EVIDENCE INTO ACTION LEARNING REVIEW

Prevent Child Sexual Abuse Programme
Oak Foundation

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Executive summary

The Prevent Child Sexual Abuse (PCSA) Programme at Oak Foundation has commissioned a learning review to take stock of its investments in research to influence policy and practice. The team refers to this approach as Evidence into Action (EiA). The review aims to address the following learning questions:

1. How can evidence producers maximise the utilisation of such evidence by practitioners, advocates, and policy-makers?
2. What are the most influential factors for researchers to effectively integrate EiA into their research plans?
3. How can Oak Foundation and other funders better support the generation and dissemination of evidence to influence policy and practice?

This review examines different Evidence into Action models based on a spectrum of less to more engagement with end users. It also presents learnings from grantee partners and other funders to make these models more effective and showcases examples of how funders can support Evidence into Action. Finally, the report provides recommendations for funders to support their partners more strategically and effectively on this journey.

The review has revealed that the most influential factors for evidence to be impactful relate to the quality of the engagement process between the evidence producers and the users of such evidence. When this engagement happens before, during, and after the research is conducted, the potential of utilisation of the evidence is significantly greater than when the engagement only happens once the evidence is published. Research projects that have established relationships with the audiences and actively involve them throughout the process, including in the problem definition and formulation of research questions, are significantly more likely to influence policy and practice than those that start the engagement process only after the evidence has been produced.

Evidence into action models

The review has identified six models that illustrate four levels in an engagement spectrum[1]: infomediary, knowledge translator, knowledge co-creator and innovation broker.

[1] Shaxson, Louise & Bielak, Alex. (2012). Expanding our understanding of K* (KT,KE,KTT,KMb,KB,KM, etc.) A concept paper emerging from the K* conference held in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. 27pp + appendices.

Level	Model
1. Infomediary	Model 1. Knowledge curation platform
2. Knowledge transfer	Model 2. Knowledge brokering
	Model 3. In-house researchers work jointly with in-house advocates or practitioners
	Model 4. EiA through capacity development and technical assistance
3. Knowledge co-creator	Model 5. Co-producing research with service providers and other end users
4. Innovation broker	Model 6. Connect and convene local, national, and global actors through multiple partnerships and multi-stakeholder platforms

Funding approaches and tactics

The review also explores different ways in which funders are supporting evidence into action:

- Approach 1: Launch calls for research with strong EiA orientation as an equity consideration
- Approach 2: Open calls to advance knowledge about EiA
- Approach 3: Fund a dedicated EiA or policy role embedded in the research project
- Approach 4: Fund an advocacy platform as a natural convener of evidence users and organise collective action
- Approach 5: Convene networking and exchange spaces where advocates and researchers can connect

In addition to these approaches, other ideas were suggested by participants as good tactics that funders could support to promote EiA, both directly and indirectly:

- Offering EiA training for researchers and data literacy training for evidence users (e.g., policy-makers, practitioners, advocates and campaigners)

- Strengthening the capacity of programme implementers to collect evidence on their own programme
- Encouraging grantee partners to develop EiA components as part of their grant proposals and research plans
- Investing in knowledge brokers as key actors in a dynamic knowledge ecosystem
- Sponsoring advocates to attend conferences related to child sexual abuse (CSA) prevention and response.

Learning Considerations

These are the main takeaways from the review in relation to how evidence and knowledge can be maximised for impact:

1. The quality of the evidence-generation process and the intensity of the stakeholder engagement are strong predictors for influence and utilisation. Start the engagement as early as possible and be open to co-create with key stakeholders. Invite stakeholders to become partners, pay attention to building and maintaining trust, and be politically savvy.
2. While the process needs to remain flexible and responsive to opportunities, it also needs to be supported by a strategy.
3. Effective communication and knowledge translation need to be incorporated into the influencing strategies.
4. Networks matter, and they take time to develop.
5. There are geographic and disciplinary differences in the degree to which research is actionable. Research conducted in the Global South was more often actionable than research generated in the Global North. Some academic disciplines tend to be more comfortable engaging with policy-makers than others.

Recommendations for funders

1. **Fund the full Evidence into Action process**, not only the research and initial communication.
2. **Consider an ecosystem approach.** This means applying systems thinking to the problem analysis and developing funding strategies that affect a broad spectrum of actors in the system of interest. This could range from learning exchanges and network development to the co-creation of interventions and strategies.
3. **Incentivise collaboration.** The most successful EiA models include partnerships with local experts, implementers, survivors, etc. Funding approaches can further promote this. The need for greater collaboration includes encouraging more collaboration amongst agencies and funders themselves
4. **Help increase EiA capacities to generate the demand for evidence**, including through training and skill development opportunities.

5. **Center equity in the EiA process.** This is not only a matter of values and ethics, but also a question of effectiveness in the EiA process. Equitable knowledge ecosystems are more diverse and by design they bring more perspectives, world views, and experiences to the table. As a result, they are more dynamic, richer, and more effective in putting available evidence to work in service of solutions.
6. **Allow for flexibility.** Influencing processes are unpredictable by nature and flexible funding allows grantee partners to make the most of unforeseen opportunities.
7. **Communicate your vision and understanding of EiA** to align on intention and purpose**.**

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Context and motivation for this learning review

Background

The Prevent Child Sexual Abuse (PCSA) Programme at Oak Foundation believes that online and offline child sexual abuse is preventable. In 2023, the programme made 53 grants totalling USD 43.18 million out of the foundation's total grant-making budget of USD 474 million.

The programme supports partners globally at community, national, and global levels through its six priority areas: Solutions and Research, Men and Boys, Safe Digital Environments, Safe Sports, Justice for Survivors, and Survivors-led Organisations. In addition to these six priority areas, the programme invests in a wide variety of partnerships to experiment and be responsive to new opportunities that fall outside of the core programme areas.

Under the funding priorities that focus on investing in innovative research and supporting promising solutions (solutions and research), the programme funds the generation of evidence and data to support the scaling of effective solutions and that inform advocacy and other efforts to drive change in the prevention of CSA. Their current thinking is informed by this framework:

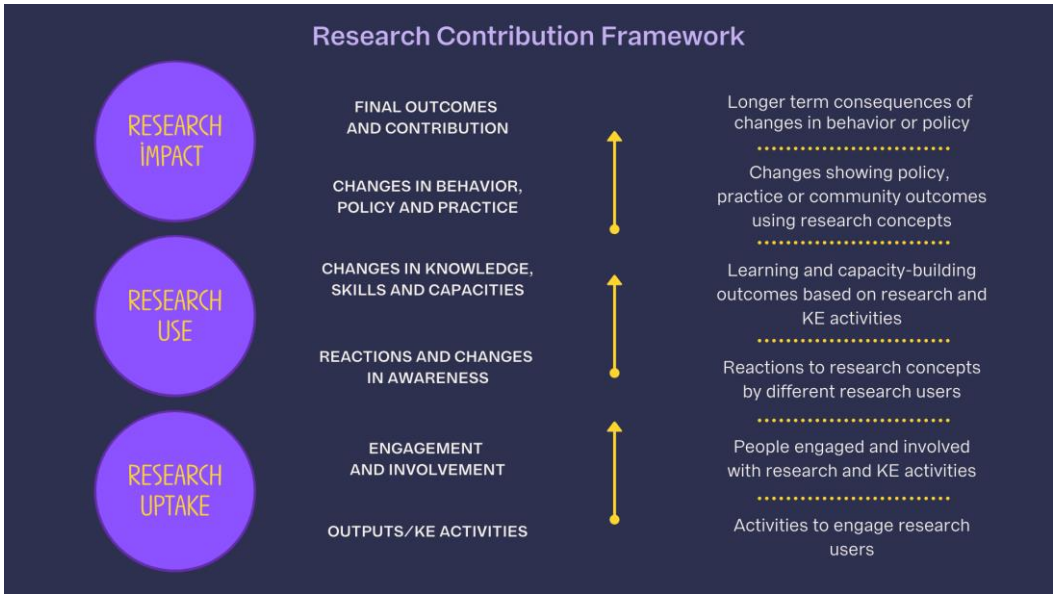

Figure 1: Research Contribution Framework, Matter of Focus

The team has learned that good quality evidence is necessary but not sufficient to influence policy or practice. With the intention of maximising the chances of the evidence generated by grantee partners being used to prevent child sexual abuse, the programme has been experimenting over the last five years with different models[2] to support evidence translation, mobilisation, and uptake through its grant-making. This experimentation has allowed the team to test and learn from these approaches and observe that they are not equally effective. However, this learning has not been systematic or documented. Additionally, the team still has fundamental questions about the main factors that could explain the differing results of their efforts and would like to explore further how they can more strategically and effectively support their partners on this journey.

In summary, the team wishes to conduct a learning review to take stock of what has worked or not and why, and to receive guidance on the most effective ways to support Evidence into Action moving forward.

Learning questions and hypotheses

The review aims to address the following learning questions:

1. How can evidence producers maximise the utilisation of such evidence by practitioners, advocates and policy-makers?
2. What are the most influential factors for researchers to effectively integrate Evidence into Action (EiA) into their research plans?
3. How can Oak Foundation and other funders better support the generation and dissemination of evidence to influence policy and practice?

During the initial discussions about this review, the PCSA's team identified several hypotheses that they had been testing over the past five years through their grant-making, to explore what are the most effective ways for the evidence to be actionable and utilised. Each of these hypotheses calls for specific tactics for funders to promote effective EiA that the PCSA team has deployed and that are further explored in the following sections of this report.

Hypothesis 1: *Effective EiA is a matter of mindset and role identity*

Many researchers interpret that their primary role in the EiA cycle is to produce the evidence base and share their findings in academic circles. They are less likely to extend their influence on its practical application for policy and practice. It is for other actors to take the necessary steps to disseminate this knowledge and data in other spaces and make it accessible to audiences outside academic circles.

[2] These models presented in the next section of this report.

In this case, the efforts should be directed at changing mindsets about the role of researchers in the EiA processes and offering broader alternatives. The assumption is that if there is an intentional influencing or impact strategy embedded in the research process from the outset, where researchers play a central role in engaging with audiences, their role in the project would be more comprehensively focused on evidence uptake, increasing the chances that the evidence will be accessed and utilised beyond academic circles.

Tactics for funders:

- Encourage a broader self-identification of researchers' role in the EiA process.
- Provide examples of successful EiA models where researchers play a crucial role in the engagement process.
- Incentivise the development of a Research into Action strategy in which researchers have a role that extends beyond the production of the evidence as a part of the research grant application process.
- Provide resources to implement an evidence uptake strategy.

Hypothesis 2: *Integrating EiA is a matter of skills and knowledge*

This hypothesis assumes that EiA can be better supported through skill development. Most researchers have not been trained on EiA approaches, so if there were tailored opportunities for researchers to participate in training and capacity-strengthening opportunities for research uptake, they would reinforce the skills required in these processes and would feel more confident, empowered, and motivated to design research projects with more effective Evidence into Action components.

Tactics for funders:

- Offer or support access to tailored training opportunities.
- Target early career researchers to build these skills from early on.
- Partner with academic institutions to introduce EiA training in core curriculum for researchers.

Hypothesis 3: *EiA requires multi-disciplinary collaboration*

This hypothesis is based on the understanding that researchers alone cannot be expected to produce successful EiA projects, they need to partner with other specialists whose role is to manage the research process, develop the influencing strategy, and engage stakeholders to bridge the gap between evidence production and use. If research projects were implemented by multidisciplinary teams that included members with expertise in communication, knowledge translation, influencing, and policy advocacy. If researchers worked closely together with those specialists, the evidence generated would have a

greater potential to be influential and accessible to non-academic audiences.

Tactics for funders:

- Prioritise proposals from multi-disciplinary teams that integrate EiA roles in the call for proposals or application process (and fund accordingly).
- Fund Evidence into Action/knowledge translation/influencing roles and infrastructure.
- Provide examples of different models of multi-disciplinary teams.
- Encourage researchers to form partnerships with practitioners, advocates, and other actors for more effective research projects.

Hypothesis 4: *The incentives for researchers are misaligned*

In the academic context, researchers publish papers in peer-reviewed journals, present at academic conferences, and mostly disseminate their work among other researchers. Academia values and rewards these academic engagements. Out of necessity, researchers need to prioritise this type of research for career advancement and to build their credibility in academic circles. In this context, there are fewer incentives (and sometimes resources) for researchers to invest time and effort in joining non-academic spaces and translating their research into knowledge products that are accessible for practitioners. If there were more career-advancement incentives for researchers to engage with non-academic audiences and translate their research into usable knowledge, they would dedicate more time and effort to doing so.

Tactics for funders:

- Create opportunities for researchers to connect with practitioners, programme implementers, service providers, survivors, and families who are closer to the issue, so that they can increase their networks and initiate mutually rewarding collaborations.
- Introduce attractive rewards and career-oriented incentives for researchers for their participation in successful models and efforts related to evidence uptake and access, as well as maintaining academic rigour.

The findings of this review indicate that while all these hypotheses hold true to some extent, the most influential factors for the evidence to be impactful have to do with the quality of the engagement process between the evidence producers and the audiences and users of such evidence. When this engagement occurs before, during, and after the research is conducted, the potential for utilising the evidence is significantly greater than when the engagement only happens once the evidence is published. In the models presented in the next section, some have proven to be more effective than others, with the main factor being the length and quality of the engagement.

The review also shows that research projects that already have established relationships with the audiences and involve them actively during the process, including in the problem definition and formulation of research questions, are significantly more likely to influence policy and practice than those that start the engagement process once the evidence has been produced. As part of this process, it is important to build a mutual understanding of the ultimate goals that the research will serve, and consequently, what stakeholders expect when considering Evidence into Action. This approach usually requires a multi-disciplinary team with a dedicated capacity to hold the process and facilitate stakeholder engagement with the researchers. It also requires flexible resources to respond to opportunities as they emerge and sufficient time (usually longer than the timelines in traditional research projects) to establish these relationships. While skill-building efforts for both users and researchers are indeed positive and contribute to an enabling environment, they are not the most influential factors. More details are provided in the analysis section, under “Learning considerations”.

The next section presents different Evidence into Action models that have been identified during the review, followed by some learning considerations based on the experiences described.

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Models to support Evidence into Action

What we mean by Evidence into Action (EiA)

The PCSA team at Oak Foundation uses the term "Evidence into Action" to refer to evidence that is generated and shared in a way that maximises its influence on policy and practice. Other organisations use the terms "action-oriented research" or "research for impact". Language matters: it can help or hinder collaboration, it can allow partners to align on a shared vision, and it can also become a barrier if actors involved hold very different mental models about what this entails. The review has revealed that "EiA" as a concept is not commonly used by partners, although the concept behind is understood easily when defined. For many it feels foreign, even "evidence uptake" can feel very alien. For others the term "Evidence into Action" refers to a specific stage in the research project (usually at the end, after the evidence has been produced), rather than an integrated approach aimed at maximising the utilisation and influence of that evidence.

Most partners use different terms, such as policy engagement, evidence-based advocacy, evidence-based programming, or knowledge translation, although they recognise these have slightly different connotations and scope. Some have not developed specific language for this way of working and when asked, most did not consider themselves EiA experts by any means. At the same time, for many, this is completely integrated into their way of working already. It reflects their core theory of change, their operating model, to the extent that they do not feel the need to name it any specific way as it is simply the way they think about undertaking research.

Evidence into Action models

This section presents six models that describe different ways to produce research that aims to influence policy and practice. These are not mutually exclusive, and some of the experiences that were examined during the review integrated elements of more than one model. This categorisation is not exhaustive, it has been constructed based on the sample of grants selected by Oak Foundation for this review and a rapid desk review to identify additional models worth mentioning.

These models are good examples of the four levels of a spectrum[3] that arise from working with information flows that seek to bring about systemic change (see Figure below).

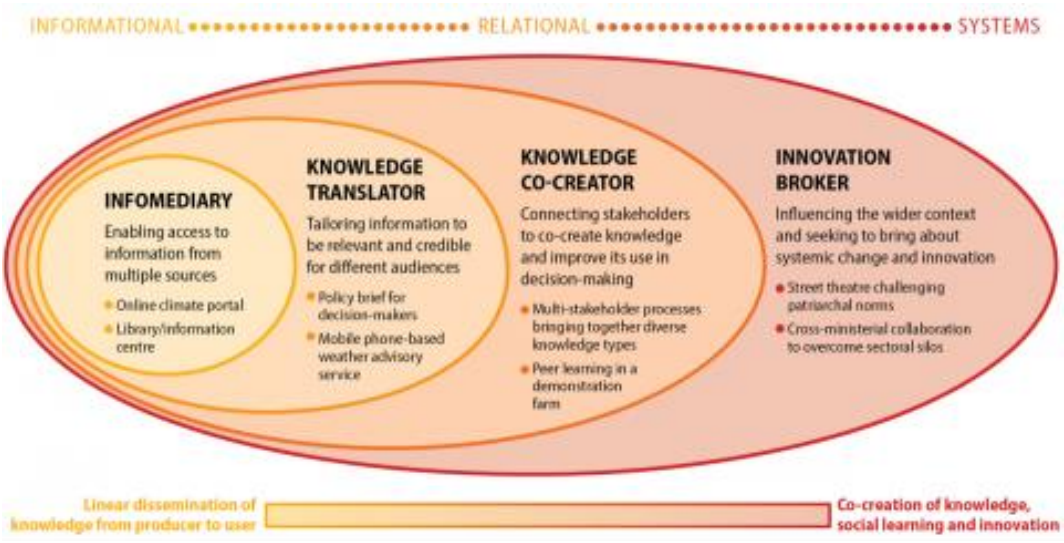

Figure 2: Spectrum of knowledge broker roles, adapted from Harvey et al. (2012) and Shaxson et al. (2012), by the Climate and Development Knowledge Network

This table presents an overview of these models and where they are located in the spectrum:

Role	Model
1. Infomediary	Model 1. Knowledge curation platform
2. Knowledge translator	Model 2. Knowledge brokering
	Model 3. In-house researchers work jointly with in-house advocates or practitioners
	Model 4. EiA through capacity development and technical assistance

[3] Shaxson, Louise & Bielak, Alex. (2012). Expanding our understanding of K* (KT,KE,KTT,KMb,KB,KM, etc.) A concept paper emerging from the K* conference held in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada.. 27pp + appendices.

3. Knowledge co-creator	Model 5. Co-producing research with service providers and other end users
4. Innovation broker	Model 6. Connect and convene local, national, and global actors through multiple partnerships and multi-stakeholder platforms

Let's look at each of these models closely.

Model 1: Knowledge curation platform

This model focuses on making accessible the latest and most relevant knowledge accessible to different audiences, usually through an online platform. Accessing a trusted, curated knowledge platform can increase knowledge utilisation by providing an efficient mechanism to find the latest information on a topic. These platforms are sometimes hosted by an academic institution or a sector thought leader. This represents the first level of effort on the Evidence into Action ladder that puts an emphasis on accessibility for a broad general public. It is a linear, one-way provision of knowledge with limited interaction with the end user, but it allows a large number of users to access the resources as needed.

Model 2: Knowledge Brokering

This model builds on the previous one by often incorporating a virtual hub or knowledge curation platform. However, it goes further by intentionally seeking to connect and engage end users of the knowledge or evidence by establishing relationships that are sustained over time. This model relies heavily on knowledge brokers — researchers, subject matter specialists, and other actors who serve as knowledge navigators, guiding the end user (such as policy-maker, practitioner, or service provider) through the latest evidence base. In most cases, knowledge curation, synthesis, and dissemination are complemented by additional activities, such as trainings, roundtables, or dialogues. These models are particularly successful when they include a skill development or capacity-building component. In the most sophisticated versions, they also provide advisory support or technical assistance in programme or policy design, mentoring, and sustained accompaniment to help put knowledge into practice.

Model 3: In-house researchers work jointly with in-house advocates or practitioners

This model combines evidence generation with influencing and engagement functions under the same organisation, strategy, and purpose. This creates a very powerful combination as researchers and advocates work closely together throughout the process. It also offers an additional advantage — evidence generated in-house by implementing organisations tends to be difficult to access without a specific entry point. For instance, leveraging its reputation and campaigning work, the Internet Watch Foundation has been granted special permission from the UK government to go into the dark web and collect information on child sexual abuse material (CSAM) that would otherwise be very difficult to obtain. This highlights why, in some cases, it is essential for researchers to partner with implementing organisations that can provide such access (see model 5: Co-producing research with service providers).

For this model to succeed, organisations need a credible reputation and well-established networks in the policy space for their research to gain attention. Their reputation and gravitas in the field are essential for being heard. The evidence base is only one element that contributes to a broader influencing strategy, which requires other elements to be in place. Building these relationships takes time and necessitates staff capacity, which needs to be factored in. Additionally, the research and advocacy functions need to be well aligned to work together toward common goals. In the case of organisations that utilise evidence for their own programming or service delivery, the data is an important element but serves a larger purpose rather than being an end in itself. The risk arises when these functions are disconnected and not mutually supportive.

Model 4: EiA through capacity development and technical assistance

This model shares similarities with model 2 (Knowledge Brokering) in the sense that it contributes to strengthening the capacity of key actors to use Evidence for Action. It also acknowledges the need to develop strategic advocacy plans and invest in capacity development as part of this process. The main difference is that, in this model, capacity building for evidence-based solutions and the provision of technical assistance are central to the work and define the purpose of the collaboration, which usually occurs over a longer time frame. Based on the learnings from several experiences, the most effective approaches build on the ‘embedded advisor’ or ‘trusted advisor' approach, integrating the researcher or expert in the team for a more direct application of the knowledge in the context of the end-user over a sustained period. Other examples include mentorship and accompaniment over time. This model has proven to be very effective in building the capacities of practitioners and policy-makers to engage with knowledge and evidence over time, increasing their awareness of the need to be evidence-informed. At the same time, it requires a strong foundation of trust, mutual interest, and responsiveness to work

effectively in practice. This trust can take time to develop, especially if the partnerships are new.

Model 5: Co-producing research with service providers

This model relies on a partnership between researchers and practitioners, implementers, or service providers, where both parties become co-producers of knowledge. This approach generates positive benefits for both sides: researchers gain direct access to communities and key stakeholders, and they learn from the experiences of practitioners who are well acquainted with the realities of the work at hand, including the practical challenges, opportunities, and the specificities of the context — insights that are invaluable for good research design. The knowledge and evidence gathered by implementers can also provide an excellent knowledge base to complement academic research. At the same time, implementers benefit from a close collaboration with academics, who can also act as knowledge brokers and help build their capacity to produce, maximise, and apply evidence in their work.

Additional advantages of this model include the co-creation of research questions by both researchers and practitioners based on needs identified by both parties, ensuring that evidence will be applied as soon as it is produced. Finally, co-creation involves close collaboration from the outset, generating buy-in and engagement from end users. The risk in this approach is that if the relationships are not built and sustained, it becomes challenging to foster genuine collaboration and co-creation.

Model 6: Connect and convene local, national, and global actors through multiple partnerships and multi-stakeholder platforms

This model takes an eco-system approach and seeks to influence large systems change at scale by engaging with as many stakeholders as possible. Their goals are ambitious. In most cases, they use the language of seeking *transformational change* or even a change in paradigm. In this model, there is often a multi-stakeholder platform, an alliance, a coalition, or a large multi-year global programme that provides an umbrella for the initiative and brings stakeholders (including funders) together. Academics can be powerful conveners and connectors. A neutral player responding to a research agenda for the public good and removed from the power dynamics between actors that, for internal politics, may find it more difficult to collaborate. Well-networked researchers can also access diversity of actors, from high-level policy-makers to implementers, service providers, funders, and community leaders. This allows them to bring different actors together, break silos, and build multi-stakeholders spaces to tackle complex, multi-faced issues.

The six principles summarise well what most interviewees have indicated as enabling

factors for Evidence into Action:

1. Research is needs-driven, solutions-oriented, and leads to a positive impact on the lives of those at risk from climate change;
2. Research is transdisciplinary and co-produced with users;
3. Research emphasises societal impact;
4. Research builds capacity and empowers actors in the long term;
5. Research processes address structural inequities that lead to increased vulnerability and reduced adaptive capacity of those at risk; and,
6. Learning-while-doing enables adaptation action to be evidence-based and increasingly effective.

Funding Evidence into Action

Examples of how funders support EiA

To explore learning question 3 (*How can Oak Foundation and other funders better support the generation and dissemination of evidence to influence policy and practice?*) the review also identified funding approaches and tactics that philanthropic funders are deploying to support Evidence into Action. This table presents some examples, including some suggested by interviewees:

Funding approaches and tactics	Example
Approach 1 Specific calls for research with strong EiA orientation as an equity consideration	Evidence for Action Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Approach 2 Specific calls to advance knowledge about EiA	Research grants on Improving the Use of Research Evidence William T. Grant Foundation
Approach 3 Fund a dedicated EiA or policy role embedded in the research project	Several grants Oak Foundation
Approach 4 Fund advocacy platforms to use the evidence and organise collective action	Suggested by interviewees
Approach 5 Convene networking and exchange spaces where advocates and researchers can connect	Suggested by interviewees
Other suggestions	

Approach 1: Specific calls for research with strong EiA orientation as an equity consideration

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) has established four signature research programmes - Evidence for Action (E4A), Health Data for Action (HD4A), Policies for Action (P4A), and Systems for Action (S4A) to show its commitment to developing the evidence base on different areas of work.

The **Evidence for Action Programme** is dedicated to developing the evidence base to advancing health and racial equity by funding investigator-initiated research and providing technical assistance to researchers and organisations working in communities to evaluate interventions. It is housed in the Centre for Health and Community based at the University of California in San Francisco.

The programme launches open and rolling calls for proposals that prioritise research evaluating the impact of policies, programs, practices, or other system or structure-level changes in such a way as to establish causal relationships between the interventions and important health and racial equity outcomes. Through these calls RWJF prioritises researchers, practitioners, community leaders, advocates, policy-makers, and other stakeholders across the many sectors and domains that impact health and well-being, who are committed to developing and disseminating evidence about what works to dismantle or remedy unjust systems and practices and produce more equitable outcomes for people and communities of colour.

The grant-making is combined with other efforts, such as knowledge dissemination through topical symposia (the latest one, on different ways of knowing[4]) or provision of technical assistance.

This has been the result of an evolution in thinking and practice. E4A has now been running for almost seven years. Initially the focus was on improving research dissemination. At present the calls prioritise the quality of the research process. The team has been thinking more critically about questions such as how is the research commissioned and designed, who is involved, who takes decisions, how the community is involved, and how they are going to be compensated for their time and expertise. More specifically, to select grantee partners, the team assesses several key factors in the applications. This includes evaluating how communities will be involved in the research process, the level of engagement anticipated, how the research topics have been selected, and to what extent they are important to the community. The team examines whether there are already existing partnerships or if they need to start from scratch. The proposal's emphasis on equitable practice is also assessed, as well as how the research process itself will build agency in the local communities.

[4] https://www.evidenceforaction.org/news-events/ways-knowing-symposia

Approach 2: Specific calls to advance knowledge about EiA

William T Grant Foundation provides research grants on improving the use of research evidence. Through a specific call for proposals[5], the foundation funds research studies that advance theory and build empirical knowledge on ways to improve the use of research evidence by policy-makers, agency leaders, organisational managers, intermediaries, and other decision-makers that shape youth-serving systems in the US.

According to the foundation's website, while an extensive body of knowledge provides a rich understanding of specific conditions that foster the use of research evidence, we lack robust, validated strategies for cultivating them. Its grants aim to advance questions such as: What is required to create structural and social conditions that support research use? What infrastructure is needed, and what will it look like? What supports and incentives foster research use? And, ultimately, how do youth outcomes fare when research evidence is used? This is where new research can make a difference.

It is interested in studies that pursue:

1) Building, identifying, or testing ways to improve the use of existing research evidence.
2) Building, identifying, or testing ways to facilitate the production of new research evidence that responds to decision-makers' needs.
3) Testing whether and under what conditions using research evidence improves decision-making and youth outcomes.

The team is learning from these grants through its annual digests, grantees blog posts, and featured resources for applicants, available on their website[6].

Approach 3: Fund a dedicated EiA or policy role embedded in the research project

Several of the Oak grants explored in this review incorporate a dedicated role within the research team. Most of the EiA models rely on a specific function that leads the development of the influencing strategy, maintains cohesion throughout the process, and facilitates stakeholder engagement.

Conversations with grantee partners have revealed that for this approach to be effective, several elements are needed. Firstly, it is important that this role is embedded within the research projects and is respected and valued equally alongside researchers. Secondly, the influencing strategy must include clear impact pathways and should be recognised and owned by the entire team, not just by the dedicated EiA function. Lastly, the success

[5] https://wtgrantfoundation.org/funding/research-grants-on-improving-use-of-research-evidence
[6] https://wtgrantfoundation.org/focus-areas/improving-the-use-of-research-evidence

of the engagement relies on a collective team effort and commitment.

For research institutions that are early in their journey of developing their 'Evidence into Action' approach, embedding this type of expertise and role in-house is also an effective capacity development strategy that supports building an EiA mindset and ways of working over time.

Approach 4: Fund advocacy platforms to use the evidence and organise collective action

Advocacy platforms can be excellent convening and influencing mechanisms bringing together multiple stakeholders, including practitioners, advocates and researchers for coordination and collective action. They could be supported to either use or commission research that provides the evidence base for their advocacy and campaign work, or to invite others to engage with the data.

Approach 5: Convene networking and exchange spaces where advocates and researchers can connect

Advocates need evidence to substantiate their campaigns, refine their strategies, paint their case or create public will. However, either the evidence they need is not available, or they do not know where to find it or how to connect with the right researchers or knowledge brokers. To address these barriers funders could invest in developing facilitated collective spaces where researchers and advocates could connect, exchange, and collaborate.

This very promising approach could take different forms and address one of the main barriers that advocates are currently facing in the field of CSA prevention. Funders could facilitate mechanisms where advocates can connect with, or even be matched to, researchers and knowledge brokers. Knowledge producers, knowledge brokers, and advocates would be supported in co-create research or access the evidence base they need for the advocacy and campaigning work. This could take the form of loose or informal learning spaces such as conferences and discussion forums, or more curated mechanisms, similar to LEAP (Jacobs Foundation), where matchmaking is facilitated and resources are provided for co-creation and sustained accompaniment over a period of time. An adaptation of model 4 (*Cultivating partnerships through technical assistance*) could also be considered, in which a research team acts as a learning partner for the campaigners over a longer duration. This could also be a way of building ecosystem-level coalitions in the field of preventing CSA.

In addition to these approaches, other ideas were suggested by participants as good tactics that funders could support to promote directly and indirectly EiA. Some of these have already been supported by Oak Foundation in other grants not included in this review:

- Offer EiA training for researchers and data literacy trainers for evidence users (policy-makers, practitioners, advocates, and campaigners, etc.)
- Support (and provide financial resources) to programme implementers to strengthen their capacity to collect evidence on their own programme.
- Encourage and support grantee partners to develop EiA components or strategy as part of their grant proposals and research plans.
- Invest in knowledge brokers as key actors in a dynamic knowledge ecosystem. Some examples of the importance of this function have been documented in other fields of work[7].
- Sponsor advocates to attend conferences related to CSA prevention and response, to promote better collaboration and access to knowledge.

[7] For instance: https://cdkn.org/resource/role-knowledge-brokers-advancing-climate-action

Learning considerations

This section presents the main takeaways from the conversations with interviewees and the document review and provides insights related to learning questions 1 and 2 and the main hypotheses outlined in the context section of this review:

- Learning question 1: *How can evidence producers maximise the utilisation of such evidence by practitioners, advocates, and policy-makers?*
- Learning question 2: *What are the most influential factors for researchers to effectively integrate EiA into their research plans?*

1

Takeaway 1. The quality of the evidence-generation process and the intensity of the stakeholder engagement are strong predictive factors for influence and utilisation.

There seems to be a consensus that more important than the quality of the final knowledge products per se is the quality of the evidence production process and how key stakeholders have been involved. Many agree that stakeholder engagement is the most difficult part of the process, and also the most effective approach to ensure the evidence is used.

These processes take time and have longer time frame than the research generation period alone. This is why research funding proposals should support the entire process, not only the evidence generation and initial communication. As one of the interviewees put it: "*We are human beings. Influencing others requires building the relationships, building the trust… That requires time*."

According to those who use this approach, other models can include stakeholder participation but unless they start by involving stakeholders in the problem definition and the exploration of the solution that requires the evidence base, they will not be as effective. Here are some recommendations from the interviews to bring others along in the process:

- **Start the engagement as early as possible** in the process to build momentum, interest, and buy-in, particularly if those partnerships are not already existing from previous engagements.
- **Be open to co-create.** Invite key stakeholders to discuss their needs, identify evidence gaps, and formulate the most strategic research questions. Begin with the real problem and the genuine need, and then utilise science and theory to produce the evidence, rather than starting with a gap in the theory. Invite key stakeholders to jointly define what the real problem is. Some researchers even engage with stakeholders to co-create and design the research, from jointly

formulating the research questions to discussing sampling strategies or dissemination tactics. This engagement is crucial for fostering ownership and interest; it is always a heavier lift to create interest after the research has been completed.

- **Invite stakeholders to become partners**, exploring the role of each partner and what everyone is best positioned to bring to the table.
- **Pay attention to building and maintaining trust** by showing understanding of the challenges they face, by keeping them up to date and by involving them in key decisions and co-creating as much as possible, even if this takes more time. For some it works to clearly set the expectations and show the value added of this process, explaining why it is important, and what you will be able to achieve together.
- **Maintain flexibility and persevere** – as one of the interviewers pointed out, "*Working with government officials is not easy, people are busy, and they do not always accept invitations. You need to be patient. Sometimes they miss the appointments or do not respond to your invitations. They have many agendas and maybe they do not have that much interest in yours but keep insisting*."
- **Be politically savvy.** Researchers need to navigate internal politics in the policy-making space, remaining sensitive to power dynamics and the nuances of the internal politics of the different ministries and agencies.

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Takeaway 2. While the process needs to remain flexible and responsive to opportunities, it also requires to be sustained by a strategy.

Most interviewees agree that effective Evidence into Action research projects need an intentional influencing strategy that aligns all actors involved around a shared purpose and goal. Often, there is a tacit one but if it is not explicit or has not been given sufficient attention or thought by all the involved, it will lack ownership and be less effective. In some multi-disciplinary teams, there is often a dedicated role that holds this responsibility and sustains the process, making the entire undertaking easier and more effective. However, this is not essential for the success of the model, provided that everyone involved understands the strategy and contributes to it from their respective functions.

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Takeaway 3. Effective communication and knowledge translation needs to be incorporated in such influencing strategies.

One common pitfall in EiA is assuming that when the research is completed, if the demand has been created, the evidence will be used. In fact, there is a middle step that is essential, which is how the evidence is packaged and communicated. The language and messages need to be tailored to different audiences. One of the interviewees shared,

"[When] *communicating with community leaders – we keep everything simple. We do not use powerpoint, we do not use a technical report. We talk about the results in the local language, with the help of community members that can act as knowledge brokers and translators."*

Some partners have even developed taglines or titles to make the evidence more memorable and accessible. For instance, "Cash and Care", or "The Prevention Triad".

Very often this goes beyond effective communication. Sometimes the evidence requires facilitation and knowledge translation, to make the evidence relevant and actionable for the different contexts. As one of the interviewees pointed out: "*To bridge the evidence utilisation gap, very often what is missing is the brokering, the facilitation, the collective sense-making, the translation to a specific context or situation*".

To communicate research findings effectively, the William T. Grant Foundation recommends paying more attention to the realities and needs of those that are going to use the evidence[8]: "*There is a growing body of evidence on the science of using research evidence. While prevailing strategies to bring research evidence into policy and practice rest on models that increase decision-makers' access to rigorous evidence and incentivise or mandate the adoption of programmes with evidence of effectiveness, research evidence remains under-used. (…) Recent scholarship points to the limitations of models that prioritise research production and dissemination without adequate attention to would-be users' realities*". The insights shared by researchers and practitioners who participated in this review confirm these observations: paying attention only to the generation of evidence and its dissemination for a generic public is not effective. To maximise the use of such evidence and its applicability in policies and programmes, the Evidence into Action models need to tailor their engagement, partnership, and communication approaches to the specific audiences they seek to reach. This is reflected in some of the models described above.

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Takeaway 4. Networks matter and they take time to develop.

To engage key stakeholders, researchers need access to relevant networks. Building these networks require time and sustained contact. Sometimes, access to these networks is facilitated from other partners involved in the project. Effective mentoring and capacity development programmes for early-career researchers should include opportunities for networking and coaching to build their confidence and ability to present themselves in front of policy-makers, as well as to foster trust and credibility. This is equally important for engagement with practitioners and communities; if researchers are perceived as disconnected from reality and speaking from an ivory tower, they are less likely to generate interest in collaboration.

[8] https://wtgrantfoundation.org/funding/research-grants-on-improving-use-of-research-evidence

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Takeaway 5. There are geographic and disciplinary differences.

Some interviewees observed that, generally speaking, research conducted in the Global South was more often actionable than research generated in the Global North. This observation was further interrogated in the review, and participants offered various explanations. Some thought this had to do with the personal motivation of researchers. As one of the interviewees shared: "*In the Global South, we see the needs and opportunities to improve the lives of others every day, and this is what drives us to be researchers*."

Others thought this had to do with funding models and the funders mindset – research funding for Southern academic institutions is often tied to development outcomes "*Funders expect research in Africa to be action-oriented*". This has generated more experience and knowledge on EiA models and stronger partnerships between researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers. On the other hand, some highlighted this also has a downside: it is more difficult for Global South researchers to access funding for purely academic research and to publish their findings. This diminishes their ability to influence debates on the global stage, access the same career development opportunities, and gain the same credibility in the international arena in the Global North.

Interestingly, another interviewee noted that she had also observed differences across disciplines: "*Economists seem to be more comfortable and more drawn to work with policy-makers, than health scientists, for instance. So, there is the North-South divide but also a disciplinary divide. This is problematic because it talks about the barriers of why in some fields we are not thinking about use and influence as much as we should*".

Recommendations for funders

This section presents the takeaways and insights from the interviews in relation to the role of funders in supporting Evidence into Action, along with funding approaches and tactics. These insights are presented as recommendations for funders interested in supporting this type of evidence and knowledge generation.

Recommendation 1. Fund the full Evidence into Action process, not only the research and initial communication.

Influencing processes requires longer time frames than the evidence production alone. The funding mechanism should acknowledge this reality and support the full process, including the development of the influencing strategy, stakeholder engagement process, capacity building when needed, and any knowledge brokering and knowledge translation capacities beyond the initial communication.

Consider all the elements that need to be in place before the research starts and well after the research has been published. Even when research grants include resources for a dedicated role or for some convening and initial dissemination activities, they usually only scratch the surface. Those initial activities are just a small step on a longer influencing and uptake engagement process that requires sustained support over a longer period than what is usually funded in research grants.

Recommendation 2. Consider an ecosystem approach.

This means applying systems thinking to the problem analysis and developing funding strategies that impact a broad spectrum of actors playing in the system of interest. These strategies could range from learning exchange and network development to the co-creation of interventions and strategies. As an example, one of the interviewees proposed: "*It would be important for funders to organise convenings to see how we can all collaborate, how we fit together, and work towards shared goals. Funders can help move us as a sector, using systems thinking*". Taking an ecosystem approach also means empowering actors to be network builders so that the ecosystem increases its connective tissue from within: "*This should be on us, to build the partnerships, and if this is important there should be funding streams that support that. Funders should support researchers to be part of networks, work in networks, forge partnerships from the beginning. [This is] not often the case, everyone goes off to look for funding on their own*". In practice, this could mean that funders either act as conveners, fund others to convene, or invest in the development of platforms, alliances, or other mechanism to foster multi-stakeholder partnerships. In any case, what it is most important is investing in the connective tissue that brings all actors together and provides incentives and infrastructure for joint action.

Recommendation 3. Incentivise collaboration.

Collaboration is key in EiA approaches. The most successful models include partnerships with local experts, implementers, survivors, etc. Funding approaches can further promote this. One interviewee pointed out the need to stop "*funding stand-alone universities to conduct research alone. Instead, funders should promote collaboration, and this starts with how research projects are funded. Researchers should not be fully responsible for the uptake. If you only fund one researcher and one PI*[9] *to do this work, you are only funding the research project. If you bring together other partners that can work collaboratively with the researchers, the results will be very different. This is part of the preliminary work that needs to happen before a grant is made*". Other suggestions mentioned by participants include preparing calls for proposals that specifically fund EiA partnerships: "*A lot of us are competing for funding, so* [I suggest] *releasing calls for research proposals that promote collaboration between institutions. Even promoting collaboration and engagement in equal power with Southern organisations*".

The need for greater collaboration includes encouraging more collaboration among agencies and funders themselves: "*In our field so many survivors are sharing these stories, and that is wonderful but there is a lot of duplication. Funders could also coordinate more and propose joint calls for proposals of joint projects*".

Recommendation 4. Help increase Evidence into Action capacities.

The need for greater investment in capacity building was brought up by several participants: "*capacity strengthening should be top of the list, for both practitioners and for researchers".* Many indicated that more attention should be paid generating the demand for evidence, including through training and skill development opportunities. According to some interviewees, practitioners tend to be more open to capacity development opportunities than policy-makers or researchers, so different mechanisms should be considered and tailored to the different groups. For example, to build the capacity of policy-makers some models can be more effective than training, including provision of technical assistance, embedded advisors or learning partners that can also act as knowledge translators. As one interviewee noted: "*The best way I've seen capacity strengthening is to have senior researchers in their [policy-makers] teams to guide them, pass on their expertise"*. For researchers, some consider it essential to train early-career researchers in evidence into action approaches and models, so they are more aware and open to consider them throughout their careers. Other skills that interviewees suggest should be further developed in researchers so they can better partner with practitioners include programme implementation science: "*Very few researchers know about implementing science and how to ensure fidelity, and this is a skill that is needed, learning*

[9] Principal Investigator

more about implementing science-based interventions".

Recommendation 5. Centre equity in the EiA process.

This is not only a matter of values and ethics, but also a question of effectiveness in the EiA process. Equitable knowledge ecosystems are more diverse and, by design, bring a wider range of perspectives, worldviews, and experiences to the table. As a result, they are more dynamic, richer, and more effective in utilising available evidence to develop solutions. The first step to centring equity is identifying and acknowledging the systemic and structural barriers that keep some voices in the margins. These barriers must then be addressed to enable more active participation of those whose experiences have been historically under-represented. Some tactics to remove these barriers include initiating the engagement with communities early on, identifying what is important to them, understanding the questions they have, and determining how they can benefit from participating in the research. Communities are a crucial part of the change process, and participating in a research project can be an empowering experience rather than an extractive one if they are invited to co-create, instead of being mere providers of information in the data gathering phase. One interviewee proposed: "*I would love to see more community level participatory research, changing the way in which we decide whose knowledge counts and who are experts, what is evidence… [Funders should] promote other ways of knowing, use the knowledge of practitioners, survivors, and communities*" and value their contribution to the knowledge base.

Recommendation 6. Allow for flexibility.

Unsurprisingly, this was identified by most participants as one of the conditions for success. Influencing processes are unpredictable by nature and flexible funding allows grantee partners to make the most of unforeseen opportunities. If the funding received from Oak Foundation had not been flexible, they would not have been able to respond to the opportunities and adapt as needed to course-correct their plans. Most grantee partners indicated that this is rather exceptional and would celebrate other funders adopting similar practices.

Recommendation 7. Communicate your vision and understanding of Evidence into Action to align on intention and purpose.

As stated in the earlier sections of this report, language matters; different terms related to Evidence into Action evoke different concepts and ideas for different actors and emphasise different elements. The review has shown that many grantee partners are either not fully aware of what Oak's definition of Evidence into Action is or use a very different language. It is important for funders who want to promote Evidence into Action approaches to communicate clearly what this means for them, as well as to ask grantee partners what this looks like for them. This opens up an important conversation to align

on process and purpose during the partnership. This clarity and initial exchanges will highlight how aligned (or not) grantees and funders are, enable better communication and mutual understanding throughout the partnership, and creating greater intentionality in the process. Some examples of how this could be achieved include developing user-friendly position statements, outcome frameworks, definitions, and examples.