Responsible Impact: Best Practice Guidance for Social Science Impact Accelerator (SSIA) projects

The SSIA is funded by an ESRC Impact Acceleration Account (IAA) grant which cannot fund new research. **Research is usually defined as investigation that is purposefully designed using documented methodology to answer a research question and that produces new knowledge that is generalisable beyond the study population**. Projects that meet this definition would frequently need to be considered and receive a favourable opinion by the RHUL Research Ethics committee before commencing.

The SSIA funds impact, knowledge exchange and public engagement activities, underpinned by ongoing or completed academic social science research. These activities can take place at any point in the research journey. Broadly, they involve working with non-academic audiences and partners, to share knowledge and apply research in the real-world for benefit or change. Many impact, KE and public engagement activities do not require a favourable opinion via the research ethics process.

Examples of impact projects

Examples of impact activities include (but are not limited to):

- o   Engagement with participants about research findings
- o   Sharing an animation/video/infographic with public audiences and tracking its usage or impact.
- o   Engaging with non-academic stakeholders at an event or forum and measuring the impact of the event on stakeholders (through surveys, etc).
- o   Hosting a workshop to share ideas and build networks.
- o   Creating a toolkit or resources for schools, charities, businesses and evaluating its usage and impact
- o   Writing a policy report and launching it at an event with policymakers and practitioners.
- o   Developing a new device, product, process or service (note IP will be discussed at award stage).
- o   Evaluation and improvement of services, systems, or products though engagement with stakeholders

These types of projects would not require engagement with the research ethics process because they are not 'research' designed to produce new knowledge that is generalisable beyond the participants being engaged.

IAA Responsible Impact

In cases where PIs believe that aspects of their IAA projects may meet the definition of research, it is important to engage at an early stage with the IAA Manager and / or IAA Academic Chair to discuss whether consideration by the RHUL Ethics Committee is required (for discrete elements only).

Even where IAA projects do not constitute research (and hence, do not require engagement with the research ethics process), they may need to consider issues around e.g. data protection, health and safety, and partnerships.

Data protection. Most IAA projects will not involve the collection of personal data. However, where personal data are being acquired then it is important to engage with RHUL resources and training around GDPR to ensure that participants in our activities are protected.

Health and safety. Impact activities will frequently involve travel and the organisation of stakeholder events. In such cases, it will be important for PIs to engage RHUL health & safety resources. These include the Travel & Fieldwork Policy , the Safeguarding Policy, and resources pertaining to Risk Assessment.

Partnerships. The IAA team will conduct Due Diligence checks on all project partners. The purpose of these checks is to ensure that any partnerships align with our values, protect our reputation and financial capital, and to meet funder requirements. Medium or high-risk cases will be reviewed by Katherine Poole (Head of Policy and Integrity) or Sue Starbuck (Director of Research and Innovation).

Guide for IAA Project Leads

All IAA Project Leads should create a plan to conduct their projects responsibly, addressing any issues around research ethics (if elements of the project constitute research), and ensuring compliance with health and safety, safeguarding, data protection, due diligence, and other institutional policies. Use your academic training and judgement to ensure risks are appropriately identified, managed and mitigated. Remember that behaving responsibly goes beyond formal procedures - it's about protecting yourself, your partners or collaborators, your participants, and upholding the University's reputation in all your professional activities.

All SSIA application forms will include the following mandatory question: Considering the SSIA Responsible Impact Guidance, explain how you will address any issues around research ethics (if elements of the project constitute research), and ensure compliance with health and safety, safeguarding, data protection, due diligence, and other institutional policies.