

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE: A KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PLANNING GUIDE

Rhoda Reardon, John Lavis, and Jane Gibson

- A new guide for knowledge transfer practitioners shows them how to get research into the hands of people who use it.
- The guide is organized around five key principles: determining the message; the target audience; the messenger; the transfer method; and the expected impact.
- Results are best when researchers and decision makers already have existing relationships built on ongoing exchanges of information and ideas.

What works and what doesn't when trying to get research into the hands of people who need it to make decisions? Researchers Rhonda Reardon, John Lavis, and Jane Gibson have put together a simple guide based on the evidence and experiences of practitioners in the knowledge transfer field. The guide is of particular value to individuals who want to disseminate research results.

From Research to Practice: A Knowledge Transfer Planning Guide is organized around five basic principles, or questions, developed to put the theory of knowledge transfer into practice. The authors recommend practitioners ask themselves 1) What is the message? 2) Who is the audience? 3) Who is the messenger? 4) What is the transfer method? and 5) What is the expected outcome? to put the five principles into action.

Five worksheets offer a step-by-step approach to answering those questions. What follows is a broad overview of the guiding principles related to each question.

What is the Message?

The message should communicate what the research means and why it is important. The guide identifies three different types:

1. a message driven by facts or data;
2. a message that expresses an actionable idea; and
3. a message that can provoke discussion among the stakeholders but cannot direct decisions because the evidence is limited.

According to the authors, determining the message type can help with the decision of how best to communicate it.

Who is the Audience/Who Should be the Messenger?

The guide underscores the importance of **targeting an audience** (determining those best positioned to use the research results) and **learning all there is to know** about that audience before bringing researchers and decision

makers together. Taking into account the impact of a proposed change on decision makers also improves the chance the message will be heard. The authors recommend practitioners consider the costs, resources, or expertise required and their availability when crafting their message.

Another way to get their message heard, according to the authors, is to choose the right messenger. Credible messengers deliver results.

What is the Transfer Method?

Research shows the best way to get evidence into the hands of those who need it is to bring researchers and decision makers face-to-face. However, that's not always possible.

The guide identifies other ways to try to get research used by decision makers. These include offering lectures and educational materials; using reminder messages to prompt evidence-informed actions; designing interventions to overcome identified barriers; performing audits and providing feedback; directing evidence to respected opinion leaders within a given discipline to influence the actions of others; and encouraging patient involvement when it will improve performance.

What is the Expected Outcome?

The guide also recommends practitioners define their expected impact, even if they don't intend to monitor the outcome of their efforts. This helps determine not only the scope of a given plan but also the best approach to use.

The guide asks practitioners to think about impact in terms of how much the information exchange could 1) change attitudes or awareness; 2) change policies; or 3) validate decisions already made. Electronic and media monitoring are offered as tools for assessing outcomes if practitioners are interested in finding out whether and how much their efforts paid off.

The principles outlined in the guide apply to all knowledge transfer initiatives, but the authors maintain they deliver the best results when ongoing relationships have already been established between researchers and decision makers.

Bibliographic Reference(s)

Reardon R et al. 2006. *From Research to Practice: A Knowledge Transfer Planning Guide*. Institute for Work & Health, Toronto. http://www.iwh.on.ca/kte/images/IWH_kte_workbook.pdf

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