



one world trust

Accountability principles

for policy oriented research organisations

A guide to the framework and online database

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About the One World Trust

The One World Trust is an independent think tank that conducts research, develops recommendations and advocates for reform to make policy and decision-making processes in global governance more accountable to the people they affect now and in the future, and to ensure that international laws are strengthened and applied equally to all.

The Accountability Principles for Research Organisations (APRO) project was initiated to explore the meaning and use of concepts of accountability amongst organisations that conduct research which individually and jointly proves in many cases highly influential in the formation of public policy. These organisations come from a wide range of backgrounds. Yet in many cases, researchers, their work processes and their outputs remain relatively invisible, and there is to date no common understanding of accountability principles which touch on the different stages of research processes that aim to inform and influence policy, and the special relationships they entail with a broad range of stakeholders.



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Acknowledgements

Together with the online database on accountability principles for research organisations, this document sets out the accountability framework for policy oriented research organisations as it has emerged from the past four years of research and collaborative engagement with a wide range of internationally based policy focused research institutions. We are grateful for the support of the Evaluation Unit of International Development Research Council of Canada during this period. Special thanks go for the work during this second phase of the project to Tricia Wind and Fred Carden.

We would also not have been able to reach this stage without the collaboration of the six research organisations with whom we had the privilege of partnering between 2009 and 2011 for the testing and further development of the initial concepts and accountability framework for policy oriented research organisations presented in the first report, published in 2008. These include CIPPEC / Argentina, RIMISP / Chile, CGD / Kenya, IIED / UK, Habitat for Humanity Latin America / Brazil, and ForestAction / Nepal. We are grateful for all the time and research inputs received during and beyond the project workshops that the partners hosted, and continuing exchanges during the research project. Thanks are also due to the input received at various stages of the project from our international advisors for the project including Goran Buldiosky, Anabel Cruz, Doug Horton, Harry Jones, Stella Ladi, Michael Otieno and Peter Taylor.

At the One World Trust a whole team worked on the project: Brendan Whitty as main researcher, assisted by Jonathan Butcher and Reham Hassan in particular on the compilation, design and implementation of the online database, as well as Yulia Poskakukhina and Julie Gersten for additional research support at the beginning of the second phase, and Robert Lloyd who helped with workshop moderation. Michael Hammer advised the project in his capacity as overall project leader, and is responsible for the shape and content of this document.

We hope that the guide to the framework and online database will be helpful for the deepening of the understanding of accountability issues arising in the context of policy relevant research, and the organisational development of the institutions involved in it. Its primary purposes are to create a basis of understanding for the approach the framework takes, and to explore in an accessible way some of the key implications of the accountability discourse on the organisational development of not-for-profit policy oriented research institutions. By working through the key generic stages of policy oriented research processes it hopes to make the online database at www.oneworldtrust.org/apro an accessible resource, and facilitate the uptake of tools and sources by researchers and research managers for a structured introduction of accountability principles and mechanisms in their work and the development of policy oriented research organisations. As such it is not a representation of the full diversity of experiences we encountered in our collaboration with them, but a contextualised summary of the essence of thinking that emerged for us from this interaction. The document has been made to be easily read, and does not aim to be a referenced review or critique of literature.

All shortcomings remain, as always, our responsibility here at the One World Trust.

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Introduction: why accountability in policy oriented research?

Evidence is seen by most policy focused researchers and many political decision-makers as a critical element in the formulation and communication of public policy. The latter does not only reflect a government's or intergovernmental organisation's substantive understanding of a certain challenge and pathways to address them, but also determines flows of public funds, progress on a range of other connected policy issues, and the shape and form of programmes that affect many peoples' lives, often well beyond the immediately visible set of stakeholders.

The process of advocating for policy propositions, including lobbying and campaigning, and the actors involved in it are therefore increasingly coming under scrutiny with regards to their ways of working. On the one hand, citizens and watchdogs exact increasing transparency of governments, intergovernmental organisations, parliaments, and senior management especially of public companies, about their interactions with advocacy organisations and lobby groups for whom they often act as primary target audiences or clients for evidence and research findings.

By contrast, the actual evidence used for making policy, and the processes that generate it, stay largely out of the limelight, partly due to their complexity, but also due to misconceptions about the wide range of actors involved in influencing public policy, their often very different ways of working, and different methodologies and quality management approaches. The assumption, widespread in the general public, that governments (and also intergovernmental organisations) are indeed basing their decisions on sound and transparent evidence needs to be tested regularly, and in many cases may prove to be unfounded.

In reality, despite governments placing much emphasis on 'evidence-based policy', many other factors beyond academic-standard research play an important role in defining policy outcomes. Supposedly 'sound' evidence is generated in very different ways, driven by very different (and not always very clear) motivations and theories of change, and influencing strategies vary greatly.

Understanding, conceptualising and building practically usable frameworks for fostering accountability in the production of policy oriented research therefore deals with an issue, which, while one step removed from the actual policy decision-making, informs the quality and above all the sustainability of policy. As the One World Trust is a 'think tank' and hence in many ways a typical policy oriented research organisation itself, the exploration of this topic touches the heart of our own work, and we believe it is indeed an identity shaping issue for our whole sector and our key working relationships.

For the researchers, communicators and leaders of policy research organisations, 'accountability' is a part of everyday life: we put our research findings forward, in the understanding that they will be analysed and critiqued by the policy community. Our donors and clients will scrutinise our activities and our deliverables. As actors working in the public sphere, we are responsible for respecting the ethical rules of research and of honest communication of our findings, and will be held to account for doing so. Despite this, the word 'accountability' is infrequently used.

And yet accountable research organisations are important, both for the research organisation itself and for the quality of public discourse. Evidence-based decision-making is fundamental to good governance and for that, decision-makers require evidence. Being an accountable research organisation has several advantages:

- Produced and presented along good practice principles of accountability, evidence is more likely to withstand scrutiny and critique because with a high level of substantive quality it is more likely to have come to more universally acceptable findings, and conclusions supported by these.
- For the political client, i.e. the end user, evidence of the above nature forms a stronger asset in the hands of the policy-maker in policy negotiations, and when meeting transparency requests.
- From the perspective of the researcher, meeting good practice principles for accountability in policy relevant research provides integrity and legitimacy to the individual and organisation generating it, leading to greater chances of uptake of the research in each case, but also increasing the chances of being asked to provide research input in the future.
- Finally, on a more abstract level, evidence based on good practice principles of accountability is more likely to fit into more widely agreed normative frameworks of ethics, including equity and human rights, which are an important foundation of legitimacy for involvement in the wider field of policy focused development research and discourse.

There are thus a range of both practical and instrumental, and other, more abstract and normative benefits to ensuring that research meets good accountability practice principles. Yet in real life organisations must balance a number of stakeholders and considerations, while striving to achieve their missions in the short and longer term future, under frequently difficult funding and policy conditions.

Accountability in research is, from our perspective, therefore not a matter of meeting a fixed set of gold standard rules, but the outcome of a conscious and recurrent process that involves aspiration and capability to meet standards that are guided by the research topic (and which may vary depending on subject matter and methodologies), and principles that relate to the good management of the organisation, effectiveness with regards to its mission, and concerning external relationships to the wider set of stakeholders.

This document seeks to aid the reader by providing a practical access guide to a major database of tools and sources compiled by the One World Trust based on an in-depth survey of literature and engagement with practitioners conducted over the past years: the [Accountability Tools for Policy Research database](#).

The conceptual Accountability Framework that is used to structure the database also shapes the pathway of this document through the subject. It works with three main categories: key principles of accountability, the work processes involved in research, and the stakeholders of policy oriented research.

Developed in a first iteration in the first phase of the project, and published end of 2008, the current version is the result of research conducted in collaboration with research institutions drawn from the not-for-profit sector involved in development research in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe, who have helped us to refine the thoughts, and also simplify and make more practically useful some of the original framework.

In developing this document we have sought to achieve a number of aims:

- **A guide to the database of tools:** This document is about the accountability of research organisations. It is designed to be used as a map or guidance note with the Accountability Tools for Policy Research database, which offers a box of ideas, references and directions to tools that can help an organisation plan out its accountability policies and systems. It supports users to access the tools in addition to explaining some of the intellectual background to the research. Most of what we have to say in this document is based on gathering and analysing the ideas of a large community of contributors to organisational development, research standards and ethics, innovation and evaluation research and practitioners. The framework we have developed seeks to bring them together in one place and contextualise them from the perspective of accountability in an overall framework.

Made for policy oriented research organisations

The database and the document are designed to be relevant to any organisation which collects and systematises information, analyses it, and then communicates its findings with a view to changing the policies of decision-makers. It is therefore for any organisation which seeks to influence policy.

In addressing accountability of evidence on which policy influencing is based, the focus is on the activity of research rather than on any specific type of organisation which conducts the research – in other words, the accountability will apply regardless of whether the organisation is an activist NGO, a university centre, or a think tank.

The aim is to provide a research manager with an overarching perspective on accountability, and an understanding of how he or she may remodel an organisation to become more accountable.

- **Best fit as much as best practice:** Organisations styling themselves as ‘policy oriented research organisations’ vary greatly: some are convening organisations, some grassroots researchers, some academic, some knowledge brokers. Some tend more towards advocacy, others more towards academia. The document is underpinned by the experiences of working with six partners, all of whom are very different, and with whom we discussed questions of accountability as it applied to them. We hope to provide guidelines for best fit, as much as best practice.
- **Practical:** We hope it will be useful to those working in and with policy oriented research organisations: we are therefore intending this to be a practical guide and reference document for the researchers and research managers themselves, as well as those supporting processes of organisational change within such organisations.
- **Support rather than exhort:** The Accountability Tools for Policy Research database collects, structures, and allows searches for a range of tools that we believe are relevant to policy oriented research accountability. It is therefore designed to provide ideas and to support, rather than to dictate; it provides ideas, rather than exhorts. Not all the tools will be useful for all, so the design enables easy searching and browsing.

Part I of this document gives an overview of the accountability framework and the resulting database structure, and how the guide will work. Part II deals with the accountability tools applicable to all research organisations and those tools applicable only to certain kinds of organisations.

Working methodology and partners

The results presented in this document build on earlier work developed by the One World Trust which explored the wider typology of policy oriented research organisations that we were able to identify across all major world regions and including research institutions from the for profit

business, not-for-profit /NGO, academic and governmental sectors. Using a sample of 16 organisations from all regions and identified main sectors, we empirically researched the complexity of their mutual and individual stakeholder relationships, and understandings of accountability issues in this wider group. On this basis we presented in a [first major report published in 2008](#) an initial accountability framework for policy oriented research organisations which focused on the options for introducing accountability in key work processes that emerged as typical for research organisations, and how to support this with key policies in the fields of information release / transparency, and complaints handling / feedback management.

In this current second phase of the project we narrowed the research focus on the specific group of not-for-profit research institutions, involved in some of the most complex stakeholder relationships and accountability challenges. In partnership with the six research organisations described in more detail below we explored their accountability systems, discussed the potentials and boundaries of applicability of the initial framework, and sought jointly to identify possible ways open to them in their specific circumstances to develop their accountability capabilities. Two individual workshops were conducted with each of the partners , and insights were validated through commented documentation and continuing exchanges during the project. This work was complemented by extensive research on tools and sources relevant to understanding and offering opportunities for the promotion of accountability in policy relevant research, the results of which are compiled in the database itself. The partners included:

- **Center for Governance and Development (CGD):** CGD is registered in Kenya and has a mission to promote democratic governance and sustainable development. Its research primarily takes the form of convening and supporting community groups to monitor government activities. Structurally, CGD works extensively through and acts as secretariat to two networks in particular, both of which mobilise citizens and civil society.
- **Center for the Implementation of Public Policies Promoting Equity and Growth (CIPPEC):** CIPPEC is a relatively large think tank based in Buenos Aires aiming to improve policy-making in Argentina through capacity building and research. CIPPEC’s staff members are highly sensitive to the political and media timetables.
- **ForestAction Nepal:** ForestAction is a self-identified policy think tank based in Nepal whose mission is to promote “equitable, sustainable and effective management of natural resources” through innovation. They do this primarily through participatory action research, community mobilisation and civil society activism.
- **International Institute of Environment and Development (IIED):** IIED is a London-based independent international research organisation that works to combat challenges in sustainable development across the world through “prioritising rigorous evidence-based research, communications and influence”.
- **Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP):** RIMISP was set up in 1986 and has gone through changes in its structure since its creation. In its current incarnation, it is a regional non-profit organisation with a base in Chile and three sub-offices. It works extensively through a network of think tanks and research institutes and these relationships are seen to be fundamental to the legitimacy of RIMISP.
- **Habitat for Humanity (Latin America / Brazil):** Habitat for Humanity (HfH) is a global organisation whose mission is to provide shelter. Traditionally, its function has been to

deliver a limited range of housing solutions, but more recently a major process of reform has moved towards a wide range of activities, and in particular advocacy, using the organisation's knowledge, links to community and experience. This work increasingly involves working through partnerships and networks.

The convening of an expert seminar at the Institute for Development Studies at the University of Sussex / UK helped to address some of the more complex issues arising from the question of stakeholder accountability through participation. Research results were also validated through presentation of papers and contributions to other related research processes including around the question of research accountability and impact in conflict situations, evaluation and impact measurement, as well as not-for-profit regulation and self-regulation.

The final results of the research fed into the development of a refined framework for conceptualising accountability in policy oriented research, which underpins the online database of tools and sources for accountability in policy oriented research, and the structure of this guide to the database.

Part I: Accountability in research in overview

Why is accountability important for the researcher?

Accountability concerns how a researcher interacts with the various stakeholders he or she comes into contact with. It is about ensuring that researchers reach a common understanding of their responsibilities vis-à-vis each of these stakeholders, meet these responsibilities and enable them to hold the researchers to account.

Accountability, as our research into organisations with public policy impact at national and global level has shown, can be justified in two ways. First, it can be justified on practical *instrumental* grounds: an accountable organisation will be more effective. Second, it can be justified on a *normative* level: it is the right thing to do, and responds to ethical frameworks underlying equitable relationships.

Practically, accountability is important because policy oriented research organisations work in the public sphere and rely on stakeholders' perceptions for their influence. Whether it is meeting the standards of evidence, addressing the politicians' problems, or asking a farmer questions in the correct language, the effectiveness of policy oriented research organisation relies on their meeting expectations of their various stakeholders, and on the way they communicate their work to others.

Accountability is fundamentally about ensuring responsiveness and maintaining good relationships with stakeholders, who are essential to the success of any individual research project as much as an organisation as a whole. It is a core function of the relevance of the work, the quality of the evidence, the manner in which it is communicated, and the networks, partnerships and links of a research organisation. From this starting point interest in understanding how researchers can increase their influence has been growing, and as a consequence a range of tools has been developed to structure their relationships and influencing work. Many of these tools are included in the database and this guide aims to help researchers understand which of these tools is best fit, and enables accountability.

The database is designed to collate practical tools to understand how best to achieve this goal. As stated above, however, the reasons for accountability are not all practical. Accountability is also a matter of ethics both in how research is conducted and how it is purposefully communicated.

Critically, research brings about change in public policy through influence rather than through direct decisions. To act as a vector for change, evidence is presented as being based on scientific method and objectivity, and its ability to persuade will be based in part on the legitimacy of the organisation and the evidence. From this point of view research organisations have a responsibility to present the values that underpin their work and the results in ways that conform to expectations framed along agreed frameworks of ethics – which includes to allow people, affected by the research, or motivated by a more general interest, to hold the organisation to account.

Accountability, therefore, is a matter of understanding and articulating the researcher's responsibilities, , meeting and holding them accountable over claims they make, and of being held answerable for breaking both responsibilities adopted by their own choice, and ethics frameworks relevant to the wider community of research in relevant given field.

Positioning shapes accountability

For the second phase of the project the One World Trust worked with six organisations, ranging from a think tank based in London with international reach to a research organisation conducting action research in forestry management in Nepal, working with specific communities. To illustrate the span of realities this involves, readers may wish to consider that while both self-identify as research organisations seeking to influence policy, and while both were staffed with highly motivated and educated staff members, both are also completely different in what they do and with whom they work. Their accountability policies and systems will also take different formats and will be determined by their positioning.

This document uses three terms in this guide with specific meanings: these are ‘positioning’, ‘theory of change’ and ‘strategy’.

Positioning: Positioning is the definition by the researcher (or the research organisation) of attitudes to the world around them, and of the role that they seek within the public sphere, including regarding how others should understand their legitimacy. Much of the discussion in this guide will centre on how organisations actively seek to position themselves and manage these perceptions.

Theory of change: theory of change is defined as the understanding of causal links. In particular, it refers to the understanding by which activities conducted by a research organisation will contribute to changes in the world. As such, a theory of change need not be stated, and it may be more or less coherent, evidence-based or plausible. Understandings of how change happens (‘theories of change’), whether implicit or explicit, will frequently be at the root of the strategy.

Strategy: Strategy can refer to planning documents which deliberately state what an organisation intends to do and can also emerge from the pattern of activities of an organisation. For the purposes of this guide, the strategy of an organisation is the combined set of stated and unstated intentions and practices that define and reflect how an organisation structures its future.

By ‘positioning’, we mean the claims an organisation makes about its purpose – understood as the changes it seeks to bring about and why these changes are valuable – and the means by which the changes will occur. In difference to the term ‘strategy’, which reflects either deliberately chosen or emergent priorities for work, mostly but not necessarily within a chosen time horizon, ‘positioning’ refers to a more fundamental definition of attitudes to the world around the organisation, and to problematic issues it wishes to address or changes that it may want effect.

While some organisations’ sole purpose is to produce knowledge without reference to the change, typically, these are not policy oriented research organisations. We argue that policy oriented research organisations seek a change that is desirable, whether to further an abstract cause (equity, democracy, human rights) or to benefit a group in society, or to improve how we do things.

Some of the partners have sought to develop very explicit positioning statements that inform their view of accountability they owe.

RIMISP for instance says that it “*is committed to supporting those who are marginalised and*

excluded within rural societies. However, it does not seek to represent such people or speak in their name or that of any other social sector. RIMISP’s legitimacy is founded on its organisational culture, its work and on the extent and type of relationships it has with its partners.”

http://www.rimisp.org/inicio/about_rimisp.php

The position that a research organisation adopts, out of choice, is therefore an important starting point for understanding and driving the way the organisation, from its own perspective, would seek

to realise accountability towards its stakeholders. However, organisations have different missions, and therefore seek to position themselves differently by managing their environment and their relationships with stakeholders. They do this through a set of recurrent processes.

- The definition of an organisational values and vision statement mostly involves the explicit formulation of a purpose or mission, which will refer to a desired change, or circumstances which the organisation seeks to address with its work. This mission is likely to be developed, refined and altered over time.
- By referring to a desired change, the organisation's mission suggests the existence of a 'theory of change'. Many organisations will leave this theory of change unsaid, and often the causal links are implicit, or not fully articulated. They may even be subconscious and will often be different from person to person or programme to programme.
- The formulation of mission and theories of change will be refined and developed through strategies which impact on the structure of the organisation, the staff, the way it builds a network, and the quality of the connections the organisation has in its network. It includes the nature of the accountability relationships that exist, and the degree to which the stakeholders are prioritised.
- Importantly, positioning, as a result of a conscious development of mission, theory and theories of change, and strategy, are both designed and emergent. It is designed in the sense that an organisation can develop deliberate strategies which place it within a public context and which manage the relationship with stakeholders. It can be emergent, in that an organisation's strategy results from its research practice and constant discussion and negotiation with stakeholders, as it balances different demands, aspirations, and pressures.

Shifts in positioning resulting from a change in the funding environment: the case of RIMISP

While RIMISP bears several characteristics of a professional organisation, where the Principal Investigators are given a great deal of freedom to operate independently, at the same time RIMISP has undergone sudden and significant reforms. Its current structure has emerged from its history, as various reforms have been initiated, constituting significant evolutions but retaining key elements of previous manifestations. Thus RIMISP changed from an IDRC-funded research network in 1986, to a stand-alone organisation when IDRC funding ended abruptly in 1994. The subsequent change in focus to "manage learning-oriented research and grants" corresponded to a change in focus for the operations. Reviewing RIMISP's progress in 2006, A. Bebbington concluded that *"The early emphasis on methodology (farming systems research methods, in particular) has declined significantly, and been replaced with a growing emphasis on building learning capacity in rural development and coordinating and conducting applied research on different dimensions of rural development."* (A. Bebbington (2006): RIMISP – an internal evaluation)

RIMISP is still evolving, and at the time of our first report (December 2008), it was at a 'fork in the road'. RIMISP is launching a partial rethink of its 'traditional' approach, which ideally would retain the strengths of its network structure, while also drawing on some of the strengths of what was described as the 'think tank model' in delivering relevant policy recommendations. A third deliberate evolution has taken place over the past year triggered by a recognition of the need to develop greater policy influence and generate research products that are directed to reforming policy.

By our first trip in 2009, RIMISP was already building the capacities and systems, and by the second many of the changes were in train – a Director was hired, the governance changes had been implemented and the communications team had been expanded. Even by the time of the first workshop, RIMISP was making strides to develop its capabilities, through revamping its governance structure and developing its M&E systems.

Positioning is thus a composite process which through programme documents and projects is gradually refined to greater details at different levels. In turn, accountability relationships are informed by the positioning of an organisation, including its purpose. Yet periods of institutional reform, in particular, entail shifts in positioning, and show clearly the corresponding need to reform accountability processes. The two case studies discussed in this section illustrate how organisations responded to radical changes in their circumstances with shifts in positioning, and how that affected their internal structures.

Repositioning due to a change in leadership: the case of Habitat for Humanity Brazil

Habitat for Humanity Brazil was undergoing a significant organisational change that has been ongoing for several years since its founder and long-term head handed over the reins. While the nature and extent of the reforms were still under debate within the organisation, they included a move from very limited models of housing provision to a much wider set of activities in the shelter and housing sector, including advocacy and policy-change.

While HfH's culture was acclaimed by external stakeholders as being accountable, transparent and participative with strong evaluation and reporting, the specific tools and mechanisms it uses to guarantee accountability are oriented towards traditional activities. Thus for example, the evaluation indicators set at the headquarters level are limited to traditional models which cannot take into account the more complex advocacy/multi-sectoral projects. A strong tradition of participation is focused on projects defining a limited number of good housing solutions but not the wider and systematic engagement of families in advocacy activities.

HfH Brazil had made significant progress in repositioning itself, and had created strong links to civil society, as well as engaging in key policy-making forums. By the time the data collection for this project had been completed, HfH Brazil were still balancing claims to political party neutrality, to inclusive advocacy work bringing in social movements and communities, and to good governance supported by accountability mechanisms.

It is partly on the basis of the brand and image – constructed on carefully presented claims and messaging – that an organisation receives funds and has influence. It is on the basis of its claims, regarding the values it represents, that an organisation's legitimacy is built. Indeed, the act of self-identification as a 'research organisation' or 'think tank' itself makes for certain implications as to the nature and quality of the data-collection work of an organisation.

Organisations position themselves very differently, and therefore there is no single set of accountability tools or mechanisms that will work for every organisation. Designing an accountability framework that is appropriate is a matter of craft – a blend of skill, expertise and art. Claims differ vastly and imply different accountability profiles and stakeholders: sometimes an organisation can be seeking an abstract ideal – accountability in global governance, in the case of the One World Trust; sometimes the beneficiary groups can be broad and indistinct – IIED works on behalf of the poor and disenfranchised; RIMISP for the rural poor across a region; CIPPEC, the citizens of Argentina. What substantiation is required for such claims? An organisation will be held to standards of research quality to prove its claims to be a think tank, but what are the standards by which claims to benefit are evaluated?

From our interaction with partners and wider research we would recommend a minimum set of issues to consider:

- Given that policy oriented research organisations seek to persuade and influence based on evidence and communications strategies, they should, at the very least, be accountable for the claims they make.
- In addition, recognising the reciprocal effect of positioning and accountability on each other, we encourage that as early as possible the theory or theories of change are explicitly recognised, both for practical and ethical reasons as they impact on the stakeholder relationships an organisation seeks and declares as relevant.
- Finally, reflecting the iterative nature of developing an organisation’s mission, we recommend that a commitment to accountability should be demonstrated through regular processes of reflection on the mission, research direction and practice, and the existing accountability mechanisms, with the aim to ensure their mutual fit and alignment with good practice.

Structuring accountability: the framework

Drawing on the experience of the policy oriented research organisations with whom we have been working and our wider research, we have refined the first accountability framework for policy oriented research organisations published in 2008. The framework presented here in its final form has a structure resembling an onion with multiple layers. It has three interconnected rings reflecting that *principles* are applied in *institutional processes* to ensure accountability to *stakeholders*.

- The central ring contains four core principles of accountability: transparency, evaluation, participation and complaints & response.¹
- The middle ring consists of processes that are common to research organisations, and which offer opportunities to apply accountability principles. These processes include strategy-setting, identifying projects, and conducting and concluding research.
- The outermost ring consists of the typical stakeholders to which a research organisation may be accountable in its processes. These include policy-makers, media, the research community and partners.



“Principles are applied in institutional processes to ensure accountability to stakeholders”

The database and classifications of tools compiled therein is built on the basis of this framework, to help organisations think through their accountability mechanisms on a structured basis. This guide indicates in what work processes these tools are potentially of most use, supporting their adoption and adaptation depending on the positioning of the organisation.

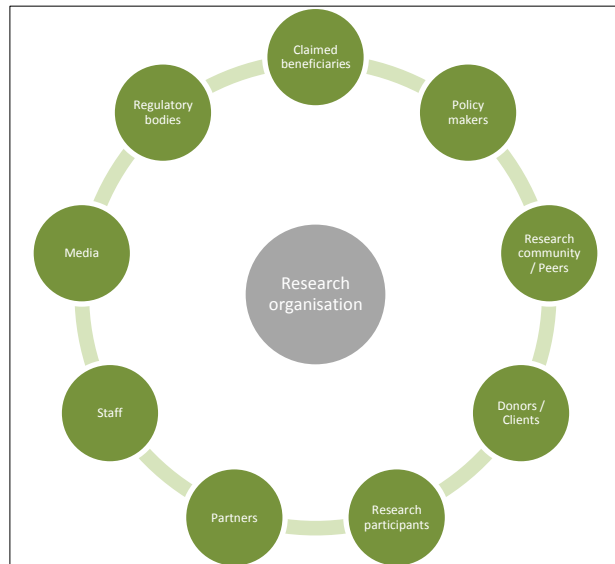
¹ These main principles are drawn from the longer standing work of the One World Trust on organisational governance and accountability. Different sectors may prefer use different terminology, such as ‘feedback management’ instead of ‘complaints & response’, but the original language is maintained to focus on the essence of the principle in the application of the concept across different sectors.

In the following we will go through these rings in reverse order, reflecting a conceptual journey from external relationships, via ways of working as defined by the organisation, to issues which describe the identity of the organisation.

Stakeholders: to whom should I be accountable?

While policy oriented research organisations position themselves differently, they do have some typical stakeholders in common. The database identifies several such groups. Each of these is likely to have different expectations, and different forms of responsiveness and accountability.

- **Claimed beneficiaries:** When positioning themselves and their purpose, organisations that claim positive change often claim that groups within society will be benefitted. These are the ‘claimed beneficiaries’. The exact shape of accountability relationships to them depends in part on the organisation’s positioning.
- **Policy-makers:** The policy-makers are the target, the people whose behaviour must change, for the policy researcher to be effective. Responsiveness to policy-makers’ needs is vital, or they will consciously or subconsciously not listen to or take on board the research findings.
- **Research community:** Peers in the research community are both similar and dissimilar to policy-makers, depending on the positioning and theory of change for the research. They are the arbiters of research quality, and therefore hold in their hands the keys to the legitimacy of the evidence base.
- **Donors/Clients:** By this we mean clients, grantors, and any stakeholder that pays the organisation to do its work. Accountability will often be governed by the contract. We also mean potential donors, with whom there is no existing formal relationship.
- **Research participants:** For organisations involved in primary research, the participants in that research are direct stakeholders. They may or may not overlap with the claimed beneficiaries, but are distinct: they are identified by involvement in the research, rather than the beneficiaries who are identified through the formulation of expected outcomes of the research.
- **Partners:** Partners are those with whom an organisation has made a specific effort to relate, and with whom they have a special relationship, which can take the form of a financial relationship, and/or that of a substantive intellectual exchange.
- **Staff:** The staff of a research organisation are a core factor in its success, which triggers a special accountability relationship.
- **Media:** Media offer excellent means of getting key messages from research across to the public. Whether in ‘old’ or ‘new’ forms, media are a key stakeholder.
- **Regulatory bodies:** Whether incorporated as an NGO or company, organisations are regulated and must meet standards of financial probity.



Our partners are examples of how organisations with different positioning interact differently with their stakeholders. CIPPEC articulate a theory of change in their mission where informing policy-makers will, in turn, improve policy and through better policy, improve life for Argentinean citizens. Speaking generally, CIPPEC is more closely aligned to the policy-makers than, for example, RIMISP, which targets its research at academic level, and the research community or ForestAction which have a closer relationship with the forest users of Nepal, their participants and beneficiaries.

Researchers are typically accountable to a range of stakeholders. An important aspect of accountability is the manner in which an organisation or manager balances and prioritises different research organisations. The key to defining a successful accountability framework is the manner in which the different stakeholder accountabilities are balanced.

Accountable processes: where can I be accountable?

Accountability is a characteristic of a relationship, referring to the way in which one actor relates to another. In the case of the accountability of an organisation, the relationship unfolds in the course of key work processes. For the purposes of the database, we identify five work processes in which accountability principles can be applied:

- **Ongoing governance:** All organisations have governance processes, which include the meeting schedules of supervisory boards, management meetings and annual general meetings.
- **Strategy formulation:** While the process by which strategies are formulated may centre on a pre-ordained plan, the strategy-making process may equally be an organic process where researchers react to their surroundings, and the active steps simply comprise discussing the values to be sought. Even within an organisation, different programmes can have different processes through which strategies are formulated and implemented.
- **Project identification and design:** While strategy-setting occurs at a programme or institutional level, the process of identifying and designing projects occurs at a lower level. Although frequently triggered by management, project identification and design is in its detail mostly implemented by researchers themselves.
- **Conduct of research:** The research itself is an ongoing process, which may, depending on the project, offer opportunities for accountability and engagement of stakeholders.
- **Closing projects:** Projects come and go, but there are opportunities for accountability in the means through which projects are concluded, lessons identified, systematised and communicated, and findings generated and transmitted.

The sum of the accountability may be a cumulative effect of a range of processes broadly following a logical sequence, both in terms of macro to micro and effective progression of work, as presented in the diagram below.



In reality, however, the processes are likely to overlap, and may or may not be linear in sequence. The database seeks to outline tools which can be used within and across several work processes by allowing entry at a freely chosen point.

The value of formality and informality in accountability processes

We argue that accountability is thus essentially a bundle of processes – or at least, values and principles which qualify an ongoing interaction between the researcher and his or her stakeholders. This may be so, but that says nothing about the formality of the processes. While formal processes can signal the importance of a value and provide incentives, effective accountability is fundamentally about the culture and practice of members of staff. No process can replace the lack of staff buying into the principles of, and reflecting a culture of accountability in their day-to-day work. This also means that finding the right balance between formal systems and intrinsic realisation of a culture of accountability is essential for ensuring that organisations can realise the full benefits of being accountable.

Indeed, respondents from RIMISP, IIED and ForestAction argued that formal processes can choke up an organisation and reduce flexibility, curtailing any benefits as a result. Thus for example, key RIMISP researchers stated that they were confident that the culture and practice of the organisation was sufficient to ensure research ethics, and did not want to create formal processes.

Whether the choice for a means of ensuring adherence to a key accountability standard or process is formal or informal therefore depends on a number of factors. These may include:

- **Drivers for accountability:** If the accountability concerns an external check rather than being driven forward from an internal recognition of need and utility, then the external context and culture may be important. It is of little use to dispute the need for a complaints and feedback mechanism if most immediate peers have one, and society and donors expect this opportunity for access, risk management and learning to be visible and available. On the other hand, Nepali senior researchers emphasised the importance of the informal culture rather than formal tick-box processes. An informal chat over a cup of tea or dinner can be a more effective way of understanding and responding to feedback than any number of formal questionnaires and pathways for official filing of such input.
- **The internal context:** An organisation with autonomous staff whose jobs require independence may require them to operate independently. At the same time, it is precisely those organisations with autonomous staff that need to make sure the core values are shared and that the basic rules respected, particularly where there are real risks of harm. In these circumstances, a mix of ex post and ex ante checks, formalised to a certain degree, may be useful.
- **Confidence in shared values:** The size of the organisation and the familiarity of all the staff with the organisation and its values is an important element in designing the processes. Senior researchers in RIMISP and ForestAction were sure that their researchers shared the same values. In CIPPEC and IIED, much bigger organisations (approximately 80 as opposed to 20 staff), senior managers were more likely to entertain more formal checks.
- **The risks of harm:** Both the severity of likely harm – where harm is more likely, a greater degree of formality may be required – and the speed through which harm is done may be relevant. If monitoring and after the event checks can stop harm happening, this can reduce the need for wearying prior approvals. Where failure to prevent harm may involve organisational risk, including claims for redress or serious reputational damage, then having a formalised risk assessment, management and complaint and response systems will rise in importance.

In the end, accountability is about ensuring transparency, responsiveness to stakeholders and accessibility to the organisation. Better accountability mechanisms help minimise the likelihood of doing harm and improve the chances for learning, which in turn maximises the gain for both claimed beneficiaries and the organisation. Opportunities for feedback, access in case of complaints, and effective and learning oriented responses to such complaints are some of the benefits for beneficiaries.

Therefore, whether the required accountability systems are best formalised or left informal depends on various factors, including external demands which may reflect statutory duties or expectations of good practice. In addition, organisations may choose to reflect and support their commitment to accountability through systems that they implement themselves (first party), that involve the management of a direct relationship (second party), or that use a third party to adjudicate in cases of conflicts. Designing the appropriate accountability systems is in conclusion more a management craft, and not a science. It is also about pay-offs: freedom and flexibility must be weighed against needs for demonstrated quality and performance assurance, and the management of legal, financial and reputational risks.

First party, second party, third party accountability mechanisms

Feedback mechanisms can be first, second or third party. This refers to the mechanism by which an organisation is held to account and sanctions exacted.

First party mechanisms are defined by the organisation. They consist for instance of complaints mechanisms set up by the organisations, and other means by which stakeholders can approach the organisation and request answers and redress. The sanctions are exacted by the organisation, and power remains in the hands of the organisation. Broadly, the stakeholder only has power insofar as the organisation gives him or her power.

Second party mechanisms consist of the stakeholder holding the organisation to account by using his / her own powers. This could be a policy-maker refusing to meet with a think tank, or not reading a policy brief from a specific sources, to a research community refusing to answer questions, to a partner discontinuing or withdrawing cooperation. The difference to a first party mechanisms lies in the research organisation not having any control over its application, which entirely lies in the hands of the stakeholder.

Third party mechanisms are familiar to us in the form of law courts. An independent arbitrator – a third party – holds the policy oriented research organisation and its stakeholder to account. External research ethics committees provide one example of these. They may act to protect another stakeholder in the same way that the state pursues criminal cases in order to ensure justice for the victim.

Principles: what is accountability?

At the heart of the framework sit the four key principles, using a terminology that we have found to capture the essence of key elements or dimensions of accountability which can be recognised from a perspective of research into organisations across sectors and different substantive fields of work. These will apply differently depending on the organisation, but form the core of accountability.

- **Transparency:** Transparency describes the way in which an organisation makes available information about its activities and aims to stakeholders. Transparency is the centre of what it

means to be accountable for a research organisation whose power is rooted in the ability to influence and persuade. The grounds for influence must be clearly communicated for the persuasion to be legitimate. Transparency therefore encompasses responsibilities to articulate the theory of change of the organisation, the values, evidence and purpose of the organisation and the research itself.

- **Participation:** Participation concerns the way in which the organisation involves stakeholders in its decision-making processes and activities. The value of this depends on the organisation, its mission and positioning. There are strong instrumental and normative reasons for realising participation in formats which are aligned to the organisation's substantive field of work, stakeholder identification, and claims regarding beneficiaries and target audiences.
- **Evaluation and learning:** Evaluation allows a research organisation to reflect on and learn from past experiences and provides evidence-based support for the reporting of progress and impact both on substantive issues and its performance with regards to accountability.
- **Complaint and response / Feedback management:** This describes ways in which an organisation invites feedback, comments and critique of its activities through a first party system. It captures how an organisation is answerable to its stakeholders.

To realise accountability, an organisation must therefore embed the principles into its day-to-day processes through building a culture which recognises the importance of accountability and which reflects on accountability in a holistic way. Thus the processes may be transparent to a stakeholder or encourage their participation; each offers a space for evaluation, or an opportunity to incorporate feedback.

Part II: A guide to the database and key tools

Using the database

This second part of the document consists of a guide to using the database, and more importantly, a map or selection of pointers to tools reflecting the discussion of accountability principles, processes and stakeholders in Part I.

In practical terms the database can be accessed in a range of different ways:

1. A graphical user interface showing the different 'rings' and components of the accountability framework. Through the combination of search criteria the database can identify a set of search results, which in turn can be expanded to reveal detail on tools and sources.
2. Alternatively, a 'browse accountability tools' function allows the selection of search criteria from a list, providing then access to tools and sources as above.
3. In addition a 'search accountability tools' function facilitates access to the pool of tools by means of free text search.
4. Finally, a 'search for sources' function allows direct access to the authors and documents on which the tools are based.

The screens displayed below show the main entry points to the database as outlined above.



Search for Accountability tools

Choose from one of the search options below to search for accountability tools and sources.

Browse Accountability tools
If you wish to browse for tools you can refine your results according to principles, processes, stakeholders and type of research.

Browse tools by selecting one or more categories below:

Principles

- Participation
- Evaluation
- Transparency
- Complaints and response

Processes

- Institutional Governance
- Strategy Setting
- Project ID & Design
- Project Implementation
- Project Closure

Stakeholders

- Claimed Beneficiaries
- Donors
- Staff
- Media
- Partners

Type of research

- Primary
- Secondary

Browse tools

Search results

You searched sources for:

Showing 1-1 of 1 results

Source name	Author	Publisher	Year
Managing for Impact in Rural Development : A guide for project M & E	Guijt, I. and Woodhill, J.	International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	2002

Showing 1-1 of 1 results

Relevant tools are presented first in a list form, and then in more detail including a summary, key words, and related sources. As described above the latter can also be accessed through a direct keyword search, and link to foundational documents in relation to the displayed tool.

Tool name	Summary	Keywords
Appreciative Participatory Planning and Action (APPA)	"APPA can be applied in a variety of contexts and with a wide range of participants. Its primary value lies in its emphasis as a process of lasting engagement and dialogue among stakeholders. APPA combines the framework of Appreciative Inquiry and the tools of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA)..."	capacity building - indigenous/local knowledge - shared-participatory learning
Cause-Effect Diagram	"The purpose of the tool is to understand the contributing causes or reasons for a particular problem or issue, or to identify effects or impacts of a particular change. From an M&E perspective this methods can help to broaden insights about impact to include positive and negative expected and unexpected..."	cause-effect assessment - diagrams/visual representation - outcome/impact assessment
Dotoracy/Dotoracy/dot-voting	According to dotoracy.org: "Dotoracy is a transparent, equal opportunity, and participatory large group decision-making tool". It relies upon democracy "ballot papers" being filled in by participants within a decision making group. These ballot papers are provided in unlimited numbers to anyone participating. A standard ballot paper has three distinct areas..."	knowledge sharing - participatory decision making - power - shared-participatory learning
Future Search Conference	"Future search" is a planning conference that aims to help large diverse groups discover values, purposes and projects they hold in common. It enables people to create a desired future together and to start working toward it. A future search conference is designed to promote principles that enable people to...	indigenous/local knowledge - knowledge sharing - planning - shared-participatory learning
Hierarchical Card Sorting (HCS)	The tool represents integration between Hierarchical Card Sorting (which refers to a process) and Tree-maps (which refers to the product of that process). It is a means of drawing out knowledge from members of staff and close associates, including their values and what they consider important. It can be used..."	change - knowledge sharing - outcome/impact assessment - participatory decision making - planning - shared-participatory learning

Tool: Most Significant Change (MSC)

Keywords
 • change • outcome/impact assessment • shared-participatory learning

Summary
 The Most Significant Change methodology is an evaluation tool which is useful where both the nature of the outcomes of a project are uncertain, and there is no consensus on the values that the project is seeking to obtain. It helps articulate both how change has come about, and what change from the project is the most significant. It can be really useful for research projects seeking to influence policy, where the outcomes are often unexpected.
 "The process involves the collection of significant change (SC) stories emanating from the field level, and the systematic selection of the most significant of these stories by panels of designated stakeholders or staff. The designated staff and stakeholders are initially involved by "searching" for project impact. Once changes that have been captured, various people sit down together, read the stories aloud and have regular and often in-depth discussions about the value of these reported changes. When the technique is implemented successfully, whole teams of people begin to focus their attention on programme impact." The approach can promote a participatory identification of impact and change by "boosting" the presentation of various points of view depending on the diversity in the judgement panel. (Source: Hovland, 2005)

Related Sources
 • The "Most Significant Change" (MSC) Technique: A Guide to Its Use
 Davies, R. and Dart, J., 2005
 • Translations of the "Most Significant Changes" Guide
 Davies, R., et al.
 • Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations
 Hovland, I., Overseas Development Institute, 2005
 • MSC: Misconceptions, Strengths and Challenges
 Kotvics, F. and Lasambou, C., Australian Evaluation Society, 2009

Overview
 Principles
 • Participation
 • Evaluation
 Processes
 • Strategy Setting
 • Project ID & Design
 • Project Closure
 Stakeholders
 • Claimed Beneficiaries
 • Staff
 • Partners
 Capacity type
 • Process

Accountability Foundations

Accountability is important because research organisations persuade because they are viewed as legitimate – as unbiased, with good evidence, and with appropriate values, and an organisation must enable its stakeholders to hold it to account for its statements. We argue that any policy oriented research organisation – or indeed any organisation that seeks to collect information and uses this to effect a change in policy – has certain minimum accountability requirements.

In order to outline opportunities to build these required internal accountability capabilities within the organisation, we reiterate briefly how the core principles can be understood and addressed in key processes to build the capabilities of the organisation.

- **Transparency** is about the processes through which the mission, the values, strategies, and activities are first of all clearly articulated (since they may be tacit – we argue accountability requires their explicit acknowledgement where possible) and then actively communicated. The aim is to ensure that all stakeholders have a clear idea of the organisation, its positioning, and can evaluate for themselves the legitimacy of its messages, and are enabled to challenge the organisation about it.
- **Participation** involves the manner in which stakeholders are identified as part of the organisation's theory of change, and how it engages stakeholders in formulating its responsibilities. Research organisations reach out in a variety of ways. They build networks, links and relationships to policy-makers, communities, and researchers. Accountability is fundamentally about the constitution of these relationships.
- **Evaluation** covers that the organisation positions itself clearly by articulating and communicating the theory of change so far as it can – their desired changes, and the manners by which that change will be brought about. This communicates clearly what they are doing, why they are doing it, and gives a yardstick against how successful they have been.
- **Complaint and response / Feedback management:** the counterpoint to transparency, this principle argues for the institution of processes and policies which allow and encourage

feedback from external stakeholders. In this, we consider mostly first-party feedback management systems.

Processes

As outlined above, the database comprises tools that address the different key stages of policy oriented research processes:

- Institutional governance
- Strategy setting
- Project identification and design
- Conducting of the research, and
- Concluding the research

In the following, the guide outlines the essence of these processes and provides pointers towards tools as they have emerged from the research. More detail can be found in the database for direct references and relevant web links. The tools may involve different kinds of guidance:

- Methods and guidelines of how to design and conduct evaluation, communication, participation and feedback management processes.
- Descriptions of the minimum norms which an organisation needs to adopt.
- Options to support processes and standards through management structures.

Institutional Governance

‘Institutional Governance’ refers to the allocation of authority and responsibility to individuals, and the processes through which they steer, advise, direct, scrutinise and hold to account an organisation for its actions. There are a variety of forms of institutional governance: in the public sector for example there is a complex arrangement of democratic institutions and the checks and balances entailed in their interaction. The focus of this project has been on accountability of private, i.e. not publicly owned or governed, not-for-profit organisations.

We are concerned here with the capabilities relating to the two core management structures within an organisation: with how the **executive management** is appointed and held to account by the **Board**, and how the Board itself operates. The board is responsible for the probity of the organisation, and has a central role in holding an organisation to account. It therefore a key stakeholder for an organisation, and the processes through which it is accountable are vital for the credibility of the institution. For this reason, this section receives more space than the subsequent processes.

Developing vision and mission

The vision and the mission are the core statements of intent for the organisation. They should communicate the values and aims of the organisation and should inform the entire purpose and work of the organisation. Organisations may wish to prepare several of the following:

- Vision: the overall aim of the organisation incorporating long-term goals
- Mission: the organisation’s purpose, that often takes the form of a mission statement
- Goals: are specific measurable outcomes that are regularly assessed

- Programmes and Projects: are the activities an organisation conducts to deliver its vision and mission and fulfil its goals

The mission statement articulates the purpose - the desired change which the organisation seeks to adapt. It makes a claim for which it will be held to account. The change should be achievable, for the organisation will be held to account for meeting them. It is of central importance to accountability, since accountability concerns assessing an organisation for the manner in which it has been able to meet its claims.

Parsing each of our partners' missions – and our own – shows that there are different ways of addressing the aims and goals of the organisation. We argue that the mission should seek to articulate in a concise and clear way the values of the organisation and the role of research in attaining these values. This contains the bones of a theory of change, which should be explicit, and which should be tested through its refinement into strategy and programmes.

Tools

- Radtke's *How to Write a Mission Statement* gives an overview of mission statement writing, and provides good practice guidance.
- Srinvas provides guidance on the same issue in *Developing an NGO's Mission Statement* and formulates an iterative step-by-step work plan adapted from the **Drucker Self-Assessment Tool**
- The **IDRC's Knowledge Translation** toolkit lays out what it considers are *ten essential elements of a communication's strategy*.

The Board

The Board of Trustees or Directors of an NGO or company has responsibility for the organisation. Their appointment is a requirement, demanded by most legal systems and regulatory authorities. The structure of the modern organisation makes executive management responsible for operational issues, while the board are responsible for governance.

Parsing the mission

Our research partners state their mission very differently. Thus RIMISP states starkly its end goal as fostering: "Latin American rural development, understood as strengthening the capacity of different social groups in the rural sector, and enhancing the freedoms enjoyed by the people who make up rural society in our region." This is elaborated in specific objectives which bring in its activities.

Others include an instrumental value and an ultimate value, like CIPPEC whose staff members "work for a just, democratic and efficient state" which is designed to contribute to the second value: improvements in "the quality of life for all Argentine citizens".

IIED aims "to build a fairer, more sustainable world, using evidence, action and influence in partnership with others", thereby explicitly including research in its theory of change. ForestAction take a similar approach in stating their mission as producing: "policy, institutional and technical innovations to promote equitable, sustainable and effective management of natural resources."

Similarly, the CGD states its aim as to: "strengthen representative institutions and empowering civic actors and economic groups for a just and equitable society through research, capacity building, civic education and advocacy."

The One World Trust's mission statement rests on the value of the educational effect for the public of its research on global governance. It says: "The One World Trust is an independent think tank that conducts research, develops recommendations and advocates for reform to make policy and decision-making processes in global governance more accountable to the people they affect now and in the future, and to ensure that international laws are strengthened and applied equally to all."

This involves taking responsibility for the probity of the organisation and holding the Executive Director (ED) to account and providing strategic guidance and advice. The processes through which the Executive Director is held to account should be characterised by transparency, clear articulation of the standards against which the organisation is being measured, and good process.

Typically, since these accountability structures are so fundamental, they are formally stated in the form of governance bylaws. Bylaws offer organisations means of enshrining certain written standards to which the board and/or its members can be held to account. Bylaws can cover a range of matters. They are implemented in order to standardise certain governance processes such as establishing a procedure for board meetings, establishing a board self-evaluation procedure, establishing a procedure for a board evaluation of the Executive Director, and establishing board election criteria and term limits

Tools

- Governance Matters' **Board Tune-up Kit**, for example, provides guided discussions to help boards fulfil their leadership and governance responsibilities. The Kit contains a range of tools that can be used to diagnose and address problems of governance.
- www.managementhelp.org is a website dedicated to providing tools and other learning materials in order to assist managers in the public, private and third sectors. For instance, its **Board of Directors Self-Evaluation Scorecard** is an example of an easily adaptable tool for getting an impression of how well the board is working from their own perspective.
- **Board Insight** provides a resource detailing issues to consider before conducting a board evaluation.
- **Traveling Management Boards** are a way of engaging board members in different contexts – whether it is within a community or another partner organisation. Help4nonprofits.com provides an overview of how to conduct such meetings and what researchers can expect to gain from them.
- Several Tools for board or organisational self-assessment are contained in the database, including the **McKinsey Capacity Assessment Tool**, **Burke & Litwin Model**, the **Seven-S Model**, **Weisbord's Model**, the **Open Systems Model**, and **Lusthaus' framework**.
- Several sources are outlined in the database designed to assist organisation in establishing its own conflict of interest policy. www.governancepages.org.uk provides a **Sample Policy** for community groups and small voluntary organisations and is adaptable for research organisations.

Membership and Advisory Group

Not every organisation has a membership. Those without members usually have a self-appointed Board, whereas a member model typically allows its membership to function as the main decision-making body, with the power to elect the Board and amend bylaws. Importantly membership models, which confer power in the governance of an organisation, need to be separated from the existence of supporter networks, which usually have no or only very limited stake in the governance of an organisation.

Advisory boards or groups are separate bodies that feed into formal management structures and are comprised of members possessing a level of expertise in a particular area. They can exist to advise a specific project, generally of an ongoing nature, or the organisation as a whole. It typically has no

formal voting power but can influence decision-making. They are therefore useful to engage core stakeholders, while at the same time not providing them formal power and therefore retaining some independence. They are prevalent in both profit and non-profit sectors.

Tools

- Several sources in the database provide organisations with information on establishing advisory (or stakeholder) boards. Michael and Dinler (2005) discuss the concept in ***Designing Stakeholder Boards in Developing Countries***, which considers the efficacy of such boards in the private sector.
- Strategic planning and marketing firm ***Stengel Solutions*** provide their ***Ten Tips to Creating an Effective Advisory Board*** that includes advice on such issues as determining the objectives of an advisory board, choosing the right people, and considering alternative feedback methods. Similarly, www.allbusiness.com provide their ***Ten Tips***. The database also provides ***several examples of operational stakeholder boards*** such as that of the *Maine Greenhouse Gas Initiative* and the *Ontario Independent Electricity System Operator*.

Reporting and Transparency

Reporting is an essential part of organisational accountability, both from a statutory perspective and that of key other stakeholders. In line with wider organisational good practice such a transparency approach should be disclosure based and involve only a limited number of narrowly defined exclusion to disclosure. Notwithstanding these requirements of a transparency policy, it is recognised that the need for transparency is balanced with the needs for privacy, contractual confidentiality and exposure to risk. Research organisations therefore may wish to make a difference between transparency tools used to report on their activities, tools to support trust in the engagement with key stakeholder groups, and tools that allow the checking of compliance with regulatory frameworks. For instance an annual or bi-annual report is a key transparency mechanism and is an integral part of a communications strategy. It captures the state of the organisation, reviews the expenditure of funds, and provides an opportunity to present how money has been spent. Yet it does neither replace a financial audit, nor transparency commitments and mechanisms that would support engagement with a community for instance where research is conducted, and where claims are made about its local benefits.

Tools

- Bartle's *Community Empowerment Collective* website provides a training resource on ***report writing for community-based organisations***.
- ***Mango's Top Tips*** provide advice on financial good practice in the NGO sector. Their ***Tips on Reporting to Beneficiaries*** provides information on why, what and how to report, and details several working examples where financial reporting to beneficiaries has yielded positive results.

Strategy-setting

The strategy plan is commonly understood as an explicit statement of intention, setting forth – perhaps in a document – how an organisation will implement its mission. For us, strategy-setting is

in large part the process of defining the positioning of the researcher or research organisation. It is relevant from an accountability perspective in two ways.

1. **External accountability:** the strategy is an important public articulation of an organisation's positioning. Since organisations ought to be accountable for the claims they make about their goals and impact, we argue that external stakeholders should be able to assess research organisations for their success in meeting the claims made in their strategy. We argue therefore that the strategy should contain a clear definition of the positioning and the theory of change, including the desired change in society.
2. **Internal accountability:** Second, in their form as a plan, strategies are about who controls the actions of the organisation. Therefore, insofar as it articulates a set direction, the strategy is a means of expressing control. It is therefore a means of holding staff to account internally. The strategy is designed as a way structure the approach of staff.

That said, not every organisation is in a position or wishes to articulate a fixed 'Five Year Plan' type of document which they will rigorously follow. The environment may be too dynamic, or the type of product too innovative to be susceptible to close planning. A strategy must be a good fit for the organisation, in order for it to facilitate the accountability and operations of the organisation. This also points towards a perspective on strategy which can either be designed, i.e. in form of a plan, or emergent, in shape of a reflection of practice.

The form of the strategy and its process of formulation is therefore important. If it is too restrictive, it can create perverse incentives and distract from the real aim; too loose, and it may reduce the opportunity to focus the organisation on the desired change, limit its opportunity to be held to account, and reduce the opportunities for learning.

A strategy must be a good fit for the organisation, in order for it to facilitate the accountability and operations of the organisation.

Independent of the form and content an organisation chooses as best fit, organisational strategies should be published and available, reflect the values of the organisation, and dependent on the degree to which it is possible to articulate specifics, demonstrate how it plans to structure the measurement of progress.

Tools

- **Strategic Forums** intend to bring together a multiple stakeholders during the process of formulating a strategy. The **Change Management Toolkit** provides an overview of when and how to implement a strategic form.
- **Stakeholder consultation/dialogue** is a general method that allow for a two-way dialogue between organisations and their stakeholders. It can be used in a range of contexts at a range of points in the research / governance process at times when the views of stakeholders are needed. A range of tools and resources can be found on the subject such as **CommGap guide to multi-stakeholder dialogue**.
- The **Most Significant Change (MSC)** technique is a participatory learning process involving the capture of significant change stories at field level, which are then used as the focus of discussions in order to discover program impact. It is particularly attractive to situations where outcomes are uncertain and thus is highly applicable to policy oriented research.

- **Social Network Analysis** is a tool that can help a policy research organisation understand how change happens in complex networks, particularly ones affected by a range of actors, through understanding that it happens in a network. It can be used in conjunction with planning and evaluation mechanisms, such as outcome mapping.
- A **Critical Timeline** is a learning tool useful for identifying trends over time by chronologically documenting key events.
- Although not accountability tools, **Learning Loops** offer a framework within which to understand the dynamics of the learning process. Single loops can be taken as learning about and correcting actions without questioning organisational structure. Double loops can be taken as learning about and correcting both actions and organisational structure. A further triple loop which is reflective about the entire learning process.
www.managementhelp.org provides a more detailed overview of the distinctions.

Project Identification and Design

Project identification and design concerns the process by which individuals take the values, standards and theories of change in the mission and strategy and apply them to their own daily work in identifying research projects.

This is determined by the internal structure and internal accountability processes which inform staff's approach to identifying and designing projects. In this the nature of the structure and internal accountability processes are closely intertwined. In the same way that the form of the strategy should fit the organisation, so the processes through which a project is identified and designed will be shaped significantly by the organisation.

Key elements that emerged as relevant include the organisation of team and staff, review and approvals including in relation to funding and viability of funding, how theory of change and evaluation are embedded in the design practice, and transparency requirements. Critically, all of these elements involve potential trade-offs where for instance independence of lead researchers may involve a more limited control of the organisation in terms of strategic fit or connection with the organisational wider theory of change.

Tools

- **Commitments to Research Participants and Researchers** help anticipate harm and taking measures to avoid any physical, socio-economic, or psychological harm that might fall on research participants or researcher as a consequence for taking part in the research.
- **Outcome Mapping** is a way to design a plan a project where the goal is subject to many factors outside the organisation's control - such as changing policy or behaviour of several actors. It shifts away from assessing the products of a programme to focus on changes.
- The **Rapid Appraisal of Agricultural Knowledge Systems (RAAKS)** is a "participatory action research methodology" about sharing and using knowledge and information from different stakeholders for innovation. It was designed to help stakeholders gain a better understanding of their performance as innovators.
- **Scenario Testing and Visioning** is a way of developing alternative futures based on different combinations of assumptions, facts and trends, and areas where more understanding is needed for a particular scenario project. Scenario testing would usually deliver at least three

scenarios: a positive (or optimistic), negative (or pessimistic), and an assumed (realistic) pathway.

- **Situation Analysis** is a participatory planning tool. It is the starting point for project initiation as it provides a clear picture/understanding of the scope and environment of the project to which the project design has to respond.
- A **Social Framework** is a format for describing an expected pathway of influence through a wider network of people, groups or organisations. Following a similar approach as a Logical Framework, the social framework places people and their relationships at the centre of outcome descriptions.

Conducting the research

Engaging communities involved in research means being transparent to those with whom the researcher is working is not a new consideration: the principle of informed consent is fundamental to research ethics, and in many research disciplines informs all interactions with all research subjects. Often, the requirements will mesh closely with the principle of transparency, which is central to accountability. It entails requirements on researchers to explain the nature and purpose of the research, what will be done with the information, and must seek permission to carry on before proceeding.

Tools

- **Consent Forms and Other Tools of Recording and Assuring Informed Consent** relate to communicating a number of information related to the research project and the nature and conditions of participation in it in order to achieve an agreement with research participants.
- **Media as a Facilitator of Community Dialogue and Mobilisation** highlights the utility of media as a facilitator of communication with research subjects and stakeholders. It can in particular support the diagnosis of problem situations and the presentation of a problem to a community and stimulate community deliberation and prioritization of research activities.
- **Rights to Confidentiality and Privacy:** Researchers are expected to anticipate any threats to the anonymity of research participants. All measures should be taken for protecting the anonymity of the participants including securing any information that can indirectly lead to the disclosure of the identity of the participant (such as location, age, ethnicity, etc.).
- **Sensitising Stakeholders to the Complaints and Response Mechanism (CRM):** This tool helps inform stakeholders on the concept of complaining through the CRM can build trust and inform future activities on an ongoing basis.

Concluding research

Closing the loop consists of the processes by which a project is finalised and the product is then communicated to the various relevant stakeholders. Typically, this is dominated by donor reporting. However, the conclusion of research is a key phase of an accountable research process, through which researchers can achieve a far wider benefit than can be reached with donor reporting alone. Presenting research findings, in appropriate formats, back to constituencies involved in the research, beneficiary groups and peers can help to communicate appreciation of contributions made by others, motivate stakeholders to provide input into evaluation activities, and proactively offer opportunities for feedback and the submission of and response to complaints. Combined with media

work, these steps help to generate transparency around research findings, and create relevant buy-in for policy relevant conclusions within wider circles.

Tools

- **Designing a Complaints and Response Mechanism (CRM)** enables stakeholders to feedback on issues or grievances into organisations. This tool helps an organisation recognise the issues that need to be addressed in designing a CRM.
- **Evaluative Inquiry** seeks to ensure the evaluating team sees its role as that of an informed facilitator providing the structure for a process of common sense making. Evaluative inquiry approaches evaluation as a learning experience using dialogue, reflection and challenge to distil learning opportunities.
- **After action review (AAR)** is a discussion of a project or an activity, to enable the individuals involved to learn for themselves what happened, why it happened, what went well, what needs improvement and what lessons can be learned from the experience.
- **Contribution analysis** is a way of trying to understand cause and effect in a complex environment, thus building a theory of change. This is critical to assessing the performance of programmes and projects.
- **Reflexivity** is a concept that describes the need for reflecting on how knowledge was 'constructed' during the research process. It forms an important quality indicator for qualitative research. It also represents an important factor to be considered in the communication between researchers and research subjects.

Conclusion

The accountability framework for research organisations presented in this document together with the core functions and some tools from the online database is, and is meant to be, a conceptual challenge to a community of research and practice whose work has stayed largely out of the limelight in terms of accountability demands and pressures. Yet research organisations face increasing attention, and at times also criticism, of their ways of working, handling of stakeholder relationships, and communicating about their accountability.

Developed over the past years through empirical research and collaborative engagement with a range of very different organisations the accountability framework seeks to support research organisations in responding in a structured way to meet this challenge.

It identifies core principles, work processes and types of stakeholders that we have found to be relevant in a generic way to all policy oriented research organisations, and indeed all organisations that collect data and seek to effect policy change through the communication of its analysis and interpretation. The range of tools identified by us and made accessible in the database shows that independent of the actual use of the 'accountability language' the policy research and evaluation community has made many inroads into understanding and reflecting accountability issues.

Yet the application of the framework in the individual organisational context also involves making some practical choices based on context:

First, the framework is a generic framework: individual organisations have to make judgments about which elements to give priority, and which less, depending on their positioning, stage of organisational development, and resources available. However, they can only do this on the basis of a conscious reflection on the above factors.

Second, each regulatory space or circumstances, and social and political norms about what is considered the right thing to do, for instance with regards to transparency, will define minimum accountability standards that need to be met in different ways. We make some propositions what such minimum good accountability practice might consist of in the work processes, but the individual circumstances of an organisation may push the demand higher up.

Third, while the framework outlines principles, processes and stakeholder relationships that a policy oriented research organisation should pay attention to, it asks of researchers and research managers to review a range of tools and sources that may help them and their organisation to realise their respective accountability duties, and then make a conscious choice about methods and approaches that ensure a best fit with positioning, identity and capacity of the organisation.

In sum, while the development of the framework may thus make the entry into an organisational development and reform process easier, realising its potentials requires effort. Yet both the normative and instrumental benefits of demonstrating accountable research practice set out in this document outweigh this effort by far.



one world trust

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