

Government Social Science Research and Evaluation

PUBLISHING PROTOCOL

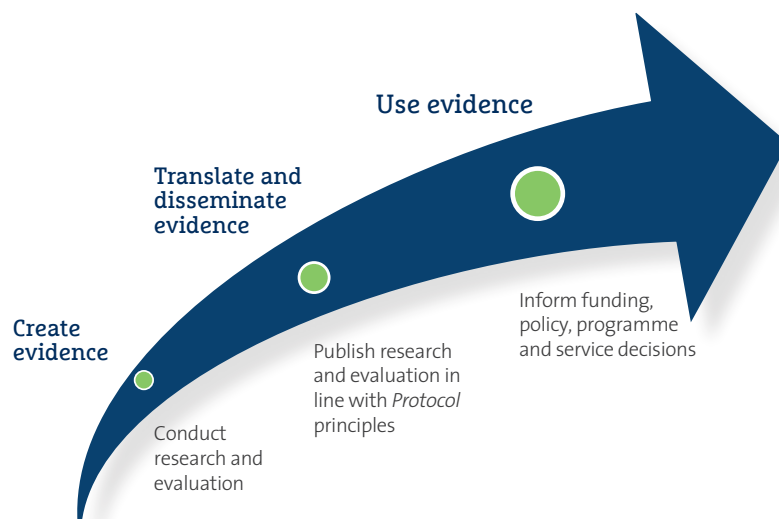
December 2015

Purpose

Government agencies undertake a substantial amount of social science research and evaluation each year. The *Government Social Science Research and Evaluation Publishing Protocol* is for agencies that carry out, commission or communicate social science research and evaluation.

The *Protocol* sets out good practice for publishing social science outputs. Implementing the principles and practices in the *Protocol* will help ensure social science outputs are published consistently and are readily available, in accordance with the government's commitment to openness (as expressed in the Official Information Act and the New Zealand Government Open Access and Licensing Framework (NZGOAL)).

This increased consistency and availability will help continue to lift the standard and impact of government social science research and evaluation.



See the **Quick Reference Guide** for the core principles and practices of the *Protocol*.

Definitions

For the purposes of clarity and consistency, terms used in the *Protocol* are defined as follows:

Government agencies

The *Protocol* applies to the following government agencies: Public Service Departments, the New Zealand Police, Crown Agents, Autonomous Crown Entities, and Independent Crown Entities.

The *Protocol* does not apply to: Non-Public Service Departments (with the exception of the New Zealand Police), Crown Entity Companies, Crown Entity Subsidiaries, School Boards of Trustees, Tertiary Education Institutions, Public Finance Act Fourth Schedule Organisations and Schedule 4A Companies, Reserve Bank of New Zealand, Offices of Parliament, State-Owned Enterprises, and Mixed Ownership Model Companies¹.

Launch

A launch is the formal announcement and presentation of a research or evaluation output. There does not need to be an official launch of the output, and any launch can occur separately from the publication of the output.

Final draft

The agreed final draft is the end point of a project at which a final draft/version of the output has been completed. This will be after any internal review/peer review and resulting revisions. Sufficient time for peer review and any resulting revisions will need to be incorporated into the project timeline.

Publication

Publication is the date on which a government research or evaluation output is released to the general public. Publication should be transparent and clearly evident to the external community.

Scope

In this *Protocol*, social science research and evaluation refers to systematic data collection, analysis and interpretation using social science methods; which can be quantitative and/or qualitative in nature. Government social science research and evaluation is carried out to generate robust information on an issue, policy or population group. It may also be conducted to clarify or quantify a policy problem, or to evaluate a policy and/or its delivery at pilot or implementation stage.

Research and evaluation outputs **within the scope** of the *Protocol* include:

- outputs from quantitative research data, including the analysis and interpretation of official statistics
- outputs from the analysis of qualitative research data
- outputs from the evaluation of policy or service delivery initiatives or pilots
- outputs from the monitoring of social trends
- outputs from literature reviews and systematic reviews, including 'evidence briefs'
- working papers designed to stimulate debate about policy and research issues.

¹ http://ssc.govt.nz/state_sector_organisations



Research and evaluation outputs which fall **outside the scope** of the *Protocol* include:

- official statistics without additional analysis and interpretation
- internal reporting
- policy advice to Ministers
- briefings prepared for policy/service delivery colleagues
- informal stakeholder consultation
- work in progress.

Principles

Good practice around publishing the government social science research and evaluation outputs takes account of the following five principles, based on the Publication Guidance² developed by the United Kingdom Government Social Research Unit. These principles and practices have been successfully incorporated into the publishing processes of different government agencies, such as the Ministry of Social Development.

PRINCIPLE 1: AVAILABILITY

The outputs of social science research and evaluation conducted or commissioned by government are made publicly available

The primary purpose of government social science research and evaluation is to inform decisions about policy and delivery, but it also plays a role in wider policy debate and generation of knowledge.

Good practice includes:

- Making all government social science research and evaluation outputs publicly available.
- Publishing all government social science research and evaluation on agency websites, in compliance with the Government Web Accessibility and Usability Standards³. Applicable research should also be published on The Hub⁴.
- In the rare situations when publication would threaten national security or destabilise the economy, withholding publication of research or evaluation if necessary.
- If outputs are withheld from publication, making decisions not to publish transparent, as part of the communication arrangements set out under Principle 4.

² http://resources.civilservice.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/GSR-Publication-Guidance-29-Jan-2010_tcm6-35775.pdf

³ <https://webtoolkit.govt.nz/standards>

⁴ www.thehub.superu.govt.nz

PRINCIPLE 2: TIMELINESS

All government social science research and evaluation outputs are released promptly

Research and evaluation outputs should be published promptly to ensure that interested stakeholders are kept well informed of the latest findings and that public debate is based on current knowledge.

Good practice includes:

- Publishing all government social science research and evaluation outputs within 12 weeks of completion of the final draft, whether work is commissioned or carried out in-house.
- The commissioning agency being responsible for the timely publication of outputs. The commissioning agency may agree to the external researchers or evaluators publishing the outputs themselves, within the 12 week timeframe.
- In rare instances, delaying publication during an election or prior to the Budget, if necessary.
- Ensuring that if findings are released to coincide with policy announcements or decisions, they are not released in a way that creates an advantage for any particular group or individual.

PRINCIPLE 3: TRUSTWORTHINESS

The way government social science research and evaluation outputs are released promotes public trust

One of the purposes of open government processes is to build trust in government institutions. This goal should not be compromised by subjecting publications or arrangements surrounding their release to political influence.

Good practice includes:

- Ensuring research and evaluation outputs are robust and findings are clearly based on the data collected.
- Gaining peer-review of research and evaluation outputs, to ensure the quality and impartiality of publications.
- Understanding that if Ministers and other public servants are briefed on findings of a study prior to its publication, they should refrain from public comment about these findings.
- Assessing whether the publication of outputs should be brought forward if government agency decisions have been made on the basis of unpublished research or evaluation.
- Reporting research or evaluation findings in a neutral manner in any press releases (although policy implications may be commented on).



PRINCIPLE 4: TRANSPARENCY

Clear communication arrangements are in place for all outputs

Clear communication arrangements need to be in place for each research and/or evaluation output, to ensure that maximum benefit is gained from its publication.

Good practice includes:

- Making information about agency-led social science research and evaluation publicly available, including announcing the publication date of any outputs in advance, when possible.
- Making research aims, timeframes and dissemination plans for current and upcoming research publicly available as soon as possible.
- Discussing and agreeing how the findings will be communicated when more than one agency is involved in the research or evaluation.
- Releasing outputs in formats and at times of day that are convenient to the widest range of users.

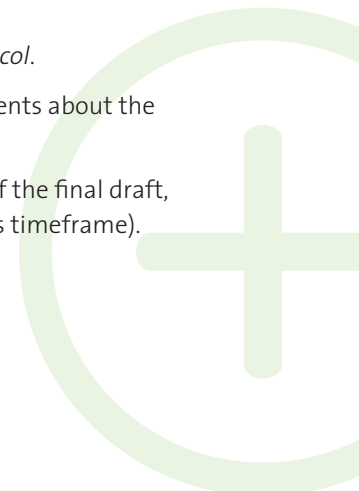
PRINCIPLE 5: CLEAR RESPONSIBILITY

Responsibility for the quality and release of social science research and evaluation is clear

For the purposes of accountability, it is important that it is clear who has responsibility for the quality of published outputs and for final approval to publish.

Good practice includes:

- Designating a senior manager in each agency with responsibility for implementing the *Protocol*.
- Ensuring that the designated person has the authority and expertise to make sound judgements about the publication of outputs within the scope of the *Protocol*.
- The government agency publishing commissioned work within 12 weeks of the completion of the final draft, unless they agree to the external researchers or evaluators publishing the output (within this timeframe).



Publication process

The principles and practices of the *Protocol* should be incorporated into the respective publishing processes of government agencies, and overseen by the designated authority within that agency. The following stages can be used as a model of good practice for the publication of social science research and evaluation outputs:





Additional guidance

Early release to reviewers

- Where external peer review is used, early access to unreleased outputs needs to be given to the reviewer.
- The team producing the research or evaluation should keep an accurate audit trail of documents, including what is sent, to whom, when and where. Peer reviewers receiving unreleased material are obliged to guarantee the confidentiality of that material until it is formally released.

Embargoes

- Embargoed access to social science research and evaluation outputs may be given to accredited journalists and other parties, where it is deemed necessary to provide them with enough time to provide informed comment at the time of release.
- Embargoed access may be particularly necessary where the research or evaluation output is complex. As a general rule, this should be no more than 48 hours before release.
- The embargo period should span usual office hours, so that those with access can reach the relevant researcher or communication personnel for clarification. The embargo period will not usually include a weekend.

Accidental and wrongful release

- Any accidental or wrongful release of social science research and evaluation information should be reported to the designated person – see Principle 5 – as soon as it is discovered. Appropriate action to limit loss of confidence should be taken quickly.
- Accidental or wrongful release includes providing any indication of the content of the research or evaluation output, including suggestions as to whether the findings are ‘favourable’ or ‘unfavourable’ with regard to a particular government policy.
- Where there is clear proof of wrongful or accidental early release of a research or evaluation output, the designated person may judge it necessary to arrange for its release as early as possible.





Our purpose

To increase the use of evidence by people across the social sector so that they can make better decisions – about funding, policies or services – to improve the lives of New Zealanders, New Zealand's communities, families and whānau.

What we do

We work across the wider social sector to:

- **promote** informed debate on the key social issues for New Zealand, its families and whānau, and increase awareness about what works
- **grow** the quality, relevance and quantity of the evidence base in priority areas
- **facilitate** the use of evidence by sharing it and supporting its use in decision-making.



For more information about the work of Superu contact enquiries@superu.govt.nz

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Follow us:  



The Families Commission operates under the name Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit (Superu)

Related Superu publications:



Evaluation standards for Aotearoa New Zealand: Evaluating with integrity
www.superu.govt.nz/publication/evaluation-standards-aotearoa-new-zealand-evaluating-integrity
(May 2015)



Government Social Science Research and Evaluation Publishing Protocol: Quick Reference Guide
www.superu.govt.nz/protocolreferenceguide
(December 2015)

www.superu.govt.nz