

BRIDGES N+ ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2026

How to maximise the impact of your research projects

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What do we mean by 'impact'?

Plain and simple and it is not the same as publishing

A real change or benefit to people's lives, beyond the university.

It is not just...

- a paper or a conference talk
- how many people came to a workshop
- 'raising awareness' in general

It is...

- someone doing something they could not do before
- a service, council or charity changing how it works
- a tool that is actually used, in a real home

Why think about impact from day one?

Not only because a funder asks — because it makes your project better



It shapes better research

Asking ‘who benefits and how?’ early sharpens your design, your questions and your partnerships.



It builds the right relationships

Partners and people with lived experience shape the work, rather than being invited at the end.



It saves you work later

Evidence gathered as you go is far easier, and far more credible, than evidence reconstructed afterwards.

Impact is not a report you write at the end. It is a way of designing your project from the start.

Four questions worth asking early

If you can answer these, you are already thinking about impact well

1

Who benefits?

Be specific. Not just 'stakeholders': which people, which organisations, which communities?

2

What changes for them?

What will be different afterwards that is not true today?

3

What evidence would show that?

Decide before you begin, so you gather it as you go, not afterwards.

4

Who else might see a change?

Change often lands in more than one place: a person living with dementia, a family member, or a service whose practice shifts.

A short answer to each is enough to start. This is a prompt, not a form to fill in.

Four very different projects

Illustrations only — not templates. Impact will and should look different in every project.



Spaces

A library redesigns its signage

Benefits: visitors with dementia, and staff

Change: people find their way independently



Arts & culture

A co-designed music session

Benefits: participants and their families

Change: connection and enjoyment



Communication

A word-finding support tool

Benefits: people with speech changes

Change: everyday conversation feels easier



Digital translation

A prototype reaches real homes

Benefits: households, and a care provider

Change: the tool is used, not shelved

Lived experience is not an add-on

It is what makes an impact claim credible in the first place

If we are claiming that life improved for people living with dementia, then the most important evidence comes from them.

In practice

- Involve people early in deciding what matters, not just reviewing it at the end
- Make taking part easy: accessible formats, flexible ways to contribute
- Consent is ongoing, not a one-off form
- Be reciprocal: value people's time and support their aims, not only your project's

And to everyone here with lived experience of dementia , either as a person living with it, or as a carer your view of whether something helped is the evidence that matters most.

How I can help

- Thinking through impact while you are still shaping a bid
- Working together on what evidence to gather, and when
- Turning what you have done into something a funder or partner can read
- With the BRIDGES team, connecting you to partners and lived-experience contributors across the network



Get in touch

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Thank you

Four questions, to remember when thinking about a potential BRIDGES project:

- **Who benefits?**
- **What changes for them?**
- **What evidence would show it?**
- **Who else might see a change?**

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