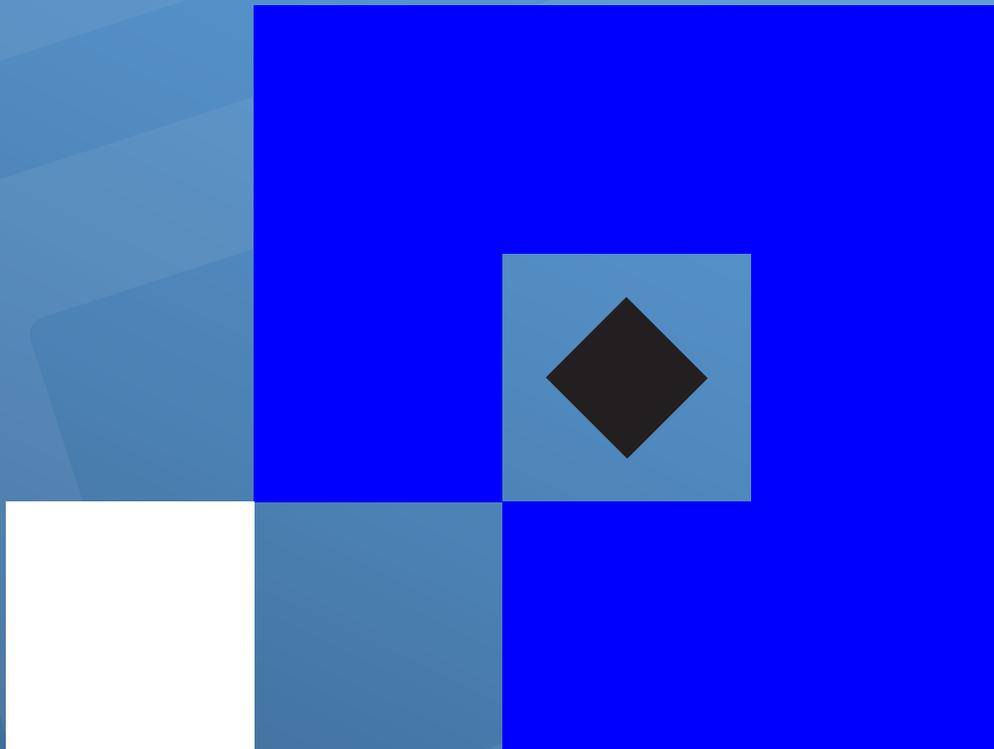


KNOWLEDGE MOBILIZATION IN PRACTICE

Insights from QUESCREN

By Anna Hunt, MA





QUESCREN is a collaborative network of researchers, community members and institutions that provides opportunities to promote the understanding and vitality of English-speaking Quebec through research, knowledge mobilization, networking, and outreach. It is housed at the School of Community and Public Affairs at Concordia University in Montreal.

Research Strategy Series

QUESCREN's Research Strategy Series addresses foundational and strategic considerations in the study of English-speaking Quebec. Its focus is setting research priorities and enhancing the mobilization and impact of scholarly knowledge on this official language minority community in Canada. The series supports QUESCREN's development and our provision of strategic science advice to policy and program decision-makers.

Credits

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Note: Glossary words are indicated in purple in the doc.

Purpose of this document

This plan was developed to formalize QUESCREN's approach to knowledge mobilization (KMb) and to situate it within the broader KMb field. It is also conceived as a community resource, offering a simplified overview of the core components and reflections we see as central to effective practice. Its aims are to provide internal direction for QUESCREN's KMb initiatives, to support others engaged in mobilizing knowledge, and to help extend the reach and impact of research on English-speaking Quebec.

Overview – What Is Knowledge Mobilization?

“Knowledge mobilization is about getting the ‘right information’ to the ‘right people’ in the ‘right format’ at the ‘right time.’”

It is an umbrella term that covers a range of activities relating to the production and use of research results, with the ultimate aim of connecting academic researchers with those outside of academia to create and share knowledge that can make a societal impact through better-informed policy and decision-making.¹

The domain contains a lot of terminology and frameworks, with vocabulary that varies according to contextual factors such as geographical location, field of study or practice (e.g., healthcare, agriculture, humanities), time period, and funding body. In Canada, the most used synonyms for “knowledge mobilization” are “**knowledge transfer**” and “**knowledge translation**.” To keep things simple, we will use “knowledge mobilization” or “KMb” throughout this document, and we have tried to refer primarily to sources that use these terms.

Ultimately, knowledge mobilization aims to overcome the “knowledge to action” gap. Failing to put available knowledge/evidence into action can be costly and harmful, especially in fields such as healthcare and agriculture (where the field of KmB finds its roots).

Two broad KmB categories²

End-of-project KmB (or end-of-grant KmB): focuses on mobilizing research/literature/evidence that has already been conducted. This uses a “**push**”³ approach, assuming the knowledge is needed and that users will seek it out.

Integrated KmB: a KmB form that focuses on collaborative and/or participatory approaches. Uses an “**exchange** model” where knowledge creators and knowledge users collaborate for mutual benefit. This has become the more widely understood meaning of KmB.

1 See Glossary for expanded definition from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

2 According to: Canadian Institutes of Health Research Government of Canada, “Guide to Knowledge Translation Planning at CIHR: Integrated and End-of-Grant Approaches – CIHR,” December 6, 2012, <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/e/45321.html>.

3 Based on “Approaches to KmB,” an interactive H5P element available at <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/bscmodule2/?p=90#h5p-5>, embedded in Ryan Plummer et al., *Building Sustainable Communities: Information Gathering and Sharing*, 2022, <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/bscmodule2/>, 43.

The authors indicate that their source of information for their graphic is Gavin Bennett and Nasreen Jessani, *The Knowledge Translation Toolkit: Bridging the Know-Do Gap : A Resource for Researchers* (New Delhi, India, Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications ; International Development Research Centre, 2011), <http://epe.lac-bac.gc.ca/100/200/301/idrc-crdj/2011/9788132105855.pdf>.

What is KMb NOT?

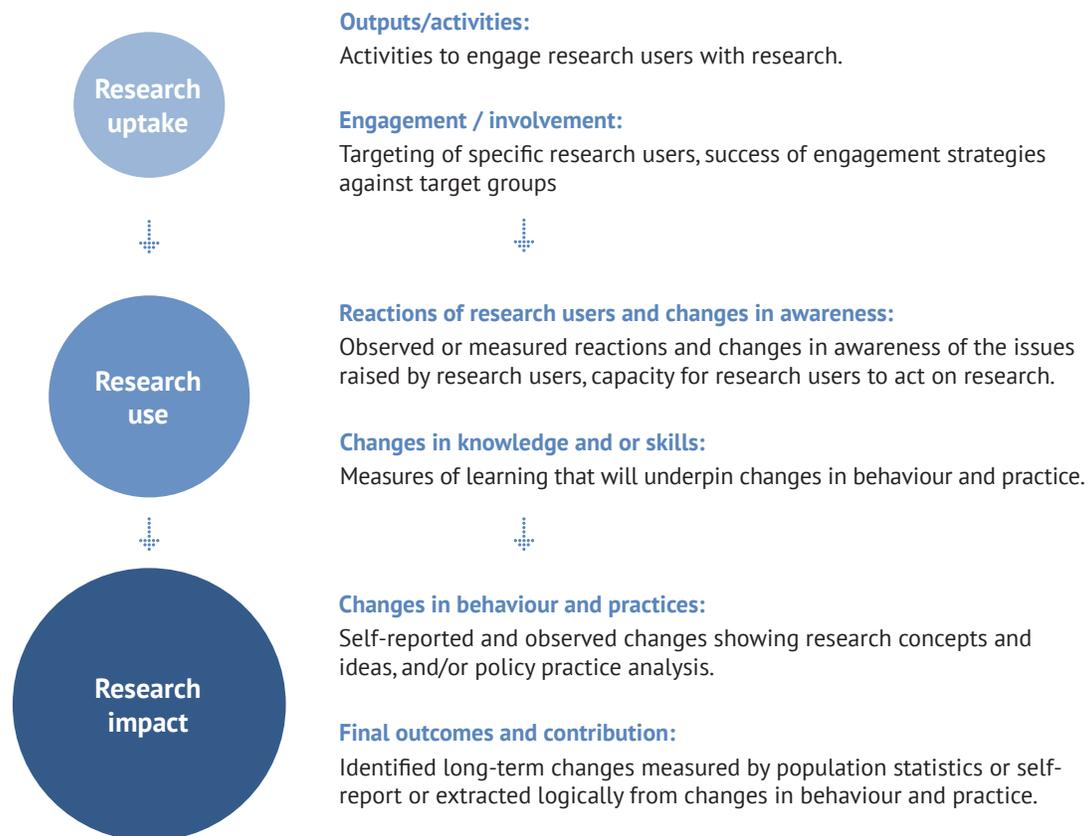
One-way or passive communication of findings (**untargeted** with no **dialogue or feedback** from audience).

Why is it important?

Societal reasons – ensures research that is relevant to and more likely to be used by knowledge users and have the desired impact.

Financial reasons – funders increasingly request a KMb component in projects. They want to see how their funded research is benefiting society.

Practical resource 1 – Basic Pathway to Impact Model⁴



4 Based on Sarah Morton's Basic Pathway to impact from "Progressing Research Impact Assessment: A 'Contributions' Approach," *Research Evaluation* 24, no. 4 (2015): 405–19, <https://doi.org/10.1093/reseval/rvv016>.

1. KMb & Relationship Building

Relationship building⁵ is essential in knowledge mobilization, since it facilitates *access* to the different stakeholders,⁶ not only for the research-creation process, but also in the dissemination and implementation stages of research.

Why are relationships important in KMb?

Fostering trust and credibility can benefit all stages of the KMb process:

- **Creation** – people **participate in research** in an open and engaged way.
- **Uptake** – target audiences **engage with research**, such as reading products, attending events, sharing our resources.
- **Use/impact** – people are more likely to **change their beliefs, behaviour** or **policy** based on research if they trust where the information is coming from.

What do strong relationships entail?

- **Time** – to establish AND to maintain relationships
- **Transparency from the start** – to ensure a shared understanding of the intentions and expectations of both sides of the relationship
- **Reflection** – considering factors such as context (historical/structural), power dynamics, and whose voice is being amplified⁷

Potential barriers

- **Time** required to build, maintain and possibly repair relationships
- **Cultural understanding** (or lack) of appropriate practices, such as when working with Indigenous communities
- **Different agendas** of the parties involved (e.g., political, strategic, etc.)
- **Project lengths** that give adequate time for building relationships

5 "Partnerships," "engagement," and "networks" are terms commonly used in the KMb context when we talk about establishing relationships, such as between community groups and academic institutions. This document will refer in more general terms to building relationships, both formal and informal.

6 We acknowledge that there is an ongoing discussion of whether the word "stakeholder" is appropriate. Some prefer terms like "interest-holder," which we will also use in this document. For a discussion on this, see Mark S. Reed, Bethann Garramon Merkle, et al. "Reimagining the Language of Engagement in a Post-Stakeholder World." *Sustainability Science* 19, no. 4 (July 1, 2024): 1481–90. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-024-01496-4>.

7 An interesting article about this is Mark S. Reed and Hannah Rudman, "Re-thinking Research Impact: Voice, Context and Power at the Interface of Science, Policy and Practice." *Sustainability Science* 18, no. 2 (March 1, 2023): 967–81. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11625-022-01216-w>.

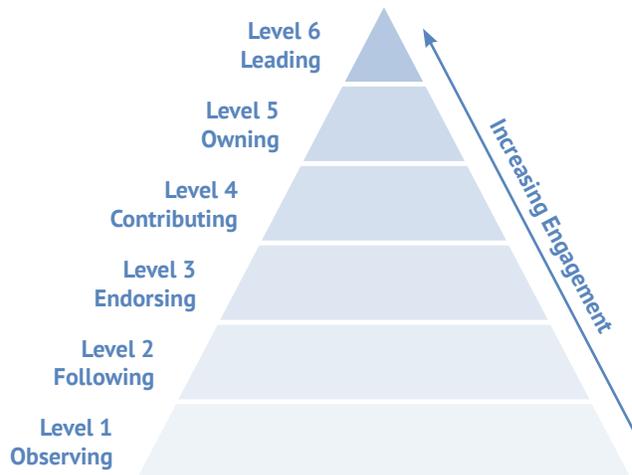
What QUESCREN is doing

- Strong and long relationships with certain **interest-holders** in the academic, community, and government sectors
- Staff involvement in multi-partner initiatives (boards, committees)
- QUESCREN’s own networks: Inter-Level Educational Table (ILET), Advisory Board, researcher-member group, and “open members” (mailing list subscribers)

Opportunities for improvement at QUESCREN

- **Mapping where we have strong relationships** and where there are gaps.
Potential areas of further improvement:
 - Connecting with more francophone institutions
 - Strengthening relationships with regional partners
 - Ensuring that our researcher-members feel like they’re part of a network/community
 - Determining the levels of engagement we’d like to have from our target audiences
- In the case of strategic partnerships, **ensuring shared understanding** of the desired level of engagement of the group/individual
- Before starting new relationships or partnerships, **reflecting upon and being transparent** with the other person/group about our objectives and expectations to make sure everyone is on the same page

Practical resource 2 – The Engagement Pyramid⁸



Someone may work to lead others in engaging with the knowledge.

Someone may be fully invested in the knowledge and want to see it successfully mobilized.

Someone may contribute their own (or their organization’s) time, money, or social investments, but do not assume responsibility for the knowledge.

Someone may believe in the knowledge enough to endorse it but not invest much time/money.

Someone may understand and be interested in the knowledge and willing to receive more information.

Someone may be aware of or interested in the knowledge, but not ready to engage with it.

⁸ Source: Material from a course by Jaime Brown and Amanda Demmer called “Engage: Building capacity to understand and use relevant evidence,” Certificate in Knowledge Mobilization, University of Guelph, 2024 and Gideon Rosenblatt, “The Six Levels of the Engagement Pyramid,” *The Vital Edge* by Gideon Rosenblatt, April 12, 2014, <https://www.the-vital-edge.com/engagement-pyramid/>.

2. KMb Activities in Universities

In a university context, KMb activities aim to make research accessible and actionable beyond academia.

Most of QUESCREN's KMb activities involve “end-of-grant KMb.”

What do they entail?

- This depends on the **purpose** and **audience** – the type of activity and content should be tailored accordingly.
- This can involve taking the **same research and delivering it in different formats**,⁹ depending on the audience and how the information is to be used.

Research Impact Canada¹⁰ splits KMb into three categories:

- **Products** – ways to share or disseminate information quickly
- **Events** – occasions where researchers can share their findings and interact with interest-holders, such as community groups and government employees, potentially “co-creating” new ideas through these interactions
- **Networks** – means of facilitating the exchange of information, resources and best practices to share and build upon knowledge, including through co-created research

Potential barriers:

- Since QUESCREN is a research network, we focus more on “end-of-grant” knowledge mobilization, since we are often sharing other researchers’ work after it’s been completed.
- The time required for co-created research, which is a best KMb practice, is longer, and can involve more time than we at QUESCREN have at our disposal.

9 Explored in Nicole Lemire et al., *Facilitating a Knowledge Translation Process : Knowledge Review and Facilitation Tool* (Direction de la recherche, formation et développement, Institut national de santé publique Québec, 2013), <http://collections.banq.qc.ca/ark:/52327/2278607>.

10 Research Impact Canada, *KMb 101: Introduction to Knowledge Mobilization [Online Course]* (Research Impact Canada, n.d.), https://rise.articulate.com/share/qV54-kftJACqH_QXUcaMODQ3W9qDw3-Y#/. See chapter 5, What does KMb actually look like?

What QUESCREN is doing

Products

- Research documents, such as working papers, research briefs, and scholarly articles
- Policy briefs
- Interactive tools, such as our online databases
- Blog posts
- Infographics
- Videos
- Podcasts

Events

- Conferences
- Lunch & Learns
- Symposia
- Workshops

Networks

- Mailing list subscribers = open members
- ILET
- Advisory Board
- Researcher-members

Opportunities for improvement

- **Engaging in more collaborative research strategies** and co-creation of research from the start of and throughout the research process
- **Systematically identifying the purpose and knowledge user** before choosing the format of each activity
- **Delivering the same research in different formats** based on the intended audience, for example, a research brief that is accompanied by a short video
- **Benchmarking/measuring impact**
- **Applying for research funding** that supports the full KMB cycle of knowledge, including needs assessment and evaluation stages

3. KMb & Communications

What's the difference?

KMb is focused on collaborative partnerships, feedback and activities that take place **throughout** the research cycle. Communications tend to focus on the **end** of the research cycle, when there are research results to disseminate in different formats and on different platforms. While communicating knowledge is an important part of knowledge mobilization, it is only one component of the process.

There are also “strategic/institutional communications” that are “aligned with a corporation’s mission, vision, values, designed to enhance the strategic positioning and competitiveness of the organization.”¹¹

In comparison, KMb focuses on sharing research results (including with communications) with the goal of research uptake and use, while strategic communications often support an institution’s goals. (See below [Practical Resource 3 – Knowledge Translation vs. Communications](#) for a visual of this.)

Potential barriers:

- The significant amount of time required to create tailored communications plans for different projects as well as to create the different communication “products”
- The level of skills and resources needed to create content in different formats using different media platforms

Platforms QUESCREN is using to communicate research, as well as in our strategic communications:

- Social media: Facebook, LinkedIn
- Mass emails (Mailchimp) for newsletter and updates
- Media releases
- Videos on YouTube
- Websites

11 For more information, see this useful [PowerPoint](#) in Michael Smith Health Research BC, “Knowledge Translation and Communications: What’s the Difference? – Health Research BC,” January 28, 2022. <https://healthresearchbc.ca/webinar/knowledge-translation-and-communication-whats-the-difference/>.

Opportunities for Improvement

- **Creating tailored communication plans** for our different projects and initiatives
- **Focusing on the relatability** of the knowledge we share, as well as the knowledge producers:
 - Personalizing posts with pictures
 - Using storytelling in our communications, for example, “key findings carousels”
- **Spotlighting** our researcher-members and their work
- **Leveraging the reach of our partners’** communication networks, for example, have a partner who uses TikTok share information that is relevant to a youth audience
- **Experimenting with social media** tools and formats
- **Tracking public engagement** with our posts and adjusting our approach accordingly
- **Actively encouraging people to share** our content

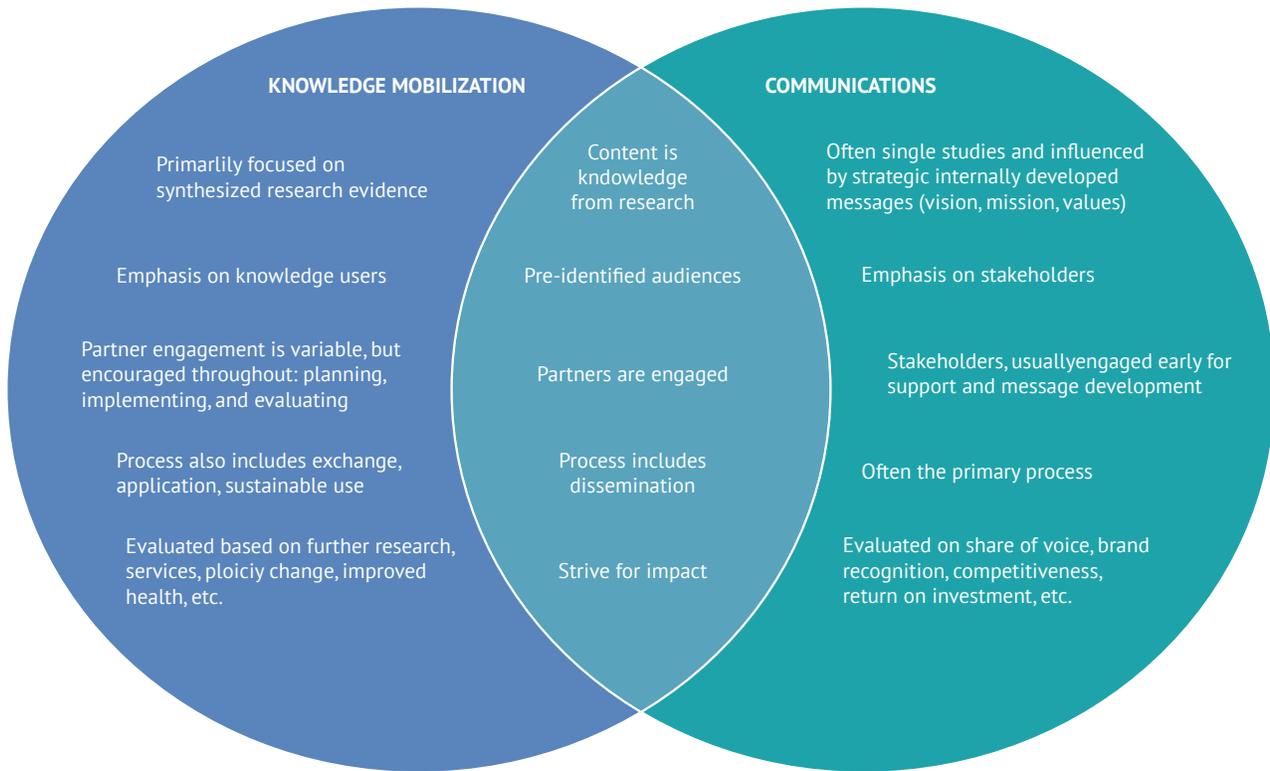
Practical resource 3 – Communications Model for Knowledge Mobilization¹²

The five basic questions—**what, to whom, by whom, how, and with what effect**—can be adapted to KMB as follows:

- 1. What knowledge should be mobilized?**
 - a. What are we communicating?
 - b. What is “good evidence” for the knowledge user?
 - c. What do we want to communicate through the research?
- 2. To whom should knowledge be mobilized?**
 - a. Who needs to know the information?
 - b. Does the intended user want to know the information?
 - c. Who can act on the knowledge?
- 3. By whom should the knowledge be mobilized?**
 - a. Who is giving the message? QUESCEN? Or is the knowledge to be shared by another organization/individual?
- 4. How should knowledge be mobilized?**
 - a. What platforms can be used?
 - b. What’s the best way to get this information to the target audience?
 - c. Interactive, face-to-face engagement is more effective than passive dissemination of information. How can we practise this type of engagement?
- 5. With what effect should knowledge be mobilized?**
 - a. What is the end goal?
 - b. What do we want to accomplish by this information being shared?
 - c. How will we determine if the knowledge has been mobilized effectively and appropriately?

12 From John N, Lavis et. al., “How Can Research Organizations More Effectively Transfer Research Knowledge to Decision Makers?” *The Milbank Quarterly* 81, no. 2 (June 2003): 221–48. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0009.t01-1-00052>.

Practical resource 4 – Knowledge Mobilization vs. Communications¹³



13 The source for this graphic is Kevin Sauve, "Knowledge Translation and Communications: What's the Difference? – Health Research BC," Michael Smith Health Research BC, January 28, 2022, <https://healthresearchbc.ca/webinar/knowledge-translation-and-communication-whats-the-difference/>.
It is based on: Melanie Barwick et al., "Knowledge Translation and Strategic Communications: Unpacking Differences and Similarities for Scholarly and Research Communications," *Scholarly and Research Communication* 5 (November 2014), <https://doi.org/10.22230/src.2014v5n3a175>.

4. Measuring KMb Impact

This is how we determine whether we achieved the impact we set out to have. It is also important to measure the *kind* of impact achieved, because it may not always be positive or as intended.

It's often tricky. Given the fact that knowledge mobilization is a human process, any change or impact achieved is often dependent on the perspective, experiences, and context of the people working within this process. The impact is not always easy to quantify, such as changes in attitudes.

As such, it can be more realistic to think of research impact in terms of *contributing* to change, rather than *attributing* change to the knowledge mobilized.¹⁴

How to measure impact

How and what you measure depends on the type of project and its intended goals. Ideally, measurement/evaluation is incorporated into the planning stage of the project and doesn't take place only at the end. Determining at the start how you will measure the success of a project can also help define the project's objectives and, at the end, whether you achieved what you set out to do.

Two broad categories for evaluating research impact are:¹⁵

- 1 Evaluating the impact of **research** – the **overall outcome**, such as policy changes
- 2 Evaluating the impact of **KMb activities** – often related to the steps in the process, such as engagement with stakeholders

To measure the **impact of research**, we can classify impact in three levels: **uptake (engagement with research)**, **use (acting upon research)** and **impact (changes in awareness, beliefs, policy)**. See “Practical resource 1 – Basic Pathway to Impact Model” above.

14 Explored in Morton, “Progressing Research Impact Assessment.”

15 Note that there are many assessment frameworks. The one referenced here is linked to the UK's Research Excellence Framework (how research is assessed in the UK), which Research Impact Canada explores and compares to the Canadian context here: Connie Tang, “Watching Impact in the REF and How It Informs the Canadian Context / Le REF en observation : Comment l'impact s'y manifeste, et son influence sur la situation canadienne.” *Research Impact Canada* (blog), April 12, 2017. <https://researchimpact.ca/archived/watching-impact-in-the-ref-and-how-it-informs-the-canadian-context-le-ref-en-observation-comment-limpact-sy-manifeste-et-son-influence-sur-la-situation-canadienne/>.

What are the barriers to consider?

- The **project life cycle** ending before the impact can be accurately measured
- The **internal capacity** required to plan the evaluation and then carry it out:
 - Time
 - Skills
 - Resources
- **External factors** impacting the evaluation process, such as people responding to surveys, being willing to participate in discussions or interviews

What QUESCREN is currently doing

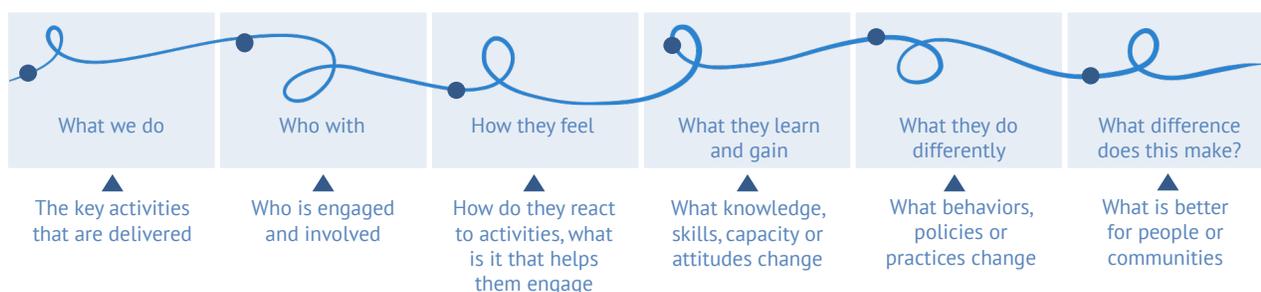
Our evaluation pertains mostly to **uptake of or engagement with KMB activities and products**:

- Surveys following events
- Mass email (Mailchimp) statistics
- Event attendance
- Web analytics
- Informal discussions with partners

Opportunities for Improvement

- **Planning how we intend to measure** the impact when the project is being created
- **Gathering feedback** from targeted groups:
 - Interviewing representatives of our different target audiences to find out more about the impact of our work
 - Targeted surveys to understand the needs and priorities of our communities
- **Utilizing storytelling to indicate the impact** of our work. There would need to be a reason for this, for example, as a reporting technique

Practical resource 5 – Outcome Mapping Framework¹⁶



16 Image is from Sarah Morton, *How Do You Know If You Are Making a Difference?* [Webinar], Matter of Focus, May 14, 2024, 56:01, <https://www.matter-of-focus.com/how-do-you-know-if-you-are-making-a-difference-a-practical-approach-to-understanding-and-tracking-your-impact/>.

Glossary of Key Terms

Interest-holder: Alternative word for stakeholder

Knowledge exchange (KE): Activities to increase the uptake of research

Knowledge mobilization (KMb):¹⁷ The reciprocal and complementary flow and uptake of research knowledge between researchers, knowledge brokers, and knowledge users, both within and beyond academia, in such a way that benefits users and creates positive impacts within Canada and/or internationally, and, ultimately, has the potential to enhance the profile, reach, and impact of social sciences and humanities research. Knowledge mobilization initiatives must address at least one of the following, as appropriate, depending on the research area and project objectives, context, and target audience:

Within academia:

- informs, advances and/or improves:

research agendas

theory and/or

methods

Beyond academia:

- informs:

public debate

policies and/or

practice

- enhances/improves services and/or
- informs the decisions and/or processes of people in business, government, the media, practitioner communities, and civil society

Knowledge mobilization language umbrella (non-exhaustive): Knowledge exchange, implementation science, K*, knowledge synthesis, dissemination, exchange and co-creation or co-production

Knowledge users: Members of the public, policy, or practice communities who use research in conceptual or instrumental ways

17 Source: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, "Knowledge Mobilization," in *SSHRC Terminology*, June 6, 2025, <https://sshrcc-crsh.canada.ca/en/funding/terminology.aspx>.

“Push” KMb approach vs “linkage and exchange” KMb approach

- **The push KMb approach** is colloquially known as the “if you build it, they will come” strategy. Here, research knowledge is the catalyst for change. The push model assumes that the knowledge users are motivated receivers of information and that they will actively seek out information. Therefore, the sole responsibility of the knowledge creators is to “push out” their knowledge and make it accessible (for whoever happens to need it).
- **The linkage and exchange KMb** approach relies on partnerships. Knowledge creators and knowledge users collaborate for mutual benefit. This model may be a short- or long-term collaboration and may occur at any point in the research/policy process. It may include priority-setting exercises, collaborative research projects, or projects with a developmental product at the end.

Research uptake/use/impact:

- **Uptake** – when research users have engaged with research, for example, read a brief, attended a conference, were research partners, advised on a research project, engaged in an activity indicating knowledge of research’s existence
- **Use** – when research users act upon research, discuss it, pass it on, use it to inform policy
- **Impact** – changes in awareness, knowledge and understanding, ideas, attitudes and perceptions. Research changes policy and practice.

Social advocacy vs knowledge mobilization: Social advocacy is promoting certain causes, while knowledge mobilization is about translating knowledge into action.

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