

RESEARCH IMPACT PROVIDER CRITERIA

Establishing the need

Purpose: The INORMS RISE Working Group has developed criteria to help research management associations (RMA) and RMA members assess people and organizations providing products and services to support research impact defined as the provable effects of research in the real world¹. This will encompass impact in its broadest sense including creating impacts, assessing impacts, stakeholder engagement, data collection and communicating impact. The INORMS RISE Working Group will not make recommendations on any provider but the considerations presented below will support RMAs to make informed decisions with respect to their own priorities.

Using the provider criteria: RMAs and RMA members who are considering engaging the services of an impact provider (individual or organization) can assess the provider using the criteria provided below. The criteria are provided as guidance. Each RMA/member will need to tailor the criteria to their own context. For example, in criterion C: “Experience (time established)” the specific criterion is five years’ experience but that might be reduced in jurisdictions who do not have a long-established impact agenda.

Approach: Two contrasting approaches are presented both of which may be useful depending on the context and need:

1. **Specific criteria:** provides clear benchmarks on what makes a ‘good’ provider. This will help organisations make judgements more easily with clear measures.
2. **Judgement support:** provides clarity on the criteria by *which* to judge. This would be more effortful for organisations but would allow them more scope to judge based on their context/ reflective of market complexity.

Criteria: Five criteria have been identified:

- A. Area of focus/service
- B. Provider identity/role
- C. Experience (time established)
- D. Track record (beyond citation)
- E. Publicly accessible information

For C-E, the need, rationale, challenges are outlined, along with examples of how a ‘specify criteria’ and ‘judgement support’ approach may work

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¹ Impact is the changes we can see (demonstrate, measure, capture), beyond academia (in society, economy, environment) which happen because of our research (caused by, contributed to, attributable to).

² <https://inorms.net/activities/research-impact-and-stakeholder-engagement-working-group/>

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A. Area of focus/service

Need: Clarify what part(s) of impact the service/provider supports. Examples below are for illustrative purposes and not meant to be prescriptive. RMAs/members should assess area of focus/service offerings against need. In all cases providers should have clarity of communication of their area of focus/service (see E: publicly accessible information).

1. Training for impact: Providers offering training for elements of impact (for example):
 - a. science communications
 - b. stakeholder engagement
 - c. impact planning
 - d. impact assessment
 - e. others
2. Supports for impact: Providers supporting RMAs/members impact activities (for example):
 - a. science communications
 - b. stakeholder engagement
 - c. impact planning
 - d. impact assessment
 - e. others
3. Doing your impact: providers working as consultants being retained to undertake impact activities for RMAs/members (for example):
 - a. science communications
 - b. stakeholder engagement
 - c. impact planning
 - d. impact assessment
 - e. others
4. Systems for impact: providers either advising on or implementing systems for impact

B. Provider identity/role

Need: To provide clarity on the role/identity of the provider should the RMA/member choose not to use available in-house capacity:

There are various provider models in the sector, e.g.:

- Academic/university staff who provide services (e.g. training) as part of their academic role
- Academic/university staff who provide services through a separate company
- Single providers (independent or incorporated into a broader network)
- Provider teams (independent or incorporated into a broader network). Services may be delivered by any member of the team.

Things to consider in choosing your provider:

- Ease of procurement
- Conflict of interest
- Sustainability for after service supports
- Capacity for scaling from small to large groups

C. Experience (time established)

Need: To provide clarity on how long a service/provider has been established, enabling judgement on provider's experience. Also, this provides an assessment of how integrated they are into your local, national and/or international context as appropriate as well as demonstrated experience with the discipline and/or community that are the target(s) of your impact work.

Rationale: With so many providers, it can be challenging to differentiate those with extensive experience, vs. those emerging into the market.

Challenges: In the UK (and elsewhere) there are a number of people stepping out of research management to go freelance – as such they'd have several years' experience but not in their 'company' role. There is therefore a challenge to establishing criteria on duration without accidentally making new (but prior experience) start-ups look bad yet privileging long-term players who may or may not have an established track record (see D, below).

Options:

- **Specific criteria:** Provider must be able to demonstrate a five-year track record supporting impacts beyond citations/bibliometrics and with experience (especially in your jurisdiction) that matches your context.
- **Judgement support:** Consider how long the service/provider has been established both (i) formally, as an established business and (ii) with any prior experience, and (iii) with the right regional context.

D. Track record of supporting impact in the real world (beyond citation)

Need: To ensure a service is understood in terms of its impact support, as opposed to academically focused areas such as citations.

Rationale: With so many providers, it can be challenging to differentiate those who support academic endeavours, but expressing this as ‘impact’, vs. those who actually focus on non-academic benefits.

Challenges: The international academic sector is still shifting from a ‘citations’ mindset to one reflecting broader social benefits. Therefore, there may not yet be full clarity within the marketplace of what support is needed to drive impact (rather than academic influence).

Options:

- **Specific criteria:** Provider must have demonstrated track record for supporting impacts of research beyond citations /bibliometrics. Evidence of track record includes, but is not limited to, commitment to open access, open data collection, testimonials from previous clients, etc.
- **Judgement support:** Consider if a provider is delivering support for impact beyond the academy, or if they are focused on within-academic effects.

E. Publicly accessible information

Need: To ensure a service/provider has sufficient publicly available information for RMA/members to make informed choices about their use.

Rationale: The mix of organisation types, organisational foci and other factors makes judging service options challenging. This is exacerbated when there is insufficient publicly available information to make an informed judgement. The tools and resources to be used in impact support should be available for assessment before engaging the provider.

Challenges: There will always be different communications and marketing strategies, which means we cannot prescribe what level of information should be made available but cite this as a decision criterion when assessing one provider against another or assessing the fit between a provider's offering and your need.

Options:

- **Specific criteria:** Provider must have publicly accessible information about their products and/or services including an option to review materials/tools in advance of retaining the provider.
- **Judgement support:** Consider how much information is publicly available on the services, products, scope, costs, business model and other factors to make an informed judgement