Role of SSH funders in creating an impact ecosystem

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About me

- Impact and innovation lead
- Funder
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- Policies
- "Voice"

An 'impact ecosystem'

▸ An ecosystem is a community that shares the benefits of a particular space or environment – and includes interactions between those involved

▸ Is this the right way of thinking about research impact?

– An ecosystems approach recognises the breadth of interactions and roles of those in the ecosystem = each has a role to play

Who is part of this ecosystem?

Researchers/academics

Publishers/journals

Research users/research partners

Learned societies

Funders

Institutions *(both universities and partners)*

Government

Professional staff/support staff in university (including research admin, knowledge exchange staff, finance, contract management)

Students & supervisors (teaching)

How ESRC funds engagement and support impact

▸ Pathways to impact

▸ Moved from an open call to 'block funding' to universities via and Impact Acceleration Account (IAAs) grant

▸ Others – What Works centres; Social Science Section of POST; Innovation Caucus; additional support to large investments; media training

Lessons learned from our 'IAAs'

▸ **Rapid responses** to opportunities are at the institutional level (vs our previous KE Opps scheme)

▸ Many universities are wanting to develop **a culture** supporting KE/impact (REF, "challenge led" [mission led] funding calls as drivers)

▸ **Dedicated staff** are essential to creating an impact culture and ensuring the success of KE activities; **leadership** is critical

▸ There is a great willingness to **share and learn** across and between institutions

▸ A key is to have KE and Impact linked into the **institution's strategy** – the challenge sometimes is getting social sciences impact on the wider agenda

Role of the funder (A)

As a funder we can [and must] enable impact:

1. Design of the funding call (ESRC led)
   a) Who we engage with early on (beneficiaries)/who we partner with (eg DFID)
   b) Expectations of impact in the proposal by applicants; mandatory partners; review and panel meetings; on-going support
   c) Acting as a knowledge broker – bringing communities together; engaging/disseminating
2. Design of the call – not ESRC led
   a) Partners recognise and value what social science is
   b) Social science helps to shape parameters
   c) It is clear in the funding text
   d) Enable time for collaborations – pre announcements?
   e) Panel/review and on going management/oversight/evaluation

Role of the funder (B)

3. Supporting universities to better enable impact – *Post graduate training, admin staff support, rapid response opportunities; Uni strategy; online toolkits*

4. Leadership role

    – what does a SSH leader look like now? *Leadership fellow*

    – from ESRC in pushing boundaries (eg open access; business collaborations)

    - *s*hape the 'value proposition' from social science (not what will be "missed" it is what will be "gained" by including it

5. Making the case for funding - demonstrating need for investment; managing expectations on impact from funding; broader value of social science

Role of the funder (C)

6. Unique for social science/humanities:

    – **Shaping** understanding on what impact is

    – **Creating** indicators around evidencing

    – **Frameworks** that allow all impact to be valued

7. Valuing and rewarding it – Celebrating Impact Prize one way

ESRC's approach has changed as well

▸ From a single "KE team" ➡ to part of all of our jobs

 – Funding call development; call writing; assessment/panels; investment management

 – Brokering and networking – funded researchers into meetings/linkages

 – Development of policies, included in our governance

 – Training and support to our panels assessing applications

▸ Shift in funding

 – Doctoral training – KE support, training ➡ collaborative PhDs expected

 – KE Opps & Follow on Funding schemes   Impact Acceleration Accounts (IAAs)

▸ Reward and recognition (beyond grant funding)

 – Celebrating Impact Prize; [social] media campaigns

Call for more action?

▸ Need to understand our ecosystem better
  – We need to work together
  – Experiences and sharing is needed
  – Value and recognise the role and strengths we all have in this, and all the roles needed
  – Value and enable the social science and humanities insights into this
  – Funders are sharing lessons learned – more is welcome!