

Your position as a ‘knowledge broker’

Time: Generally takes < 2 hours for one project.

Resources: Requires two large pieces of flip chart paper, marker pens and 3-5 people participating.

What is the purpose: To help decide what role you play in communicating your message and whether others can play an advocacy/brokering role for you.

This tool helps to set the scene for the project’s communications strategy as it relates to policy influence. Thinking through this can really help to refine your communications plans and activities.

The key question is deciding what type of advocacy/brokering role your project needs to play. This may vary throughout the project life, but at least if you are aware, you can start to decide where you need to prioritise your efforts. It will also help you to determine whether you are always the best messenger for your research. Other organisations may be better placed to take part in debates, convene groups of people or lobby for a particular point of view. They should have all appeared on your stakeholder map, but in terms of developing a robust communications strategy it is helpful to consider your own comparative advantage and that of others.

Table 2 sets out the four different functions which form part of the process. These are:

Function	Typical project leader role (Examples)	What others may do (Examples)
Information intermediary: collating information and ensuring it is accessible (dissemination)	Preparing project reports, academic articles, briefing papers, web pages, presentations, using social media etc.	[Not much: the project’s responsibility, steered by the lead researcher]
Knowledge translation: ensuring that information is translated into formats understandable by different groups of people	Preparing briefs for policy-makers, web pages or blogs for the general public, guides for technical staff, (simplified) reports or presentations to local stakeholders (e.g. village committees) and project participants.	Setting project results in context of other work, synthesising this work with other similar work, arranging events that showcase the results in tandem with other results.
Knowledge brokering: active involvement in decision-making to improve the use of evidence	Engaging in ongoing discussions with key decision-makers, participating in expert advisory groups for policymaking, co-producing knowledge on project-related issues.	Using project results to engage in wider debates about change, building coalitions of like-minded groups and people, spotting opportunities for others to use project results.
System-level facilitation: enabling system-level changes to improve the flow of knowledge and opportunities for innovation. This can happen at three levels: individual, organisational and system.	Improving the capacity of individuals and organisations to continue this sort of work. At system level, changing conceptual understandings of mental health.	Committing resources to project-related issues (e.g. further research funds, support to networks). Putting in place structures and organisations that facilitate new networks, partnerships or collaborations.

Table 2: Communications functions, in detail

It is often difficult to distinguish exactly between the four functions, but they are systemically linked to each other (see Figure 4 below). Note that the form of communication changes as you move across the spectrum: from linear dissemination to co-production of knowledge.

How to do it:

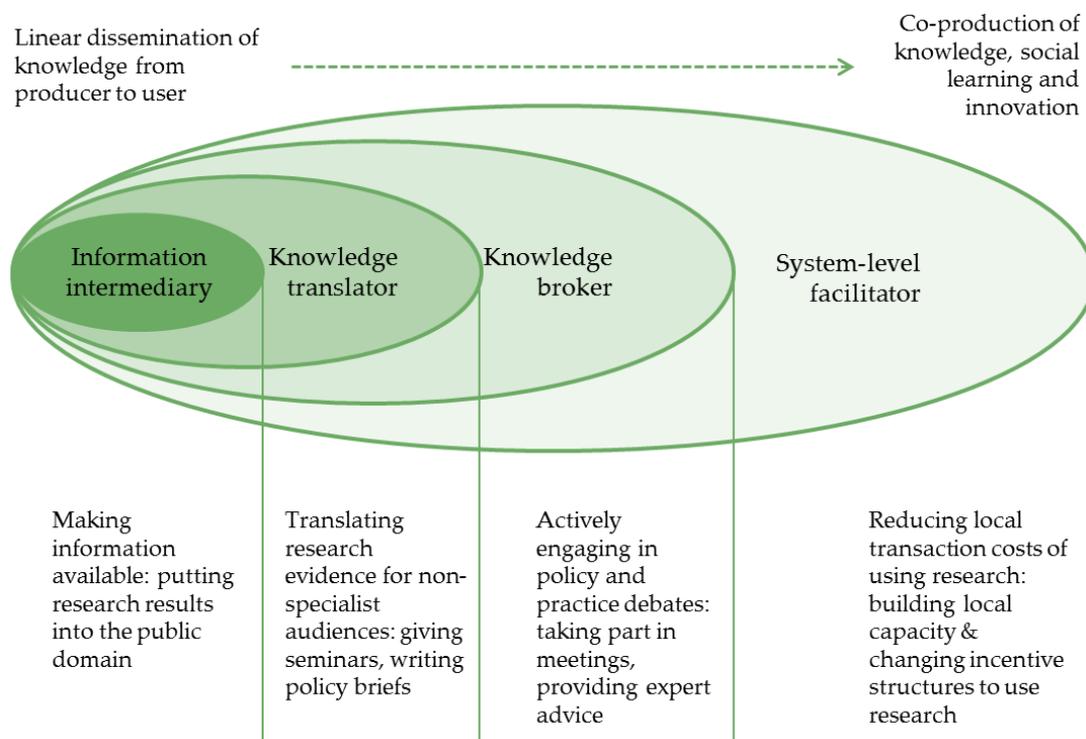


Fig 4: The spectrum of knowledge functions

Each project should not attempt to undertake all four types of function at once. Instead, plotting where you and your other stakeholders are situated on the framework will help you decide what sort of activities will be important at different stages in your project's lifecycle (and who will be best placed to do them). Once these role(s) are identified, defining communication objectives and developing messages and activities becomes much clearer.

The steps:

1. Put the piece of flip chart paper on the wall or somewhere accessible, and appoint a scribe who has the marker pen.
 2. Draw the above spheres onto the paper, replicating the four categories: information intermediary; knowledge translator; knowledge broker; and system level facilitator.
 3. Ensure everyone is happy with what the differences are between the four categories (making sure they recognise that the boundaries are sometimes fuzzy).
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4. As a group, start plotting where you sit on the spectrum. You may need to place yourself in several of the categories if you think you are fulfilling several different roles. Highlight any that you think you do particularly well.
 5. As a group, start plotting where your other stakeholders sit on the spectrum.
 6. Discuss what the overall map looks like: where are you particularly strong or weak? Where are there gaps that nobody is filling? What might that imply for how you are able to facilitate the uptake of knowledge/evidence into policy?

After this exercise

It is important to remember that not everyone needs to do everything. After this exercise, link the discussion about what to do next back to people's mandates. Some may not have a mandate to be a knowledge broker and that is fine. If you find gaps, they can be filled in a number of ways: a) by changing your mandate, b) by working with others c) by finding new people to work with.



This tool is part of a [Global Mental Health Policy Toolkit](#) created in response to a report titled ['Global Mental Health from a Policy Perspective: A Context Analysis'](#) produced by the [Research and Policy in Development \(RAPID\) team at the Overseas Development Institute \(ODI\)](#) for the Mental Health Innovation Network (MHIN). For more details visit: www.mhinnovation.net/