

# THE EAC GUIDANCE ON DEVELOPING A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

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This guidance has been developed by the Working Group on Developing Guidance on National Research Frameworks of the European Archaeological Council.

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# INTRODUCTION

**T**his guidance provides a practical guide to support you develop or update a research framework. It is aimed at everyone involved in the process: from those commissioning a framework to those running a project to create one. The guidance is not meant to be prescriptive, setting out the “correct” way to develop a framework. Instead, its aim is to illustrate the wide variety of frameworks developed to support European archaeology, and set out a number of steps and considerations that can help you think through the processes and all the different aspects involved in creating the appropriate framework for your needs.

The guidance is broken down into:

- **A strategic document** that provides the strategic context that establishes the value and role of research frameworks in fostering a coordinated research culture and embedding a research/evidence-based approach that underpins heritage management, regardless of the different political, legal, administrative and economic contexts of individual states. This value includes supporting decision-making and broadening public benefit to include social and communal values as well as the research dividend. The document is aimed at those people who are responsible for commissioning, funding or developing research frameworks. It can be used to support the creation of a business case for developing a research framework, and explains the key principles that should be considered in doing so. Available as a pdf download. ([EAC Guidelines 7](#))
- **Practical guidance** covering the workflow of processes and steps to be considered when developing a framework. This document is a PDF version of the guidance which is also available as a web resource, here [www.europae-archaeologiae-consilium.org](http://www.europae-archaeologiae-consilium.org).
- **Examples of different research frameworks** that accompany the guidance. Available as links within the web resource and at [doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14473051](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14473051).

## RESEARCH FRAMEWORK PRACTICAL GUIDANCE

This resource sets out how the main principles behind developing a research framework can be introduced into the process of creating the framework.

There is no blueprint for the ideal research framework as each one is created to meet the individual requirements of the context within which it is created. The guidance in this section shows different ways that can help you define your own approach, tailored to your own situation.

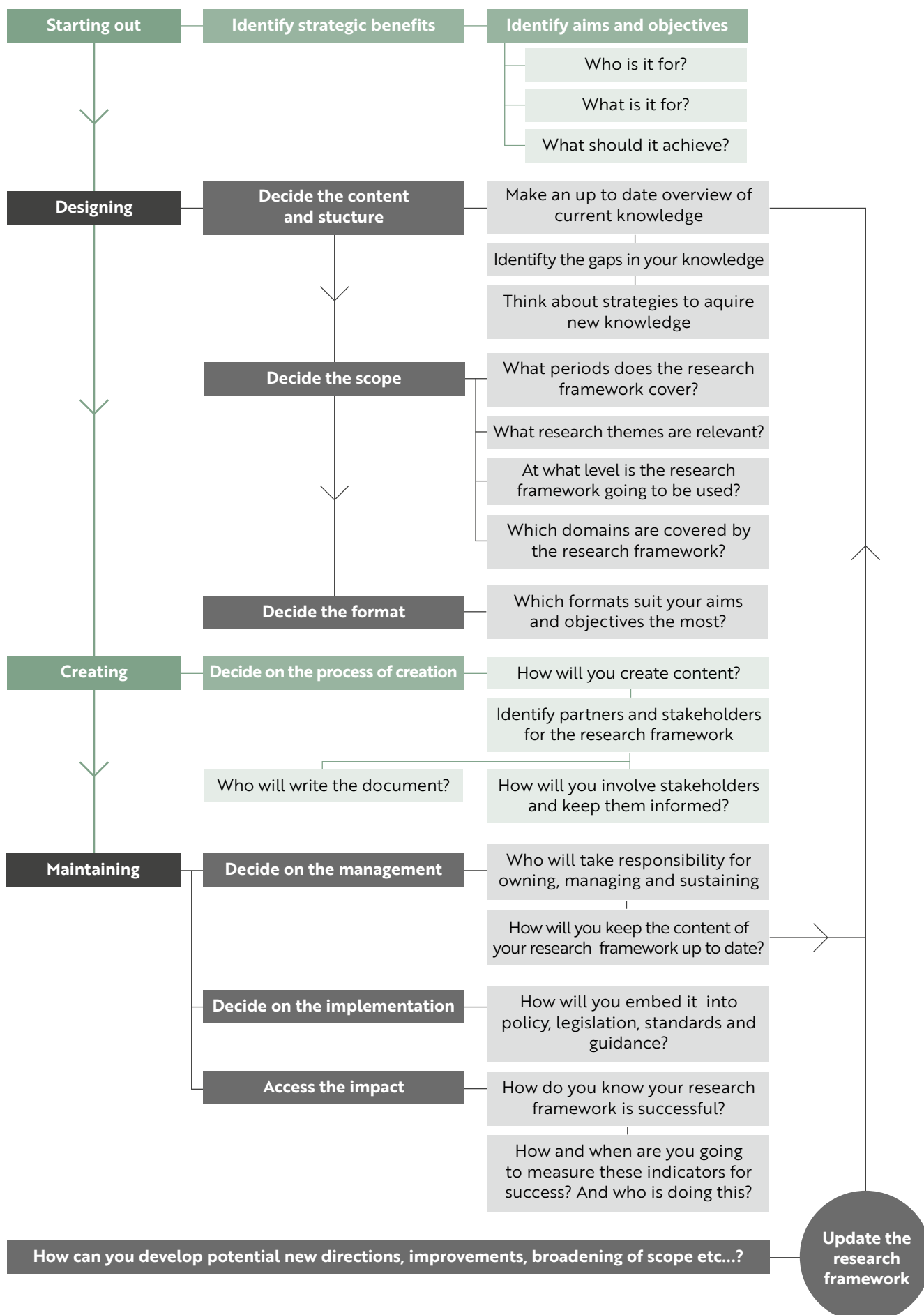
The guidance below is broken into three different sections:

01. Making a research framework
02. Keeping your research framework relevant and up to date
03. Reviews of existing research frameworks

The first two sections are illustrated by case studies or examples of current research frameworks from EAC member states. The third section provides these case studies as individual pdfs which illustrate how the different countries have developed their research frameworks.



## MAKING AND MAINTAINING A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK FLOW CHART



# 01. MAKING A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The process of making a research framework can be divided into three phases which are based on project management principles:

- **Phase 1:** Starting a Research Framework – the proposal or initiation phase to develop a project design
- **Phase 2:** Designing the content, structure, scope and format – establishing the content, scope and format of the Research Framework in relation to your aims and objectives
- **Phase 3:** Creating a research framework

## PHASE 1: STARTING A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

Every project starts with an idea or a proposal. This is then developed into a project design which sets out the aims, who will be involved, what will be delivered, a timetable and likely costs.

At the proposal or initiation phase of a project it is important to determine the desired strategic benefits of having a research framework, and more practically, the aims you want to achieve. This can be used in a business case or a justification that sets out the reasons for undertaking the work.

It is a valuable exercise to show policy makers, funders, managers or the archaeological community your plans at an early stage to foster enthusiasm and 'buy in'.

## THE STRATEGIC BENEFITS OF YOUR RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The benefits of a research framework often directly contribute to corporate or strategic priorities; and meet specific aims and objectives that are set by a state body or organisation. Why and how the development of a research framework can contribute to these depends on the individual circumstances of the project. Begin by considering whether you have a clear vision of the role that a framework will play. If not, analysing the political, economic and social context within which it will sit will provide a clearer view on the restraints, challenges and risks, as well as the opportunities and potential benefits of the research framework.

Understanding the different roles and values that research frameworks can bring will flesh out the strategic benefits. These are covered in the accompanying document: [The value of developing a Research Framework](#), but in short are:

- Identifying the most important or significant aspects of the past.
- Providing an overview of current understanding, research questions and strategic objectives.
- Creating, supporting or even restoring the archaeological research cycle.
- Justifying why development-led investigations are required.
- Promoting a better coordinated research culture.
- Helping in building partnerships.

Understanding how your research framework will be used, in what context and by whom, and establishing that these will be closely aligned to its strategic benefits is the first vital phase. This will help with the next phase: to set out the aims and objectives of your research framework.



## THE AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF YOUR RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

The aims and objectives of your research framework are determined by the answers to the following questions:

- Who is the research framework for?
- What is the research framework for?
- What do you want it to achieve?

### Who is the research framework for?

Research frameworks can be designed for broad audiences or more specific users depending on the context and the needs of both the funding organisation and the users themselves.

A broad audience could include anyone working or interested in archaeology in a particular country or region (see England, Scotland or Wales). These include:

- national or local authority heritage managers
- commercial archaeologists
- museums
- academia
- community groups
- subject specialist groups

Other frameworks are targeted at more specific audiences:

- The Denmark research framework has a main audience of cultural heritage agencies, research organisations and museums.
- The Netherlands research framework is primarily for those institutions responsible for making choices in the context of archaeological heritage management, for example local authorities and their advisors, or the authors of investigation project designs.

It is important to define your audience and users as early as possible as this will influence the process of creating the research framework, its design and content.



### What is the research framework for?

Defining what the research framework is for, is very important. This means you need to identify the user needs for the intended audiences. The user needs can then be translated into aims for your research framework.

User needs of the various audiences can be wide ranging and depend on the context (subject, topic, state, region, locality etc) which means the role of a research framework can also vary.

The following overview of different roles that research frameworks can contribute to is:

- increasing knowledge and understanding of the past
- providing more effective spatial planning
- making the results of investigations more accessible
- securing maximum value from private sector investigations
- developing joint working approaches to address strategic and front-line priorities
- extending responsibility for research and knowledge sharing to national and local communities
- increasing public access to knowledge and information
- supporting funding decisions
- or any combination of these.

The variation in aims/uses can be seen in the current published research frameworks in Europe. The research frameworks of the Netherlands and Belgium (Flanders) are a starting point for new research and a source of inspiration, for example, to develop specific project/investigation research questions. The Netherlands research framework is very much underpinned by the concept of making choices by identifying only a relatively small number of national research questions that provide direction when addressing the most important knowledge gaps.

Research frameworks can also function as a control mechanism to ensure good archaeological fieldwork is conducted, for example by checking research budgets, methods and techniques and expected knowledge gain (see Denmark).

They can provide an overview of the existing knowledge and other sources of background information that a researcher or investigator may want when starting a new project. This includes summaries of previous research, funding, training, guidance, methodological reviews and bibliographies (see UK England, Scotland and Wales). Research frameworks in England have been specifically created to provide a research focus to development-led investigations with the aim to generate as much research benefit (furthering understanding and knowledge) from the planning system. Development-led archaeology makes up more than 90% of archaeological work in England and research frameworks were created to inform local authority heritage management decision making, in particular in proposing mitigation strategies for archaeological works and to support archaeological contractors develop research focused project designs or written schemes of investigation.

Most of the research frameworks provide research questions or strategies that can help frame and coordinate research. Some, when used to justify work to be undertaken, or when linked to specific funding streams, could be thought of as a way to focus research in specific areas or themes. Other frameworks are more open and less prescriptive in terms of their research aims.

**What do you want to achieve?**

An important consideration that underpins the creation of a research framework is to think about the outcomes that you want to achieve. What do you want to achieve in terms of change? This will help define not only the aims of the framework but also determine the process of creation. For example, if the desired outcome is a collaborative and unified archaeology sector then a collaborative approach to developing the framework is essential. But if it is to maximize the research value from development led investigations then the format of the information, the level of research questions and the mechanism to embed the framework into the functioning of the individual state planning system may be essential. It may be that there are a number of outcomes, and each of these should be defined as they will have an important impact on the design of the framework and of the project to create it.

## PHASE 2: DESIGNING THE CONTENT, STRUCTURE, SCOPE AND FORMAT

The user needs, aims and intended outcomes of the research frameworks determine to a large extent how the research framework is structured, what it should contain, its scope and the format it should take when published. The following sections break this down into its different components.

### CONTENT AND STRUCTURE

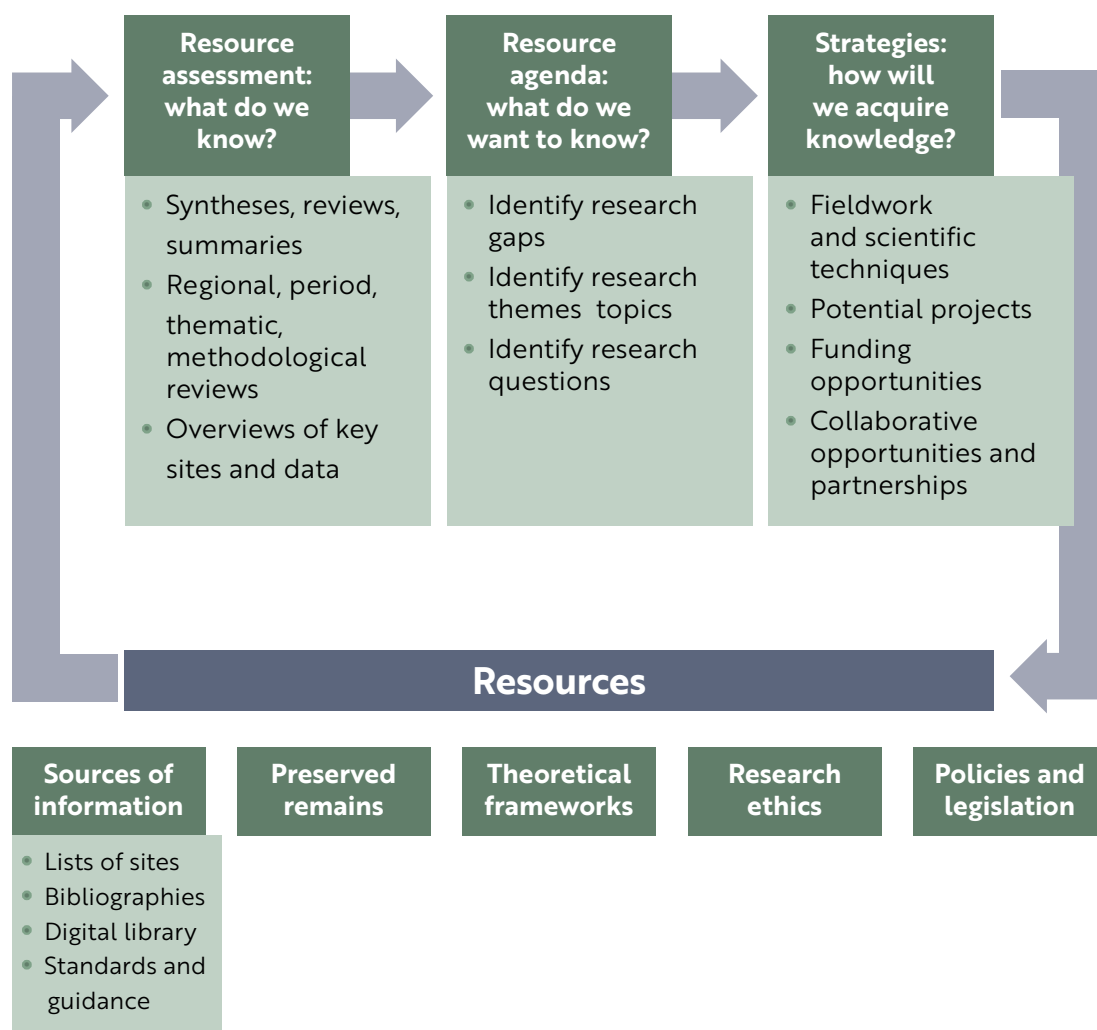
Research frameworks consist of different components, some of which are common across all the frameworks. The basic structure of a research framework is based on the principles set out in “Frameworks for our Past: A review of research frameworks, strategies and perceptions” (Olivier, A 1996). This sets out a three part model that underpins research frameworks:

- 1** Resource assessment - an up to date overview of current understanding – “what we currently know”. This provides an overview of a specific period, place or theme.
- 2** Research agenda – identifying gaps in our knowledge – “what we want to know”. This establishes an agreed set of research areas and questions that is used to help coordinate research.
- 3** Strategies to carry out this research - “How we plan to acquire this knowledge”. These strategies set out the mechanisms to deliver the research, promoting potential ways forward and partnerships.

All current research frameworks follow the basic principles set out above as they include, to some degree, the following:

- **Synthesis, reviews or summaries of the current state of knowledge**
  - overviews of current research
  - resource assessment – regional, period, thematic and methodological assessments
  - overview of key sites
- **Research gaps**
  - research themes or topics
  - research questions
- **Research strategies or strategic objectives (to fill the knowledge gaps)**
  - fieldwork and scientific methods and techniques
  - potential projects to undertake
  - funding opportunities
  - opportunities for collaborative work and partnerships
- **Sources of relevant information**
  - list of key relevant sites and publications
  - downloadable documents, for instance on research themes
  - bibliographies
  - standards and guidance
- **Preservation of remains**
- **Theoretical frameworks (for instance on how to formulate research questions)**
- **Research ethics**
- **Policies and legislation**

## Model for a research framework



## SCOPE

The majority of research frameworks are structured by period with some cross-cutting research themes. They often differ in their scope and scale – i.e. some just cover archaeology, whilst others include the broader historic environment (including the historic built environment). They may also differ in the time periods and research themes, and also in geographical coverage – national, regional, local or site based.

Research frameworks can have the following scope:

- **Period driven**
- **Thematic**
  - Research themes – e.g. maritime archaeology, urbanization, conflict or defense, death and funerary, paleoenvironment, society, etc.
  - Material or object themes – e.g. metallurgy, bone working, glass production, pottery, etc.
  - Methods and techniques – e.g. isotope research, conservation, preservation, dating, remote sensing investigation, etc.
- **Different in scale**
  - national
  - regional
  - local political/planning boundaries
  - supporting management plans
  - World Heritage Sites
- **Cover different heritage and associated domains**
  - cultural heritage
    - historic built heritage
    - museums heritage
  - natural environment
    - landscape change and management
- **Cover the connections to the wider context in which heritage operates - e.g. social, economic, policy, wellbeing, climate change, sustainable development goals.**

The value of thematic and chronological approaches is that they are useful as a context to identify key issues for understanding the past and to assist in addressing them in a meaningful (archaeological) way. These approaches can be applied to different heritage domains (including the historic built environment and natural environment) and at different scales. However, the periods and themes mentioned above may not be as recognizable to non-archaeologists and if the aim is to create a broad cultural heritage framework, then a more extended thematic approach with overarching themes such as landscape or environmental change, should be considered.

It is also important to think of the level of detail or the scale of your research framework in terms of what you need it to achieve. A national research framework of a small country (e.g. the Netherlands, UK Wales or Denmark) can be as extensive and detailed as a regional research

framework for a large country (e.g. Germany or UK England).

In general, the larger the area or scale covered by a research framework, the more of an overview or summary of information and broader research questions it will provide. Depending on the user needs and desired outcome of your framework this need not be a problem. But if the aim is to publish research questions that can be used directly to inform individual investigation project design aims and objectives then, the broad scale approach may not be appropriate.

A sliding or nested system with overarching questions/themes and more specific questions could be used to provide a broad national or regional perspective with more detailed questions for specific areas or investigations. The aim would be that specific investigation or project designs would set out the research questions that contribute to the wider, overarching ones used in the research framework.

## FORMAT

It is crucial at the start of a project to think about the format of your research framework, taking into account the user needs of your different audiences. It may be that different formats are required, but we encourage that a digital first approach is taken.

Research frameworks have been produced in the following formats:

- Single or multiple volume printed publications
- PDFs that can be downloaded
- Article in a book or journal
- Web pages with downloadable PDFs
- Web-based interactive online research framework

The traditional format for research frameworks has been the printed publication or monograph, which are often hundreds of pages long. This is the standard way for archaeological investigations to be published and which continues today. However, there is a greater requirement to make information more publicly accessible and in formats that makes it easier to be used for a variety of different purposes – not just for research.

Traditional print/publication formats inhibit this – and their lack of online access can be a barrier to their active use beyond the interests of cultural resource managers. They are also difficult to update and keep current as they require new print runs, which also adds additional costs.

In recent years the majority of research frameworks have moved online and to digital formats. These have provided a number of benefits including:

- Improved accessibility for multiple types of users
- Possibility for interactive communication with the users
- Ability to efficiently update and keep current
- Flexibility in organising information
- Potential to link to other heritage management systems
- Ability to link the output of research to its questions and strategies



However they are accompanied by some risks, for example:

- Resource to maintain and keep them (specialist knowledge and information management)
- Issues with online security
- Web technology needs updating

Recent examples of online published research frameworks include the research frameworks of France and Belgium (Flanders) (downloadable pdfs from a website) and the Denmark research framework (web texts). In the Netherlands and the UK a more dynamic web approach has been taken with the Dutch National Archaeological Research Agenda 2.0 (NOaA 2.0) and the UK [researchframeworks.org](http://researchframeworks.org) website.

The Dutch National Archaeological Research Agenda (NOaA 2.0) was published online in 2016 (<https://noaa.cultureelerfgoed.nl/search>). It was the follow up of a printed version and its aim was (amongst other things) to make a user-friendly online research agenda which was more easy to search through and up date. The research questions can be accessed via four search filters: place, period, subject and site type. The more search options are used, the more specific the results of the search. This makes the search process quick and efficient and leads to customized search results.

In the UK, the Research Frameworks Network website ([www.researchframeworks.org](http://www.researchframeworks.org)) brings together the different national thematic and regional research frameworks in England and Scotland in one place enabling users to access all the resources online. All the research questions and strategies are in a database behind the website and are tagged with heritage-controlled vocabularies (<https://heritage-standards.org.uk/>). This enables the research questions to be cross searched and allows the research frameworks to be interoperable with other systems – e.g. sites and monuments inventories and registers, developing a more integrated approach.

## PHASE 3: CREATING A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

There are some key principles that should be considered when creating a research framework. These include:

- building upon existing knowledge and ongoing work for maximum effect.
- using broad-based partnerships across the heritage sector and beyond to encourage inclusivity and as wide a sense of ownership as possible.
- engaging actively with specialist communities of interest, including local communities, to assess and understand values, and to stimulate direct public participation in understanding and caring for the archaeological heritage.
- avoiding making research frameworks prescriptive, so that there are always opportunities to undertake independent or serendipitous research.
- ensuring research frameworks are dynamic, iterative, and constantly evolving, ensuring scientific quality and relevance.
- using digital formats to provide widespread dissemination of, and access to, research frameworks to increase impact, utility, and participation.
- ensuring that they are actively managed, resourced, and regularly reviewed in the light of new evidence, theories or participation by new partners.

## OWNERS AND PARTNERS

The existing research frameworks have mostly been initiated or funded by government heritage agencies or national research bodies. These are usually also the parties that own the framework and keep it up to date. Two examples of this are the Danish Archaeological Strategies for Excavations, initiated and owned by the Danish Agency for Culture and Palaces and the French National Program of Archaeological Research, initiated and owned by the National Council for Archaeological Research (CNRA). However, there are other models. In England most of the research frameworks are regional so are managed by regional representatives of the heritage sector. In Wales there is a separately constituted management committee formed to help develop the national research framework.

Partners and stakeholders should be identified at the initiation of the project and then engaged with during the development of the framework. The stakeholders involved depend on the specific situation that the framework is being developed for, and also on the individual heritage laws and context of the nation. For example, in the UK there is a recent initiative to widen the stakeholders to incorporate communities – whether these are community archaeology groups, specialist communities or local communities living within the area of the framework. This community-based approach may however not be applicable in other EAC states.

However, at a broad level stakeholders could consist of representatives of:

- Universities or other higher education institutions
- Government or semi government agencies
- Local authorities
- Research institutes
- Museums and other cultural heritage institutions
- Independent heritage researchers
- Commercial archaeological sector
- Community groups and societies
- The public

Collaboration between all archaeological (and/or heritage) stakeholders can be key to the successful creation and embedding of the research framework into practice. Further engagement outside the archaeological/heritage sector can also be very useful in embedding the use of research frameworks into wider government or local authority strategies and plans, for example tourism, health and wellbeing, economic growth and development.

## STRATEGIES TO CREATE RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS

A description of the processes used to create existing research frameworks is given in the review documents. In general, the following collaborative strategies can be implemented:

- Partnerships and networks (involving different stakeholders including academia)
- Expert voice
- Community voice
- Co-creation
- Workshops and roundtable discussions
- Case studies
- Dedicated project teams and steering groups

Most of these strategic approaches to developing the frameworks aim to engage the profession (and beyond) so that there is an agreement on the aim, content and processes required to develop an overarching strategy and to identify more immediate objectives and mechanisms to ensure future sustainability. It is also important that the approach and processes used are transparent and the results are made public so that not only the immediate partners but also the potential users feel involved.

## HELPFUL POINTERS

Developers of existing research frameworks have noted the following lessons learned during the process of creation:

- If the research framework is primarily supporting heritage management, it is useful to engage with the (international) academic sector in the process of creating it. They are an important partner because they are, for a large part, responsible for the synthesis of investigations and moving forwards the theoretical underpinning of research.
- If community archaeology is an important area of interest, consider asking the public or volunteer organizations (e.g. local residents and subject matter specialists) what archaeology they find important or are interested in. If you opt for this approach, it is good to record at an early stage, for example in the project plan, how you will weigh the opinion of the public in relation to the opinion of the professional specialist.
- If you create the research framework through co-creation engaging a large and diverse group of people, you'll find that there will be a very broad range of needs and wishes. It will be difficult to satisfy all of these, and you will need to be transparent and pragmatic in your decision making. Having a steering or management group will help make these decisions.

## 02. KEEPING A RESEARCH FRAMEWORK RELEVANT AND UP TO DATE

A research framework is not a static document. The research cycle implies that new knowledge is constantly gained while doing archaeological research which means that subsequent research may need to be adjusted based on this new information.

### THE RESEARCH CYCLE



Every section in this part of the guidance starts with a check list of considerations to be addressed at each stage of the process. The answers will help to ensure that your research framework is sustainable and future proofed.

## MANAGEMENT AND KEEPING RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS UP TO DATE

- *Who will own it, who will take responsibility to manage and sustain the framework?*
- *How are you going to keep your research framework up to date?*
- *How are you going to manage the framework after it has been completed?*

When a research framework has been established, it does not mean that the work is done. In order to keep the research framework up to date and relevant, it is important that it is a live product that moves with the times, because heritage management decisions need to be taken using up to date evidence bases and research values and themes change. This means that you should evaluate your current research framework and use this guidance again to support this process. Therefore, it would be a good idea to design a research framework that is flexible and can be adjusted if the perspectives change. Online research frameworks are often used now to achieve this.

Generally, a body is needed – a management team or editorial board - that is responsible for maintaining and adjusting the research framework when necessary. This task can be assigned to an existing stakeholder but it can also be a specially created group for this purpose. If this is the case it needs to sit alongside, reflect and represent regulatory, museum, academic and commercial sectors and be effectively coordinated. It is also important to empower this group to have real authority if it is to be successful in driving the research framework. Transparency, a set term of office, clear operating guidelines and regular turnover of members is key to gaining wide support and facilitating a successful structure.

This management team will need to be linked into other areas of heritage management and academia as the research framework is an element of the wider ecosystem of archaeological research. This could include funding for synthesis (identifying gaps to be filled), improving access to heritage data and broadening public engagement.



## IMPLEMENTATION INTO LOCAL PRACTICE

- *How are you going to embed it into policy, legislation, standards and guidance?*

For a research framework to be successful it needs to be embedded in practice – it needs to become a key element in the research and heritage management processes. This could be at a strategic and policy level, through being cited in planning legislation as a key resource, or cited in archaeological reports produced by commercial contractors writing up and reporting their investigations.

A research framework is just one tool used to support heritage management decision making. It needs to be integrated into a heritage management toolkit that collectively helps decision making – whether it is informing planning decisions or the assessment of significance or defining investigation methodologies and research aims. The heritage management toolkit can include the following resources:

- Historic Environment Records / registers of sites and monuments
- Historic landscape characterisation mapping
- Deposit modelling/mapping of the distribution of buried deposits of archaeological remains
- Predictive modelling/mapping
- Urban/Local strategic plans
- Extensive urban surveys
- Archaeological priority areas
- Maps with current archaeological and/or cultural historical values
- Wide range of spatial mapping resources

Promoting the use of a research framework by the archaeological sector starts with stakeholder engagement during the process of its creation. This is why it is so important to involve as many users as possible in the process of creating the framework. This is followed by actively promoting the use of the research framework to the different audiences and creating guidance on how it can be used. One of the responsibilities of the research framework management team may be to continue to raise awareness of the research framework and engage its users in different ways to maintain the connections.

It is also beneficial to embed the research framework into the broader context of national or local administration so that it extends outside of internal sector use, and becomes embedded in local plans, planning advice, tourism strategies and other significant policies and strategies.

## ASSESSMENT OF IMPACT

- *How do you know your research framework is successful?*
- *How and when are you going to measure these indicators for success? And who is doing this?*

It is important that there are clear key success criteria that can be used to evaluate how successful your research framework has been in delivering its desired outcomes. These could include the following:

- Quantification of the use of results across the sector
- Increasing interest in synthesis of results through different approaches, for example commissioned reports, theses and accessible reporting strategies
- The citation level of research framework in mitigation strategies
- Increased interpretation of results in site reports
- More community engagement and increased level of public engagement
- Engagement with museums, links with exhibitions
- Increased recognition of the value of heritage as an important economic driver
- Link with government indicators, for example on well-being and health
- Quantification of funding, availability of research grants
- Increased employment and vibrancy in the sector
- Regular, periodic review

Someone should be responsible for measuring the indicators of success. This can be the management team or editorial board responsible for managing and keeping the research framework up to date but it could also be a third party, for example the commissioning organisation or government/state agency.

## IMPROVING YOUR EXISTING RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

- *How can you develop potential new directions, improvements, broadening of scope etc...?*

Research frameworks are primarily focused on coordinating archaeological research and delivering research benefit from this work in terms of knowledge gain. They have been traditionally focused on periods and longstanding accepted research themes.

However, research frameworks provide the opportunity to expand their remit and to engage more with the social value that archaeology can bring, as well as underpinning the decision making as part of heritage management choices and mitigation.

Potential new research directions evolve over time as a result of scientific discourse or the evolution of the archaeological profession. Compared to the 1990s and the 2000s, themes like climate (and hence landscape change), social engagement, remembrance, health and wellbeing are becoming important themes in archaeology. These are some areas that are now being included in some research frameworks. In addition, the increasing emphasis on public engagement and benefit in archaeological practice could have an impact on the content of your research framework.

Regularly updating your research framework and continuing to engage new and existing stakeholders with it will ensure that these new discoveries, themes and initiatives can benefit your research framework and thus future archaeological research.

## 03. REVIEWS OF RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS

The web version of this guidance provides reviews and summaries for several European archaeology research frameworks. They provide information and inspiration for the many uses, formats and aims that research frameworks can cover. Each review document contains links to the research framework, where they are publicly available. The summaries have been reviewed by representatives from each country, for which the EAC is grateful.

The reviews can be found on the [EAC website](#) and at [doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14473051](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14473051)

The EAC hopes to add more reviews and case studies to build this resource. If you would like to contribute, please contact us, using the contacts on the [EAC website](#).

