

## Narratives for impact:

### Templates for telling inter- and transdisciplinary stories

#### Notes:

1. These templates are designed to provide guidance for those of us who want to show the ways in which inter- and transdisciplinary methodologies can provide solutions to “wicked” problems. There is no standard recipe for this kind of story-telling – these are ideas only. We expect the templates to be adapted and modified according to circumstances, and the objectives and needs of the narrators and their audiences – indeed drawing a distinction between writer and reader, in the context of transdisciplinary research and practice will not necessarily be helpful. In many cases the writer will be holding the pen on behalf of many participants.
  
2. While impact stories may be framed in different ways, there are key elements or principles that underlie all effective narratives. These include:
  - a. Having clear understanding of purpose – what is written and the way it is structured should reflect the purpose of the narrative and the outcomes sought by the writers when deciding to tell the story
  - b. Writing with the audience in mind – important messages will be lost if writers do not provide for the ways of knowing and learning that those experiencing the story are most comfortable with
  - c. Describing impacts and impact pathways<sup>1</sup> clearly and carefully – the narrative is all about the impact or influence that inter- and transdisciplinary approaches have had in resolving a problem or set of problems. The impact needs to be at the heart of the story; however, the impact pathway(s) are unlikely to be sequential, in the sense that there is a clear causal chain between research input and project outcomes – the narrative may well need to weave together a number of strands in a way that gives meaning or purpose to the methods used
  - d. Recognising the importance of providing evidence for impact – in setting out the benefits of the work being described in the narrative, evidence of the “significance” or “reach” of the outcomes needs to be demonstrated through indicators, quantitative or qualitative, that will vary depending on the types of impact being described

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<sup>1</sup> A couple of working definitions:

“Impact” can be defined as a discernible change in behaviour, livelihoods and/or well-beings (including social, cultural, environmental or economic) as a consequence of the creation of new knowledge. In this sense it goes beyond simply filling knowledge gaps, representing the final and long-term effects. It is the end point of one or more pathways

“Impact pathways” describe the connections in a chain or network of inputs, activities and outputs that include research or “new knowledge” outcomes, which can ultimately lead to impact. As noted above, in ITD programmes such links are unlikely to be sequential or linear. Many of the pathways involve circular or iterative processes

- e. Telling stories in a compelling way – impact narratives need to be message-driven, requiring coherency and clarity in communicating the essential elements. Leading with headlines gives the audience options in terms of their levels of engagement.

### The templates

Two templates are provided below, although there are many variations possible, both for template and language. These two templates are linked, in that the first identifies the information relevant to the construction of an impact narrative, while the second provides a framework on which a narrative might be built. The first, “the content template”, which follows the format used for impact narratives on the NITRO website, might be useful for researchers and practitioners interested in developing more comprehensive case studies. The second, “the narrative template”, is based around a series of statements (middle column) which taken together, provide the thread of an impact story. The key elements or questions are provided alongside each statement. These provide a checklist of suggestions for developing a storyline.

#### Template 1 – content

Section	Key elements/questions
Aim	What was the problem the research/programme was trying to resolve? Why were inter- and transdisciplinary methodologies used? Was it a conscious choice to do so? Had other single or multi-disciplinary approaches been brought to bear previously and if so, why had they been unsuccessful?
Time period	When did the work happen? Is it ongoing?
Disciplines involved	What research disciplines were required for the work? How were these integrated? How were community and indigenous knowledge systems incorporated?
Stakeholders	Who was involved in co-design? What institutions and communities took part? Were indigenous communities included as programme partners?
Research integration outcomes	How were the various types of knowledge sources brought together to generate new understandings? Who was responsible for the integration, translation and synthesis of knowledge and what insights were gained as a consequence? How did we manage conflicting world views?
Research implementation outcomes	What were the outcomes and impacts of the work? Did the work lead to enhanced well-beings (economic, social, cultural and environmental)? If not, what might be needed to generate impact? Who gained value from the new knowledge? And why? Can we apply the conclusions to other situations – scaling up and out? What would have been the “normal” approach & why wouldn’t it have achieved the outcome the I/TD approach has?

## Template 2 – structuring the narrative

Section	The story line	Key elements/questions relevant to this part of the story
The problem or opportunity	<i>“.....is an important issue/opportunity because it leads to <b>[negative impacts / value that could be created]</b>”</i>	What were the drivers behind this initiative? What was the nature of the problem?
The context	<i>“Many approaches have been taken to tackling....., but they have failed/proved very difficult because <b>[barriers / impediments / failure points]</b> This makes ..... a really challenging wicked problem/unattainable opportunity”</i>	Why did we need to do things differently to make headway?
Partnerships and expertise	<i>“We got together these <b>[skills / stakeholders/disciplines]</b> to tackle .... “</i>	What types of knowledge did we need in the room? Where did expertise lie, and where did we go to find it? How did we tap into knowledge held out in the community? How did we access, respect and share indigenous knowledge?  What partnerships did we form in tackling the issue?
Research integration outcomes	<i>“We used these <b>[approaches / tools / integration methods]</b> to work together on....., which was different to previous efforts in <b>[these ways]</b>.”</i>	How did we manage all of the information sources needed for the programme? How was it all brought together and packaged in a way that was accessible to everyone? How did we manage relationships?
Overall outcome/Impact	<i>“This removed these <b>[barriers/impediments/failure points]</b> which in turn enabled these <b>[achievements]</b> which had previously been intractable and, in turn resulted in <b>[this outcome]</b>”</i>	What did we deliver? What did success look like? What limited us and how did we overcome barriers? Are the conclusions transferable to other situations?
Lessons	<i>“We learnt &lt;these lessons&gt; from this experience”</i>	What did we learn about relationships, managing value

		conflicts, new ways of generating knowledge, co-innovation...? What else would need to be done to be successful?
Resourcing, including co-funding	<i>"In carrying out the work we were supported by ..., who provided.... These contributions were important because..."</i>	What resources did we need? How much did it cost? Who contributed and in what kinds of ways?
Additional information	<i>"If you want to know more about this work go to ...."</i>	How do you find out more about this programme?