

Translating Population Health Research into Policy and Practice

The Role of Academic Incentives

September 30, 2015

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Every system is perfectly
designed to achieve the
results it gets.



Population Health Research

- Peer reviewed publications
- Research grants
- Conference presentations
- Teaching



If you think changing history
is hard, try changing a
history department!



New Paradigm Emerging?

- Interdisciplinary
- Problem identification includes non-academic partners
- Including a focus on knowledge transfer

Phaneuf, 2007

The Role of Academic Incentives in Applied Health Services Research and Knowledge Transfer

*Patricia Pittman, Ph.D., AcademyHealth; Margaret Trinity, M.M., Independent Consultant;
Jennifer Tsai, M.P.H., AcademyHealth*

October 2010



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Pressures on the Academy

- Recognition of the need to focus on population health
- Demands on AMCs to serve the public good
- Federal initiatives (e.g. CTSAs)
- ACA related pressures

Growing Interest in Research Impact Assessment

- Given limited funding available for research, science agencies and funders around the world are emphasizing research that has clear societal benefits and documented impact outside academia¹

¹Holbrook, J.B. & Frodeman, R. (2011). Peer review and the *ex-ante* assessment of societal impacts. *Research Evaluation*, 20(3): 239-246.

How do you evaluate research impact?

- Traditional tools to evaluate impact:¹
 - Bibliometrics
 - Case studies
 - Economic cost-benefit analysis
 - Peer review
- The Payback Framework²
 - Commonly used, multi-dimensional model for “paybacks” from research, including:
 - 1) Knowledge; 2) Benefits to future research and research use; 3) Benefits from informing policy and policy development; 4) Health and health sector benefits; and 5) Broader economic benefits

¹Jones, M. & Grant, J. (2013). Making the Grade: Methodologies for assessing and evidencing research impact. *7 Essays on Impact*. (Ed. Dean et al.): 25-43.

²Donovan, C. & Hanney, S. (2011). The ‘Payback Framework’ explained. *Research Evaluation*, 20(3): 181-183.



Funders are taking note...

- The Research Excellence Framework (REF): new peer assessment system for evaluating the quality of research in UK higher education institutions that informs selective allocation of research funding¹
- National Science Foundation Merit Review Criteria²
 - Intellectual Merit (e.g. importance, innovation, etc.)
 - Broader impacts (e.g. societal impacts)
- Among others

¹Research Excellence Framework (2014): <http://www.ref.ac.uk/>

²Holbrook, J.B. & Frodeman, R. (2011).



UK Research Excellence Framework

- Impact is defined as ‘any effect on, change or benefit to the economy, society, culture, public policy or services, health, the environment or quality of life, beyond academia’
- Outcomes used in 3 ways:
 - Funding allocation
 - Accountability for public investment
 - Benchmarking & establishing reputational yardsticks
- Allocation formula
 - The quality of research **outputs**. (65% of assessment)
 - The **impact** of research beyond academia. (20% of assessment)
 - The research **environment**. (15% of assessment)

UK REF Analysis Impact Case Studies

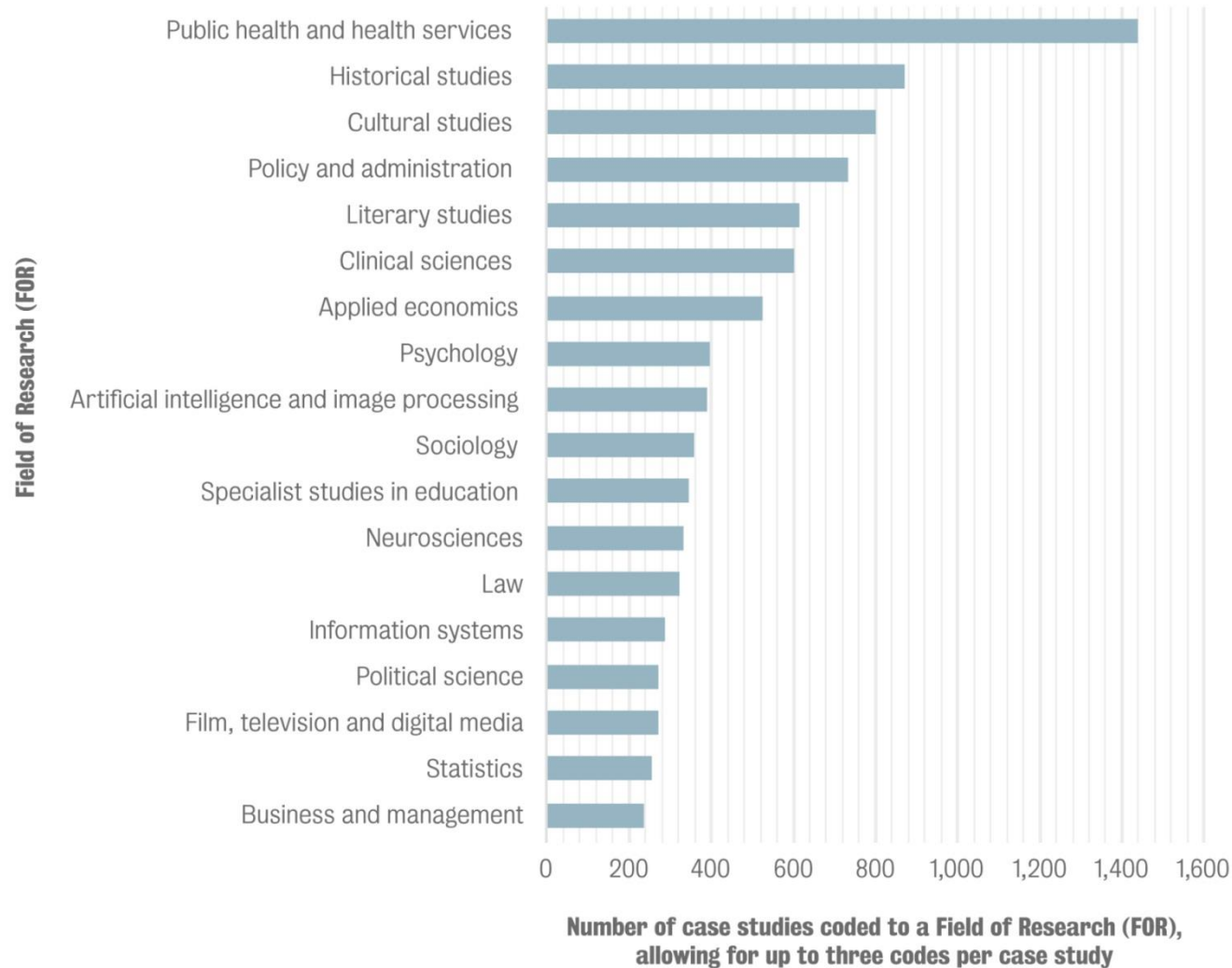
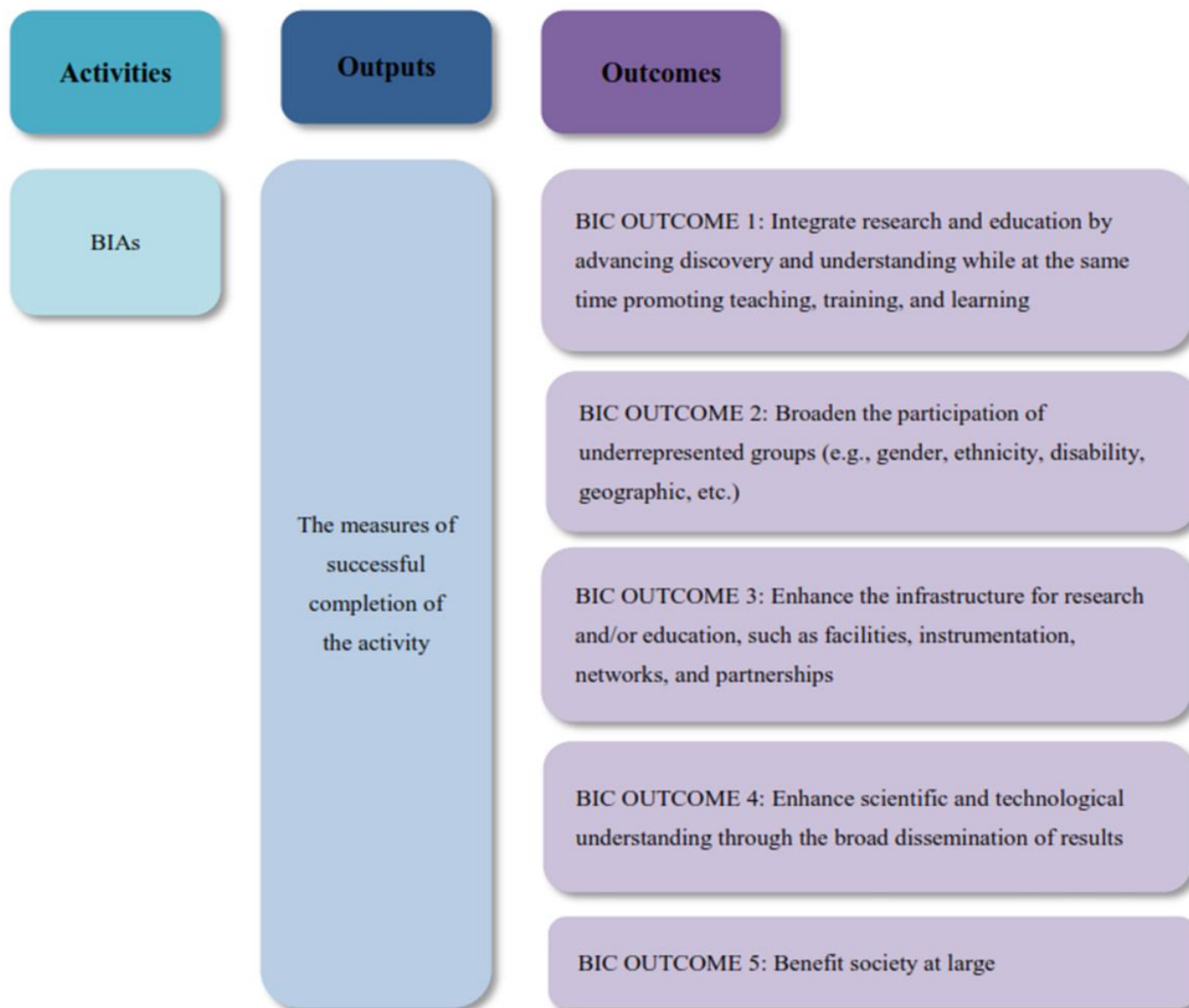


Figure 1. BIC program logic model 1



So what's the hold up?

- The UK, Australia, and Canada have made significant strides in evaluating research impact and aligning funding allocation
- But... the US lags: Why?



Challenges

- No metric is perfect; effective assessment involves both quantitative and qualitative strategies
 - This can be labor-intensive and cost-prohibitive
- The pathway from research to impact is neither linear nor quick
- Attribution is challenging when a research study contributes to a body of evidence
- Knowledge transfer activities are still not rewarded in traditional academic incentives in the U.S.

Application to Population Health Research

- Challenges in demonstrating impact may be particularly pronounced for population health research
 - Given time lag to realize population health outcomes and challenges with attribution
- Funders are increasingly rewarding research that can demonstrate impact beyond academia
- Opportunity for population health researchers to consider the impact of their work in new ways... ways that will resonate with funders and the public

