

Exchange of Experience and Training on Impact Assessment of Research Infrastructures

Hosted by EATRIS-ERIC, co-organised by EATRIS-ERIC and EFIS Centre

Context & Rationale

[EATRIS](#) hosted a workshop on Impact Assessment of Research Infrastructures on March 30-31, 2023 at EATRIS Hub headquarters in Amsterdam, as part of the H2020 project, [EOSC-Life](#). Co-organised with the [EFIS Centre](#), the workshop was initiated and designed to offer an opportunity for the Life Science Research Infrastructure (RI) community to exchange experiences and learn from one another on the topic of impact assessment.

RIs are increasingly required to better monitor, assess and communicate their societal value and impact to national and European funders, however most RIs currently often lack dedicated human and financial resources to do so. We deemed essential to organise this workshop as the kick-off of a community of practice on RI impact to support continuous engagement and coordinate ongoing efforts.

The workshop was attended by 17 representatives of 10 research infrastructure hubs and national nodes, and offered a balanced programme of presentations from EFIS and experienced RIs and interactive group reflection sessions (see [Agenda](#)).

The list of takeaways below is an executive summary of the lessons learned, which were shared by the speakers, and informal reflections shared by the participants. Under the Annex provided on page 4, you will find an exhaustive table of the outcomes of the group exercises held on the second day. Participants were invited to reflect on the challenges they face with Impact Assessment and subsequently think of potential solutions according to four main areas of interest: data collection; impact framework; resources; and nodes.

Following this workshop, EATRIS will set up a community of practice around RI impact, to ensure RIs, ERICs in particular, can continue to exchange, learn and grow in the area of Impact Assessment. A first exchange is planned on Friday, June 9, 2023.

We would like to thank our speakers (Corinne Martin, ELIXIR, and Kim Gurwitz, EMBL-EBI) and trainers (Elina Griniece and Matias Barberis, EFIS Centre) for their highly valuable contribution and all the participants (Euro-Bioimaging, INSTRUCT, ECRIN, EATRIS, Health-RI, Berlin Institute of Health, ELIXIR UK, ELIXIR Norway) for their active engagement and interest in the topic.

For more information, please contact: Anne-Charlotte Fauvel, EATRIS' Head of European Affairs, annecharlottefauvel@eatris.eu

8 Takeaways from the Workshop

It's never too early to start

Several participating RIs pointed out the importance of planning and organising data collection from the very beginning of the operations, as Impact Assessment influences IT and HR needs of the organization, node reporting requirements and communication strategies among several other aspects. Start early (even from the design phase of the RI) and refine your strategy as you progress. This also applies to the projects that RIs may lead or contribute to; impact assessment has to be embedded in the project design for it to happen.

One place to start is to draft the Impact Statement of your RI to highlight impact areas where you can actively influence the outcome.

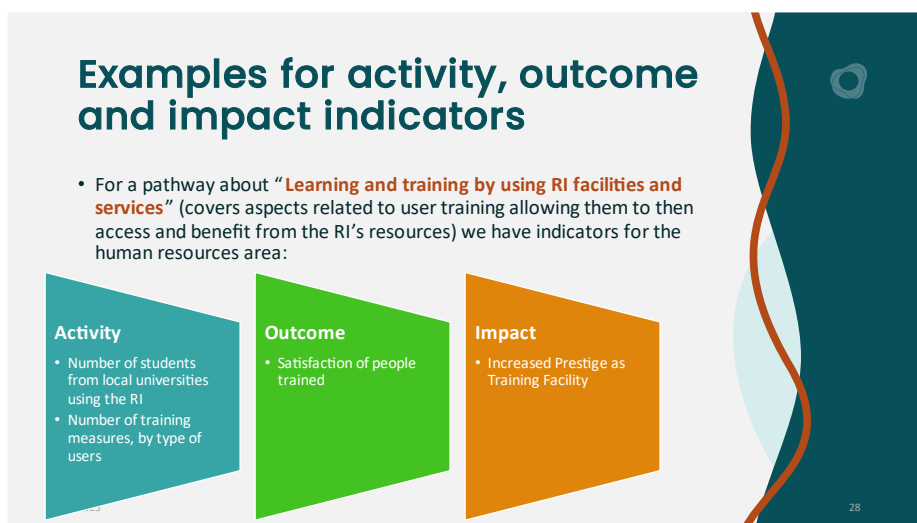
Prioritise according to resources you have available

Impact monitoring and assessment requires dedicated human resources. Depending on the HR you can dedicate to Impact Assessment within your organization, you may want to start small and focus only on a few highly strategic impact areas and indicators, and in any case, you will need to make choices, and the process to get comfortable with your Impact Assessment methods, might be slow. Make sure you manage your own expectations and those of your funders.

Leverage impact areas and indicators as strategic development tools

Putting together a formal impact framework structuring the RI's activities, related outputs and outcomes can help structure and refine the activities the RI should focus on to reach the desired impact. Outcomes should be quantifiable; impact is an extrapolation.

The list of indicators could be structured as follows: activity indicators, outcomes indicators and impact indicators. Develop simple indicators, for which you can easily retrieve data (especially for the nodes), try not to treat Impact Assessment as a side project. Embed Impact Assessment at the core of your operations and strategy development.



Extract from EFIS presentation – the full presentation is available [here](#)

Contextualise your indicators

Try not to present raw numbers and numbers alone, especially to funders. Provide as much as contextual information as possible along with the data you have collected. Contextual information may include mentions of the assumptions and limitations of the data collection, as well as the scale of your RI operations. Find a good balance between quantitative and qualitative indicators (e.g. success stories).

Participants shared a common concern that funders may at times overlook the scale of the RI operations and annual budget when assessing its impact.

Impact Assessment monitoring can be “as simple as an Excel spreadsheet”

One of the main and in appearance simplistic observations drawn from the workshop was that the most effective way to proceed with your Impact Assessment might be to structure your data in-house using a simple Excel spreadsheet. There are commercial tools that have been designed to help organisations map their impact better, however, thus far, and due to RI specificities, no RI present at the workshop recommended any particular commercial tools, apart from external consultancy for impact framework design (e.g. EFIS Centre), data visualization (e.g. IT expert) and paper mining (e.g. subscription-based databases).

Create a culture of impact: the importance of node engagement for Impact Assessment for distributed RIs

Participants shared a common concern that as the Hub leads Impact Assessment efforts, the impact of the nodes may be underreported. Several ideas were shared to stimulate the engagement of node staff on the topic of Impact Assessment, notably:

- Identify impact champions among the nodes;
- Ask volunteers to work on one impact case study;
- Organise staff exchanges among nodes and the hub;
- Provide incentives to the nodes curious about Impact Assessment: e.g. offer extra budget to cover their personnel effort and travel expenses to attend workshops and training; organise a competition among the nodes for the best impact pitch.

Some RI such as ELIXIR also contracted EFIS to provide formal training complemented by “node support calls”, making EFIS Centre experts available to help node staff navigate their Impact Assessment methodologies;

- Ensure online legacy of the work done through your RI intranet.

What matters is to encourage a “monitoring and Impact Assessment mindset” and create a culture of impact among your RI.

Know your audience and share widely

RIs often communicate towards a diverse group of key stakeholders (scientists, policy-makers, funders, infrastructure members, etc.), the evidence collected may speak better to a group versus another.

Share the results of your impact assessment widely (RI main PowerPoint presentation, Annual Reports, news articles, videos, etc.), and make sure you work closely with your communications team.

Don't do it alone

The workshop was symptomatic of the need for the RI community to share more experiences on this topic, which can appear daunting for RI with limited HR to dedicate to this endeavor. A community of practice has been set up following the workshop, contact EATRIS if you'd like to join (see above for contact information).

On a 2-year to 5-year cycle, you may want someone external to evaluate your Impact Assessment thus far, ensuring that you are not missing out on any critical impact pathway.

Links to Workshop Presentations

- [Elina Griniece and Matias Barberis, EFIS](#)
- [Anne-Charlotte Fauvel, EATRIS](#)
- [Corinne Martin, ELIXIR](#)
- [Kim Gurwitz, EMBL-EBI](#)

Next page: Annex 1 – Outcome of the group exercises on Impact Assessment challenges and solutions for RI

Annex 1: Outcome of the group exercises on IA related challenges and solutions

Area	Problems identified	Solutions
Data collection methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Surveys: How to get more responses/people to answer more questions/leave comments? - Surveys: design, response rate (getting critical mass), translation of surveys into impact narratives - Difficulty in collecting qualitative data in a non-biased way - Taking credit for something we only partially contributed to (e.g. collaborative projects) - Collection and access to “relevant” data as for example of publications of clinical trials years after the start - Not capturing important impacts because we are not informed by the users (e.g. a new collaboration, publications) – things that you become aware of over “coffee breaks” - Collection of data on films <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How best to capture contact of audience for feedback from social media (YouTube/Twitter, etc) How to track longer term outcomes resulting from introductory videos (people might not remember unlike a training course) Converting subsets of audience from survey to interviews - GDPR limitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Standardised questions - Incentives to respond (prizes, the opportunity to win a training) - Help from communication team + balance of questions and connect quantitative and qualitative questions - Messaging in the survey text to incentivise + anonymised survey
Impact framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hierarchy of impacts - Identify relevant indicators for each impact pathway - Systematised framework not yet in place (central data organisation, guidelines) - Implementation & monitoring impact of diverse programmes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Design & implement a comprehensive framework including design & plan for stakeholder engagement/ buy in -> demonstrate clearly value to them - Just do it, it’s not an exact science

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Streamlining common KPIs – any guidance? - How best not to overburden researcher and encourage consistent engagement? - Outputs fragmented - Shared understanding of what are activities, outcomes, impact; expectations from funders at EU level and national level - IA lagging behind RI developments 	
<p>Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dedicating sufficient staff, time and funding for impact assessment strategy - Engagement of relevant staff – done on top of other activities - Due to the size of the organisation, the dedicated people do not have time to do the impact analysis because they get so many more acute tasks to do - Establishing the right questions – the people who are doing the impact assessment are experts in other fields, not this one - Budget + expertise: funding long-term sustainability, manpower, budget for training staff, IT mining expertise or budget for external expert, analysis expertise, budget to get expertise externally - Slow process because it is not high-priority - Unfamiliar process – inexperienced, how to know when don't know (good practice guidelines?, team up internally & externally - Lack of appreciation of impact as a process, as a serious discipline - Getting scientists and developers to value impact measurements is very hard - Lack of peoplepower to get in-depth info on our training impact (conduct interviews, analysis and synthesis) and to integrate feedback properly into next trainings (incomplete impact circle) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Raise awareness of “serious” fields that use/do impact analysis e.g. international development use impact logic by default - Include impact assessment skills/activities in DORA & COARA - Connect impact assessment to things that need to be done anyways - Highlight impact assessment as a skill and recognise this/ put on performance review/ job ad. Also distribute the workload. - Identify impact champions to encourage others

Nodes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We don't have a template. ERICs/other organisations need more collaboration and sharing practical tips. - Establishing the ways to collect data - Lack of consolidated and coordinated impact assessment strategy across the entire RI - Quality/ reliability of the data coming in from the nodes varies a lot (they have mentioned not being able to capture data from national institutes) - Missing a community of practice around impact that spans several research infrastructures - "Slack in the system" to interact – we are distributed, we wear several hats - Lack of knowledge/understanding/resource (and potentially) motivation at the node level - Low awareness on impact at higher management, nodes, team leaders, general staff - Implementing (and keeping) an "impact" driven culture - Lacks an organisational focus on impact – one of two people are interested in it, but it is more of a side activity than something we have to do - Convincing the nodes that it is worth their time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guidelines should be crystal-clear (+ concrete examples) - Identify nodes who are already reporting a lot at national level -> get their lessons learned - ARIA system looks fabulous to track all the activities funded by a RI - Slack space? Mailing list? Annual event to network? - Train the nodes on what/ how they could track/ collect data - Travel grants or person months - Tweak existing monitoring systems to include impact angle - Embed impact in existing processes (things that nodes already have to do) - Find impact champions/locomotives at the node level - Give nodes staff some kind of exposure/recognition (ex.co-authors in a publication)
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