How to *specify a knowledge* request

Reliable and high-quality research knowledge is vital to policy-making. Various societal actors, such as ministries and municipalities, have knowledge requests to researchers through requests and commissions.

This guidance aims to support specifying knowledge requests in the science-policy interface. The guidance can support knowledge users in clarifying what knowledge is already available, to what question the knowledge request should respond to, and what type of knowledge is needed. Systematically formulated knowledge requests support researchers in responding to the requests more accurately. As a result, the relevance of provided knowledge for policy-making improves

Use the following questions to specify a knowledge request:

OPTIONS FOR COLLABORATION?

What type of options and constraints exist for collaboration?

TYPE OF KNOWLEDGE?

What type of knowledge is needed? Is there a need for quantitative or qualitative data, peer-reviewed research, expert views of researchers or recommendations that are based on applying research findings?

CONTEXT?

What is the decision-making context in which the knowledge need has risen? What is the wider political context in which the knowledge need is situated? What issues and topics are central in decision-making relating to the knowledge need? How will the knowledge be used?

WHAT IS ALREADY KNOWN?

What kind of knowledge already exists on the phenomenon? What kind of knowledge is needed to complement existing knowledge?

WHAT IS EXCLUDED?

What kind of knowledge is excluded? What topics are left out? What are the implications of the selected exclusions for understanding the big picture and the usability of knowledge?

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ADDITIONALLY, SPECIFY:

What kind of knowledge is needed?
When factoring in uncertainties, time perspective and level of knowledge is it helpful to consider:

A. Nature and methods of knowledge:

Is there a need for detailed knowledge, a broader picture of a phenomenon or both? Is there a need for statistical data, calculations, or qualitative analysis? What kind of interpretations and analysis is desirable?

B. Uncertainties in knowledge:

What are the uncertainties associated with different types of knowledge? What degrees of uncertainties are acceptable? How are uncertainties and disagreements presented?

C. Time perspective:

Is there a need for a situational analysis, a description of the causal relationships behind the phenomenon or a more forward-looking assessment of future trends?

D. Scope of knowledge:

What is the scope of the knowledge request and the extent to which the phenomenon should be addressed? As an example, on the scope of a knowledge request on advancing electrification in Finland:

1.

The global extent: How do global megatrends affect the phenomenon that is addressed in the knowledge request? For example, should the impact of global availability of critical raw materials also be assessed?

2.

National systems level: What is the state of national electricity infrastructure in Finland

3.

Regional and local level: What local incentives should be used to steer electric car use at the individual level?

E. Practical realities:

Is it possible to combine details and the desire for a big-picture analysis given the practical constraints on the knowledge request (such as timeframe, length, etc.)?

Further reading:

Pathways to Impact: Researcher's Handbook on Science-for-Policy

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