Research in Librarianship – Impact Evaluation Study refers to two projects supported by the LIS Research Coalition in 2011 and 2012.

RiLIES1 explored the extent to which funded librarianship research projects influence library practice in the UK. Of particular interest were the factors that increase or hinder the impact of project outcomes on practice.

RiLIES2 produced a series of outputs to support the use and execution of research by librarians and information scientists. This leaflet is part of the output.

The projects were led by Professor Hazel Hall, (h.hall@napier.ac.uk) Director of the Centre for Social Informatics at Edinburgh Napier University (www.csi.napier.ac.uk) and Executive Secretary of the Library and Information Science Research Coalition.

Commitment from many levels is needed

Initiating and running a successful and impactful LIS project requires comments from many bodies: local government, other organisations and people. Senior executives can use their networking skills to promote the project and secure the contribution and support of key stakeholders and communities.

Through networking and support, these senior stakeholders can prompt other to take up or build on the results of successful projects, taking key development decisions and attracting further investment. One outcome could be the adoption on long term strategies triggered by project results.

Projects can use key stakeholders as figureheads for the project to front for the media.

Find out more

Website: www.lisresearch.org
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Making your LIS project really count

Many LIS research projects involve partnership with customer-facing practitioners and organisations. This guidance is aimed at these projects.

Not to under-estimate the importance of publications, but if a research project is going to make a real impact, it has to have active support from the decision makers where its results have implications. This could include Councillors (particularly for public libraries), departmental or divisional Directors and senior figures in professional organisations such as CILIP.

All organisations have internal politics. Projects need engagement from people who have an awareness of the implications of any findings or recommendations, and can help resolve any organisationally “political” issues that they raise.

If a project's output cannot be sustained locally, it has little chance of spreading good practice elsewhere.
How to create a lasting legacy

“Experience shows that the most successful projects... were those that understood the importance of institutional backing right from the start”

- Projects without legacy are a waste of money
- Backing from budget holders is a key success factor
- Bring senior executives on-board as ambassadors

The big question any project should be asking itself is "how can we achieve a lasting legacy".

- Once the project has come to an end, and you are no longer there, it can slip off their agenda if there is no one to support it
- Involving decision makers such as Councillors, Directors and other senior officials as project stakeholders is an important step
- Creating a reference group from the early stages of project preparation or getting senior managers to engage themselves in a project as ambassadors will help facilitate this
- Experience shows that the most successful and impactful projects are those that understand the importance of institutional backing right from the start.

How to involve key stakeholders

- Make clear the role that senior executives have in promoting the project
- Secure top level commitment from the start
- Connect research questions to local issues

It is important that projects identify and approach senior executives to enlist their full support early on. Some advice from experienced project managers on how best to do this:

- Provide a good briefing on the strategic points. Senior people do not need to know all the details
- Change is inevitable on a project of any duration. Brief new stakeholders
- Secure stakeholder commitment from the start of the project. Externally-funded research indicates high level interest in the project - and therefore a change for a higher profile for all involved
- Establish simple direct contact and information lines
- Make clear what role these stakeholders have in promoting the project
- Set up a board or (political) strategic reference group so that all stakeholders and meet regularly to discuss the project and its direction
- Raise stakeholder interest when the project results start coming through and media interest is secured
- Encourage the site visits so that the stakeholders can see the good ideas for themselves and how they work
- Put the project forward for awards that will help raise interest in the local area
- Identify a hook for your argument - managers are more likely to be influenced if you link your case to their political, economic, social arguments or curricular objectives.

Advice from senior stakeholders:

- Be clear about how your priorities relate to their organisation’s objectives
- Measure success and share good practice across project partners

How key stakeholders can make a big contribution to the impact of your project

- Projects need to benefit the local community (users)
- Projects need to have potential policy level influence
- Stakeholders can network for you across different levels and organisations

"Through networking and support senior stakeholders can prompt others to take up or build on the results of successful projects”

The success of (real-world) projects depends on communication, leadership, political support, resources, vision, preparation and flexibility. Many of these issues are interdependent. For example, political support depends on communication, vision and leadership, which in turns influence issues such as allocation of resources.

In order to be of interest to potential promoters, projects must generate outcomes that are of benefit to their community.

Senior executives can help to focus the project outcomes on what will best meet the community needs. They are also best placed to take a strategic view of what project outcomes can achieve and be built on for the longer term.

Institutional backing is key

Many LIS research projects involve the active participation of practitioners and/or their employers.

Incorporating the support of Councillors, Directors and other senior executives can help to integrate the project and its outcomes into the organisation and assist towards making a lasting legacy for the work.

If projects fail in achieving lasting impact through policy influence and securing funding after the project period is over, important know-how and valuable advances in LIS knowledge will be lost.