Irish Cancer Society
Research

Appendix 2: Research Impact Framework (RIF)

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1. Introduction

1.1. Purpose

The Research Impact Framework (RIF) is a guide on impact for those applying for funding from the Irish Cancer Society and for grant holders who are successful in securing a grant.

Its purpose is to **help maximise the impact of the research that the Irish Cancer Society funds through our grant schemes.**

Creating impact from the research that we fund has always been of great importance to the Irish Cancer Society. This RIF pulls together previous information and guidance on impact into a single document.

The RIF is the central Irish Cancer Society guidance document on research impact.

It is intended to support researchers to understand, plan for, deliver, and demonstrate research impact and to enable the Irish Cancer Society to facilitate, understand, and communicate on that impact.

It should act as an important reference point for grant applicants, grant holders, and the Irish Cancer Society to ensure that impact remains a focus before, during, and after a funded research project is completed.

Please note that each successful award will have terms and conditions (T&Cs) specific to that award. These T&Cs will cover many of the same areas as this document but the specific terms may be slightly different. Precedence is given to the T&Cs specific to each award.

1.2. What is research impact?

Broadly speaking, research impact is the demonstrable contribution that research makes to society.

For the Irish Cancer Society, research impact is defined as 'research being **used to bring about a positive change to the lives of people affected by cancer.'**

We recognise that the impact is specific to each project and can be varied; impact can occur over different timescales, from the short- to the long-term. However, all forms of impact are important to the Irish Cancer Society and we must work in partnership with researchers to not only achieve impact, but also to measure, and communicate it.

1.3. Why is impact important?

The Irish Cancer Society receives the vast majority of its income from donations. **People donate to us because they want to make a difference to the lives of those affected by cancer.**

Therefore, it is our duty to our donors to ensure that the research we fund does just that - makes a difference.

It is very important that the research we fund is always working towards making an impact on the lives of those affected by cancer. It is equally important that we can communicate this impact to our donors to let them know how their donations have made a difference.

The Irish Cancer Society's vision or goal is:

'By 2025, 3 out of 4 Irish cancer patients will survive their diagnosis and everyone affected by the disease will have access to world-class treatment, care and support. In future, no one in Ireland will die from cancer.'

To achieve this goal, we must strongly focus on maximising the impact of our funded research, in particular putting an emphasis on achieving outcomes that will ultimately contribute to realising this goal.

2. Research Impact Framework

2.1. Framework overview

The RIF describes how the Irish Cancer Society approaches research impact in four sections:

- **Framework Principles** - How the Irish Cancer Society and researchers will work together: a set of principles which underpin how the charity will work in partnership with grant holders to maximise research impact.
- **Theory of Change** - What the Irish Cancer Society is aiming to achieve: the Goal, and the Outcomes (or changes that need to happen in order for that goal to be achieved), to which all research projects funded through the grants scheme should aim to make a contribution; this is articulated in the 'Theory of Change'.
- **Impact Plan** - How impact should be planned by researchers at the application stage.
- **Impact Reporting** - How the progress of achieving impact will be monitored by the Irish Cancer Society.

2.2. Framework principles

These research impact principles frame the relationship the Irish Cancer Society wants to have with all of its grant holders.

By having these principles, it allows us all to work from the same page from the very start. They are designed to ensure the best levels of support, partnership and mutual understanding, with the ultimate aim of maximising research impact.

Principle	**Principle in practice**
Working in partnership	Partnership is the best way to ensure maximum impact and this is a two-way relationship. The Irish Cancer Society will contribute internal expertise and networks to support and promote the research. Grant holders will work with the Irish Cancer Society to maximise the potential of the research to benefit people affected by cancer.
Involving the public and people affected by cancer	Grant holders will need to carefully consider how the public and people affected by cancer can be meaningfully involved in their research. The Irish Cancer Society requires that public and patient involvement (PPI) is included in the research projects that we fund. The Irish Cancer Society can provide guidance and training on including PPI in grant applications and projects.
Regular communication	Grant holders will maintain an ongoing dialogue with the Irish Cancer Society through regular reporting. Reporting schedules will be determined for each grant and will be detailed in the T&Cs. Outside of these reports we encourage regular communication with our grant holders. The Irish Cancer Society will provide a named contact for each grant and will respond promptly to queries, issues or updates.
Dissemination and engagement	Grant holders will inform the Irish Cancer Society of any dissemination or engagement activities planned as soon as they can. The Irish Cancer Society Research and Communication teams will support grant holders to deliver communications in accessible ways, especially for people affected by cancer, donors and the general public. Grant holders will work closely with the Irish Cancer Society teams (including Communications and Fundraising) to plan and undertake communications and attend engagement events run by the Irish Cancer Society to raise awareness of their research and its findings.
Open access	Open access to research outputs is an important way of maximising the impact of research. Grant holders are encouraged to share their research outputs (not just publications, but also datasets and other outputs) with the wider research community, and with the public and other audiences as appropriate. The Irish Cancer Society will support open access publication costs.

Long-term impact monitoring	Impact can take a long time to emerge, often beyond the timescales of a research project. The Irish Cancer Society will want to work with grant holders to monitor impact both during and beyond the grant funding period. Grant holders are encouraged to maintain longer term contact with the Society through its research community.

2.3. Theory of Change

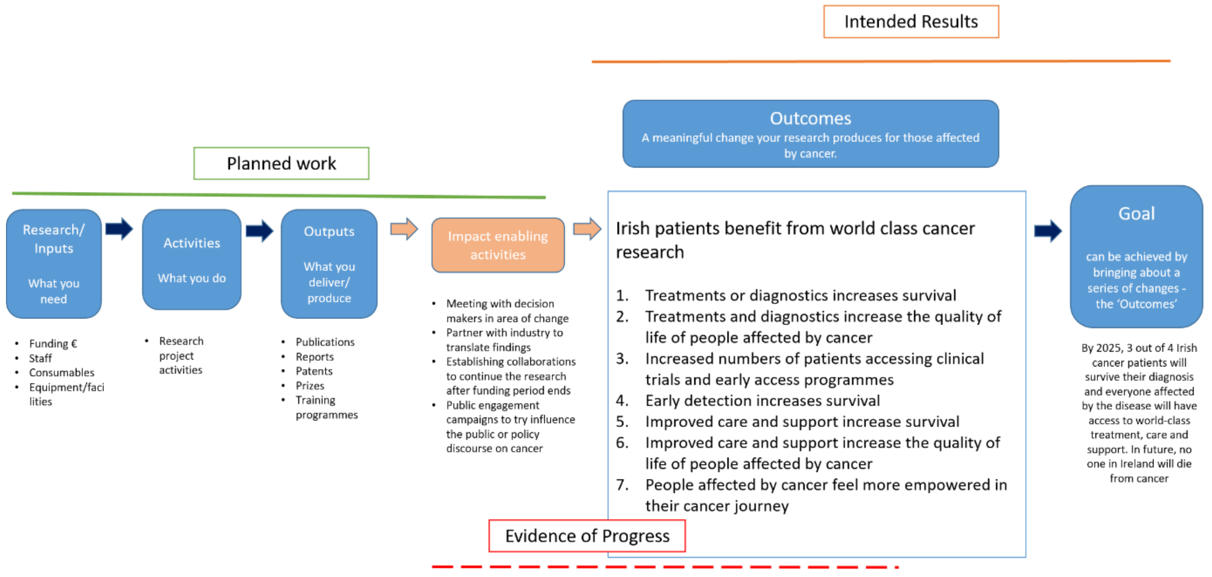
A Theory of Change, in simple terms, is an illustrated diagram showing how activities create outcomes (or change).

The Theory of Change provides a clear structure for the progression of research towards achieving impact (or goal). It defines long-term goals and then maps backward to identify necessary outcomes, outcome-enabling activities, outputs, activities and inputs.

Applicants to the Irish Cancer Society grant schemes will be required to provide an impact plan at application stage. The key factors to be considered in the impact plan are mapped off the structure of the Theory of Change.

The Theory of Change is set out in diagrammatic form in Figure 1.

The goal and outcomes for all impact plans submitted to the Irish Cancer Society are pre-determined based on the Irish Cancer Society strategy. These are detailed in Figure 1 and explained in more detail in Section 2.4.



- Meeting with decision makers in area of change
- Partner with industry to translate findings
- Establishing collaborations to continue the research after funding period ends
- Public engagement campaigns to try influence the public or policy discourse on cancer

Irish patients benefit from world class cancer research

1. Treatments or diagnostics increases survival
2. Treatments and diagnostics increase the quality of life of people affected by cancer
3. Increased numbers of patients accessing clinical trials and early access programmes
4. Early detection increases survival
5. Improved care and support increase survival
6. Improved care and support increase the quality of life of people affected by cancer
7. People affected by cancer feel more empowered in their cancer journey

By 2025, 3 out of 4 Irish cancer patients will survive their diagnosis and everyone affected by the disease will have access to world-class treatment, care and support. In future, no one in Ireland will die from cancer

Figure 1. *Theory of Change shown in diagrammatic form. The examples of each key factor are only for illustrative purposes and are not comprehensive.*

2.4. Impact plan

As mentioned in Section 4, at the application stage for the majority of the Irish Cancer Society awards, applicants will be required to complete an impact plan based on the Theory of Change model outlined in Section 4.

The purpose of including an impact plan at the application stage is to focus all projects on working towards achieving impact from the outset.

The impact plan information provided by researchers at the application stage may be somewhat limited as the project has not yet started and it can be difficult to predict research results or how a research landscape may change over time.

However, it is still important to start thinking about the key factors on the pathway to achieving long-term impact from the start of the project as it will provide a strong foundation for maximising progress towards impact when a grant gets underway.

There are a number of key factors to consider when developing an impact plan, these are illustrated in Figure 1 and explained in more detail below (Section 5.1).

Of particular importance in the impact plan at the application stage are the 'Outcomes', 'Impact enabling activities', 'Evidence of progress', and 'Outputs', sections.

For the 'Inputs', and 'Activities', sections of the impact plan, high level information is adequate as information on these sections will be detailed in other sections of the application such as aims and objectives and budget sections.

Please note for funded projects, the level of information required as part of the impact plan will become more detailed as the project progresses (for more information see Section 6).

The impact plan must consider the following key factors:

- ↓ Goal
- ↓ Outcomes
- ↓ Impact enabling activities
- ↓ Evidence of progress
- ↓ Outputs
- ↓ Activities
- ↓ Inputs

Each of these sections are described in more detail over the next few pages:

↓ Goal

A goal is an idea of the future or desired result that a group of people or organisation envision. It is the ultimate impact that an organisation wants to achieve.

For impact plans required by the Irish Cancer Society the goal is the Society's vision-

'By 2025, 3 out of 4 Irish cancer patients will survive their diagnosis and everyone affected by the disease will have access to world-class treatment, care and support. In future, no one in Ireland will die from cancer.'

For the Irish Cancer Society investing in research and *ensuring the Irish patients benefit from world class research* is a way of contributing to achieving this goal. Therefore, all Irish Cancer Society grant holders should be working towards achieving the predetermined goal of the Society.

↓ Outcomes

Achieving impact or a goal can be complex, take time and involve change in a number of different factors. **Outcomes are factors that need to change in order for that goal to be achieved.**

Demonstrating that impact has been achieved can be difficult and it is often inferred by looking at changes in outcomes.

There are **7** key outcomes that the Irish Cancer Society work towards in order to ensure that Irish patients benefit from world class research.

These outcomes tie into the Irish Cancer Society strategy and are outcomes that we have identified that will help us achieve our ultimate goal. Like the goal these outcomes are pre-determined for all applicants. Applicants should select one or more of these specific outcomes for their research project.

It is important to start thinking about the pathway to impact from the start of the project. This will provide a strong foundation when a grant gets underway. As such, plans should be as comprehensive and considered as possible. The recommended approach is to develop the impact plan by work backwards, from goal to inputs

While the direction of the research may change over time, or may not succeed in its original objectives, linking the research to (at least) one of the framework's outcomes sets the direction of the research in the context of what is important to the Irish Cancer Society.

The outcomes as identified by the Irish Cancer Society are listed in Table 1. There is no particular hierarchy to the order of these outcomes, all of them contribute to the goal.

Applicants will also be asked to detail why they have selected the outcome(s).

7 Key Outcomes: “Irish patients benefit from world class cancer research”

1. Treatments and diagnostics increase survival
2. Treatments and diagnostics increase the quality of life of people affected by cancer
3. Increased numbers of patients accessing clinical trials and early access programmes
4. Screening increases survival
5. Improved care and support increase survival
6. Improved care and support increase the quality of life of people affected by cancer
7. People affected by cancer feel more empowered in their cancer journey

Other

’Other’ should only be selected by the researcher if they feel strongly that none of the other outcomes covers the potential outcome of the research. If other is selected, then more detail will be required on the proposed outcome.

↓ Impact enabling activities

Impact enabling activities are activities that drive outputs to outcomes. These impact enabling activities are very important as they support the progression of the research along the pathway to impact.

Outputs are quantitative results which are achieved after implementing an activity. Many times an output alone will not contribute to achieving an outcome. What is important is what is done with that output.

For example, if a report is published detailing how a service can be improved, the report alone cannot be impactful if it is not shared with the people who make decisions on that service.

Therefore, an activity to drive the report (output) to potentially contribute to achieving an outcome would be to organise a meeting with the decision makers to discuss the report.

Other examples of impact enabling activities include:

- Partnering with industry to translate findings
- Establishing collaborations to continue the research after funding period ends

- Public engagement campaigns to try contribute and influence the public or policy discourse on cancer

These are just examples and are not a comprehensive list. The appropriate activities will vary for each type of project and what outcome has been selected.

For many projects the impact-enabling activities will not directly contribute towards achieving the outcome. But may be a step on the pathway to achieving the outcome.

This does not mean that the impact plan should not be ambitious but constraints of the project should be kept in mind. A well-thought out, ambitious but achievable impact plan is recommended.

Please note the difference between ‘Impact enabling activities and ‘Activities’ (Section 5.2).

↓ Evidence of progress

An impact enabling activity can occur but what is important is what is achieved through the activity.

Evidence of progress is evidence that the impact enabling activities are progressing the research on the impact pathway towards contributing to an outcome.

The type of evidence a grant holder will collect will depend on the impact enabling activities and the outcome that has been selected.

Progress evidence can be both quantitative and qualitative. However, quantitative evidence can be difficult to show when it comes to progress towards impact, therefore, in the majority of cases the evidence will be qualitative.

For example, an impact enabling activity may be organising a meeting with other groups to discuss collaboration to bring the research further. The evidence that the meeting (the impact enabling activity) progressing the research on the impact pathway would be that the meeting went positively and the groups agreed to collaborate on funding applications to bring the research forward.

This is an example of short-term qualitative evidence- the meeting went positively and the groups agreed to collaborate. An example of longer-term quantitative evidence would be that a grant application was applied for.

Applicants will be asked to consider both short-term and medium-term evidence. Medium-term evidence may only occur after the grant end date.

It can be difficult to envisage what evidence will be needed at the start of a project as plans may change over the course of the project for a number of different reasons. The reason for asking for this information at the application stage is for researcher to identify and plan the appropriate methods for gathering evidence so that relevant evidence is gathered in real-time and that no evidence is lost.

For some projects evidence gathering may start earlier in a project or it may start later, either way it is important to be prepared.

↓ Outputs

Outputs are quantitative results which are achieved after implementing an activity. Examples of outputs include papers, publications, blog posts, newsletters, patents, information leaflets and training programmes.

These are just examples and are not a comprehensive list. The appropriate outputs will vary for each type of project and what outcome has been selected.

The Society recognises that outputs are important for a researcher's career and are encouraged. However, as outlined above, the plan for driving outputs to outcomes is more important in terms of achieving impact from a research project.

↓ Activities

These are the activities that will be undertaken by the researcher as part of doing the research project. These activities will generate an output.

For the impact plan the information on the activities can be high level and in most cases articulating the project objectives with a breakdown of what will be done under each objective will be adequate.

Examples of activities in a translational research project include- completing in-vitro and in-vivo testing of a drug compound in a cancer model. The output of these activities could be a publication on the results of the research.

Examples of activities in a social, nursing and allied health project would be trialling an intervention to increase treatment compliance in cancer patients. The output of these activities could be the publication in a scientific journal or a report.

↓ Inputs

The inputs of research include the funding needed and resources required to deliver the research. Resources can include personnel, equipment, consumables etc. The inputs allow the activities to take place.

2.5. Format of Impact plan at application stage

Key Factor	Additional guidance
Goal	This is pre-determined and will be standard for all the research that we fund.
Outcome	There are 7 pre-determined outcomes based on our strategy. It is recommended that you start the impact plan by selecting one of the seven outcomes most relevant to your research. Once this has been selected you can then work backwards from this to complete the other sections. You can select more than one outcome if relevant.
Impact enabling activities	Impact enabling activities are activities that drive outputs to outcomes- i.e. progress the research along the impact pathway. What activities need to happen to drive outputs to outcomes? When will these activities take place? The information provided can be a mixture of bullet point and narrative in style.
Evidence of progress	How will you know that the impact enabling activities have progressed the research on the path to impact? What evidence can be used to show this? Indicators may be qualitative or quantitative.
Outputs	Planned outputs for the project.
Activities	Activities that will take place as part of the research project. A high-level breakdown of what will be done under each objective will be adequate. Bullet points can be used.
Inputs	Resources needed for the project- high level information is adequate and can be in bullet points.

3. Reporting to the ICS on Impact

An impact plan will be required as part of the application for the majority of the Irish Cancer Society funding awards from early 2021 onwards.

It is important both for the Irish Cancer Society and for grant holders to be able to demonstrate evidence of progress in their impact plans.

Therefore, grant holders funded by the Society from 2021 onwards will be required to provide an update on the progress of their impact plan in their reports to the Irish Cancer Society. The schedule of reporting will be determined by the T&Cs of the award. Generally, reports are required annually, for shorter awards a 6-month report may also be requested.

More detailed information may be required as the project progresses and the impact of research projects become clearer. The impact plan may therefore change during the grant period in response to both the research findings and changes in the wider research landscape. Any changes in the impact plan must be detailed and explained in the progress reports.

Two additional section will be part of impact reporting in the progress reports:

- Progress on path to impact
- Plans for next reporting period

Progress on the path to impact

Grant holders will be asked to update on the progress of the research on the path to impact.

Grant holders must update on the contribution that the enabling activities have had to an outcome. This will be done by detailing the evidence that the outcome enabling activities have contributed to an outcome.

This evidence will have been gathered through-out the project. The method and type of evidence gathered will be identified in the impact plan at application stage. Both quantitative and qualitative evidence may be given. However, as it is often difficult to quantify ‘contribution’ it is more likely that the evidence will be qualitative and the information in this section will be narrative in style.

In addition, impact enabling activities may not have directly contributed to an outcome. In these cases, what we are looking for in this section is evidence that the research is progressing towards contributing to an outcome.

Plans for next reporting period

Grant holders will be asked to detail the impact enabling activities for the next reporting period and how evidence of progress will be gathered.

As detailed in the Framework Principles (Section 2.2) it is encouraged that grant holders work in partnership with the Irish Cancer Society to maximise the potential of the research to benefit people affected by cancer. Therefore, a member of the research team will be available to work with you on your impact plans through-out the duration of your project. Regular communication is strongly encouraged.

Impact can take a long time to emerge, often beyond the timescales of a research project. The Irish Cancer Society will also want to work with grant holders to monitor impact both beyond the grant funding period. Grant holders are encouraged to maintain longer term contact with the Society through its research community.

4. More Information

This RIF should act as a guide for researchers making applications to the Irish Cancer Society awards and also to grant holders. However, impact is a broad and varied topic and therefore not all aspects of impact may be covered in the RIF.

All queries and questions should be sent to grants@irishcancer.ie.