

## **What does impact mean to me? – Cassy Rutherford, Funder**

So the Robertson Trust is an independent funder that supports third sector organisations aiming to improve the lives of individuals and communities living in Scotland. We produce and commission our own research, often with an explicit aim of informing policy and practice, and we also read and receive a lot of research from applicants and grant-holders. From our perspective, research impact means research that is used and useful. Whether it's a small light touch piece of research, or something much bigger, in our experience we've identified a couple of trends that we think helps to improve the likelihood of research impact.

So first of all, for us, having a clear, shared purpose at the start of any research project has been really essential. Before we produce any research with the trust we produce a plan which outlines the research questions, timescales, and proposed outputs, and we get that signed off by all the internal and external stakeholders. That's not to say they're not flexible during the larger research project, so plans can change, absolutely, but ensuring that there's that shared outstanding has been really, really valuable to us. Before we had the plans we did have some research where we produced research, where it turned out to be everyone had slightly different expectations about what they were going to receive. And it meant that the outputs actually weren't that useful in the end. There was almost no point in doing it.

Research needs to be timely, so it needs to be answering the right questions at the right times. Recently we part-funded 'Hard Edges Scotland,' which looks at severe and multiple disadvantage in Scotland. And we've been told by a couple of people that this research project helped to inform Scottish Government's recent programme for government, particularly around health and justice areas of work. And we think that's because it answers a lot of questions, it provides the data that they need to take a more collaborative and preventative approach to addressing some of the really deep-seated challenging problems in our society.

For us there's usually a collaborative element to successful research or research that has impact. So that's sometimes done through data gathering and analysis, but it might also be as simple as engaging stakeholders in some of those early conversations and early plans. We recently commissioned some research to see what published evidence tells us works in addressing the term 'mental health.' We were speaking to relevant Scottish Government departments right from the outset of that and they helped us to set the parameters of the research and the research questions. We know that they're using the research to inform some of their own discussions. And we think it's because we know the research answers questions that they had, as well as questions that we had. It wasn't just that we went to produce the research, put it on their desk and said 'There you go, I hope it's of use.'

Research should be produced in plain English and shared in a way that's accessible to the audience that you're intending it to be used by. So the big pieces of work that we commission will usually produce a big, big full report with a methodology, the bibliography. But we know that very few people actually have the time to read that much detail. So we also try to produce some reports,

blogs, infographics, we'll pull together key themes from various research and evaluation projects to submit evidence to Scottish Parliament committees which we've done recently. Anything which helps make the findings a little bit more manageable and easy to digest certainly helps with the impact. And in our experience, meetings, more than reports, is actually one of the best ways of disseminating research and having it used by people. So this comes back to my point about collaboration. Collaborating at each point, so from the planning right through to the dissemination is essential. And with the publication of 'Hard Edges Scotland' we're actually using that as a launch pad to host some events and some conversations to see what the next steps are. So it's not just we commissioned some research and it's going to sit on a shelf.

So for us, research impact is research that is used, it's research that's useful, and for us it should always be seen as the starting point of a conversation, or the starting point of actions and decisions, never the end point. Once the research project is finished, it shouldn't just sit on a shelf, it should be used to start conversations, and I think that's what really helps to increase its impact.