

Developing partnerships & projects between universities and policy partners: a project scope template



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How this template has been created

Capabilities in Academic Policy Engagement (CAPE) is a knowledge exchange and research project that explores how to support effective and sustained engagement between academics and policy professionals, funded by Research England. We are a partnership between UCL and the Universities of Cambridge, Manchester, Northumbria and Nottingham in collaboration with the Government Office for Science, the Parliamentary Office for Science and Technology, Nesta and the Transforming Evidence Hub.

This scoping template has been developed from CAPE's original project scope template used throughout the CAPE project from 2020-2024. We have used our practice-based learning to create a more mature and comprehensive template that is usable for different types of collaborative and co-produced projects or partnerships.

As noted in the template, it is important to reiterate that CAPE was primarily a demand-led project, meaning that we created projects collaboratively with policy partners guided by the priorities of the policy partner. Sometimes we created projects to help unearth these priorities together. This explains why policy need features first and foremost in this template.

The scoping template itself was co-developed between CAPE and our policy partners, and we have gathered feedback widely across CAPE project staff.

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We would like to recognise and express gratitude in particular for the learning experiences from the CAPE Coordination team whose work with our policy partners has underpinned the development of this resource.

Acknowledgements

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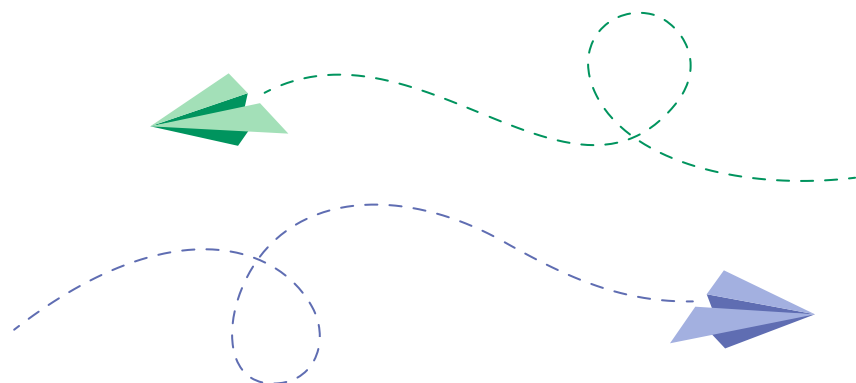
Introduction

When CAPE started in 2020, we approached engagement with our policy partners using a very simple ‘project scope template’, with a short summary, aims, proposed activities for the work, and anticipated outputs. At that point it was little more than headings on a word document. Since then, we’ve worked through our original scoping document with multiple policy partners at different governmental levels, developed a Theory of Change, and learnt a lot about project development at scale and working collaboratively. When we started to consider sharing our original project scope as a sector resource, we recognised the opportunity to produce something far more comprehensive drawing upon this learning that speaks to both how universities and policy partners can get the most out of engaging with one another.

Between 2020-2023, the academic policy landscape in the UK has also changed significantly, with multiple other projects and university policy units emerging or developing, alongside new ‘knowledge mobilisation’ staff working in interfacing roles between universities and policy organisations. This of course means more engagement activities. Nevertheless, it’s not always standard practice to complete a scoping document for such activities and to think about policy engagement in this way.

We’ve heard from our sector colleagues that there is a need for a pro forma that can guide project planning and facilitate the initiation of collaborations with policy partners. In a survey CAPE administered in September 2023, 80% of professional services and 76% of academics rated their interest in a policy scoping document as a 4 out of 5 or a 5 out of 5. What we aim to provide here through this newly developed policy scoping template, therefore, is a starting point to meet this need. A way of initiating engagement projects between universities and policy organisations in a thoughtful and strategic way.

CAPE’s approach, driven by policy demand and taking into account the way that policy organisations want to work with academics, underpins this template. This is why the template invites you to think about purpose and outcomes before moving onto thinking about designing what activities you’d like to undertake. It is designed to be used if you’ve never done any policy engagement before or if it’s your 100th engagement project. We’ve provided a downloadable blank copy that you can use as appropriate and we’re keen to work together on piloting and walking through live examples of using the template. If you’re interested in collaborating with us, get in touch by emailing cape@ucl.ac.uk



Who is this project scope template for?

The scoping template is intended for those who want to coproduce and codevelop projects between academia and policy and for planning more strategic academic policy engagement. Users of this scoping template may work in many different roles including knowledge mobilisers, academics, project managers, partnership or network managers, policy analysts, evidence leads, communications leads, among others.¹

The scoping template is best suited for policy partnerships or projects with central government departments, local authorities, regional or combined authorities. Engagement with Parliament can differ significantly. It may also be helpful for those universities focusing on their civic mission and working more strategically with local policy organisations on local policy issues.



How to use this template

The scoping template can be used if you've never done any academic policy engagement before or if it's your 100th engagement project.

It's designed to be completed **collaboratively** by those in academic and policy environments. The development process can take several iterations to ensure that the ideas within work equitably and meet the needs of the organisations involved. We have worked closely with our policy partners to ensure that this template is applicable to policy organisations as well as to universities. Because of this, there are similarities between this template and Project Initiation Documents (PIDs) that are frequently used in policy organisations to scope projects.

The scoping template is designed to be comprehensive and to push your thinking across all sections. When working through it, you may make an active choice that some parts aren't relevant. Sometimes it can benefit both partners to undertake a project or partnership that is less clearly defined or detailed and so only higher-level sections here may be useful.

You could also use it alongside a funding template to cross check and adapt this.

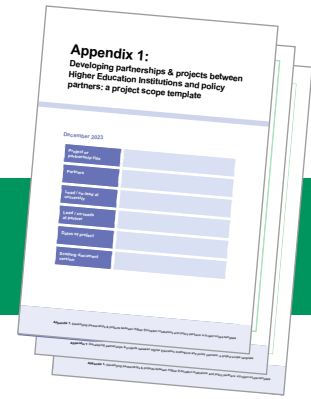
It is worth returning to the scoping template at regular intervals and building in review processes to ensure updates are captured, as well as maintaining version control for any iterations.

¹ Knowledge mobilisers are those in interfacing roles between academia and policy organisations who work towards sharing information with others: www.cape.ac.uk

Partnership / Project scoping template



Download a blank copy of the partnership and project scope template to work through.



Start Here



Section 1. Purpose

- What is the policy need?
- Intended impact
- Outcomes



Our policy partners have emphasised starting here – often this is missed as people skip to designing the project first.



Section 2. Designing what the project will do

- Outputs
- Activities



This is an opportunity to build stronger and deeper relationships, have conversations, and explore and test different ways of engagement.



Section 3. Thinking about alignment

- Aligning available research expertise and policy need or interest
- Alignment with organisational strategies
- Existing engagement or relationships



This can help you think about feasibility and strategic importance of the project especially when you might have limited capacity.



Section 4. Practicalities

- Interested parties or collaborators
- Embedding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion
- Ways of Working
- Project plan and milestones
- Resources



Our practicalities sections help you embed best practice into your engagement initiatives.

Section 1. Purpose

Overview and policy need or interest

We recommend starting by exploring what the policy need or interest in engagement is. Policy partners have emphasised that this helps get the best out of engaging with universities and academics. Consider the broader policy context and what previous work has been done on this topic.

This might be brief to start with but can be expanded as necessary.

Questions to consider:

- What is the context of the proposed relationship or project and why is it significant?
- Does the policy need require refining as part of the activities?
- What is the policy need and why is it needed now?
- What does the partnership / project offer in terms of addressing the policy need?

It may be helpful to refer to [Areas of Research Interest](#) (ARIs), policy documents, existing evidence bases, literature reviews, or relevant organisational strategies to help achieve alignment of aims and objectives. Using this alongside the database [Overton](#) can also give you a good sense of whether the perceived need or interest has been worked on / met already.



[Search Areas of Research Interest](#)



CAPE resource: [Engaging with evidence toolkit](#)



TIP: You do not always need a clear policy idea for an engagement project before starting. Engagement projects can uncover policy priorities or refine modes of engagement through the activities.

Impact

Detail the broad or longer-term effect you want to have as a result of the project or partnership.²

Questions to consider:

- What are the potential long-term effects will the partnership or project?
- What benefits or positive changes will the project or partnership seek to create?
- How will the engagement between academia and policy contribute to the advancement of knowledge, policy formulation, or societal well-being?



TIP: Impacts or changes created by the project do not have to be specifically about policy change. Impacts can equally be about creating or deepening relationships or systemic and procedural changes. It's important to remember that impacts(s) also do not always manifest immediately at the end of a period of engagement so longer term follow up may be needed.



CAPE Resource: CAPE Blog [‘Evidence: from engagement to impact’](#)

Outcomes

Detail the outcomes you want to achieve through the project. Outcomes represent (often measurable) changes resulting from engagement. They can be expressed, for example, as increased, decreased, enhanced, improved or maintained. These help both to establish boundaries and in evaluating your project.

Outcomes tend to be more immediate or intermediate than impacts. They can relate to building relationships as well as potential policy impact.

Note: in policy organisations it is common to have a primary goal or ‘grand challenge’ for a project alongside several [SMART objectives \(p.25\)](#). Using the SMART structure to develop aims can help align the project with policy practice. These aims can be taken from policy objectives and refined collaboratively to reflect both organisations’ priorities.

² Using a Theory of Change can be helpful approach here, but it is not essential.

For more about Theories of Change see [New Philanthropy Capital, Theory of Change in 10 Steps](#)

Questions to consider:

- What effects or changes would you like to see as a result of this partnership or project?
- How can you measure this effect or change?



TIP: Impact and outcomes can sometimes look similar. You might want to spend longer on these sections and iterate them as your learning progresses.

You may want to use the following table:

Outcome (Measurable change)	Baseline (What was it like before?)	Indicator (How will we know we've done it?)	Evidence for success (From projects, data, partner testimony, own experience etc.)

Section 2. Designing what the project will do

Outputs

Detail the intended outputs for the project. Outputs are tangible products as a result of the engagement activity and should help to achieve the desired outcomes.

Questions to consider:

- What collaborative outputs do you need to co-produce to support you in achieving the outcomes?
- Who are the key audiences for these outputs? How can you design these outputs with the audience in mind?
- How will you collectively communicate and disseminate these co-produced outputs to ensure widespread engagement?
- How can you follow up afterwards to assess the effect of your co-produced outputs on your audiences(s) for all involved?

Academic policy engagement outputs

Outputs are produced as a result of academic policy engagement activities. They are the tangible products as a result of the activity. Common co-produced outputs from collaborative activities can include:

Relationships

- New or strengthened relationships
- New or strengthened networks
- Identification and shaping follow on or new projects

Knowledge exchange

- Workshops
- Sandpits
- Meetings
- Advice

Written

- Event note
- Policy briefing
- Report
- Case study
- Research paper
- Rapid evidence review
- Systematic review
- Evidence note

Dissemination (can overlap with written outputs)

- Blog
- Podcast
- Video
- Media
- Conference



Tip: Budget for outputs accordingly in your planning. Communications costs, such as designers for reports, tend to be overlooked so make sure you factor these in.



[Consult the NIHR guidance on costing knowledge mobilisation activities](#)

Activities

Detail the engagement activity or activities this partnership or project will utilise to achieve your co-produced outputs and outcomes.

Questions to consider:

- Would a singular activity or multi-stranded approach work best?
- How does each activity help you to achieve your outcomes?
- Have you considered alternative approaches to make sure you have found the most suitable?
- Is this approach accessible for all relevant actors? If not, how can you adapt the approach to make it more inclusive?
- How will you evaluate and reflect on your activities?



Tip: it may be useful to use an activity such as a sandpit or workshop to scope or guide subsequent activity rather than planning the entire project. It is important to build in and allow for flexibility to respond to organic and iterative development.



Common engagement activities include:

- 1:1 relationship building
- Knowledge exchange events (sandpits, roundtables, workshops etc.)
- Network building
- Policy Fellowships (academic placements in government and / or policy placements in universities or meetings with academics)
- Observation, shadowing, or buddying
- Collaborative or co-produced projects
- Policy-focused seed funding schemes
- Training
- Student placements

**CAPE resources**

[CAPE Policy Fellowships Contract Guidance Note, Hosting Policy Fellows: a guide for Higher Education Institutions](#)



Tip: There is no one-size-fits-all model for determining appropriate co-designed activities for your collaborative project. Depending on your partnership or project aims and the time and resources available to you, you may want to use one or multiple activities over the course of your activities.

Section 3. Thinking about alignment

Aligning available research expertise and policy need or interest

Identify the research taking place at your institution that could align with the policy need or interest, and consider if a partnership approach or interdisciplinary offer would strengthen your activities.



Tip: There may be occasions when the expertise lies outside of your institution. It's a good idea to ascertain this early in the conversation and think about who else needs to be part of the conversation and what their institutions approach to supporting academic-policy engagement is.

Questions to consider:

- What type of expertise and / or evidence is needed to meet the policy need?
- Does the university have the available research and / or expertise in order to address this policy need?
- Would collaborating with other universities strengthen the partnership or project?



[Search governmental Areas of Research Interest and related UKRI funded projects](#)

Aligning with organisational strategies

Identify if and how this partnership or project aligns with internal organisational strategies, both at the university and the policy partner. This supports buy in at both organisations and can help with setting resource needs against the activities, setting goals and framing the outputs.

Questions to consider:

- Can you identify portfolio holders for academic policy engagement within your organisation? Do you need to discuss this with them?
- Is there an Impact, Research or Knowledge Exchange strategy that attends to academic policy engagement, if yes, how does your project support the objectives?
- How might this project help to make a difference outside your organisational unit?



TIP: For those based in universities, it's a good idea to speak to your institutional policy infrastructure teams such as a policy unit or REF impact team. If you don't have one, you could reach out to the Universities Policy Engagement Network (UPEN).

Existing engagement or relationships

Consider any existing relationships between the policy organisation and relevant staff / teams at and beyond your institution and if there are, whether you want to build on these.

Questions to consider:

- Do existing academic / research services staff relationships exist with the policy partner?
- How can you track longer term relationships between the university and policy organisation? How will you account for relationships you catalyse as part of the activity but aren't central to the project?
- How will you promote sustainability of partnerships beyond individual relationships between academics and policy makers?
- For universities: could this relationship or project potentially be used in future REF impact case studies? If so, how will you track and evidence impact?

Section 4. Practicalities

Interested parties or collaborators³

Detail the collaborators on this project, including core partners, others you may want to include for capabilities or elements of the work.

Questions to consider:

- Who are the collaborators and interested persons on this project?
- Who else needs to be aware or involved in the ideas / activities and what is their role?



CAPE resource: [Co-production in regional academic policy engagement](#) (useful for guidance on building equitable longer term relationships).



Find out how to create mapping interested parties:

[How to create a stakeholder map, Policy at Exeter](#)

Embedding Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Outline how you will include EDI in your partnership or project design and potentially in its outcomes. Examples could include:

- Inclusive working practices resulting in widened engagement.
- Enhanced opportunities for underrepresented groups to engage with and contributions to policy outputs.

Questions to consider:

- What opportunities are there to get those who are usually underrepresented in academic policy engagement involved?
- How will you ensure you give all voices an opportunity to speak and be heard?
- How will you collect data on your EDI inclusion?
- How will you ensure inclusive practice through the activity life cycle, from inception to competition?
- Could you create an Equality Impact Assessment?

³ We prefer the use of the terms 'interested parties' or 'collaborators' as we are actively avoiding other more 'usual' terms because of the associated colonial heritage. [See Milbank, Q \(2016\) for fuller explanation](#)

Ways of working

Detail how the relationship between university and policy partner will proceed. This should include both practical considerations such as key responsibilities and commitments but also working principles.

Questions to consider:

On principles and values

- Is power going to be shared between partners, if so, how? For example, will parties have equal say in decision making processes?
- What principles or values do you want to put in place to underpin the relationship or project?
- Does the balance of responsibility for each partner feel appropriate and proportionate?

On project management

- What project management tools do you need in place to enable the effective delivery of the activities e.g., shared and accessible workspace, regular progress meetings, monitoring tools?
- What are the key activities and who will be responsible for them?
- How will you identify risks and put plans in place in case something goes wrong? How often will you monitor risks and issues?



CAPE resource: [Co-production in regional academic policy engagement: developing optimal conditions](#)

Project plan and milestones



TIP: Sometimes a policy engagement project will require a formalised agreement, due to money changing hands, intellectual property, staff working offsite and so on. There are different types of agreement depending on what is needed, for example memorandum of understanding (MoU), collaboration agreement, or fellowship contract. Some formalised agreements can simply be a commitment to working together.

Any type of formalised policy agreement will require time and administrative resourcing. You should account for this in your project scoping.



CAPE resource: [CAPE Policy Fellowships Contract Guidance Note](#)

Detail your project plan and any relevant milestones.

Questions to consider:

- What's the timeline for delivery of activities?
- What milestones can you identify? (note: milestones do not have to be temporal)
- Which tasks or activities need to be completed first?
- Which tasks or activities are likely to take the longest? Are there any 'quick wins'?



TIP: You should build in time for regular check ins throughout projects. Collaboration works best when communication is regular and proportionate.

Whilst it is vital to be aware of busy periods within university cycles, it's also good to consider policy rhythms which may be different and will need to be factored into your project planning.

Resources

Detail any costs allocated to this project including who is providing the funding and potential costs for activities and outputs.

Questions to consider:

- How will the project be resourced and how much will be supplied in cash and in kind and by whom?
- Do suppliers of services such as designers or facilitators need to be approved on procurement systems and what is their lead time?
- How long will any formalised agreements take to put in place so that money can change hands?
- Is the use of money cost effective for achieving the desired outcomes?



TIP: Outputs from projects such as publications or resources can cost more than anticipated and are often overlooked. Project spend can also be uneven, it's a good idea to think particularly about what you might need towards the end to disseminate learning or carry on engagement.

What to cost into policy engagement activity?

Depending on the resources available, here are some suggestions of activities that can be costed for engagement:

- Salaries (for example fellowships, principal investigators, research assistants etc.)
- Collaborating organisations
- Facilitators for events
- Training
- Conference fees
- Services for written or visual outputs and dissemination (including visual artists such as event doodlers, website designers or services, podcast or video equipment and editors, graphic designers for published materials etc.)
- In person costs (travel and accommodation, room bookings, catering etc.)



[Consult NIHR guidance on costing knowledge mobilisation activities](#)



[Download the template here](#)

The template is also attached to this PDF

