

# The true costs of knowledge exchange – a checklist

*Planning and budgeting knowledge exchange activities can often be a black box exercise, with activity occurring in an ad-hoc and un-costed fashion. Drawing on case studies of successful knowledge exchange projects, Denis Karcher and Chris Cvitanovic present a framework for where costs fall in knowledge exchange processes and a checklist for researchers looking to plan for knowledge exchange.*

---

Knowledge exchange (KE) at the interface of research and decision-making is increasingly used as a way to achieve research outcomes and impacts. For example, when done effectively, interactive KE can build capacity for evidence-informed decision-making. However, impacts on policy are just one of the diverse outcomes interactive knowledge exchange can generate – A [recent review](#) showcased a diverse range of impacts that can occur on individuals, society, research process, or the environment, to name a few.

However, despite increased research attention about the importance of KE and the ways by which it can be achieved, there is little information on the monetary and non-monetary costs that those funding (e.g. research donors) and conducting (e.g. universities) KE projects should consider. In particular, despite acknowledgement that effective knowledge exchange can be very expensive, there are few sources in depth outlining the range of costs involved in KE practices, beyond broad framings of direct monetary costs (e.g., for 'engagement'). As such, there is also no guidance on how to plan and budget for effective and efficient KE.

To address this gap, [we examined](#) four case studies that apply common approaches to KE (knowledge co-production, knowledge brokerage, boundary organisation or social connections/networks) in conjunction with a literature review to begin to identify and articulate the full range of costs associated with KE. In doing so we also generate a series of questions to help guide how researchers and practitioners plan their knowledge exchange efforts.

## Appreciating the true costs of knowledge exchange

We found that effective KE comes with real, significant, and often unforeseen costs that may hinder its effectiveness if not considered and planned for early-on in the process. Specifically, we identified a range of costs that apply before, during, and after KE activities (summarised in Figure 2).

Before		Knowledge exchange	
Direct	Indirect	Direct	Indirect
Working hours & staff time	Initial contacts, stakeholder mapping	Administrative costs	Energy and
Team-building and coordinating	Motivation, energy, emotional effort	Implementation costs (e.g. hiring labour)	Communic
Recruiting staff	Trust, agency, relationship building	Production costs	Keeping pa
Training	Awareness plans	Research budgets & student stipends	involved
Costs of making decisions	Risk of non-funding	Developing support products	Overcomin
Networking or horizon scanning	Negotiating funding contracts	Travel and accommodation	disciplinary
		Events, activities, co-location, meetings, conferences, venues	barriers
		Catering, coffee, parking, allowance/ compensation	Conflicts, p
			Personal d
			discomfort
			Risk of mis
			Risk to rela
			Being avail

Figure 2: Conceptual overview of the diverse costs of KE based on a review of the literature, and four case study experiences (see [Karcher et al., 2022a](#), Figure 1, also attribution of sources in the table).

As can be seen in the table above, the costs associated with KE can be direct (e.g., budget for training, labour, administration, events) and/or indirect. Indirect costs can be both monetary (e.g., costs that cover the broader knowledge exchange setting, overheads, etc.) and non-monetary in value (e.g., emotional effort, trust building). The latter non-monetary costs could be supported, for example, through institutional support structures (e.g. employment of knowledge brokers and/or performance metrics that recognise a broader set of activities such as those required to build trust) or the presence of a collaborative and supportive workplace culture,. Our study outlines that KE is not a one-off discrete activity and the nature and temporal resolution of the costs needs to be considered. As such, when planning KE activities, it is critical to acknowledge the full diversity of costs as many are intangible, hard to measure, underappreciated and often insufficiently budgeted for within research projects.

## Key questions to plan KE more efficiently

To help researchers and practitioners better account for the diversity of costs involved in effective KE, we also identified a range of considerations to guide planning and budgeting activities. For example, we suggest that researchers considering KE activities should account for contextual preconditions and invest in pre-project effort (i.e. KE must start well before the research activity, and this effort involves real direct and indirect costs). Here, we draw on the findings of our paper to outline the types of questions that researchers should ask themselves to inform their planning and budgeting for KE to adequately account for four key aspects: the context in which the KE will take place, the scale of the KE activities, the timeframes over which KE processes will take place, and opportunities for cost-efficiencies:

### **Context**

- What knowledge needs to be integrated, (co-)created and shared?
- Is there a need to engage diverse stakeholders/participants?
- What is the local context (including relevant stakeholders and their goals/needs)?
- How can you meaningfully and equitably include all relevant actors and knowledge types to your project?
- Is it possible to build on existing relationships?

### **Scale**

- Which KE activities are most suited and most efficient to achieving the goals of your project?
- Which obstacles can be expected?
- Are you missing any expertise in the team?
- How to address conflicts and power dynamics during interactions?

### **Timeframe and process**

- What time and money will it take to get to know the actors' expectations and build relationships and trust?
- What are realistic tangible and intangible outcomes of KE and to whom are they relevant?
- What is the timeframe for impact?
- How will the continuity of engagement and maintenance of networks be ensured?

### **Funding and cost-efficiency**

- What costs (incl. indirect) are expected from KE engagement (incl. events and meetings)?
- What budgetary flexibility is needed throughout the KE process?
- Do the expected benefits outweigh the full range of costs?
- What is the minimal fall-back option if the proposal/grant is not successful?

---

*This post draws on Karcher, D.B., Cvitanovic, C., Colvin, R.M., van Putten, I.E., Reed, M.S., 2021. [Is this what success looks like? Mismatches between the aims, claims, and evidence used to demonstrate impact from knowledge exchange processes at the interface of environmental science and policy](#), published in *Environmental Science & Policy* and Karcher, D.B., Cvitanovic, C., Sherlock, R., Hobday, A.J., Stephenson, R.L., Dickey-Collas, M., van Putten, I.E., 2022a. [More than money – The costs of knowledge exchange at the interface of science and policy](#), published in *Ocean & Coastal Management*.*

*The content generated on this blog is for information purposes only. This Article gives the views and opinions of the authors and does not reflect the views and opinions of the Impact of Social Science blog (the blog), nor of the London School of Economics and Political Science. Please review our [comments policy](#) if you have any concerns on posting a comment below.*

*Image Credit: Adapted from [Karcher et al., 2022](#).*

---

