Research Impact Canvas

Short title	Research Impact Canvas
Long title	Meet the Research Impact Canvas: A Structured Guide for Planning Your Science Communication Activities
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In the last 10 years, we have spent a lot of time thinking about the impact of research, both from a research and science management perspective. A few years ago, we also started giving trainings for other researchers on how to approach the blackbox "societal impact". Our experience is that few researchers really know whether and how their research can have a societal impact. We

believe that one reason for this is that science communication and societal impact hardly plays a role in researchers' education.

Over the years we put some thoughts in the tools and material we used for our trainings. Due to the lack of adequate material, we began using tools and teaching material from other fields. One tool that has proved useful in our training courses is the Business Model Canvas (BMC) by Osterwalder (2008). The BMC is a simple template for developing business models, in which the typical activities of the respective business model are formulated and put into relation with the relevant resources and actors in order to develop a clear value proposition. In this respect, a new business model is not much different from a science communication project. Both are about creating an offer based on available resources for which there is or could be an audience. Sure, science and business differ in essential respects. One reason is that in science, success is generally expressed not in financial gains, but in reputational gains (e.g., citations, awards, renowned grants). Of course, the production conditions and actor constellations in science are fundamentally different to those in business. Universities are not factories, and the recipients of scientific achievements are usually not customers in the narrow sense. Whenever we used the BMC for teaching and training, the course participants perceived these differences as irritating.

We therefore decided to fundamentally revise the BMC and adapt it to the needs and conditions of science. The result is the Research Impact Canvas (RIC), a simple canvas that deals with the most important questions in possible outreach activities and correlates them in a meaningful way. In our opinion, the RIC is a simple yet powerful strategic tool for planning science communication activities. The aim of the RIC is to make science communication activities manageable. At the same time, it should help researchers to develop empathy for people outside science.

Five distinct modules

The RIC consists of five distinct modules (comprising in total fifteen elements) of a coherent impact strategy. These are: value, translation, operation, administration, evaluation. The modules and the respective elements it contains should be worked through iteratively to generate an effective strategy for your impact project.

Module 1 - Value

The first step involves using your own expertise in order to create an impact proposition for an envisioned group. What is the expertise you have and which of your other skills might help you to realise your project? Who do you want to reach and what interests them? The place where your expertise and their interest meet and match is what we call an "impact proposition".

- **Expertise**: The knowledge and skills you have at your disposal (e.g., your specific research field, your communication skills).
- **Impact Proposition**: The societal added value you hope to generate with your research (e.g., useful insights you could deliver for business, politics, and/or broader society).
- **Target Groups**: The groups you want to reach with your outreach activity (e.g., journalists).

Module 2 - Translation

The second step involves the process of translating expertise into a specific product or activity. So, in general terms, what is the best format to reach your target group? Can you best convey your content/idea in written form or do you want to produce a podcast, a video or something completely different? The answer to this question gives rise to another: How will the format you chose find its way to your target group? How do you distribute it? Is there a "right time"? For example, Is there an ongoing public debate or a change in legislation that is relevant to you?

- **Strategic Opportunity**: The specific occasion to launch an outreach activity (e.g., ongoing political campaign)
- **Format**: The medium that you use for your outreach activity (e.g., a podcast).
- **Channel**: The channel you choose to reach your target audience (e.g., ITunes for a podcast).

Module 3 - Operation

The third step involves reflecting on the operational activities that are necessary to realize a specific impact proposition. Besides being smart and having all the expertise and skills you luckily can bring yourself, are there other people you need for your project? Can they add skills, knowledge or resources you don't have but need? To develop awareness of the operational effort, it is always helpful to spell out the core task your project requires and whether you need help or resources to manage them or not.

- **Core Tasks**: The most important activities in executing your impact proposition (e.g. producing podcasts).
- **Collaborators**: Partners that you have to collaborate with in order to realize your impact proposition (e.g., researchers with relevant knowledge; persons with valuable contacts).
- **Resources**: The material and immaterial resources that your impact proposition requires (e.g., office space, equipment, analysis software).

Module 4 - Administration

There is no such thing as a free lunch. So you should be honest that even a project that "only" requires you to invest your own time comes with some costs. Bigger projects might actually need a lot of money to come true. So step four involves reflection on the administrative activities that are necessary to undertake your outreach activity. Do you need money and, if the answer is yes, where are you going to get it from? Sometimes it is also helpful to take a deeper look on your potential funding partners, and whether they add constraints or benefits.

- **Costs**: The financial cost of your outreach activity.
- **Funding**: Possible financing sources for your outreach activity (e.g., research foundation, private investment).

Module 5 - Evaluation

The last thing you should do is to look at your project from the end. What would make it successful? It is useful to identify some criteria beforehand; these should reflect the intended (personal and societal) effects of your project and measure its impact.

- **Measurability**: Ways to measure the impact of your outreach activity (e.g., views, revenue, traction)
- **Risks**: Potential negative impacts for you, your organization, or society at large (e.g., reputational damage).
- **Rewards**: Potential positive impacts for you, your organization, or society at large (e.g., reputational gain, less CO2-emissions)

Using the Research Impact Canvas

We are well aware that the RIC is not a panacea for all the problems science experiences in terms of its societal role. Furthermore, it has only limited use in basic research, where the aim of reaching an audience outside of academia is secondary. Still, we believe that the RIC helps researchers (and people working in research management) anticipating and coordinating typical tasks that occur when planning outreach activities. In our experience, there is an immense need for actionable knowledge from science in society and there is immense room for improving the relationship between science and society. For this reason we believe that the Research Impact Canvas can be of great use in the planning of science communication and public engagement activities.

The RIC is still in beta; we appreciate feedback and criticism of all sorts in order to improve it. Furthermore: the RIC is meant as an open resource; this is why we are sharing it under a

CC-BY-2.0 license and currently working on methods and exercises to fill out the single fields. Stay tuned!

References

Osterwalder, A., Pigneur, Y., & Clark, T. (2010). Business model generation: A handbook for visionaries, game changers, and challengers. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.