
GLOSSARY OF SRE TERMS

(*Note: Definitions quoted from other sources are indicated with citation information. All other definitions have been developed by and for the SRE program. Please cite as:*

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Activities: Actions undertaken by the project/program; in a research context, this can include background scoping and preparation work, definition and design of the research questions and project, literature review, fieldwork, and planned communication or engagement with relevant stakeholders or boundary partners (i.e., expert consultations, workshops, fieldwork, etc.).

Adoption: The acquisition and use of social, institutional, or technological innovation.

(Contextual) Assumptions: Suppositions about the prevailing context within which a change is expected. Hypotheses about the *external* factors and/or mechanisms explaining why a change is expected.

(Theoretical) Assumptions: Hypotheses about the *internal* factors and/or mechanisms explaining why a change is expected.

Attribution: Attribution refers to both isolating and estimating the particular contribution of a program/project to the outcome/impact (MARLO, 2015).

[Research] Effectiveness: Extent to which research generates knowledge and stimulates actions that address the problem and contribute to solutions and innovations (Belcher et al., 2016).

[Stakeholder] Engagement: Explicit and deliberate effort of a research project to involve people who can influence or may be affected by the project.

Evaluation: “The systematic and objective assessment of an on-going or completed project, program or policy, its design, implementation and results” (MARLO, 2015, para.21).

Impact: A change in state or a change in flow resulting in whole or in part from a chain of events to which research (or another intervention) has contributed. Impacts can be economic, socio-cultural, institutional, environmental, technological, or of other types.

Impact pathway: “The causal pathway of a research project or program that outlines the expected sequence to achieve desired objectives beginning with inputs, moving through activities and outputs, and culminating in outcomes and impacts. Assumptions underpinning the causal chain and feed-back loops are usually included” (MARLO, 2015, para.30).

Indicator: “A quantitative or qualitative variable that represents an approximation of the characteristic, phenomenon or change of interest (for instance, efficiency, quality or outcome). Indicators can be used to monitor research or to help assess, for instance, organizational or research performance” (MARLO, 2015, para.33).

Knowledge translation: A dynamic and iterative process that includes synthesis, dissemination, exchange and ethically-sound application of knowledge. Notably, the exchange of knowledge refers to the interaction between the knowledge user and the researcher for collaborative problem-solving and mutual learning through processes of planning, producing, disseminating, and applying existing or new research in decision-making (CIHR, 2016).

[Research] Legitimacy: The research process is perceived as fair and ethical by knowledge users. This encompasses the ethical and fair representation of all involved and the appropriate and genuine inclusion and consideration of diverse participants, values, interests and perspectives (Belcher et al., 2016).

Outcome: Changes in knowledge, attitudes, skills, and relationships that manifest as changes in behaviour (who is doing what differently and why) resulting in whole or in part from research, a project, or a program and its related activities.

Outputs: The products, goods, and services of research and the research process, including knowledge and discourse packaged as publications, presentations, dialogues and discussions, strategies and plans, popular media and artistic representations. This includes knowledge, fora, and processes generated by the research project/program activities.

Participatory evaluation: “Evaluation method in which representatives of agencies and stakeholders (including beneficiaries) work together in designing, carrying out and interpreting an evaluation” (OECD, 2009, p.36).

Policy: A decision or commitment to a particular course of action (adapted from Pielke, 2007).

Power: Access to and capacity to mobilize resources and realize goals (Avelino & Rotmans, 2009).

Purpose: The overarching goal to which the research aims to contribute but is not accountable for.

Relevance [of research]: Importance, significance and usefulness of research problems, objectives, processes and findings to the problem context (Belcher et al., 2016).

Research: “Systematic pursuit of knowledge” (Pielke, 2007, p.79).

Research process: The series of decisions made, and actions taken throughout the entire duration of the research project (e.g., formulating research aim, conducting literature review, data analysis and reporting, as well as partnerships and other processes).

Science-policy interface: “A social process which encompasses relations between scientists and other actors in the policy process, and which allows for exchanges, co-evolution, and joint construction of knowledge with the aim of enriching decision-making and/or research” (Sarkki et al., 2014, p.165).

Social networks: “Formal or informal structures that link actors (individuals or organizations) who share a common interest on a specific issue or a general set of values” (Perkin & Court, 2005, p.2).

Socio-ecological context (also ‘context’): Refers to the social, cultural, temporal, and environmental (including spatial) setting(s) that gives rise to a research problem, including aspects of: location; culture; scale in time and space; social, political, economic, and ecological/environmental conditions; resources and societal capacity available; uncertainty, complexity and novelty associated with the societal problem; and the extent of agency that is held by stakeholders (Carew & Wickson, 2010).

Sphere of control: The range of activities and outputs that are under the control of a project or program.

Sphere of influence: The range of results (outcomes and impacts) that can be influenced by project or program outputs.

Sphere of interest: The range of results (outcomes and impacts) that a project or program aims to contribute to but that are outside the direct influence of the project.

Stakeholder: Any actor who can affect or be affected by a decision or action taken by, or as a result of the research project - these may be agencies, organizations, groups, or individuals who have a direct or indirect interest in the research (Freeman, 1984; MARLO, 2015).

Tailored products: Resources developed by the research project/program that package knowledge for specific audiences.

Theory-based evaluation: Evaluation that empirically tests a theory of change (ToC) against qualitative and/or quantitative evidence of outcomes and/or impacts.

Theory of change (ToC): An explicit, testable model of how and why change is expected to happen along an impact pathway in a particular context. A basic research-for-development ToC identifies the context and key actors in a system and specifies the causal pathways and mechanisms by which the research aims to contribute to outcomes and impacts.

Transdisciplinary research: Research that crosses both disciplinary and institutional boundaries to incorporate stakeholders and other lay actors, to integrate scientific and extra-scientific knowledge and insights and foster relevant and socially robust knowledge and outcomes.

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