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Public Policy Engagement Guide

A toolbox for UWA researchers

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Why you should consider public policy in your research

A large amount of research that is carried out has intrinsic value for scholarship and furthering knowledge and understanding. But this is not the only value of such research. Governments are also interested in research for three main reasons:

- **To use research findings to design new policies to improve lives** – e.g. how best to combat coastal erosion.
- **To use research to evaluate the effectiveness of existing policies** – e.g. the results of existing therapies for eating disorders.
- **To become better informed about emerging problems** – e.g. to assess whether trade patterns are disadvantaging poorer economies.

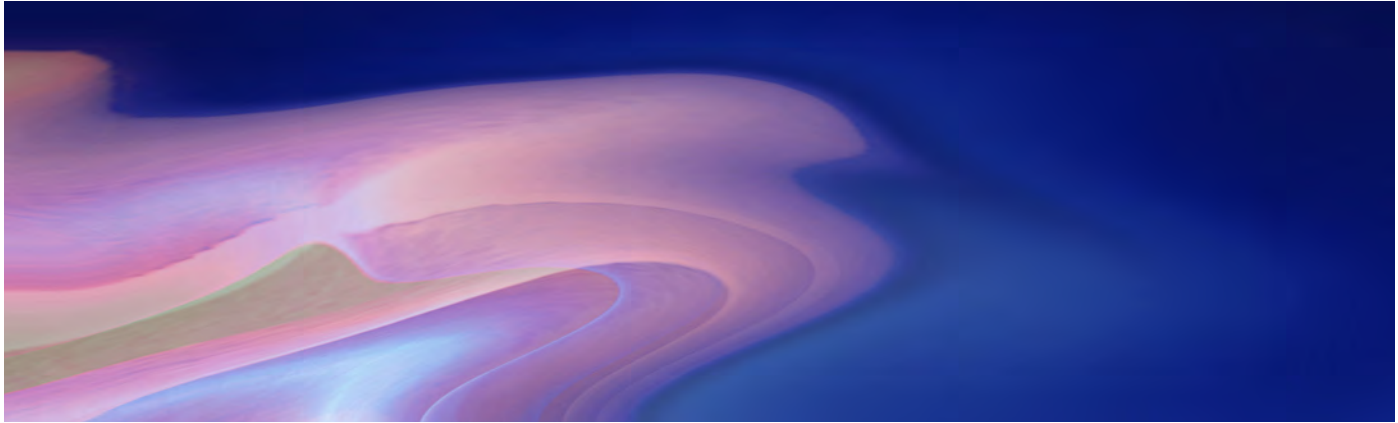
For these reasons, publicly funded research asks researchers to consider openly and early on how their research ideas can be used to design and evaluate public policy. For example, research that examines how well patients follow medical advice has application in shaping how clinicians are trained.

Funding agencies and foundations often try to prioritise supporting projects that have a clear description of how potential users of the research will be engaged. Funders are also interested in how real-world impacts from earlier research were obtained, either directly or indirectly, and how those insights can be used to maximise future impacts.

In 2024 the Australian Research Council will be conducting the next Engagement and Impact Assessment. This Assessment is about measuring engagement with research users and practitioners, and “how universities are translating their research into economic, social, environmental, cultural and other impacts”. It is an important part of the landscape for future research funding.

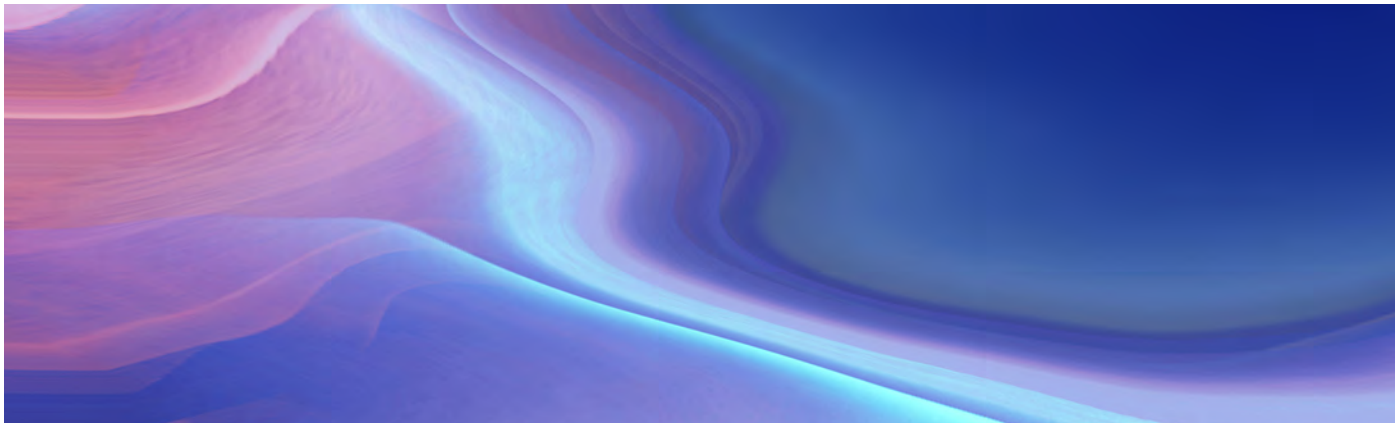
In the end, the biggest reason to take public policy seriously is to ask how your research might improve people’s lives and the environment. Making a difference to lives and environments is a very common motivation behind academic careers, especially among early career researchers whose commitment to their research is increasingly a reflection of their identity.

This Public Policy Engagement Guide is designed to give you advice and food for thought on how to ensure that government does not miss out on the fruits of your findings.



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Foreword

Traditionally speaking, university academics have not been trained or incentivised to work with government, community or business sectors. The ecosystem of higher education has its own rhythms and forces in which learning and scholastic enquiry underscore what is valued and what gets done.

That picture is changing, in part because the engine of advanced research is a central component of a dynamic economy and of a cohesive society, and therefore it is important that government invests strategically in our sector. But it is also changing because a new generation of researchers has entered the academic workforce in order to make a practical and positive difference in their fields of interest. Knowledge, for them, is a means to that end, so working with government is a further reflection of those original motives.

This Public Policy Engagement Guide is designed to break down that broad goal by examining what research engagement and impact are in practice, offering core advice on how to sharpen your appeal, setting out different ways in which you can get going, and, crucially, describing what the constituent parts of government are and do. The aim is to demystify and present options that academic colleagues can pick up and run with.

It is important to note that while this general advice is transferable into different jurisdictions, the levels of government described and examples used here are based in an Australian (and Western Australian) context, and aimed at UWA researchers in particular.

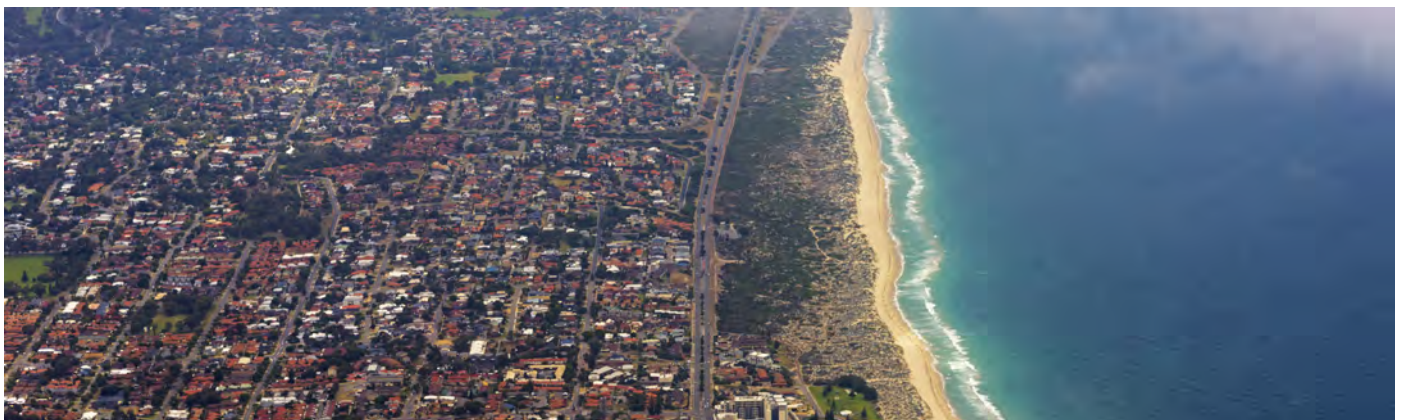
In addition, there are two general pieces of advice that accompany this Guide. The first is to recognise up front that the academic community is distinct and unique: we are in the business of identifying and explaining patterns, and probing to see if we have understood things correctly. Others, including in government, do not share the same preoccupations in and of themselves. The upshot is to occasionally check your view of assumed knowledge when interacting with government.

Second, what we offer is deeper, better and shared understanding as a way to inform decision-makers. Therefore, while it is important to know about the preferences and prejudices of those in office, academics working with government should be careful not to second-guess what policymakers want. It is your role to independently inform, propose and advise, and your brand as an independent expert depends on doing so without bending to what others may want to hear.

I would like to acknowledge the substantial contribution of the UWA Office of Research's Research Impact Toolkit to the content of this guide and encourage you to consult the Toolkit as a whole as an additional resource. Furthermore, I would like to thank Rosanna Marchesani, Ben Reilly, Adam Hannah, David Gilchrist, Maria Osman, Peter Robertson, Michael Schaper and Julie Ji, who assisted the Institute in the development of this document by reviewing and commenting on particular sections. This is designed to be an iterative document so we are keen to have your suggestions for further editions.

Professor Shamit Sagar

Director, UWA Public Policy Institute



An introduction to public policy

What is public policy?

Public policy describes what government does in broad terms to address the problems that exist in society and that it considers important, for example health outcomes, social services and education. It can also describe what government should be doing, as well as what others who wish to form governments think should be done.

Policymakers can range from ministers making current decisions, public servants in ministers' offices or departments implementing those decisions, and advisers and supporters who have a say in shaping ministerial priorities. Priorities are not just shaped by those working in government but by conversation in media, and speeches and statements about changing priorities made by leaders outside politics.

From the perspective of academic experts, the unifying thing that matters is that policymakers seek to answer the 'What should be done?' question. Therefore, a useful self-discipline skill is to respond to this question not on a scientific basis of 'all things being equal' (they rarely are), but rather of 'as many things considered as possible' (which better describes the context).



The policymaking process and the role of expertise

The process that underlies modern policymaking is cyclical and multi-faceted. A core assumption is that decision-makers are properly informed as they set priorities and allocate resources. But without easy access to the evidence (research) and expertise, this can be misplaced. Some information can be provided from within government, but a lot comes from external sources such as academic networks or think-tanks.

The process of academic engagement can involve providing advice and expertise to parliament. In Australia, at state and federal levels, Members of Parliament (MPs) often hold inquiries into specific topics or proposals, and they also monitor the performance of government. Expertise can be put to good use by a parliamentary committee who in turn will seek to influence ministers.

Policymaking processes can also include formal consultations established by government and independent agencies of government, particularly when a new policy is being proposed. This is a good opportunity to respond with expertise but it is vital to stick to the questions that are asked; if you think these are limiting, a strong consultation response can point this out at the start before going on to address the questions raised.

An often forgotten part of the process involves evaluation and assessment of existing policy measures. Specialist consultancies and professional services advisers are often involved in this, but they too are indirectly dependent on up-to-date academic research knowledge.

The figure below illustrates the different phases of a policy cycle, starting with identifying issues, then moving through analysis and implementation to evaluation of the policy's effects (relating to the main stages of ideation, realisation and evaluation).

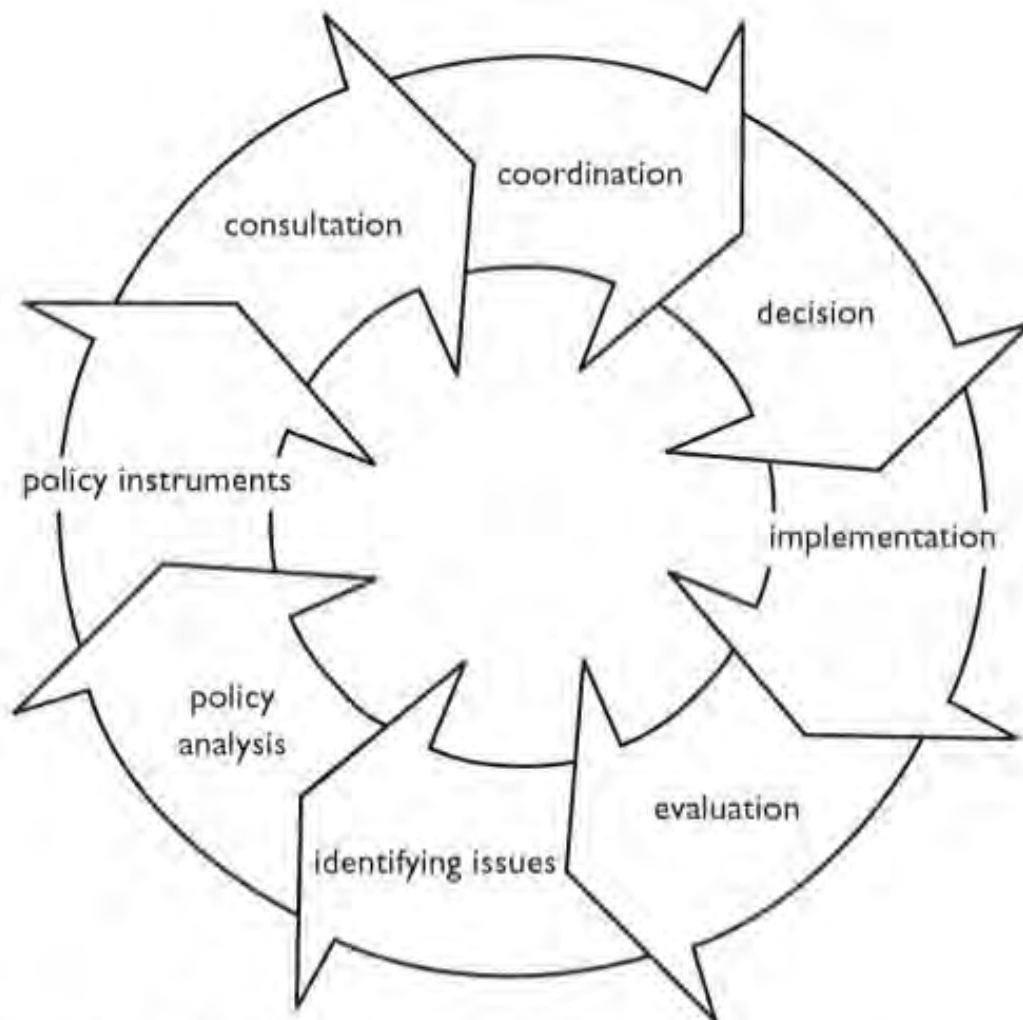


Figure 3.2 The Australian policy cycle

(Taken from Catherine Althaus, Peter Bridgman & Glyn Davis, The Australian Policy Handbook, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2013)

What is public policy engagement?

Policy engagement describes the many ways in which researchers and policymakers can connect around and explore common interests at various stages in their respective research and policymaking processes. From informal to formal enquiries, in consultation or sustained collaboration, policy engagement enables researchers and policymakers to improve public policy through making the most of their evidence, expertise and experience.

(From the University of Oxford: ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/policy-engagement)

Research engagement vs research impact

Let's first take a step back and orient ourselves within research engagement and impact. These considerations should be at the fore of your research projects to help navigate towards your policy goals.

The difference between the two

Many researchers conflate engagement and impact – here's the difference:



	ARC definition	Simplified definition
Research engagement	The interaction between researchers and research end-users (including industry, government, non-governmental organisations, communities and community organisations), for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge, technologies and methods, and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.	How you bring your research outside the university to users and practitioners.
Research impact	The contribution that research makes to the economy, society and environment, beyond the contribution to academic research.	How you end up affecting change as a result.

Real examples

See some examples of impact case studies that have been assessed as 'highly rated' by the ARC: rdi.uwa.edu.au/research-impact-toolkit#uwa-research-impact-case-studies

Research engagement and research communication

Your research will only have real-world impact if it reaches the right people. Co-designing with and engaging stakeholders within your research can improve the quality of your outputs and impact, raise your profile and develop your skills. Communication activities are an important action you can take to increase the impact of your research.

Communication is often left to the end of the research process, but it plays a critical role throughout the project's lifetime. Engaging stakeholders and audiences early in the research process can help ensure relationships have developed by the time you come to publish your findings.

The key to a good stakeholder communications strategy is to know who you want to reach, what you want to communicate, and how you want to reach them. This means thinking about the channels and tools you will use to relate your findings to the right audience. You will also need to develop a process for capturing evidence of your engagement.



Launch of Minister Tony Buti's book Alkira, 16 September 2021 - an example of public engagement

Research impact

Let's skip straight to research impact, which is the end goal of public policy engagement. Keep the following examples in mind as potential outcomes of the suggested engagement activities recommended in this Guide.

Different types of impact

Your research may give rise to one or more types of impact. Across and within the different disciplines there will be considerable diversity in the types that can be achieved. Here are some below, starting with policy impact.

Type of impact	Definition	Examples
Policy	The contribution research makes to new or amended laws, regulations or other policy mechanisms that enable them to meet a defined need or objective that delivers public benefit. Crucial to this definition is the fact that you are assessing the extent to which your research makes a contribution, recognising that it is likely to be one of many factors influencing policy.	Your research is probably one of hundreds of studies in a particular area, but your work provides a missing link or some other crucial piece of evidence that makes a policy possible. You may simply be the person who can advise those developing the policy. Your research may be heard in committees and cited in policy documents, but if it is not, you should be able to collect testimonials from members of the policy community explaining your role in the process, and the significance of your research.
Attitudinal	A change in attitudes, typically of a group of people who share similar views, towards a new attitude that brings them or others benefits.	Public engagement might lead to a new appreciation for alternative views and more positive perceptions of people who hold differing views.
Economic	Monetary benefits arising from research, either money saved, costs avoided or increases in turnover, profit, funding or benefits to groups of people or the environment measured in monetary terms.	Your research might demonstrate that a new or existing policy is not achieving its goal thus wasting money, leading to the withdrawal of that policy (saving money) or its replacement with something that works.
Environmental	Benefits from research to genetic diversity, species or habitat conservation, and ecosystems, including the benefits that humans derive from a healthy environment.	Environmental benefits for nature alone, or research that only benefits nature. Research that also then benefits people as a result of the benefits for nature. Research that may lead to human behaviour changes that benefit nature.
Health and wellbeing	Research that leads to better outcomes for the health of individuals, social groups or public health, including saving lives and improving quality of life, and wider benefits for wellbeing.	Research that may reduce mortality and morbidity via interventions such as new drugs and treatments or public health interventions to shift individual behaviours towards more healthy outcomes.
Understanding and awareness	People understand an issue better than they did before, based on your research. This can often lead (in time) to other types of impact.	Your research raises community knowledge about something that was previously unknown or poorly understood and an awareness of an important issue that gets limited media coverage.
Other forms of decision-making and behaviour change impacts	Research can inform a wide range of individual, group and organisational behaviours and decisions leading to impacts that go beyond the economy, health and wellbeing or policy.	Your research may change the attitude of a particular group towards others.
Cultural	Changes in the prevailing values, attitudes, beliefs, discourse and patterns of behaviour, whether explicit or implicit in organisations, social groups or society that deliver benefits to the members of those groups or those they interact with.	Research on a classical composer may provide cultural impacts by opening up that composer's work to new audiences through interpretation, and influence how performers interpret, perform and record the composer's work, leading to critical acclaim and enriching the cultural experience of the music-loving public.
Other social	Benefits to specific social groups or society not covered by other types of impact, including, for example, access to education or improvements in human rights.	Your research on education in collaboration with researchers working on low-cost internet-connected devices might lead to the development of self-taught courses that give millions of children access to education that would otherwise not have been possible.
Capacity or preparedness	Research that leads to new or enhanced capacity that is likely to lead to future benefits, or that makes individuals, groups or organisations better prepared and able to cope with changes that might otherwise impact negatively on them.	As a result of research collaborations, you may be connected to a more diverse group of people or organisations you trust. These connections and their capabilities can be deployed to respond faster and more effectively to a natural disaster.

(Adapted from the Research Impact Toolkit: rdi.uwa.edu.au/research-impact-toolkit)



Breakfast by the Bay: Building Bridges to save our planet: Climate change and intergenerational justice, 9 June 2021

The benefits of research impact

Embarking on a research impact pathway will benefit both you and your prospective stakeholders.

Benefits for you, the researcher	Benefits for your prospective stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Building strong and trusted relationships outside of academia. -Enhanced credibility within industry, government, community or groups. -Enhanced reputation as an expert in your field. -Greater awareness of, contribution to and membership of advisory committees. -Opening up opportunities for undertaking new and relevant research by engaging more closely with the beneficiaries of your research. -A focus or a diversification of your research program as a result of stakeholder feedback. -Increased opportunity for testing or translation of your research in a practical or real-life setting. -Awareness of and access to different funding sources or in-kind support. -Capacity building through shared resources and expertise. -Developing new ways of communicating your research to the community. -Wider socialisation of your research and outcomes. -Articulating the benefits that have been realised as a result of your research. -Raising awareness of the importance of committing public funds to support research. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Accessing future funding and new business opportunities. -Adding an evidence-based quality or feature to your work. -Visibility among advisors and decision-makers. -Developing new solutions to old problems. -Increasing personal impact/influence through collaboration with researchers. -Intrinsic motivation to 'make the world a better place' or a desire to learn about the issues being researched. -Adding to value-for-money discussions by decision-makers. -Enhancing expert networks that government can call upon.

(Adapted from the Research Impact Toolkit: rdi.uwa.edu.au/research-impact-toolkit#the-benefits-of-research-impact)

Measuring the policy impact of your research

Impact has only been achieved once you can identify a benefit. Usually there is a pipeline that is part of the research program and provides evidence of the engagement that links the research to the impact.

(Engagement) INPUTS	(Engagement) ACTIVITIES	(Engagement) OUTPUTS	(Impact) OUTCOMES	(Impact) BENEFITS
Time and resource materials	Engagement activities you undertake	Products your engagement produce	Changes that happen because of your research	The overall measurable benefit your research has achieved
Examples:	Examples:	Examples:	Examples:	Examples:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Research income -Staff -Background IP -Infrastructure -Data -Collections -Researchers employed or placed outside academia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Presentations to practitioner communities -Connections to cultural institutions, seminars/workshops, internships and engagement with the public -Public lectures, seminars, open days, school visits -Consultation with/advice to government -Contributions and/or submissions to public enquiries -Translational research designs: working with user stakeholder and participatory groups -Mentoring external research partners -Serving on external advisory boards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Event participation statistics (public lectures, cultural events, exhibitions, etc.) -Metrics that capture social media activity -Media coverage of exhibitions and new works -Patents granted, PCT applications, triadic patents -Number of contracts for research, consulting, expert witness and testing -Licensing agreements -Confidentiality agreements -HDR students in internships/placements -Authorship on public reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Repeat business with industry -Start-up/spin-out companies -HDR student employment destinations -Memoranda of Understanding (MOU)/Agreements -Expert witness in court cases -Expert consultancy -Co-funding of research outputs with research end-users -Book sales -Philanthropy linked to research support and in-kind support -Number of different clients with contracts worth greater than a threshold value -Citations in patents to traditional research outputs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Established networks and relationships with research users -In-kind support from end-users -Meaningful change in society through equity, equality, quality of life, educational change, community knowledge, cultural investment, employment, and/or technological advance -Industrial leveraging of academic knowledge -Significant institutional partnerships, e.g. WA Health Translation Network; various global research consortia, OECD, World Bank, World Health Organisation, UN, UNESCO



How to be successful in policy engagement and impact creation

Tips and tricks

Ask yourself these questions when drawing up a policy engagement plan for your research:

1. Who's your target?

- **Who is important?** Ministers and ministerial offices; parliament; intra-agency decision-makers; different levels of public servants; think-tank leaders and senior journalists.
- **What organisation?** Policy and opinion-forming organisations; regulatory bodies; executive service delivery agencies; statutory agencies; government departments, community services.
- **Which level?** International bodies and organisations; federal (Commonwealth); state/territory; local.

2. What can you offer?

- **Existing knowledge:** ability to quickly summarise/explain existing body of knowledge.
- **Extending knowledge:** new research that sheds more light on an issue.
- **Program and policy ideas:** generation of new policy options.
- **Program and policy assessment:** independent evaluation, analysis of existing programs, laws or intervention tools.

Avoid self-driven (non-client-focussed) research where you unilaterally wish to explore a particular issue and government is seen only as a repository of grants and other funding.

3. Building relationships with government

Keep these tips in mind when developing a strategy to engage with government:

- **Know the structure:** understand the reporting and organisational structure of the government and public sector.
- **Know people personally:** get to know the staff. Researchers often only get to know one person in an organisation. When that person leaves, the relationship breaks.
- **Look for multiple avenues:** often numerous persons and agencies can be approached.
- **Realise where decisions are made:** this is not always obvious.
- **Maintain a long-term focus:** build a relationship, not just a temporary transaction.
- **Make it clear what you want:** funding? Board roles? Data sources? Research partners? Infrastructure? Help with promotion/advocacy?
- **Find different ways to collaborate:** research projects, informal advice, committees and boards.
- **Be proactive and persistent:** they don't come looking for you! Send your research papers, read ministerial media statements, strategic plans and Premier's priorities.
- **Develop networks:** attend industry, community and government events, not just academic conferences.
- **Utilise your students:** senior government officials undertake postgrad or executive education courses – get to know them.
- **Develop a profile:** offer to speak at government events. List yourself on LinkedIn and expert guides like the UWA Media Experts list: web.uwa.edu.au/engage/media/uwa-media-experts
- **Keep in touch with your government contacts:** maintain regular catch-ups.
- **Join a government board or committee:** there are numerous opportunities within policy/review bodies, trading boards, regulatory bodies, governing boards, etc.

Dos and don'ts

Do...	Don't...
assume your research will be of value to policymakers, expressed and presented in the right way, in plain and easy to understand language.	assume that the pedigree and findings of good research speak for themselves.
monitor the topic your work speaks to as a way of assessing whether government is missing something important.	think that government is only interested in incremental policy change – your work can easily strengthen an existing debate within government to consider first order direct policy change.
take the time to identify and write down who or what is losing out or being harmed or excluded, i.e. the potential beneficiaries of better-informed policies.	take as read that policymakers devote energy to scanning for optimal evidence – very often they do not and cannot.
stop to think about what exactly your research would cause government to do differently. Does the purpose of your research serve both the research and the stakeholder?	accept the conceited opinion that Canberra is superficial – even if it is true, this should redouble your efforts to insert good evidence into the fray.
observe how adept political leaders craft a story through which government's role is told to the wider public.	be fooled into thinking that journalists always get the story wrong – they are often quick to get to the heart of the issue. Keep media comments succinct. Media outlets will look for 'grabs', so make it easy for them.
stay in regular contact with the stakeholder. Keeping them involved ensures they are engaged with the research and keeps it relevant.	



Ways to shape and influence public policy

Collaborate with a think-tank

Think-tanks are private organisations that are interested in connecting ideas and evidence to influence public policy. Think-tanks mostly combine drawing on academic networks and doing some in-house research, the fruits of which they will proactively insert into a policy debate or decision point. Universities' research is broader, more curiosity-led and aimed at gaining citations among academic peers and higher league table rankings. Your choice of partner will be based on their:

- topical area
- ideological leaning
- academic pedigree
- access to senior figures
- your role, i.e. writing, speaking - or both

Offer an opinion piece (op-ed) for a newspaper

- It helps to know an op-ed editor, or a relevant contact.
- To start, try writing a letter for publication in response to an opinion piece.
- Pitch your piece succinctly.
- Is there a correction/something missing/an alternative frame?
- Craft a three-sentence angle or a title to capture your viewpoint.
- Avoid jargon.
- Include killer facts.

Provide evidence to a Parliamentary Committee Inquiry

- Research who is chairing which Committee.
- Look out for calls for evidence.
- Suggest topics of inquiry.
- Offer to be examined by the Committee.
- Present broad commentary, not only your narrow specialism.
- Remember: the recommendations of respected Committees are picked up by ministers.

Invite a minister or a government official to a policy seminar

- Set out the exam question to be covered carefully.
- Invite reliable academic colleagues you have worked with.
- Curate the line-up and topics that will be covered.
- Time the event to match a suitable policy window.
- Give the minister/aide a chance to ask questions.

Get recruited to a government body's board

- Resource: OnBoardWA (see below).
- You're not using your specific research knowledge but rather you're able to offer an overview of research in this field broadly.
- You must be willing to examine practical operational matters, and reflect on how research can be used to change priorities.
- You should be interested in executive decision-making.
- Boards generally look after four areas: strategic direction; executive scrutiny; assorted corporate governance matters; senior stakeholder relationships.

Write a book for opinion formers

- Start with a long-ish op-ed.
- Get reactions to your argument.
- Pose it as a question or as a proposal.
- Imagine you want your wisdom to permeate into every relevant conversation.
- Build a comms plan to feature in discursive media.
- Select a publisher with a track record of impact publishing.

Pitch an idea to UWA PPI

We can help you get your ideas to the right people, through targeted meetings, private roundtables, public awareness-raising events, media releases, etc. To do so, we need you to:

- identify an issue that is burning, or about to be.
- explain who is losing out, or who could benefit.
- ensure that we have the expertise on-hand.
- specify external organisations who could be brought in.

Communicating your research to policymakers

Research and engagement activities and media	How to go about it (note: some websites require UWA staff logins)
Organise a PhD industry placement	Australian Postgraduate Research Intern (APR.Intern) connects PhD students with industry through short-term internships: aprintern.org.au
Hold a webinar or virtual event	bit.ly/3wow8IX
Website development and updates	Request website training or support from Brand, Marketing and Recruitment: dcs.uwa.edu.au
Blogs, Vlogs and Podcasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> –Speak to your local Marketing rep about your potential ideas: bit.ly/3A4qlgl –Book a studio room: bit.ly/3jWztn9
Research Impact Stories	Research Impact Stories exist within the Research Impact website and are combined with a video and social media campaign: researchimpact.uwa.edu.au . This UWA service includes an interview with the researcher, offering you the chance to talk about your research project and the potential impact it has had. Your story will be featured on the UWA website, displayed at UWA events, and shared via social media. Get in touch with Rosanna Marchesani to pitch a story: rosanna.marchesani@uwa.edu.au
Contribute to stakeholder publications	Work with your collaborators to be featured within their internal publications, newsletters, articles and media engagement. Rewrite your research into quarterlies, annual reports, newsletters, Explainers, plain language summaries, briefing notes, resources such as leaflets, information sheets and booklets. Where possible, socialise these publications on social media.
Start expert consulting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> –Learn how to establish a consulting agreement with an industry partner, set your price, negotiate contracts and commercial considerations via UWA Consult: bit.ly/3mGSI62 –Also refer to a toolkit designed to assist academics and researchers to become successful in securing and conducting consultancies: bit.ly/2ZGKL7H
Brand development and communication	Having a strong brand as an academic engenders credibility and trust. Your academic brand is one which you construct for yourself as a researcher. It comprises a one-line summary of yourself which includes who you are, what you do and how you represent what you do to the rest of the world: brand.uwa.edu.au
Increase your networks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> –In the academic sector, the increasing value placed on collaborative partnerships and the emergence of the research impact and engagement agenda have heightened the need to have a broad professional network. –Networking will help you to meet other stakeholders in your research area so you can explain what you are doing. You can find out what they need from you and explore whether they would be interested in working in partnership. –Learn how to engage with industry: rdi.uwa.edu.au/engaging-with-industry
Social networking sites (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn)	Speak to your local Marketing rep about your potential ideas: bit.ly/3A4qlgl
Write for 'The Conversation'	The commissioning editors in each area are always looking for new ideas and fresh faces. Ideally, pitch your idea with the news cycle in mind and/or a link to a real-world development and/or an event or unfolding scenario that is imminent: theconversation.com/become-an-author
Write for and get involved in UWA News and Media	Pitch an idea to the UWA Media Team: bit.ly/3EF0aES
Use open access data sharing	Work with your local Librarian on Open Access: bit.ly/3EDHeGq
Commercialise your ideas	UWA's Research and Development Innovation will work with you to assess and protect IP, develop commercialisation strategies and source development funds and partners: bit.ly/3GLer4u

Hold or collaborate on stakeholder events	Learn how to plan and hold an event: uniwa.sharepoint.com/sites/uwastaffintranet/Services-support/Engage/Pages/Events.aspx
Hold seminars/conferences for non-academics	Learn how to plan and hold an event: uniwa.sharepoint.com/sites/uwastaffintranet/Services-support/Engage/Pages/Events.aspx
Create infographics to help with promotion	Canva was founded by UWA alumni and can be used for free. It's easy and useful: canva.com
List your idea on Crowd Research at UWA	crowdresearch.uwa.edu.au
Be involved in an inquiry before a Parliamentary Committee	Keep an eye on the WA Parliamentary Inquiries currently open: parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/commit.nsf/WebInquiriesCurrent
Research infrastructure	Hunt down infrastructure available for your use, or open up your research infrastructure for wider use to bring in collaborators: research.uwa.edu.au/research-infrastructure
Become a member of an advisory group, a board or a committee	onboardwa.jobs.wa.gov.au
Respond to consultations	Be willing to respond to consultations put out by departments and government agencies, for instance, Department of Communities, Mental Health Commission.

(Adapted from the Research Impact Toolkit: rdi.uwa.edu.au/research-impact-toolkit)

How to write for policy professionals

Senior people in government are interested in what researchers can contribute, but, because they operate in a time-poor environment, their needs can be difficult to navigate. It is a given that you will have to present your expertise in a way that goes with the grain of public policy practice.

There are four areas around which you should think about concentrating your thoughts:

- 1. What is the rationale for government to be involved?** Policymakers do not take it as read that government should step in and provide something that is missing or currently poorly delivered. There are lots of competing priorities that make this hard. It is important that you explain why government has a role, or a different role.
- 2. What is the detriment?** Policymakers want to understand who is experiencing harm or losing out in some way. They will want to know whether those harms are directly caused by how government currently works, or whether they are the result of other things. If harm is unevenly experienced, what is your take on why this happens?
- 3. What is working and what is not, and why?** Policymakers are under pressure to deliver better results. That means they have an appetite to stop or curb existing programs that are ineffective. They are also interested in why policies that work elsewhere have succeeded, and how much scope there is to borrow from best practice.
- 4. How much leverage does the government have to respond?** Your advice should acknowledge what actions governments can take and what actions they currently cannot take. You should be free to propose new actions but this distinction should be made clear. You should bear in mind that some options require massive political capital which, again, is not a reason to shy away but instead to be clear about that.



How to pitch to media

Research communications and pitching to media requires an understanding of what is newsworthy. Step outside your research bubble and ask yourself why your neighbour would be interested in it. How would you explain it to your barista in the time it takes them to make your coffee? Pitching to media means your research is no longer about you – you need to show the public that your research has some kind of impact on them.

What's your angle? What is the most interesting thing about what you want to say? Use the bus stop test: why would someone waiting at a local bus stop care about X? If you can't argue how X would affect their lives, it likely doesn't have media potential, e.g. research that indicates how people can be healthier could be of wide interest, but a new book about health law in WA may only be of interest to the legal community. Which brings us to...

Who's the audience and which media outlet should you target? Is your audience likely to be reading newspapers, or are they more likely to read *The Conversation*? Would they listen to the radio? Would the angle suit the print medium better, or do you have amazing video footage that could be played on TV? For instance, shark research footage is excellent on television, whereas commentary on education may work better in print.

Send a short pitch to the UWA Media Team

(media@uwa.edu.au), including:

- What the event/research/book/topic is.
- Who is involved and what are they doing.
- Why does it matter?
- When is it happening?
- How is this news? What's *new* about it? What does it change?
- High-resolution images and/or video.
- A URL for registration, if it's an event, and web links to anything of interest.

Be available for interviews: The positive result of a media release is media interviews. If you've told the world about X, make sure you're available for phone interviews or to drop by a TV network studio, should you be invited. If your work is provocative and the Media Team expect interest, clear your schedule and be ready to jump on it to gain the full benefit.

Pitch to *The Conversation*, if relevant. Most academics underestimate how widely read and widely promoted *The Conversation* is across social media. It is also not easy to get your piece accepted because of huge competition. A published piece is a prize worth having. Find the appropriate editor: theconversation.com/au/team.



Navigating the Australian policy landscape

What follows is a high-level breakdown of the major players in the Australian/Western Australian policy landscape to demystify where to start and who to aim your policy engagement at.

Commonwealth Government

Parliament

The Constitution gives the legislative power of the Commonwealth—the power to make laws—to the Parliament.

The Parliament consists of the Queen, represented by the Governor-General, and two Houses—the House of Representatives (151 members) and the Senate (76 members).

The central function of the Parliament is to consider proposed legislation and make laws. Proposed laws have to be agreed on by both Houses of Parliament to become law. The Parliament also authorises the Executive Government (often simply called the government or the Executive) to spend public money by agreeing on government proposals for expenditure and taxation, scrutinise the administrative actions of the government and serve as a forum for the debate of public policy.

Prime Minister and Cabinet

The Executive Government (the Prime Minister, cabinet ministers and other junior ministers) is drawn from Members of the Parliament. The Prime Minister is the head of the Australian Government. Ministers are selected by the Prime Minister, who also allocates portfolios. The Cabinet, consisting of senior ministers presided over by the Prime Minister, is the Government's pre-eminent policymaking body. Major policy and legislative proposals are decided by the Cabinet, however, as far as the proceedings of the House are concerned, no differentiation is made between cabinet ministers and other junior ministers.

The functions of the Executive Government are to govern, to set the policy agenda, propose new laws and administer existing laws. To govern, it needs to have its revenue and expenditure measures approved by the Parliament. To implement many of its policies it requires Parliament to pass its legislative proposals.

(Adapted from: aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/House_of_Representatives/Powers_practice_and_procedure/00_-_Infosheets/Infosheet_20_-_The_Australian_system_of_government)

Government bodies

Australian Government bodies are diverse, and they include:

- Principal Australian Government Entities

Non-corporate entities, such as Government departments or the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Corporate entities, such as Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) or the Reserve Bank of Australia.

Commonwealth companies, such as foundations or trusts.

- Secondary Australian Government Entities:

Advisory Bodies, for policy and stakeholder consultation, such as the PM's Business Advisory Council or the Australia-Japan Foundation.

Statutory office holders, offices and committees, such as the Gene Technology Regulator or the Director of Human Biosecurity

Non-statutory, given discrete functions with separate branding, such as Medicare, Centrelink or the Australian Border Force.

Ministerial councils and related bodies, including those established by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) (which brings together federal and sub-federal governments), such as the Early Childhood Policy Group or the National Cybercrime Working Group.

Inter-jurisdictional and international bodies, such as the Australia National Commission for UNESCO or the Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee.

- Other Entities:

Subsidiaries of corporate Commonwealth entities and Commonwealth companies, such as Star Track Pty Ltd (a subsidiary of Australia Post) or Voyages Indigenous Tourism Australia Pty Ltd (a subsidiary of the Indigenous Land Corporation).

Joint ventures, partnerships and other companies (where the Australian Government owns 50 per cent or more of the equity).

National law bodies, such as the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Authority.

Bodies linked to the Australian Government through statutory contracts, agreements and delegations, such as the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute or the National School Resourcing Board.

(Adapted from: directory.gov.au/sites/default/files/types_of_bodies_2018-07-20_0.pdf)

See a full list of Australian Government bodies by portfolio and type: bit.ly/3pYAhf2. For a breakdown of organisational structures, roles and staff charts, consult government body websites and departmental annual reports.

Royal Commissions

A Royal Commission is a public inquiry. In Australia, they are the highest form of inquiry on matters of public importance. A Royal Commission has broad powers to gather information to assist with its inquiry, including the power to summon witnesses to appear before it and the power to request individuals or organisations to produce documents as evidence.

Royal Commissions are a form of non-judicial and non-administrative governmental investigation only established in rare and exceptional circumstances. They have terms of reference which set out the key areas of investigation as well as the timeline by which the inquiry must be completed.

Many recent Royal Commissions (e.g. into Banking Misconduct or Aged Care) have been established following major scandals or shortfalls in delivery. For those reasons, they are natural territory for ideas and proposals for new approaches to improve outcomes.

(Adapted from: royalcommission.gov.au/about-royal-commissions)

WA Government

The WA Parliament comprises two houses:

WA Parliament

The Legislative Council (the Upper House)

The Legislative Council is the upper house of the Parliament of Western Australia, and comprises 36 members elected from six multi-member regions by a system of proportional representation.

The Legislative Council has an important role as a check on the government, particularly when the government does not have the majority in the upper house and therefore needs to obtain the support of some of the non-government members to pass legislation or other measures.

It has three main roles:

1. Making laws.
2. Monitoring and reviewing government legislation, administration and expenditure.
3. Gathering information and publicising issues.

(Adapted from parliament.wa.gov.au/WebCMS/webcms.nsf/content/role-of-the-legislative-council)

Legislative Assembly (the Lower House)

The Legislative Assembly is the lower house of the Parliament of Western Australia, and comprises 59 members elected from single member electoral districts by a system of preferential voting. It is the house where government is formed based on a single party or a coalition of parties having a majority of seats, i.e. 30 or more.

It has five main roles:

- Forming government.
- Providing finance for government operations.
- Making laws.
- Scrutinising the government's performance.
- Forum for matters of public concern.

(Adapted from parliament.wa.gov.au/WebCMS/webcms.nsf/content/role-of-the-legislative-assembly)

Members of Parliament

Members of Parliament (MPs) are voters' representatives in Parliament, and bring a variety of experience to their roles. The best place to meet an MP is at Parliament. Since members are required to be at Parliament on sitting days unless granted leave of the house, you should consult the Sitting Calendar and choose a sitting day when requesting a meeting with an MP, and being mindful of their parliamentary duties.

Members who are not ministers usually sit on parliamentary committees, which fulfil an important scrutiny role in relation to legislation in the Legislative Council and government portfolio responsibilities in the Legislative Assembly.

What MPs do:

- Make laws and debate public policy.
- Scrutinise the work of the government.
- Represent their constituents.
- Represent their political parties.

(Adapted from: parliament.wa.gov.au/WebCMS/webcms.nsf/content/what-members-of-parliament-do)

Premier and Cabinet

The Cabinet is the full cohort of ministers for the State. See the current cabinet ministers here: premier.wa.gov.au/Minister

WA Government Bodies

Similar to the Commonwealth structure, the WA Government includes government departments, independent bodies like the Office of the Information Commissioner, agencies such as the WA Police Force and Landgate, State arts organisations such as the Art Gallery of Western Australia, universities, and regulatory bodies such as the Legal Practice Board. Browse the full list: wa.gov.au/agency

Royal Commissions

Again, similar to the Commonwealth, Royal Commissions are public inquiries and can take place in Western Australia. One such example is the Perth Casino Royal Commission, started in March 2021 and expected to deliver its report by March 2022.

Not-for-Profit and charitable sector

Not-for-Profits (NFPs) and charities are organisations that have a purpose other than to make profit. This gives them special tax status but also disallows them from distributing their profits or assets to members, hence, the Not-for-Profit description.

Charities are a sub-group of NFPs and must be registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission. They also receive substantial tax benefits because they must pursue a charitable purpose that ameliorates disadvantage in the community, examples of which include the provision of aged-care supports, disability services or education services. These organisations and their staff can receive significant tax benefits.

On the other hand, the far more numerous NFPs are not regulated as closely as charities but generally do not receive significant tax benefits other than not being required to pay income tax. Typically, NFPs are established as sporting clubs, hobby groups and special interest groups.

Regardless of whether an organisation is a charity or NFP, it must pursue its objectives set out in its constitution or foundation rules and it must report to its members.

Charities cannot act as political activists while NFPs can do so. If a charity is deemed to undertake political activities it can lose its charitable status which can, in turn, impact donors and other stakeholders.

Charities and NFPs are often contracted by government to provide social and human services (about 50 per cent of the sectors' income) and also receive grants from philanthropists and from charitable giving or trading to raise funds (about 50 per cent of the sectors' income).

NFPs are a crucial potential target for your research. They will seek to be connected to experts who are up to date in their field, who can help them make connections to similar NFPs elsewhere in the country, and who can also advise them on what research evidence is saying and not saying.

Many NFPs stage periodic campaigns to muster the attention of the press and politicians. Academic expertise can be vital if they are aiming to project facts and insights that are not widely known. One way to get involved might be to author an opinion piece for the press, and your willingness to co-author with an NFP chief executive can greatly increase the chances of publication.

NFPs vary in their objectives: they may be seeking greater funding for what they do; they may be interested in government agencies taking on responsibility for what an NFP currently does; they may be focused on reforming existing policies they feel are ineffective or create gaps that need to be filled.

Think-tanks

As we mentioned, think-tanks are private organisations that are interested in combining ideas and evidence to influence public policy. A think-tank might be entirely privately funded by donors who see the value of what they are doing; or it may receive public funding and have close ties with the state; or it may be supported by a range of donations from others in business or charitable bodies who hope to benefit in some way from its work; or it may be linked to (and thus partly funded by) an existing research foundation or university.

Think-tanks grew rapidly in Australia from the 1990s onwards, and reflected a similar expansion in the US and UK a decade or two earlier. One reason for their growth was a larger appetite among political leaders to have access to fresh thinking. Another reason was the slow pace of universities in filling this need. Finally, these organisations started to act as nurseries in which future political careers could be built.

Think-tanks vary by their broad ideological position, their fields of topical interest, their capacity to do their own research and, of course, their access to senior figures in politics and public life. Some of them have close formal or informal links with political parties. All of these features should be known to you before you make any firm commitments

Think-tanks are often part of larger knowledge and influence networks – that is to say, working on one thing at a particular moment can leverage connections to a much larger number of opinion-formers who are able to insert your work into efforts to influence policymaking. These networks are constantly evolving, and your participation in a think-tank project will often feed into those relationships.

Think-tanks are about research insights, succinctly expressed and cleverly timed to have a splash. Your expertise is means to all those ends, so they are a natural habitat for academics seeking to influence public policy.

Business sector

The business sector is often overlooked as a significant user of research evidence. Academics with PhDs are regularly hired by businesses as part of their operating model and their knowledge and skills are put to use within a larger context. In WA, this is a common feature of the resources and minerals industries.

In addition, businesses will commonly seek academic expertise in three dominant areas. The first is among applied economists and those with particular knowledge of business models, financial acuity and risk management. In fact, the existing relationships with university business schools are chiefly based around those needs.

The second area is in businesses' needs to manage environmental, social and governance issues. Almost every medium and large business is investing in these areas, in part because of the growing scrutiny applied to environmental, human rights and other societal impacts of their operations. In addition, businesses, on average, increasingly recognise that how they conduct business and their own senior decision-making circles are far from private matters. The extent of diversity of their boardrooms is widely examined by the press and by shareholders, for example.

The last area has to do with using expertise to understand future consumers. If a given business can gain some important insight in this way, they are likely to have a clear advantage in creating value tomorrow.



What is the UWA Public Policy Institute?

What we do

- Run a dynamic in-person and virtual **public events** program on a range of social, economic and political issues of the day.
- Produce and disseminate **reports** for government policymakers.
- Provide **UWA research expertise** to policymakers.
- Organise **private roundtable discussions** for closer exploration with key decision-makers and advisers.
- Run **training and workshops** for UWA researchers on how to work with government, business and not-for-profits.

How we support your research goals

- 'How to work with government' training workshops and seminars.
- Public events as a platform for research engagement and impact.
- Ad hoc connections to ministers, Members of Parliament, departments.
- Targeted emails about open Parliamentary inquiries and how to write a submission.
- Personal invitations to private roundtables of interest.
- Opportunities to contribute to reports sent to key government, NGO and not-for-profit stakeholders.

Get in touch

Our door is always open for collaborations, commissioned reports, and requests for expertise on policy topics. Drop us a line with a pitch, a query or an expression of interest: uwappi@uwa.edu.au

More resources

UWA

- **Office of Research:** research.uwa.edu.au/staff
- **Research Impact Toolkit:** rdi.uwa.edu.au/research-impact-toolkit (a comprehensive toolkit to help you bake research impact into your projects, from start to finish)
- **Impact:** uwa.edu.au/news (news, research and expert insight from UWA)
- **Media Office:** web.uwa.edu.au/engage/media (to help with media pitches, media releases, etc.)

Government

- **WA Government Agencies:** wa.gov.au/agency (an A-Z listing of Western Australian Government agencies)
- **OnBoard WA:** onboardwa.jobs.wa.gov.au (register interest in being nominated to a board)
- **Australian Government Federal Directory:** directory.gov.au (easy guide to the structures, organisations and people in Government)
- **WA Local Government Association Directory:** walga.asn.au



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