

## GUIDANCE NOTE 1

# Principles of monitoring, evaluation and learning for policy engagement

## Strategising up front, or at an early stage

### 1. Start early

Ever had to scramble at the last minute to collect information for a report to research funders or for a REF case study? Ever wished you'd thought a little more about how and when to engage with policy makers at the beginning of your research?

**Many people leave monitoring and learning until the end of a project, but starting early will increase the chances of success and save time later.**



### 2. Acknowledge complexity, context and luck

The policy process can be disorderly and unpredictable. The ability of researchers to have an impact depends not only on their experience and expertise, but also on the political environment and sheer chance.

**This amplifies the importance of learning as you go, and makes monitoring and evaluation more like understanding a game of poker, than a game of chess.**



### 3. Think about relationships, power and politics

Policies are forged in a crucible of vested interests. Research evidence is just one of the many contributions competing for the oxygen of attention. Researchers are among many other actors on the policy-making stage, who are often connected in complex ways that are not always visible.



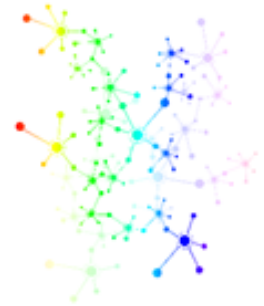
**Understanding the key players, what makes them tick and how they relate is important for effective engagement as well as for assessing change over time.**

## Monitoring and learning by doing

### 4. Track contacts, networks and coalitions early

Policy engagement is all about relationships - investing in them, maintaining them and, from time to time, ending them. This often requires building broader interest groups or coalitions.

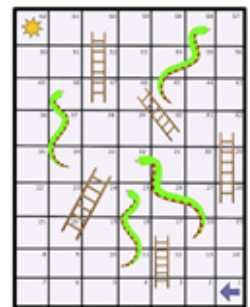
**Keeping track of how these relationships are evolving is key to learning and adapting as you go, as well as being able to tell the story of how outcomes occur.**



### 5. Track outcomes and impact – explore multiple pathways

Changes in ideas, behaviours, policies or practices are usually the result of a combination of factors. The contribution of evidence and your policy engagement may be a small part of a larger jigsaw. Your engagement might be focused directly on policymakers, or be more oblique or indirect.

**Harvesting outcomes and gathering intelligence about how they came about is a critical step in the learning journey.**



## Evaluation and reflection

### 6. Make space for learning and reflection

Sense-making is a critical part of monitoring and evaluation, yet is often under-resourced, or simply overlooked. Creating the time and space for learning about your engagement is important.

**Set up a regular time and space for reflection and protect it.**



### 7. Ensure evaluation is fit for purpose

Is an evaluation really necessary? What questions are most important? Who is interested? Involving people who care about an evaluation is an important predictor of findings being used.



**Being clear about purpose and who is involved is the key to designing an appropriate evaluation which is robust and useful.**