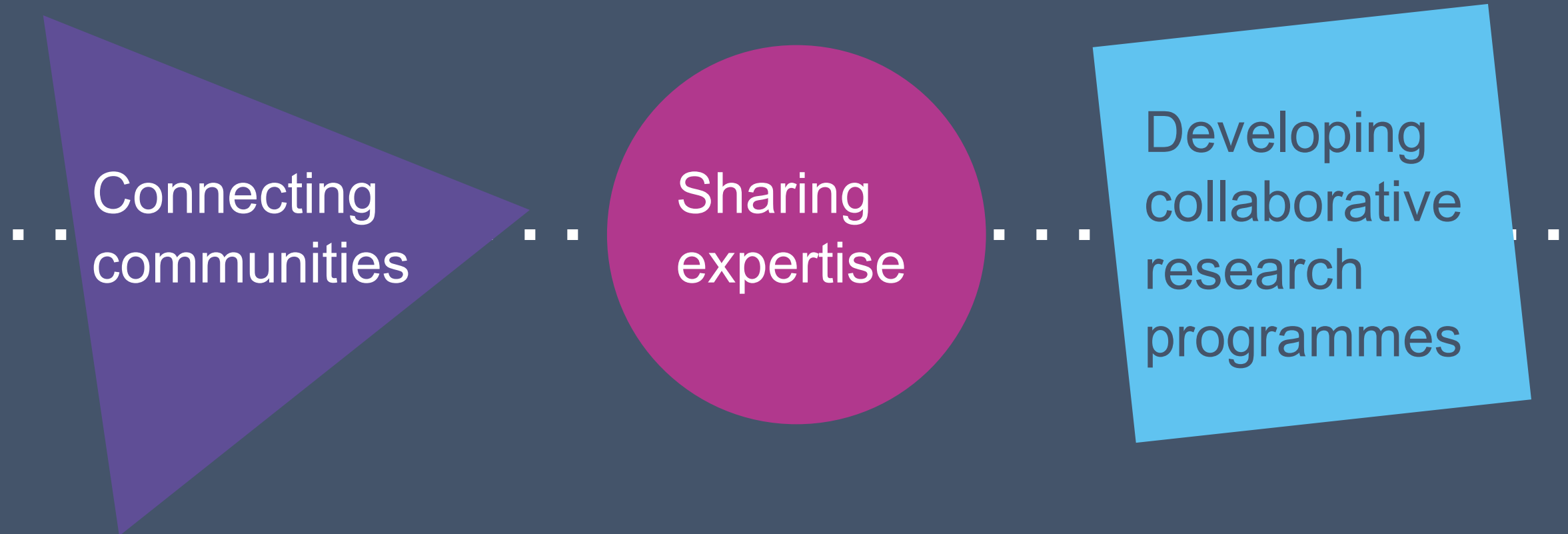


Seven challenges to the impact agenda

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What we do ...



Mapping academic-policy engagement

- Commissioned by ESRC to identify promising approaches to promoting research impact
- Sought to identify UK research funders, learned societies, universities, intermediaries, policy organisations and bodies, practice organisations and bodies, think tanks and independent research organisations, non-profits, and for profits/consultancies with purposive samples from overseas

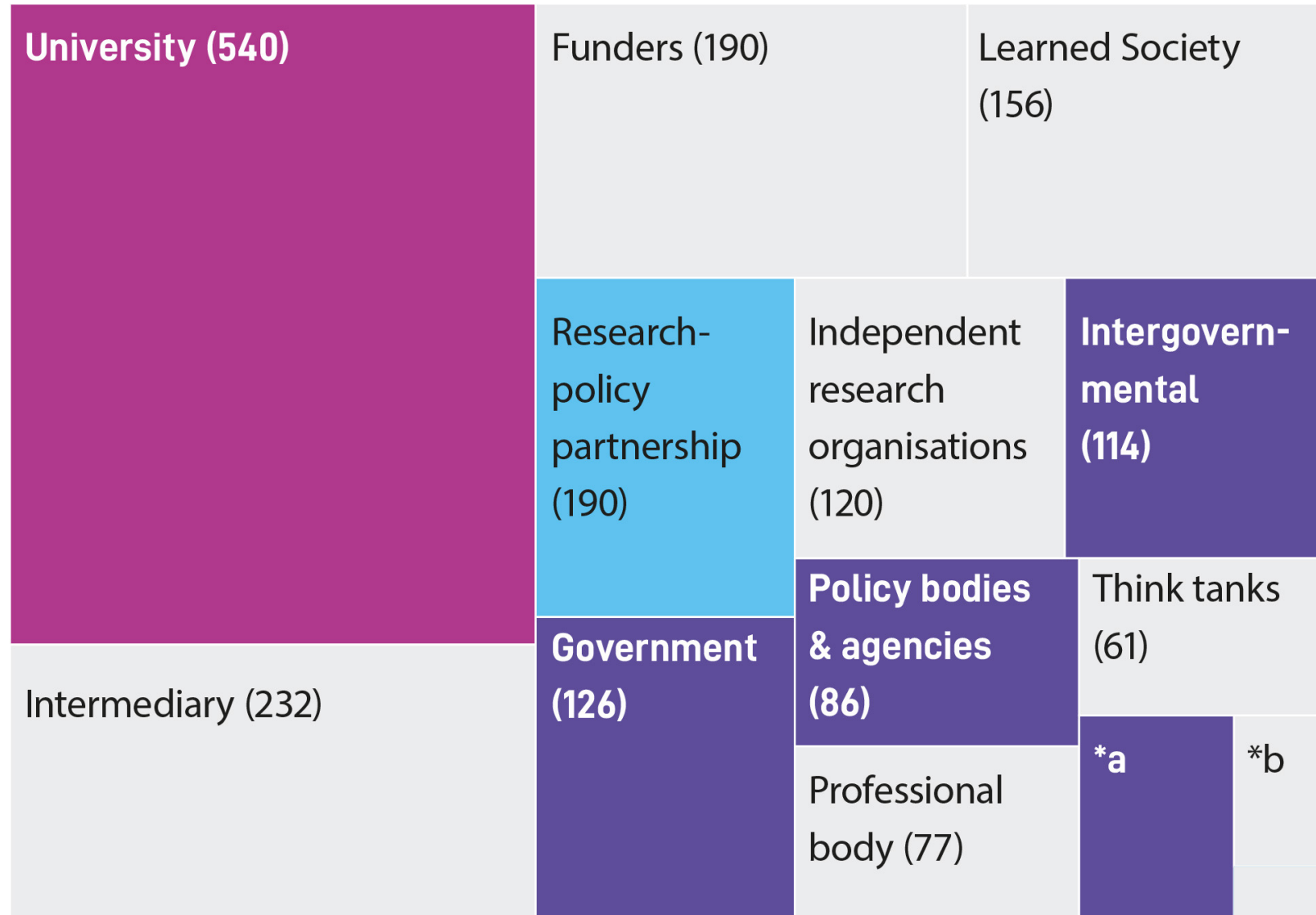


We looked at

- **which organisations and initiatives** were actively promoting research-policy engagement (who; where; when; at what cost; funded by whom)
- **how** (what specific activities, and what types of practices they were engaged in), and
- **to what effect** (whether there was any evaluation of these activities, or other research indicating impact of these activities).



The mapping revealed a complex landscape in which many organisations and stakeholders promote engagement ...



*a Parliamentary Initiative (51)

*b Business (21)

**We identified
9 different
research-policy
engagement
practices, that speak
to three different
ways of thinking
about how to improve
evidence use in
government**

Approach to improving evidence use

1

Linear

Linear approaches 'push' evidence out from academia or 'pull' evidence into government

2

Relational

Relational approaches recognise that evidence use is social, relying on expertise and shared understanding

3

Systems

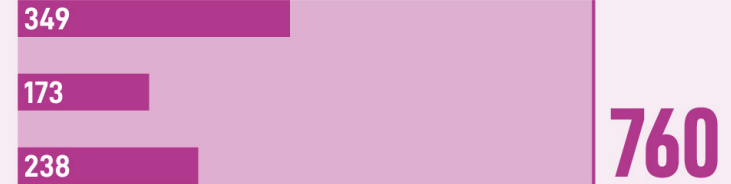
Systems approaches aim to tackle barriers to improved evidence use and create more supportive cultures

What do research-policy engagement initiatives do?

How many?

Linear

1. Disseminating and communicating research
2. Formal institutional requests for evidence
3. Facilitating access to research



Relational

4. Building decision-maker skills
5. Building researcher skills
6. Building professional partnerships



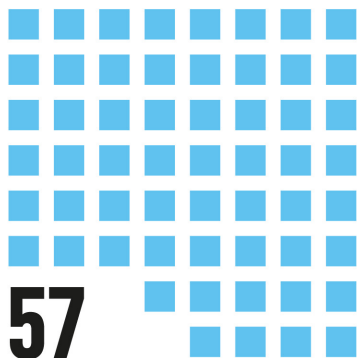
Systems

7. Strategic leadership
8. Rewarding impact
9. Creating infrastructure and posts



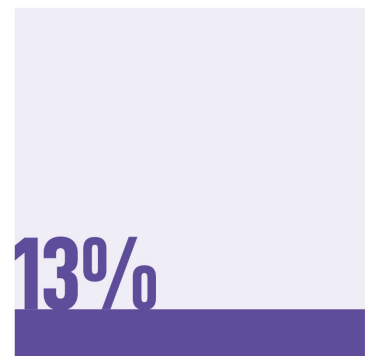
We found pockets of learning from evaluations that offer a rich and nuanced picture

A total of ...



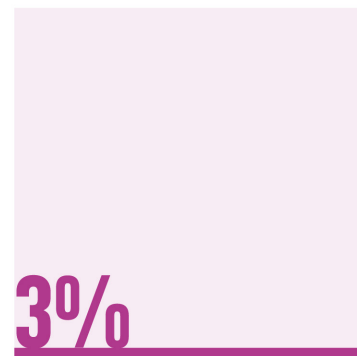
organisations have made evaluations of their work available in the public domain

That's only ...

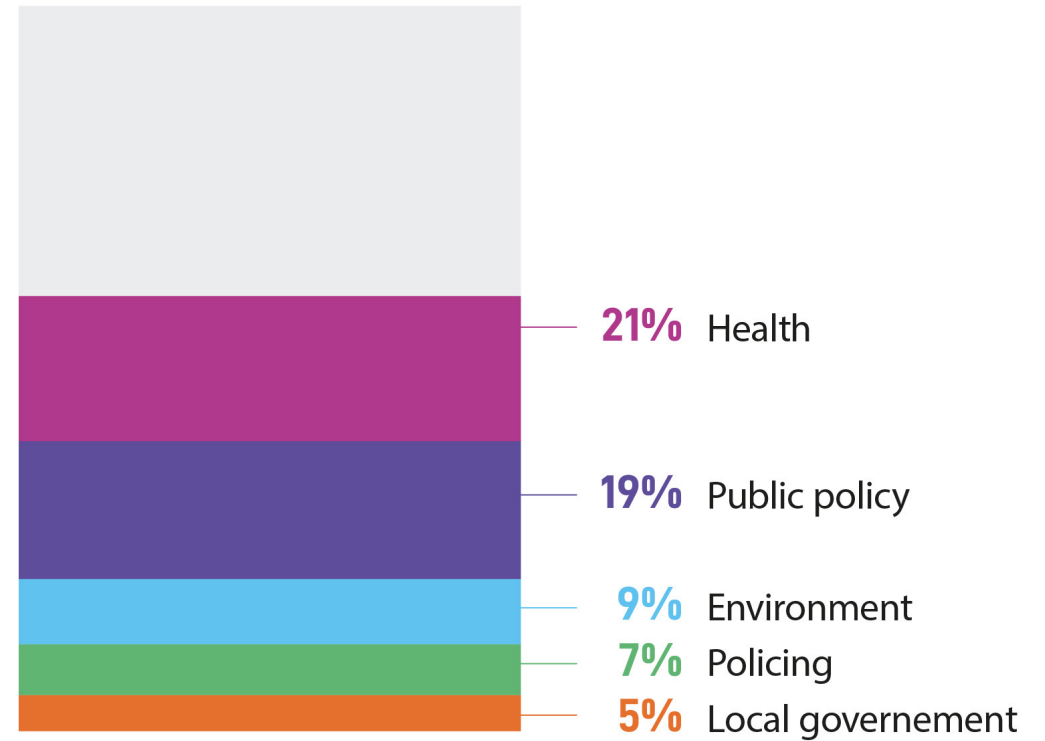


of organisations who have shared evaluations

Just under ...



of the initiatives we found



We concluded

- Overall picture is large and growing, but busy rather than effective
- Yet without clear goals or any coordination, engagement can do more harm than good
 - Wasted time and resource
 - Worsening relationships and goodwill
 - Increased inequalities
- Moral and social obligation to do better – how?

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1. Rather than trying to design a new policy impact system, adapt to policy systems and practices that exist

Research managers could:

- Focus less on the abstract design of research engagement models based on what researchers would like to see, and more on tailoring researcher support to what policymakers actually do
- Help researchers to learn about realities of policymaking, not seek to change them
- Help identify relevant policymakers and identify good moments to converse

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2. Clarify the role of support directed at individuals, institutions, and systems

Research managers could:

- Recognise when existing training (often based on experiences of successful individuals) perpetuates inequalities
- Help researchers to adapt to policy systems, rather than seek to control them

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3. Reduce ambiguity by defining the policy problem to which impact is a solution

Research managers could

- Help researchers and others to understand their institutional and others' strategic priorities
- Foster a culture of honesty about what impacts are truly likely, and how they could come to pass

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4. Tailor research support to multi-centric policymaking

Research managers could

- Help researchers identify (more realistic) local and regional policy partners to engage with
- Foster culture of rewarding this type of engagement (as opposed to merely the Westminster ministerial model)

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5. Clarify the role of researchers when they engage with policymakers

Research managers could

- Help researchers to understand the moral and ethical choices to be made
- Seek a broader and more honest conversation about goals of engagement (individual career, institutional, policy change, wider public good)
- Support researchers to develop relevant skills (e.g. co-design and facilitation)

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6. Establish the credibility of research through expertise and/or co-production

Research managers could

- Help those involved in engagement to understand the different types of evidence and knowledge which inform policy
- Foster discussion and reflection about the different forms of evidence-informed policymaking

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7. Establish realistic expectations for researcher engagement practices

Research managers could

- Seek greater clarity about realistic goals of engagement initiative, and what implementers and users can expect to achieve
- Lobby for more research and evaluation of engagement initiatives to improve choices about how to engage

In summary

Build on and seek to generate empirical evidence about how to influence policy and increase evidence use

Complement and support existing initiatives, structures and systems

Thank you

[Transforming Evidence \(transforming-evidence.org\)](http://transforming-evidence.org)

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