

**What advice would you give to an early career researcher  
who wants to do research with impact?**

This series of four handouts collates advice from three academic psychologists that may be of interest to students and academics seeking to develop a greater chance of policy impact. The full length interviews by Winnifred Louis with the academics as well as all four handouts are available on <http://www.socialchangelab.net/policy.html> .

**Community and Clinical Psychologist Eleanor Wertheim:**

- \* Don't imagine you can do it alone - teams are more impactful. Try to find people with like-minded passions. Try to find people with an established track record as mentors - Who you choose as mentor is important. Have they a record of making a difference, of disseminating research? Don't just look for publications.
- \* Think about what difference you want to make in the world - aside from career and reputation, what difference will you make? Plan and aim for this.
- \* In general, international collaborations are more impactful.
- \* Join organisations, interest groups, be aware of who is working in the field, and approach them. Think of being in a global network.

Winnifred Louis adds: Yes because often opportunities only open for change in a country for a window or moment, and in an international network it can be easier to spot them.

- \* Don't just look at what you're interested in. Look at what government and funding bodies and inquiries are interested in – think of how you can find common ground, frame the pitch in terms of what you can bring to them.

**Environmental Psychologist Kelly Fielding:**

- \* Turn up, if you get invited to a meeting. Go to the meeting, sit down, be friendly, be open, be excited - show enthusiasm. Don't condescend to others.
- \* Jump at the chance to work with people from different disciplines and outside of academia.
- \* Go in with low expectations – outreach increases your chance of impact, but there are no guarantees. Very many of these initiatives go nowhere. Very often a project will not lead to any action. People go radio silent. Behind the scenes in corporations and govt, things are happening that you aren't privy to – so this is demoralising, but normal, it is nothing to do with you. But keep turning up, showing up, reaching out, knowing that this will sometimes lead to opportunities and outcomes.

### **Cross-Cultural Psychologist James Liu:**

- \* Seek to be part of a team or system. E.g., look for internships – you can't be out there alone.
- \* Know the context you're in – get advice from your mentors about how to position your research.

Winnifred Louis adds: My mentor told me a good rule of thumb is 'you have to do both' – to reduce risks in your academic career, you should have a line of work that is more predictable, mainstream, and published using methods other high status people in your department/ discipline recognise and value, and in journals people recognise and value. Then you can take on policy work, which has uncertain timelines, controversial topics, mixed methods or under-valued methods, and may go to under-valued journals, or be disseminated in totally different formats, like websites or workshops, that others discount or see as 'unscientific'.

- \* Develop pluralistic methods - qualitative and quantitative, etc..
- \* Understand that you can't control a situation when you are out there in the field – the rigor of the research can be compromised, but this may open you up for insight. Don't be 100% married to natural science ideology or epistemology. If you are a believer in natural science epistemology, it may be better for you to stay in the lab or administer surveys and do discovery / basic research. If the field, you have to be flexible, be responsive to community needs and respond to what happens in the field. Community-engaged and policy-relevant research rarely goes as you planned. It's a great adventure that keeps you growing as a person.

*Feedback?* We welcome your comments and questions, to [w.louis@psy.uq.edu.au](mailto:w.louis@psy.uq.edu.au) or via the comments box at [socialchangelab.net](http://socialchangelab.net) .