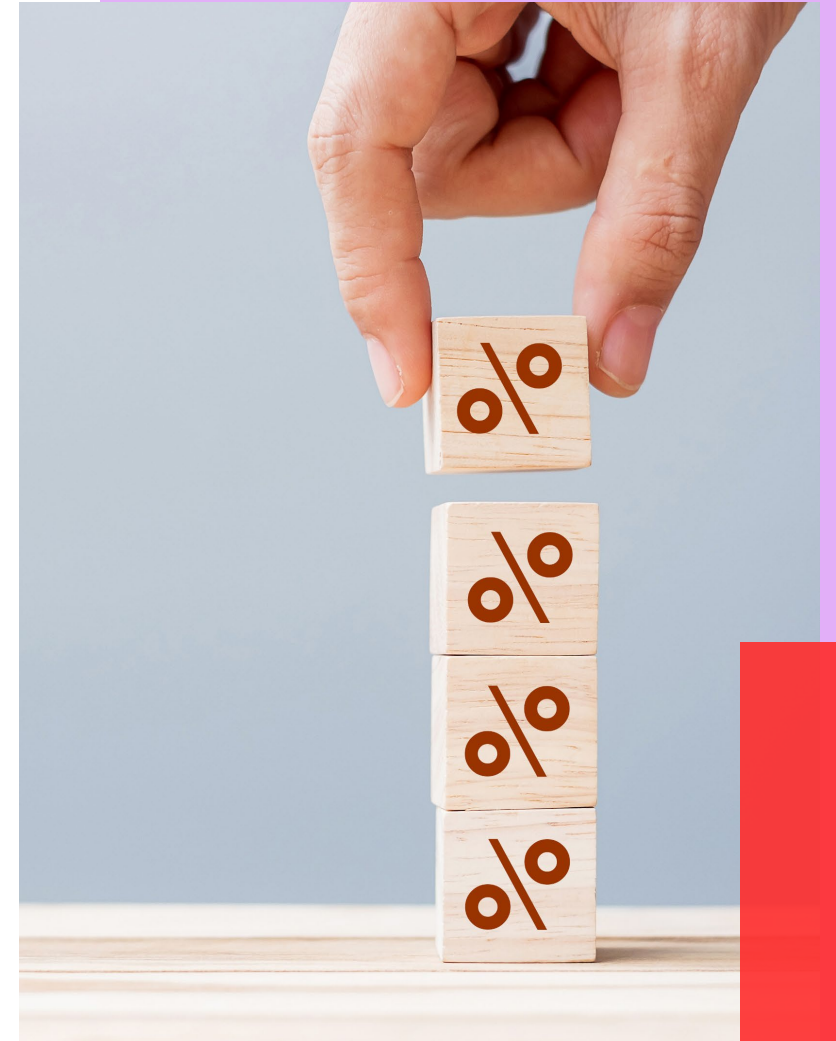
Purpose: Ensures the project is on track and provides data for timely adjustments.

Evaluation

Periodic, analytical assessment of:

- ❖ Delivery and quality of outputs
- ❖ What changed (intended and unintended)
- ❖ For whom (distribution and equity)
- ❖ Why it changed (your contribution vs. other factors)
- ❖ Implications for scaling, policy, or further research

Purpose: Demonstrates credibility, learning, and real-world effects.



Key Components of an M&E Plan

Baseline

- Establishes the starting point before interventions
- Essential for demonstrating improvement or change

Indicators

- Measure progress across **outputs** → **outcomes** → **impacts**
- Must be aligned with the *WHAT* section of your Theory of Change
- Should capture *use, adoption, and benefits*, not just activity

Data Sources & Methods

- Surveys, interviews, admin data, observation, contribution analysis
- Identify who collects the data and how often

Targets & Timelines

- Define expected levels of change
- Clarify when progress will be assessed

Roles & Responsibilities

- Specify who is responsible for data collection, analysis, reporting

Learning & Adaptation

- Use evidence to refine activities, improve design, and support scaling
- Demonstrates responsiveness and research maturity

Case Study: Ghana's Community Mining Scheme

Project Overview

- ❖ The University of Derby (UoD) is delivering a pilot study funded by the International Growth Centre (IGC) to evaluate Ghana's Community Mining Scheme (CMS), a government initiative designed to shift artisanal miners away from illegal galamsey towards safer, regulated, community-led mining.
- ❖ The project develops and validates a framework to assess economic, social, and environmental impacts, informed by miners, community leaders, and government agencies



Case Study: Ghana's Community Mining Scheme

Why It's a Strong Indicator Case Study

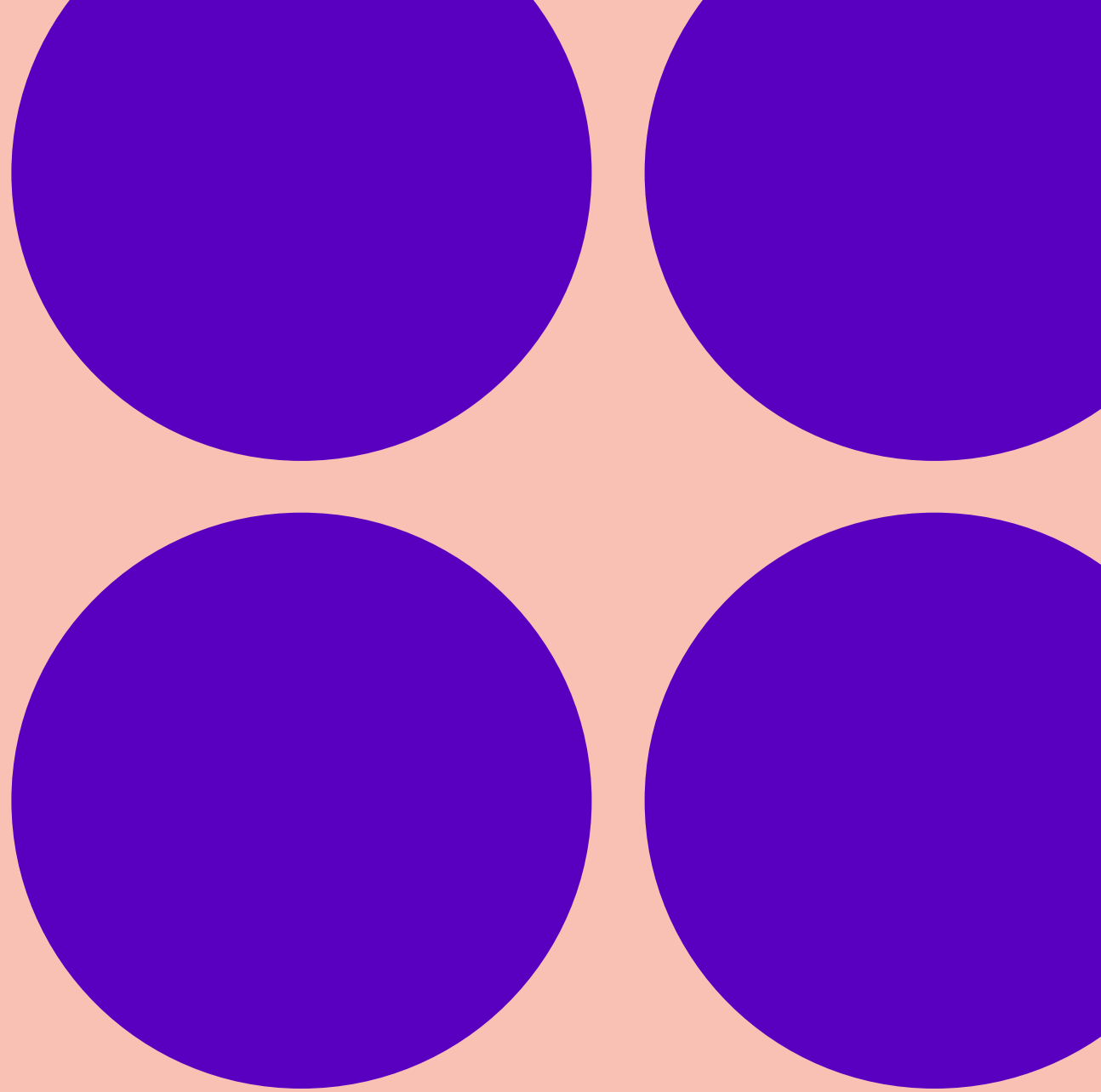
- ❖ Clear policy problem with measurable change pathways
- ❖ Defined intervention (CMS) enabling structured indicator design
- ❖ Multi-stakeholder verification and pilot testing across two CMS sites
- ❖ Produces evidence directly relevant for Ghana's mining policy and monitoring systems

Indicators

- ❖ **Outputs:** Number of tools/resources developed; stakeholder engagement completed
- ❖ **Outcomes:** % of participants applying new knowledge or practices; documented organisational uptake
- ❖ **Impacts:** Improved environmental or livelihood conditions; evidence of policy or guideline updates

Activity: Build a Mini Theory of Change

Build a Mini Theory of Change Based on Your Own Research Project



Activity: Build a Mini Theory of Change (30 minutes)

Choose one real research idea that you want to take to a funder. Using the template provided, map out a simple Theory of Change for that specific project, including:

⌘ **WHY** – What problem/need is your research addressing?

⌘ **WHO** – Who will benefit? Who will use your findings?

⌘ **WHAT** – One Output (tangible product)

- One Outcome (behaviour/knowledge/practice change)
- One Long-Term Impact (wider societal/sectoral change)
- HOW – One core Activity that drives the pathway

⌘ **ASSUMPTION** – One condition that must hold for your pathway to work

⌘ **RISK** – One factor that could disrupt delivery or uptake

Small Group Sharing (10 minutes)

In groups of 3–4, share your Theory of Changes and discuss:

- ⌘ Does the pathway logically link WHY → WHAT → HOW?
- ⌘ Is the Outcome realistic and evidence-driven?
- ⌘ Does the Impact match what funders consider “real-world change”?
- ⌘ Are Assumptions plausible?
- ⌘ Is the Risk appropriate and funder-credible?
- ⌘ What indicators could strengthen your WHAT (output/outcome/impact)?

Link to Theory of Change Task

⌘ Full details of the task can be found at:

⌘ <https://tinyurl.com/BCModule4Task>



Key Messages

- ❖ **Impact must be planned, not assumed.** Funders expect clear pathways showing how research outputs lead to outcomes and long-term change.
- ❖ **Outputs, outcomes and impact are different,** and strong proposals show how each one connects logically to the next.
- ❖ **A Theory of Change** provides the foundation for credible project design by linking the problem, beneficiaries, activities, outcomes and impact.
- ❖ **Indicators should measure real change, not activity.** They must focus on influence, uptake, behaviour, or policy shifts.
- ❖ **Monitoring and Evaluation strengthens credibility,** helping projects track progress, learn, adapt, and demonstrate contribution to real-world benefits.
- ❖ <https://tinyurl.com/BCModule4HO>



Thank You



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