

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The USAID-funded Research Technical Assistance Center (RTAC) held a four-part webinar series that provided an overview of our [Research Translation Toolkit](#) and a then deep-dive into each of its three sections. Throughout the webinar series, RTAC highlighted what the toolkit is, why it is important to your work, when you can use it in the research process, and how you can use it yourself. The questions and answers below reflect frequently asked questions from participants of the webinar series.

Overview

Is there a difference between knowledge translation and research translation?

In the case of the [Research Translation Toolkit](#), research refers to a process that produces data and evidence relevant to specific questions. Research translation is interpreting findings based on these data and evidence to identify actions that might be supported by the evidence after considering other available information and the local context. Communicating this evidence and its implications in accessible language and formats is an important part of research translation. Knowledge translation is a broader concept; research data and evidence are a subset of the many types of knowledge that one might want to convey. Strategic, clear communication is important for translating any type of knowledge. For more information on the research process, see: [A Vital Resource for Researchers: The Research Translation Toolkit Factsheet](#).

Why does it seem like donors—who fund the relevant research—rarely read policy briefs?

The usefulness of a policy brief depends on several factors, including timing and relevance to the specific question that interests the intended audience. For example, a donor with a history of supporting efforts to increase women’s labor force participation may already know the general issues and current studies and may approach the problem from a national policy perspective rather than the perspective of an individual household. As such, this donor may be unlikely to read materials such as policy briefs which may not seem relevant at first glance. One consideration is what does your policy brief communicate that the donor in question may not know or be able to address.

Strategies to prepare for engaging a donor include interviewing someone from their stakeholder group to learn about how they get their information and their immediate information needs, as well as planning how to best communicate relevant findings. The toolkit walks through these processes; in particular, the [Stakeholder Analysis section](#) includes a Stakeholder Interview Guide.

There are many barriers that may keep donors from understanding and using the results of the research they fund. In the toolkit, the [Research-to-Action Plan section](#) expands on some of these barriers; see “Factors That Motivate Stakeholders to Use Research in Decision-Making” on page 23 of the “Research-to-Action Plan” Guide.

How can experts who manage technical information engage with audiences?

Knowing your audience is key. Some people, including other researchers or technical specialists, might want all the technical details, but others might want—or only have time for—short and simple recommendations. It is important to investigate how your audiences typically consume information; the [Communication Products Section](#) of the toolkit walks through how to develop ideas for communications

products and craft simple main messages with the audience in mind. See also the [Research-to-Action Plan section](#) graphic “Identify the Best Format for Communicating With Your Audience” on p. 37 of the “Research-to-Action Plan” Guide.

Are there constraints in using this toolkit for program/policy evaluations rather than action research projects?

The tools can be adapted for conveying recommendations from program evaluations, not just from primary scientific research. Both uses require participation of experts or implementers with in-depth understanding of the research or program purpose and results. See the Research-to-Action Plan Template in the [Research-to-Action Plan section](#) for a worksheet that guides users through the process of capturing relevant results for research-to-action planning.

Are the references (in other words, evidence) that were used to develop the toolkit available?

Each section of the toolkit concludes with a reference list. This list does not encompass all the literature and tools that were reviewed in the process of developing the toolkit. Some of the more theoretical background and associated empirical literature examining the hypothesized processes for policy or program change in comparative or developmental contexts may be found in the work of [Jeremy Shiffman](#) and others who have applied his framework to global health issues in Asia and Latin America. Also, John Kingdon’s multiple streams framework has been applied to USAID work ([Travis et al, 2005](#)) and recently has emerged in scholarly literature analyzing policy change in African countries (see [Ridde, 2009](#)) and at the subnational level. Both theorizing and empirical research by low- and middle-income country experts can be found by searching for analyses regarding specific countries.

Should all the tools in the toolkit be used in conjunction? How much time does research translation take, relative to the total research effort?

Whether a user should use all the tools together depends on what work they have already completed. For example, someone who has held a stakeholder workshop in a previous project might not need to use the Stakeholder Analysis section.

A common practice among agencies is to suggest that 10% of the total research effort is budgeted for research translation.

Stakeholder Analysis

A stakeholder appears to have competing/conflicting research. How should they be approached?

Generally, these stakeholders have high interest and possibly high influence. It's important to monitor their activities and consider engaging them if it seems appropriate. Many approaches to stakeholder analysis - including the toolkit's [Stakeholder Analysis Guide](#)- recommend monitoring these stakeholders and engaging with another stakeholder who might be able to influence those with conflicting interests.

What is the best way to scan for new people or groups to avoid missing influential stakeholders?

One way to identify potential stakeholders is to interview existing stakeholders, who might share their connections. Other strategies include asking colleagues to review a stakeholder list, making new connections at conferences or policy fora, and exploring stakeholder profiles and common connections on LinkedIn and similar professional platforms. It's impossible to find every potential stakeholder; the priority is to identify a few influential stakeholders with aligning priorities. In addition to targeted communication with these stakeholders, a broad dissemination strategy via local media and a scholarly search can help reach unknown stakeholders who are actively looking for information on the topic.

After stakeholder mapping, what can be done to ensure local organizations are fairly represented?

Sort stakeholders by category, then prioritize within the categories. It can be useful to designate a team member to specifically keep an eye on representation issues—a person who raises their hand when they see that marginalized or less-influential groups are being de-prioritized.

How do you transfer scientific research and publications into products for a broad, public audience?

The art of transferring science publications into user-friendly products that non-experts can understand can be learned. It requires access to science professionals to explain important nuances. The toolkit also outlines how to use and engage communications professionals to write short, reader-friendly briefs. See the [Communication Products Section](#).

Can stakeholder analysis be done virtually?

A lot of background research can be done online. In addition, personal networks—relationships with the department heads, interest groups, or colleagues with relevant contacts—can assist with accessing stakeholders that may be difficult to reach without a personal connection.

Communication Products

How can the use of research findings—or the effectiveness of a communication product—be tracked?

Tracking requires setting up a system, which might include configuring Google alerts, or sending a short follow-up survey to the recipients of the products. Select interviews of stakeholders can sometimes reveal applications that cannot be found through an internet search or survey.

Sometimes technical staff or researchers prioritize different communication objectives than the communications team. How can everyone's needs be balanced?

Communication objectives should be driven by the specific audience and what they need to know to use the evidence. Having firm grounding in the audience's needs is helpful when a difference of opinion arises.

Scientists and researchers sometimes worry about their research being oversimplified to get audiences to pay attention. How can this be addressed?

It's important to convey that using simpler statistics or descriptive results does not demean research, but rather makes it clearer and broadens its impact. Making a clear statement and providing access to the more complex research gives readers actionable information and an incentive to go deeper through further reading or follow-up.

Research-to-Action Process

When is the most appropriate time to present research findings to stakeholders?

To whom you present and when depends on your specific goals. For example, if the goal is to get more funding to expand the research, one might present preliminary findings earlier in the process to align with specific funding cycles. Or if the goal is to increase the use of findings, it might make sense to present when your research is completed and clear, actionable recommendations are ready to share. It is also important to know the stakeholders, and their schedule and time considerations, to find a time when they might be receptive.

To motivate stakeholders to take action, a research team needs to be able to translate their findings between different formats. What are the tradeoffs in time, effort, and cost involved in translating research versus conducting it? How might researchers create incentives or conditions that support research translation?

Research translation is a specific skillset, and the right tools and support are crucial to a research team's success. The [Communication Products Section](#) contains templates and tips on how to translate evidence to different formats and explains that the additional time, effort, and costs involved in research translation helps ensure that findings reach wider and intended audiences often to greater impact. In certain cases, a communications professional could be a wise investment to ensure quality research translation in your communication products. The [Research-to-Action planning process](#) and toolkit worksheets can help teams map out and consider tradeoffs.

Is there additional guidance on outputs/outcomes to measure evidence application? What metrics can measure it?

The [Stakeholder Analysis Section](#) suggests additional ways to measure the uptake of research findings. For example, this section includes templates and instructions on how to monitor your project's stakeholder engagement by considering indicators to track progress and measure success and by doing data collection.