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Guide to Disseminating Research (GuiDiR)

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The framework was developed by dissemination experts, researchers and patient and public representatives.

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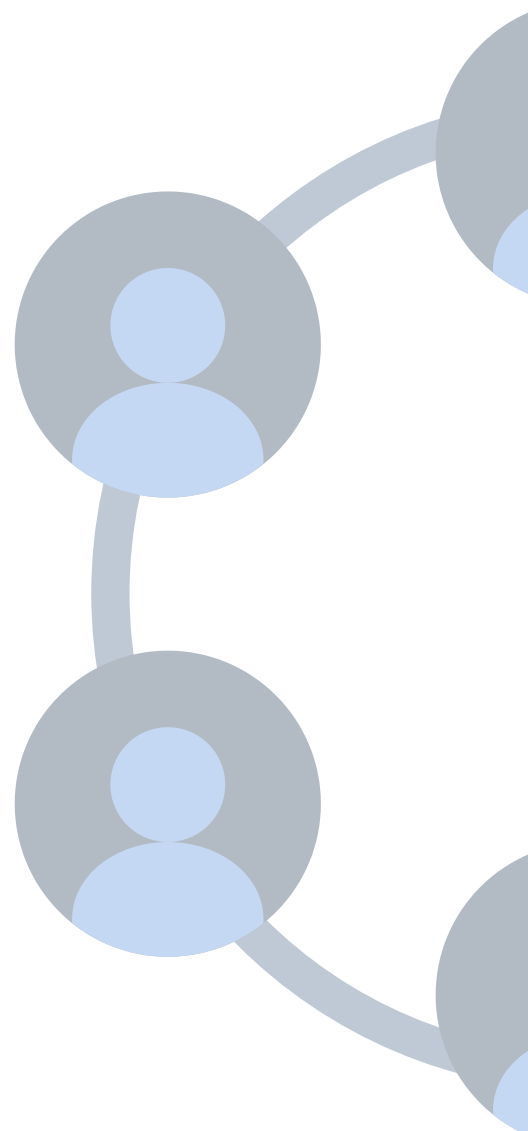
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Glossary of terms

Active dissemination - two-way communication between the research team and the target audiences. This method intends to generate understanding of the key dissemination messages among very specific target audiences. For example, via webinars, workshops and meetings with individuals and groups.

Adoption - the decision of an organisation or a community to commit to implementing new practices (2).

Barriers and enablers - factors such as environmental contexts, socioeconomic circumstances, attitudes, beliefs and cultural norms that might impact your dissemination efforts.

Dissemination - the continuous process of spreading your research findings to the target audience(s) using planned strategies (3).

Dissemination partners - individuals and organisations who guide and facilitate you to reach your target audiences. They are opinion leaders who support credibility and trustworthiness and can act as gatekeepers between you and your target audiences. These may include:

- organisations representing people with lived experience (e.g. charities)
- key community partners (e.g. religious leaders)
- membership organisations (e.g. professional bodies and unions)

Gatekeepers - a person or organisation that controls access to your target audience(s).

Implementation - the process of putting to use or integrating new practices within a setting (4).

Knowledge mobilisers - experts in ways of sharing knowledge; they have key knowledge regarding relevant networks and the skills to develop creative knowledge products such as infographics, newsletters, fact-sheets, lay summaries, presentations and/or video stories.

Passive dissemination - one-way communication from the research team to the target audiences. This method intends to generate awareness across a wide range of target audiences. For example, via posters, social media and letters.

Stakeholder mapping - the process of identifying your target audiences. This process will allow you to prioritise which target audiences (stakeholders) you need to engage with at critical points during your programme of research.

Glossary of terms

Target audiences - individuals for whom the message is intended, including:

- the 'end users' of the evidence (the individuals who will make use of it)
- those who may be impacted by the evidence (e.g. patients, families, practitioners, membership organisations)
- those who may be influenced by, or influence, the use of the evidence (e.g. membership organisations, policy makers and commissioners)

Purpose

What is dissemination?

Dissemination is the continuous process of spreading your learning from research to the target audience(s) using planned strategies (3). The aim of dissemination is to raise awareness of your research and encourage the target audience(s) to act upon the evidence. This means that if and when the evidence proves to be effective, organisations or communities are ready to commit to act upon it. Effective dissemination is therefore key to downstream research utilisation activities such as adoption into policy and implementation into practice.

Lifetime of a research project



Dissemination should span the entire lifetime of a research project but is generally only recognised as a single downstream step in most knowledge translation frameworks. It also requires more than the typical efforts of sharing research findings via academic networks, such as scientific journal publications and conference presentations. Yet practice of the academic community continues to be dominated by these approaches.

Who is this framework for?

This framework is aimed at researchers, research funders and practitioners. It can be applied to a diverse range of research and is intended as a practical guide to help you develop a strategy for disseminating your findings.

Existing knowledge translation frameworks generally focus on planning and executing the implementation phase, with brief guidance to support researchers to disseminate. This framework complements these by providing detailed instruction on how to plan and execute dissemination across the lifetime of a research project. It comprises **five core steps** that drive the process of dissemination, which are detailed overleaf.

Overview of framework

The framework comprises **five core steps** to help you plan and execute your dissemination strategy.

Prepare to disseminate

1

Identify target audiences and dissemination partners

2

Engage with dissemination partners

3

Identify barriers and enablers to dissemination

4

Create dissemination messages

Disseminate

5

Disseminate and evaluate

Prepare to disseminate

Click on the steps to learn more.

1

Identify target audiences and dissemination partners

- Use **stakeholder mapping** to **identify and characterise your target audiences**.
- **Identify and characterise dissemination partners** who can facilitate channels of communication with the target audiences.

2

Engage with dissemination partners

- **Form relationships with your dissemination partners** at the appropriate stage in the research, informed by the stakeholder mapping.

3

Identify barriers and enablers to dissemination

- Work with your dissemination partners to **identify the barriers and enablers** to disseminating your evidence to the target audiences.

4

Create dissemination messages

- Work with your dissemination partners to **develop and shape key messages** for the target audiences.

Disseminate

Click on the step to learn more.

5

Disseminate and evaluate

- **Set goal(s)** to raise awareness at local and wider levels of the gap in practice or evidence that your dissemination strategies aim to fulfil.
- **Formulate dissemination strategies** (that address the Step 3 barriers and enablers) to fulfil the goals set.
- **Evaluate and refine** your dissemination strategies.

When do I use the framework and undertake each step?

Before you start

Plan, cost and record the research and dissemination strategy (using the five steps of dissemination as a guide)

During the research

Conduct the research and undertake the five steps of dissemination in parallel

Given that dissemination spans the lifetime of a research project, we recommend that you plan, cost and record your dissemination strategy when developing your research protocol/grant application. We provide some examples of resources that you may consider costing at the end of this document.

We also recommend making your dissemination plan publicly available to support transparency and sharing of best practice.

Identify target audiences and dissemination partners

Activities

- Use **stakeholder mapping to identify and characterise the target audiences**. These will include the end users of the evidence, those who may be impacted by the evidence, and those who may be influenced by the evidence.
- **Identify and characterise dissemination partners** who can facilitate channels of communication with the target audiences.

What is stakeholder mapping?

Stakeholder mapping (sometimes called stakeholder analysis) is the process of identifying your target audiences. In the context of health services research dissemination, you will identify:

- The 'end users' of the evidence (the individuals who will make use of it)
- Those who may be impacted by the evidence (e.g. patients, families, practitioners, membership organisations and health services, policy and decision-makers)
- Those who may be influenced by, or influence, the use of the evidence (e.g. membership organisations, policy makers and commissioners)

This process will allow you to **prioritise** which target audiences (stakeholders) you need to engage with at critical points during your programme of research.

You should **review and refine** your stakeholder mapping throughout the research to respond to emerging evidence and changing contexts, e.g. new health policies.



Who are dissemination partners?

Dissemination partners are individuals and organisations who will guide and facilitate you to reach your target audiences. They are **opinion leaders** who support credibility and trustworthiness and can act as gatekeepers between you and your target audiences. These may include:

- organisations representing people with lived experience (e.g. charities/patient groups)
- key community partners (e.g. religious leaders)
- membership organisations (e.g. professional bodies and unions)

In addition to working with opinion leaders, you may also partner with '**knowledge mobilisers**' who are experts in ways of sharing knowledge. They have key knowledge regarding relevant networks and the skills to develop creative knowledge products such as infographics, newsletters, fact-sheets, lay summaries, presentations and/or video stories.

You will work with your dissemination partners throughout the dissemination process (Steps 2-5) to reach your target audiences.

What does 'characterisation' involve?

Characterisation includes describing the needs, contexts and missions of the target audiences and dissemination partners. This is explained in further detail in the stakeholder resource linked below.

Helpful links

A resource to guide you through the process of **stakeholder mapping** can be found here: [NHS stakeholder analysis](#). We also recommend using the [NIHR-INCLUDE](#) resource to help you think about stakeholders who may be underrepresented.

A resource on the role of **knowledge mobilisers** and the skills they have can be found here: [NIHR knowledge mobilisation specialists](#).

Engage with dissemination partners

Activities

- **Form relationships with your dissemination partners** at the appropriate stage in the research, informed by the stakeholder mapping.

You need to engage with dissemination partners to develop and nurture a shared interest in the evidence that will require dissemination. The intention is to **inspire and generate commitment** from them to support you in your dissemination activities and problem-solve if necessary. In order to form an effective working relationship with your dissemination partners, it is vital that you:

- build trust (e.g. by being transparent, empathetic and consistent in your thoughts and actions)
- understand how they perceive your evidence
- foster a shared understanding of each other's goals and expectations relating to disseminating the evidence

How do you reach them? Identify members of your research team to engage with the identified dissemination partners. Consider who has existing contacts or is most appropriate - for instance, patient and public representative members of your research team may be most appropriate for organisations representing people with lived experience (e.g. charities) and key community partners (e.g. religious leaders), while clinical members of the research team will be appropriate for membership organisations (e.g. professional bodies and unions).

Helpful links

The [NHS stakeholder analysis](#) resource provides guidance on how to form relationships with key partners.

Identify barriers and enablers to dissemination

Activities

- Work with your dissemination partners to **identify the barriers and enablers to disseminating** your evidence to the target audiences.

Before you can formulate your (active and passive) dissemination strategies, you need to consider what factors may act as barriers or enablers to your evidence reaching the target audiences.



What does identifying and addressing barriers and enablers involve?

You need to understand how factors such as environmental contexts, socioeconomic circumstances, attitudes, beliefs and cultural norms might impact your dissemination efforts.

Your **dissemination partners** will know the target audiences and can help you to understand the barriers and enablers that need addressing and how these might be addressed. This will be achieved by them **sharing their existing knowledge** and/or helping you **design approaches to generate this knowledge**.

For example, you may wish to convene a focus group with patients (members of the target audience) who tell you that they trust information that is disseminated via a particular charity (enabler). You may also survey the membership of a professional body with the results indicating that practitioners do not have sufficient capacity to engage with new sources of knowledge in work time (barrier).

Identifying the barriers and enablers to dissemination at this stage will help you to formulate your passive and active dissemination strategies at [Step 5](#). It is therefore important that you understand what we mean by passive and active dissemination.

Passive dissemination is one-way communication from the research team to the target audiences. This method intends to generate awareness across a wide range of target audiences. For example, via posters, social media and letters.

Active dissemination is two-way communication between the research team and the target audiences. This method intends to generate understanding of the key messages (Step 4) among very specific target audiences. For example, via webinars, workshops and meetings with individuals and groups.

Examples of dissemination strategies that are informed by potential barriers and enablers are illustrated below.

Barriers and enablers	Passive dissemination strategy	Active dissemination strategy
Patients trust information that is disseminated via a particular charity (enabler)	Article in monthly newsletter distributed by the charity	Present evidence followed by a question and answer session at a meeting facilitated by the charity
Practitioners do not have sufficient capacity to engage with new sources of knowledge in work time (barrier)	Disseminate via routes that practitioners are already engaging with outside of work time, e.g. Twitter	Convene an interactive webinar outside of work time and incentivise attendance by awarding continuing professional development points

Create dissemination messages

Activities

- Work with your dissemination partners to **develop and shape key messages** for the target audiences.

What does creating dissemination messages involve?

You need to work with your dissemination partners to agree what the key messages about the evidence are and how to frame them so that they are engaging and accessible to the specific target audiences. For example, the key messages and how you frame them may differ for practitioners, patients and policy makers. Your **dissemination messages** need to:

- convey the gap in practice, knowledge or need(s), relevant to your target audiences, that the research evidence is addressing
- be as specific as possible and include only the essential information presented in an accessible and attractive format
- convey the credibility and provenance of the evidence to the end user
- provide enough detail for the target audiences to make informed decisions

Once you have created your dissemination messages, you can refer back to these throughout the duration of your research programme and incorporate them into your dissemination strategies (Step 5).



Helpful links

Implementation frameworks provide guidance on the goal of messaging at different stages of the research process, e.g., [Consolidated Framework for Implementation Research](#).

Disseminate and evaluate

Activities

- **Set goal(s)** to raise awareness at local and wider levels of the gap in practice or evidence that the dissemination strategies aim to fulfil.
- **Formulate dissemination strategies** (that address the Step 3 barriers and enablers) to fulfil the goals set.
- **Evaluate and refine** your dissemination strategies.

Your passive and active dissemination strategies should seek to address the **barriers and enablers** identified in Step 3 and have a clear **goal** that they are trying to achieve. Typically passive dissemination is undertaken first to prime the target audiences for subsequent active dissemination strategies.

Examples of **passive dissemination** strategies include:

Websites	Newsletters	Scientific publications
Radio	Posters	Social media
Newspapers	Letters/brochures	Podcasts

Examples of **active dissemination** strategies include:

Webinars	Seminars	Oral presentations
Workshops	Individual meetings	Group meetings
Launch event	Telephone discussions	Poster presentations

What does setting goals involve?

Setting goals helps guide and focus the development of your dissemination strategy. Setting a goal for each strategy also enables you to **evaluate** its success and identify any barriers to achieving the goal. It may be useful to structure your dissemination strategies around the following **SMART Goals**:

S	Specific Make your goals specific - think about what exactly you want to achieve
M	Measurable Set a measurable target (metrics or other) against which you will measure the performance of your dissemination strategy
A	Attainable Is your goal realistic to achieve?
R	Relevant Make sure your goals are relevant to your research aims and objectives
T	Time-based Give your goal a (realistic) deadline.

You should **review and refine** your dissemination strategies based on performance relative to the set goal.

Example 1: Passive dissemination

Let's return to our example of a passive dissemination strategy informed by a potential enabler, as illustrated in [Step 3](#):

Barriers/enablers	Passive dissemination strategy
Patients trust information that is disseminated via a particular charity (enabler)	Article in monthly newsletter distributed by the charity

The table below provides an example goal for this dissemination strategy:

SMART Goals	Description of goal
Specific	Disseminate new research evidence to patients diagnosed with a relevant health condition via charity newsletter.
Measurable	10,000 people diagnosed with a relevant health condition receive communication about the new research evidence.
Attainable	The charity newsletter has 20,000 contacts, thus a conservative 50% opening the article is attainable.
Relevant	A core objective of the research is to disseminate findings to the patient population that the research evidence will affect.
Time-based	Research team to work with dissemination partners to plan co-production of the article and full report before the target charity newsletter is distributed.

The article could include a link to a full report hosted on the research website. The charity newsletter metrics can tell the research team the number of people who received the newsletter, the number of people who opened the newsletter and the number of people who clicked on the link. The website metrics can tell them how long people interacted with the report.

Example 2: Active dissemination

Let's return to our example of an active dissemination strategy informed by a potential barrier, as illustrated in [Step 3](#):

Barriers/enablers	Active dissemination strategy
Practitioners do not have sufficient capacity to engage with new sources of knowledge in work time (barrier)	Convene an interactive webinar outside of work time and incentivise attendance by awarding continuing professional development points

The table below provides an example goal for this dissemination strategy:

SMART Goals	Description of goal
Specific	Disseminate new research evidence to practitioners specialising in the relevant clinical area to which the evidence relates.
Measurable	10% of the practitioner population in the UK attend the webinar 70% of all attendees engage with polling during webinar
Attainable	Communication with professional body of the practitioner population indicates typical uptake of 10-20% for webinars hosted out of work time
Relevant	A core objective of the research is to disseminate findings to the practitioner population that the research evidence will affect.
Time-based	Research team to host the webinar before approaching policy makers. This permits polling results to bolster arguments for a change in national guidance in response to the new research evidence.

The webinar could involve multiple speakers beyond the research team, such as dissemination partners who support credibility. The webinar should include interactive components, such as polling and breakout groups, to facilitate the research team in assessing whether the dissemination messages are understood.

Additional information to support dissemination

'10 tips for improving research visibility' (5)

The above resource will help you consider what type of platform is appropriate for different dissemination messages, e.g. social media is good for expanding your network informally but has a word limit, whereas newsletters have a higher word count but are typically more formal.

Websites

There are free website options available, e.g. via your institution or other user-friendly website builders. Depending on your budget, you may wish to contact a website developer, copy writer and graphic designer.

Social media

We strongly recommend utilising social media platforms. These are typically free. The '10 tips for improving research visibility' resource can help you consider which platform is appropriate for different dissemination messages.

Automation software

Social media scheduling tools can help you to schedule and publish your social media content across multiple platforms and analyse their effectiveness in one place.

Email marketing platforms can help you to manage your mailing lists, create newsletter templates and automate your email campaigns. They typically offer different pricing plans, including free subscriptions.

Costing your dissemination strategy

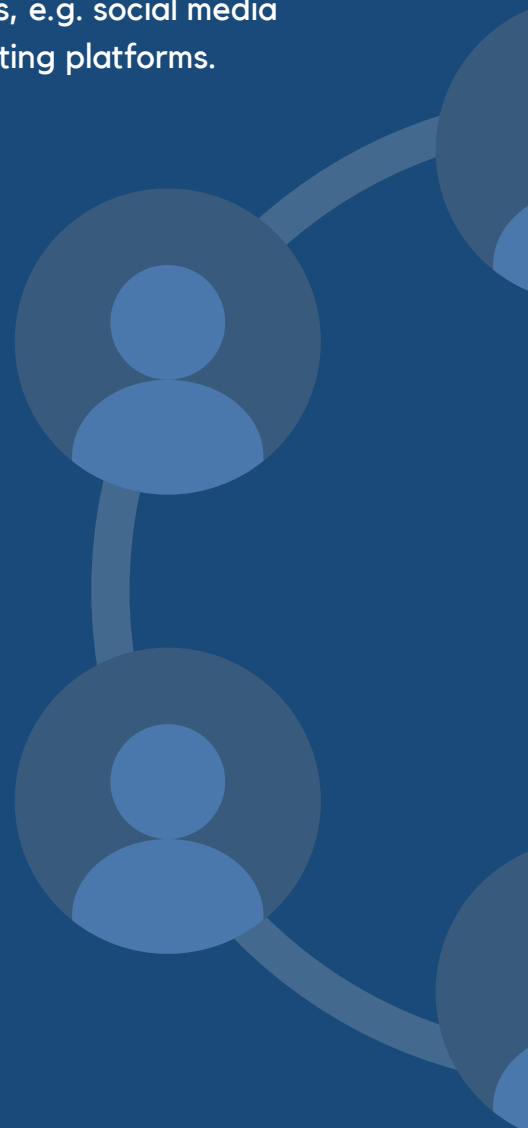
In order to effectively deliver your dissemination strategy, you need to plan for and cost the required resources. You will first need to undertake a skills analysis of the planned research team. To do this, identify which of the following approaches will enable the research activity to be delivered:

- existing research team members have the required skills
- new research team members are required
- the required skills be can be feasibly developed by existing research team members (e.g. via training course)
- an external organisation is required

The approaches will vary depending on the nature of your research project and potential budget. The examples below illustrate some of the knowledge and skills required for **passive dissemination (website and social media content creation)**:

- Salary for research team member(s) with detailed knowledge of scientific subject over duration of research
- Cost of media training for research team members, e.g. social media storytelling, infographic design and other digital content creation
- Consultant fee for website designer

You then need to consider other resources that will support delivery of your dissemination activities, such as: software subscription costs, e.g. social media scheduling platforms, illustration software, and email marketing platforms.



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