Coronavirus
COVID-19 UPDATE

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, research funders in Ireland have launched two rapid-response, impact-focused funding calls. Unlike most other calls, research funded under these programmes is expected to have **rapid impact**.

Click the links below for detailed guidance about these coordinated calls:

HRB/IRC call

SFI/EI/IDA call

Potential impact is one of the three assessment criteria, and projects with high potential impact will be prioritised in case of equal ranking. The application form contains no specific impact section, but it should be reflected throughout the application, especially in the Project Overview, which asks you to specify the project's potential to contribute to the global or national response to COVID-19.

CALL IS NOW CLOSED

Now in Phase 2, this call is focused on research that can impact society in the short- to medium-term. One of the three review criteria is centred around impact. You will be assessed on how significant the problem is, and whether your proposed solution can have a positive impact on the COVID-19 crisis. In a specific impact section, you are asked to describe the difference your solution will make if successful.

So ensure your research is focused on a solution to a significant problem.

By all means, use the guidance in this document to help craft the impact section in your proposal, but make sure your application demonstrates rapid impact and captures this sense of urgency.

HOW TO WRITE AN EFFECTIVE
IMPACT SECTION

Links only work in the PDF version of this infographic.

Most major funding bodies around the world consider **impact** a crucial part of their research programmes. So, when you apply for funding, they expect you to articulate the potential impact of your research on society.

A lot of researchers leave this section of the grant application blank until the last minute. But with these tips you will be able to write a concise and compelling impact section, giving yourself the best chance of being funded.

1. UNDERSTAND IMPACT
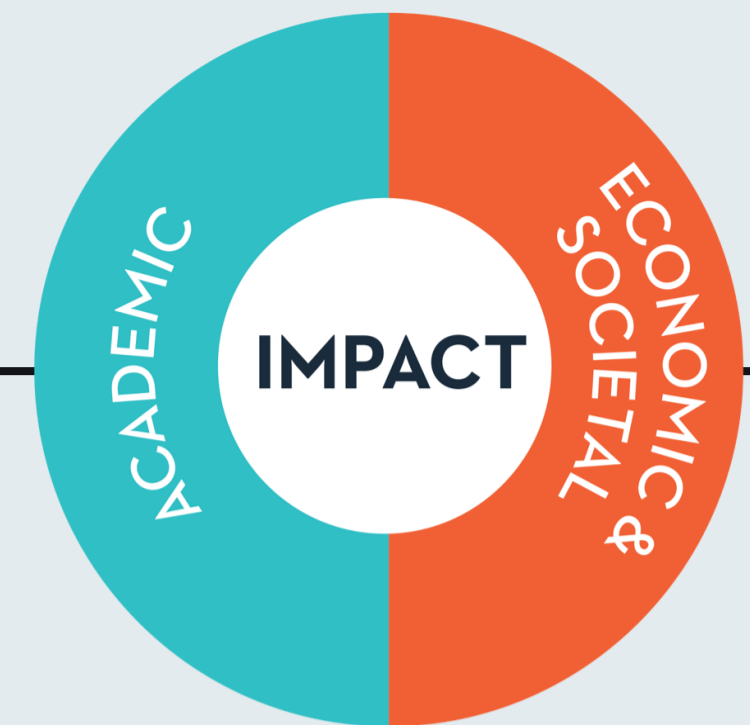
Before you can write about impact, you need to know what it is. Explore our website to learn what we mean by impact at UCD.

Impact is the demonstrable contribution that excellent research makes to society and the economy.

— SFI, UKRI and UCD

SCALE AND SIGNIFICANCE

Impact is made up of two things: scale and significance. The best impact has both, but one or the other can still be meaningful.

Scale refers to how widespread the impact is, or how many beneficiaries there are.

Significance refers to how important or valuable the impact is to each beneficiary.

So, saving one life is highly significant but at a small scale. Slightly enriching a million lives is large-scale but of lower significance. Ideally, scale and significance will be judged relative to the academic disciplines and the scope of the research.

2. CONSIDER THE FUNDER

Many funders have web pages dedicated to impact. Read these to learn what particular funding agencies consider impact, and what they don't. Different funders may also favour particular types of impact, like economic, health, technological or political. Familiarise yourself with these preferences, and make sure they come across in your application.

Don't forget to read the call document for the funding programme you are applying to. This will likely have additional guidance.

TIP Click the logos above to see how other organisations talk about impact.

Dedicated help pages on the UCD intranet give information about specific calls, including background information, closing dates, UCD Research contact people, internal procedures, and external links. Read these.

Help pages for some calls, like EU Horizon 2020 Societal Challenges and Industrial Leadership calls, have links to additional guidance documents with dedicated sections on impact.

Projects under the Horizon 2020 Framework Programme are expected to contribute to a set of **expected impacts** outlined for each call topic (in the work programmes for Societal Challenges and Industrial Leadership calls).

You must describe how your research contributes to these, the barriers you might face, and how you will maximise the impacts.

3. GET INSPIRED

In general, your impact section should not discuss impact within academia. Don't get distracted writing about citations, prestigious publications and h-indexes. Think about the impact on wider society: who or what in the "**real world**" stands to benefit from your work?

For inspiration, you may wish to read impact sections from successful applications. Ask peers in your School or College if you can take a look at theirs. Examples can also be found elsewhere on the web. But be wary of reading impact sections out of context – it is important to understand how they fit into the application as a whole.

Impact can come in many forms, and can be arrived at in many ways. There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Don't lazily copy and paste someone else's impact plan; think carefully about what your own research can offer.

4. USE THE CANVAS

Take 20 minutes to fill out the UCD Impact Planning Canvas.

This flexible tool will help you gather material for your impact section, prompting you to consider important questions, like these:

- What real-world challenges does your work address?

- Who in society will benefit from your research?

- What evidence will you collect to demonstrate impact?

Watch our video tutorial for filling out the Canvas, available on the Research Portal.

5. FOCUS ON BENEFICIARIES

We generally like to think about those who stand to benefit from our research. But some stakeholders may experience negative impacts. It's important to consider these groups as well, and how their input can be incorporated into the project.

When filling out the Canvas, you need to think about who will be affected by your research. As this is arguably the most important aspect of your impact section, it warrants a little extra consideration...

Be precise

Don't just say *Government* or *industry* or *the public*. Which organisations, teams or individuals will benefit? How will they benefit? How will you engage with them? Why is this the best way of working with them?
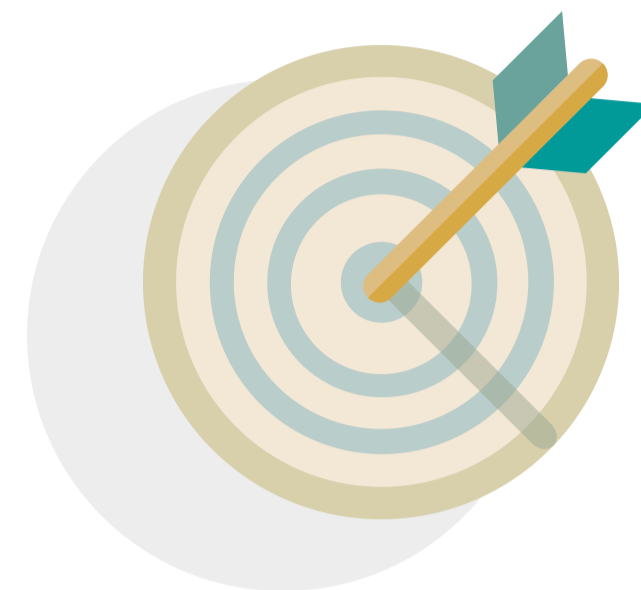
Consult

The world is a big, complex place. You probably won't be aware of all the potential beneficiaries of your research. Ask your colleagues and external contacts to help you conduct a stakeholder analysis.

Prioritise

Once you've identified your stakeholders, consider how significantly each could benefit from your work, and how much influence they have over your ability to create impact.

Reach out

Pick a handful of beneficiaries with high interest and influence, and contact them. If possible, do this *before* you submit your application. They may be able to help you craft a more convincing impact section.

Listen

Two-way dialogue is usually better than one-way communication of your findings. Listen to your stakeholders and adapt to meet their needs. This is far more likely to lead to meaningful impact.

Some organisations use other terms – like stakeholders, end-users or customers – to refer to beneficiaries. Regardless of the language, research funders generally want you to describe how people will benefit from or be affected by your research.
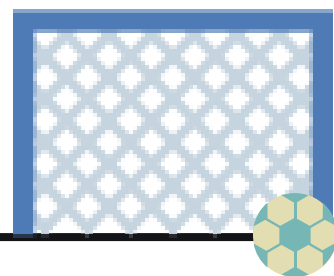
6. HAVE CLEAR GOALS

Be clear about your **impact goals**.

What impacts do you expect to create, and when? What are the milestones? You might want to categorise your goals as short-, medium- or long-term. What evidence will you gather throughout the project to demonstrate your impact? How will you evaluate this evidence to see if you are on track?

Your goals should be inspirational yet feasible. They should not simply be about communicating your outputs; they should be about creating real change in the world.

Every goal should be supported by appropriate activities.

7. ARTICULATE THE COST
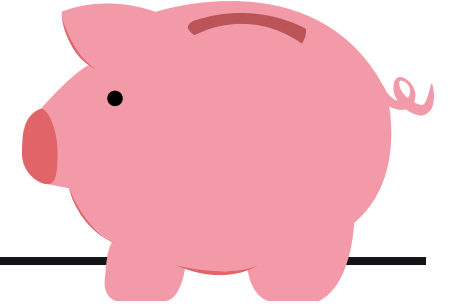
Be clear about how much this will **cost**. You may need additional resources to help create impact, whether that's for running an advisory panel of stakeholders, hosting a workshop, developing communications materials, or organising public dialogue events.

Remember: activities like public dialogue are not impact in and of themselves, but they can be an important part of the impact pathway if they contribute to change.

8. BE CONVINCING

You know who your beneficiaries are, and you've written some ambitious but realistic impact goals. You now need to convince the reviewers that you can make it happen.

Credentials

Have you helped foster impact before? Have others on your team? Let the reviewers know that you have a successful track record.

Wider interest

Are your beneficiaries actually interested in this research? Prove it! Include evidence of public interest in the topic. Write about the stakeholders involved in your project. Perhaps they can give you a quote explaining their interest?

Cross-references

Don't limit impact to the impact section. Show you're serious about making a difference by referring to impact elsewhere in your application, like in your research plan.

9. USE PLAIN ENGLISH

Impact sections are often read by lay members of the funding panel, so use every-day language instead of technical jargon. And use subheadings to make the section as clear and easy to read as possible. Consider asking a friend or family member check that non-experts can understand your draft. Better yet, ask an impact expert to review it.

Since you will often be constrained by word count, be punchy. Avoid long sentences and paragraphs, and don't repeat information – every sentence should say something new.

Use the tips below to keep your word count down and your language accessible.

KEEP IT ACTIVE (MOSTLY)

Use the active voice to keep your writing crisp and clear.

So don't say The policy was influenced by my research.

Say My research influenced the policy.

Don't say 200 people were hired by the company.

Instead, say The company hired 200 people.

> But the passive voice is useful if you don't know (or it doesn't matter) who or what is doing the action. For example:
>
> UCD is known for the impact of its research.

DON'T TURN VERBS INTO NOUNS

Don't say We had a discussion about my research.

Say We discussed my research.

Don't say The committee was in agreement.

Do say The committee agreed.

> Using a verb as a noun is known as **nominalisation**, which definitely isn't a plain-English word.

AVOID CUMBERSOME WORDS AND PHRASES

At the present time can be replaced with Now.

Prior to is clunkier than Before.

Utilise has a specific meaning – try Use.

In light of the fact that can be changed to Because.

Ameliorate could be replaced with Improve.

> The great enemy of clear language is insincerity. When there is a gap between one's real and one's declared aims, one turns as it were instinctively to long words and exhausted idioms, like a cuttlefish spurting out ink.

George Orwell ➡

LIMIT YOUR USE OF ABBREVIATIONS

Try not to use more than three acronyms or initialisms (like NASA or DNA).

Unless widely known, like those above, define each abbreviation when first used.

Remove an abbreviation (or other technical term) if you only use it once.

Avoid two-letter abbreviations if possible.