

Nesta...

Evidence of impact

Making the case



RESOURCE

What

Generating evidence is all about describing what you do, why it matters and whether what you have done has made any difference.

Why

The successful growth or adoption of any innovation ultimately rests in its ability to demonstrate that it is creating a positive impact. Thinking about evidence of impact is therefore important from the outset.

While evidence will often be limited in the early stages of innovation, as time passes and experience grows, stronger evidence will increase confidence that the innovation warrants further investment to increase its impact.

How

Have a plan for building evidence from the outset of your project. After you've developed your initial account of change, collect data that helps you show whether your innovation is creating positive change. Explore ways of demonstrating causality through the use of randomisation and control groups. Commission an independent evaluation. And if you replicate your model at a later stage, evaluate the different sites to confirm whether this has been achieved while continuing to have a positive impact on outcomes.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

Levels of evidence

1

You can describe what you do and why it matters logically, coherently and convincingly

You should be able to do this yourself, by drawing on existing data and research from other sources. Constructing a theory of change should help you to logically and coherently describe how your intervention will achieve the effects you outline.

For more information on creating a theory of change, see Module 4, Topic 1 'Evaluating early stage innovation'.

2

You capture data that shows positive change, but you cannot confirm that your intervention caused the change

At this stage, data can begin to show the effect your innovation has but may not demonstrate direct causality. Many of the methods outlined in the previous topic will help, as would more structured surveys of your participants before and after, or at intervals during, your intervention.

3

You can demonstrate causality with reference to a control group or comparison group

In order to demonstrate causality, you will need to show evidence of what happened to those involved in your intervention alongside evidence of what happened to a similar group who were not involved in your intervention (called a control group).

Selecting participants randomly to both groups strengthens your evidence and you will need to have a sufficiently large sample for your results to be convincing.

4

You have one or more independent evaluations that confirms your conclusions and potentially replicates your results

You should commission a robust, independent evaluation that demonstrates and validates why and how your innovation creates impact. You might also seek endorsement via commercial standards, industry kitemarks or similar.

5

You have manuals, systems and procedures to support and ensure faithful replication of your innovation

You need to show that your product or service can be operated by someone else, somewhere else, whilst continuing to have positive direct impact on the outcome and remaining a financially viable proposition. Towards this end, you might pursue an evaluation across multiple contexts that - amongst other things - tests the fidelity of practice and outcomes between sites.

How to generate the evidence