



Preparing a dissemination plan: a guide for researchers

“Engaged dissemination” (McPherson)

The best and most effective kind of dissemination is “engaged dissemination”. According to McPherson, this can be defined as “[a] planned process of understanding potential adopters and engaging with them throughout the life of the project, to facilitate commitment to sustained change.” It involves:

- Distributing project products or information
- Telling others about the project
- Others using the project outcomes
- Spreading and embedding project impact
- An ongoing two-way process aimed at bringing about change (McPherson)

Questions to ask when planning your dissemination

- What do you want to disseminate?
- Who is your target audience?
- Why do you want to disseminate?
- How are you going to do it?
- How might you involve your target audience throughout the process?
- Have you allowed time for evaluation, reflection and re-planning?
- How will you know that your dissemination has been successful?

Secondary questions

- What are the best ways to make contact and engage audience?
- What are the outcomes that are going to be most useful in this conversation?
- How do I make this sustainable for the research team and my audience to engage in this process?
- What is the cost?
- Have we included the dissemination process in our evaluation plan?

Thinking about your audience

- Who is/are primary audience?
- Engage with the audience early – from the beginning of your research

- Keep in touch throughout the project
- Consider and engage and secondary audiences gathered along the way
- Ensure you also disseminate your research to any participants in it, and use appropriate language and formats to do this
- Identify primary source(s) each potential user group is already tied into or most respects as an information source
- “Share with the appropriate audience in the right way” - (CIRT)

Utilise opportunities

You probably already have connections, opportunities and resources that you can use to disseminate your research. For example:

- Partnerships with established networks
- Existing conferences and events, where you can exchange knowledge and raise awareness
- Formal and informal collaborations
- Expertise within your team
- Liaison with other experts
- Funds for dissemination activity (should be included in funding application)

Identify potential “dissemination partners” within your networks/research area (Elsberry and Mirambeau). These are influential opinion leaders who could champion your research.

Format/media for dissemination

There are many channels/media/formats you can use, but you need to ensure that you use the right one for each of your targeted audiences. Communications for dissemination should be:

- Plain English, accessible
- Attractive and readable, concise, highlight results, define special terminology, graphs, bullet points

“Non-traditional outcomes” can also be used for dissemination (McPherson). E.g. films and participatory art exhibitions. Dissemination should involve the audience, as far as possible, as this should mean that they are more engaged with the research itself. For example, if you disseminate your research via a blog, invite and respond to comments.

Using a variety of media, not just written formats, also helps to make your dissemination more inclusive and accessible.

Examples of emerging technologies

Kudos:

Kudos is an online dissemination toolkit. It works in three steps:

1. Researchers create a Kudos publication page by filling in a template to explain their research, why it is important, and to link related resources to their publication to show the broader context.
2. The researcher can share this page via social media, and on their blog or website.
3. Kudos provides metrics to measure the impact of using it – looking at downloads, citations and altmetrics.

Buffer:

Buffer is a relatively new social media management platform. It allows people to manage all their social media accounts in one place, schedule posts and get analytics for their accounts. It gives users a complete overview of how all of their social media accounts are performing, which is useful for researchers using a variety of dissemination channels.

Timing

The timing of dissemination can be critical to its success. You will need to 'get to know' your target audience(s) to find out when is the optimum time to deliver the dissemination of your research – dissemination should not be limited to end of the research project.

- Identify and plan critical time points
- Consider external influences
- Build momentum through the entire research lifecycle
- Be aware of time constraints and ensure these are included in your planning

Risks and sensitivities/Barriers

Researchers need to identify and address potential barriers to disseminating their research. These include:

- The current cultural and political climate
- Different groups perceptions of the research the methods of its dissemination
- Intellectual property/copyright issues
- Whether or not the researcher themselves/their institution is seen as a trusted source of information
- Barriers to accessing the research itself (e.g. journal paywalls)

Sustainability

- How will you ensure sustainability of your research over time?
- For how long will you continue to share information?

- Bear in mind static web resources for hosting your research/data (e.g. some funders require things to be available for a certain period of time)
- Do you have any concerns about sustainability of project/research outcomes? How might these be addressed?

Evaluation

- How will you know/measure if dissemination is successful?
- Describe how, when and who will gather data on this (if applicable)
- What kinds of indicators/assessment measures can you use?
- Web analytics, talking to partners, metrics, altmetrics (and ensure to record *who* is sharing your research)
- Tools: Altmetric, Kudos, Buffer, Twitter Analytics, Google Analytics

Example of a data management plan in table form (Elsberry & Mirambeau):

Product	Target date	Audience	Lead contributor(s)	Status	Notes
Written					
Presentations					
Etc.					

Overall, the plan should:

- Chart the course of your efforts in disseminating your research
- Allow you to strategically consider your audience and identify key partners
- Assess your efforts and modify or recycle the information to ensure you've accomplished effective dissemination (Elsberry & Mirambeau)

Bibliography

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