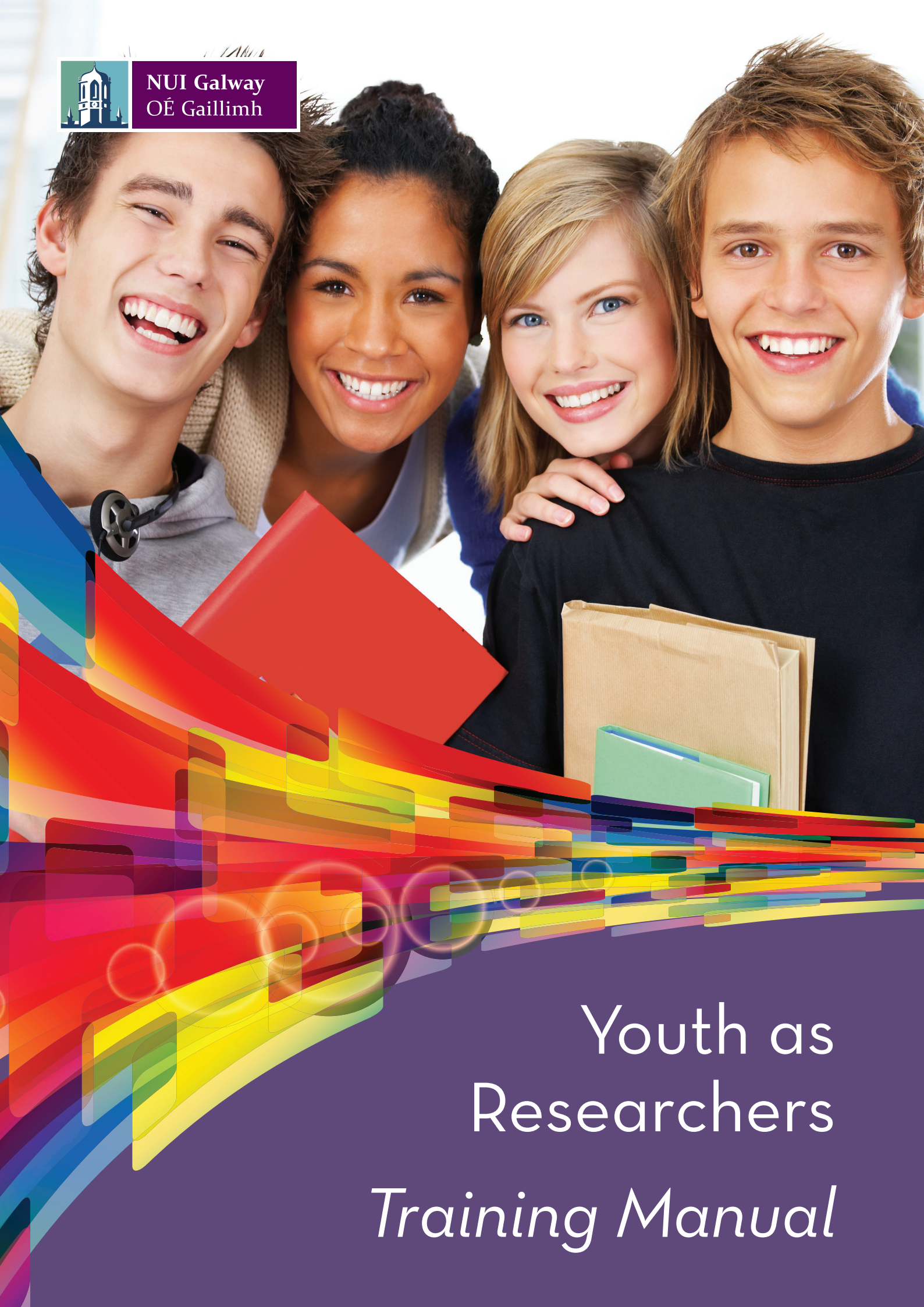NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh

Youth as
Researchers

Training Manual

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What is the Youth as Researchers Training Manual and accompanying Workbook?

The training manual and workbook were developed by a team of researchers and youth researchers at the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre in the Institute for Lifecourse and Society under the guidance of Professor Pat Dolan. The team comprised Maria Campbell, Danielle Kennan, Chloe Greene, Ailish Gowran and Keith Egan. The manual provides a step-by-step guide to carrying out a research project and the workbook is designed to complement the training by suggesting practical tasks to support the research process. The manual draws on examples of research previously undertaken by students of the Foróige Leadership for Life Programme. This youth programme is accredited by National University of Ireland, Galway under the academic directorship of Professor Pat Dolan and is delivered by the youth organisation Foróige in projects and clubs nationally. Module 2 of the programme requires the students to work on a team research project investigating local, community or global issues.

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FOREWORD

As patron of the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, it gives me great pleasure to introduce this Youth as Researchers Training Manual. Providing support and training to youth researchers is part of the Centre's broader agenda to promote positive youth development and to empower youth to actively engage in the communities and wider civic society to which they belong.

Ensuring the voice of young people is present in matters directly affecting them is an issue close to my heart. Research driven by youth can build their capacity and enable them to add their voices and influence change on issues that matter to them.

This training manual is designed to support youth researchers to undertake an ethical and scientifically grounded social research project and to encourage youth to use their research as a tool to advocate for change.

I wish all users of this manual well with their research projects!

Cillian Murphy
Actor and Patron of the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre

INTRODUCTION

Research is a process by which we 'find out' about something. You have probably been involved in research at some point. In school you might have been asked by a teacher to look up facts about the history of your local community or to fill out a survey for classmates who are trying to set up a mini-company as part of their enterprise education in Transition Year. TV news reports and newspapers are always filled with articles that include things like 'new research has shown that…'

The great thing about carrying out your own research is that you can 'find out' about something that affects young people or a problem in your community that needs to be addressed. Your research can then be used to influence change in an area or to address a particular issue. However, in order for our research to be valuable we must ensure that it follows a certain set of rules. This manual and accompanying workbook will offer a step-by-step guide to carrying out a research project that adheres to good research standards. In the end, you will have produced a valuable source of information on issues that affect your life and your community.

(1) DECIDING ON A RESEARCH TOPIC

What am I going to research?

Step 1: Chose an idea

What am I interested in?

What do I feel strongly about?

What am I curious about?

What would I like to change?

- Brainstorm ideas;
- Consider interests that you, or if you are working as part of a team your fellow researchers share, such as common hobbies, living in the same area etc.;
- Think about things that affect your lives, such as lack of facilities, relationships with your friends, parents, siblings etc.

Step 2: Narrow the topic by asking questions

What are the different parts of this topic?

What aspects of this topic especially interest me?

Where and how could I find out about this?

Adapted from Kellet (2005) How to Develop Children as Researchers. London: Sage.

At this early stage you don't need to be too specific; that will come later. For now just try and come up with a 'big idea' for your research. Here are some topics that have previously been covered by the students of the Foróige Leadership for Life Programme. This will give you an idea of where to start:

Homelessness	Obesity	Politics	World Hunger
Nutrition	Mental Health	Drugs/ Alcohol	Recession
Education System	Global Warming	Peer Pressure	Sex Education
Voting Age	Eating Disorders	Happiness	HIV/ AIDS
Bullying	Disability	Gay Marriage	Older People
Self Esteem	Internet Benefits/ Drawbacks	Asylum Seekers	Animal Welfare

Do	Don't
Choose a topic that you have an **interest in** and that is **relevant** to you and/or your research team. Remember this is your chance to have a voice on issues that affect your life!	**Don't start off with anything too specific.** Keep your early stages of research broad so that you can narrow in on an aspect of your 'big idea' later on in the process.

EXAMPLE:

Alice comes from a town in county Mayo that is home to a large population of asylum seekers, especially young people around her age who are housed in a Direct Provision Centre on the outskirts of the town. Despite this large population of young asylum seekers living in the town, Alice noticed that she very rarely saw any of these young people outside of school. They did not seem to be involved in community activities. She explained this to her research team and they all agreed that it was something they would like to research.

(2) FINDING OUT ABOUT THE TOPIC

What information is already out there?

In this next stage you will find out information that is already available on your 'big idea'. This will allow you to narrow down your topic to a more specific area by identifying gaps or problems that need to be addressed. It will also ensure that you are not carrying out research that has already been done. In research language this is called carrying out a *literature review*.

LITERATURE REVIEW
This means finding out what information and research is already out there about the topic you have chosen.

Three things to remember when carrying out your Literature Review:

Find it ⟶ Judge it ⟶ Record it

Find it:
- The Internet is always a good place to start but make sure to look at other sources as well, such as books or articles.
- Try your local library for these books or old newspaper articles. A librarian might be able to guide you in the right direction.

Judge it:
- You will probably be able to find loads of information on your topic pretty quickly. However, not all the information you will find will be useful to you. Make sure to ask yourself a few questions about the information. The guide below is a useful checklist for judging your sources.

- **Think about who has written the information:**
  - » Are they an expert? What makes them an expert?
    (For example: has the author good qualifications / experience? Is it a university or government published document? Is it in a well-known and respected website or newspaper?)
  - » What is their opinion? Are they writing a neutral report or trying to convince people that their opinion is correct.

- **Check the facts:**
  - » Where have the facts come from?
  - » Can you check they are accurate? (If the facts come from a reliable source, for example, it is written by an expert, it is a university or government published document, it is in a well-known and respected newspaper then you can generally assume the facts are accurate. (See also the section on websites below).
  - » When was it written – are the facts out of date?

- **Think about who runs a website:**
  - » An online encyclopedia like Wikipedia can be a great starting point, but the information is created by a variety of users and should be checked with a different source too.
  - » A charity may have reports and information on their website and it is in their interest that the information is accurate, up-to-date and professionally presented.

- **Don't just copy big sections from websites or reports:**
  - » Pick the sections you need carefully.
  - » As much as possible, summarise the information in your own words.
  - » You should say where you found the information.
    (If it is a website, name the owner of the website, the address and the date you accessed it. If a report, book or newspaper article, give the author, title and date it was published).

Adapted from the Foróige (2013) Leadership for Life Programme Workbook Module 2.

- Most importantly, you must ask yourself **'is it relevant to my topic?'** This can be the hardest step, as you will have lots of information that might be interesting but not necessarily related to your research. For example, if you are researching crime rates in Donegal and the report focuses on Dublin it won't be useful for your research.
- Use a highlighter to go through all your information and pick out important points you want to discuss with your group.

Record it:

- Once you have found your information it is important to organise it in a way you can find easily later on.
- A good tip is to write up an index card for each source, which includes:

Type of Source: Internet, book, newspaper article, interview etc.

Author's Name:

Year of Publication:

Title:

Brief Summary: A couple of sentences to sum up what the source tells us.

Key Pages: Page numbers for quotes, interesting points, etc.

Do	Don't
When working as a group it is important that you don't end up reading the same things. It is a good idea to **divide up into sub-groups** and each take a different aspect of the project to research.	**Don't forget to keep a record** of where you found your information. You don't want to spend valuable time later on going through all your research trying to find a specific statistic.

EXAMPLE:

Alice and her research team divided into smaller sub-groups to carry out their literature review.

- The first group researched asylum seekers in Ireland. They gathered information from websites such as the Refugee Council of Ireland, a locally established project SOLAS (Support, Orientation and Learning for Asylum seekers) and from government reports.
- The second group concentrated their research on asylum seekers specifically in their local area. They found newspaper articles on the issue with the help of their local librarian.

Each group wrote up an index card on each of the sources they used. Then they came together and used all the information they had gathered to narrow the focus of their 'big idea' and decide what their project was going to do.

(3) PLAN FOR CHANGE

What will our research do?

Your research is an important tool. It can be used to influence change in an area or to address a particular issue. It is important to always keep this in mind.

Take a look at this triangle, which is a reminder of the relationship between research, policy and practice:

RESEARCH
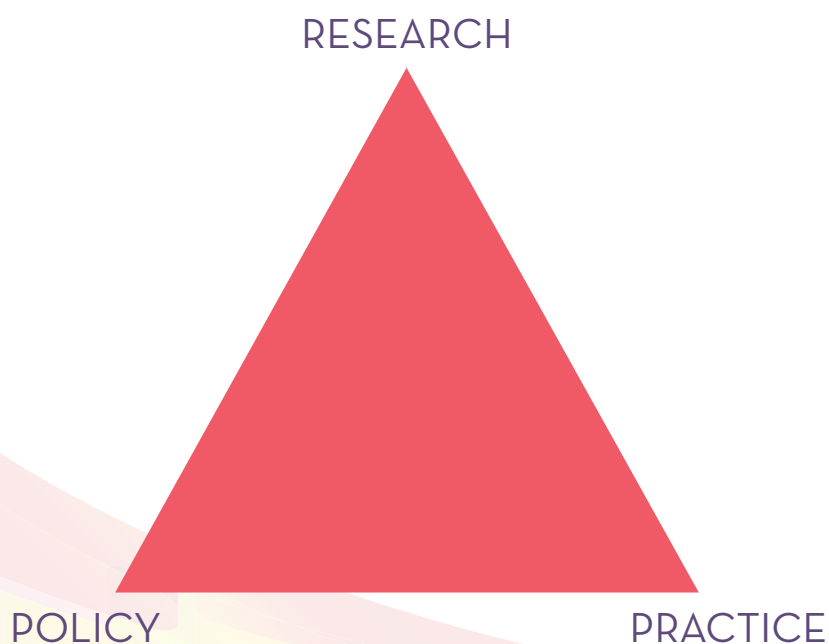
POLICY   PRACTICE

Research: A way of gathering evidence that can be used to support changes to policy and practice.

Policy: A plan or course of action, which is taken by governments or other organisations to determine their decisions and actions.
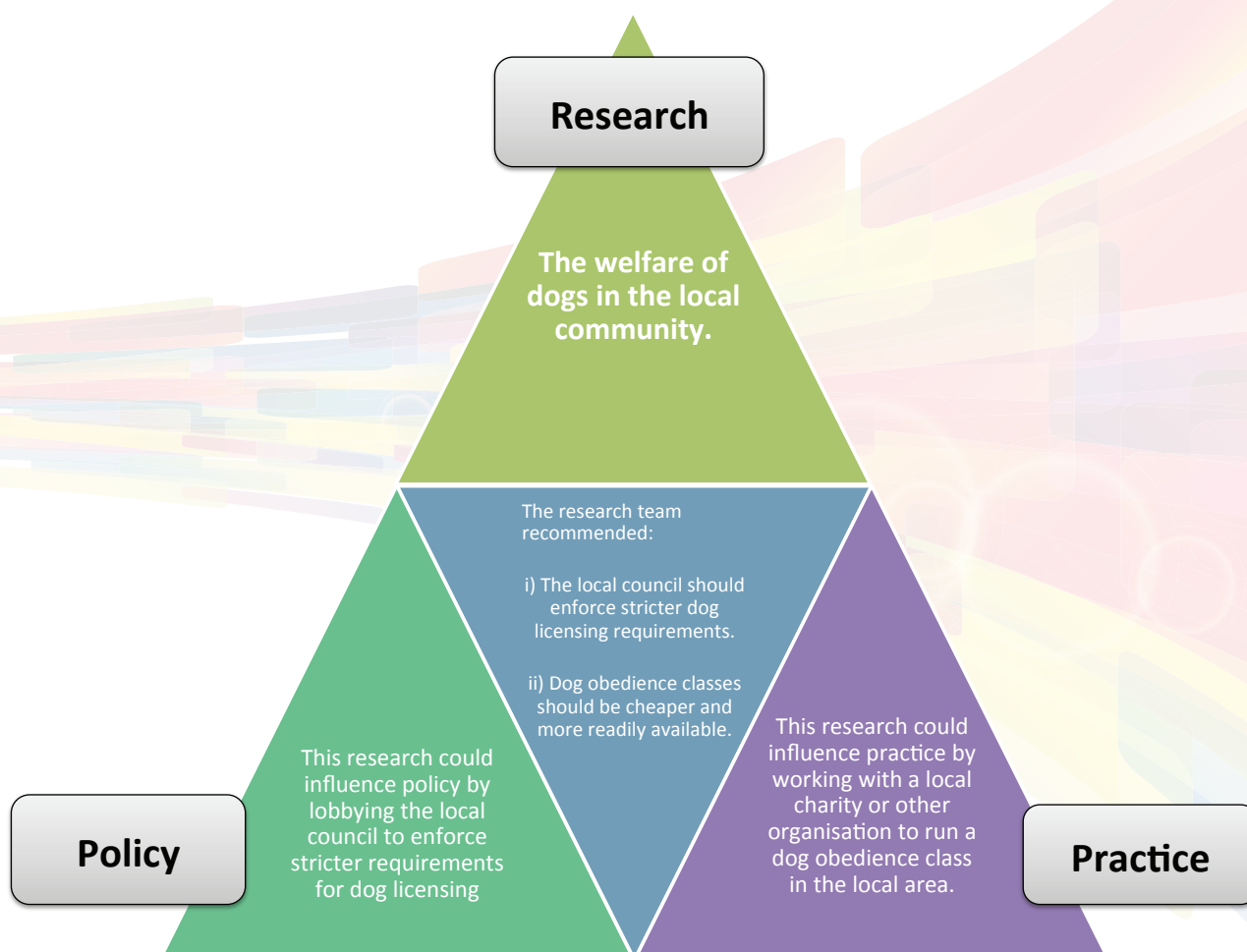
Practice: How we actually do something.

In order for your research to influence change, it is important to know whom your research should target. For example, if you want to influence national policy change you need your research to target local members of government or members of the local county council. On the other hand if you want to influence practice you want your research to target organisations working in the area, such as charities.

Ask yourself:
- What do you want to change, and why?
- Do you want to influence change in policy, practice or both?

Take a look at this example. It comes from a research project completed as part of the Foróige Leadership for Life Programme in 2013. It illustrates how the research could have been developed into an action project to influence policy and practice.

Research

The welfare of dogs in the local community.

The research team recommended:

i) The local council should enforce stricter dog licensing requirements.

ii) Dog obedience classes should be cheaper and more readily available.

Policy

This research could influence policy by lobbying the local council to enforce stricter requirements for dog licensing

Practice

This research could influence practice by working with a local charity or other organisation to run a dog obedience class in the local area.

Do	Don't
Keep an **action project** in mind. Your research portfolio could only be the beginning.	**Don't underestimate your capability**. Your project has the ability to make a real change, so think big!!

EXAMPLE:

Alice and her group planned to find out why young asylum seekers were not more involved in the local community. By examining the reasons that prevented them from being more involved, the group hoped to be able to influence both policy and practice.

- Their research could influence policy by highlighting ways in which the government could improve policies to promote the integration of young asylum seekers.

-

- Their research could influence practice by making recommendations on how programmes run in the community could include young asylum seekers.
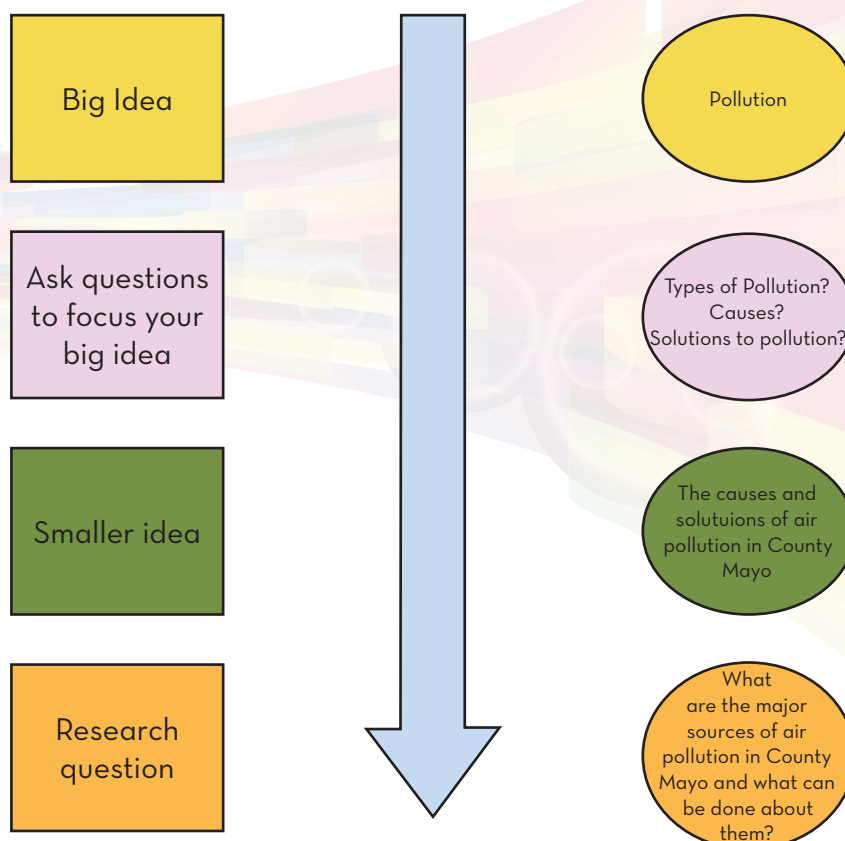
What are we trying to find out?

A research question is another way of framing what is the aim of your research.

A research question will help:

- **Narrow your focus and define the limits of your research:** Instead of asking 'what do young people want?' ask 'what afterschool facilities do young people want in North Dublin?'
- **Manage time:** Is it possible to research all this in your timeframe? Maybe you should narrow the focus. You could do this by adding an age bracket to your research. For example, 'what afterschool facilities do young people aged 12-15 want in North Dublin?'
- **Remain Motivated:** You can use your research question to make sure you don't get sidetracked with information that isn't useful to your research.

Framing a research question

Framing a research question means going from a 'big idea' to a smaller, more focused question that you can answer by doing a research project.

Big Idea	Pollution
Ask questions to focus your big idea	Types of Pollution? Causes? Solutions to pollution?
Smaller idea	The causes and solutuions of air pollution in County Mayo
Research question	What are the major sources of air pollution in County Mayo and what can be done about them?

Do	Don't
Answer this question.... *After reading my research project, the reader should know....*	**Don't leave your research question vague.** Make sure you are as specific as possible so that your research is focused and manageable in the timeframe

EXAMPLE:

Alice and her research team brainstorm to decide what they want their research question to be. They decide on two questions:

1. What are the major barriers in their town for young asylum seekers to be more involved in the local community?
2. What can be done to break these barriers down?
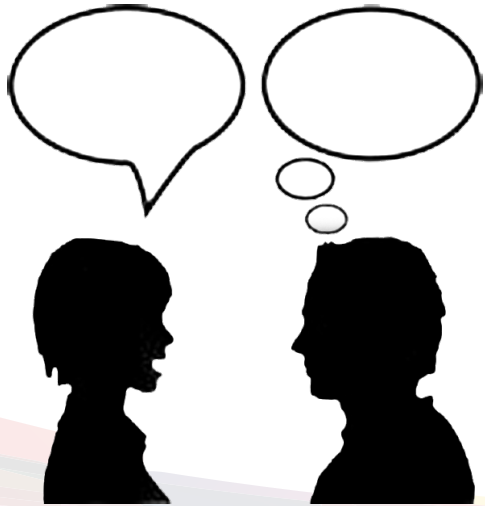
(5) RESEARCH DESIGN

How will I answer the research question?

There are many different types of research and it will be up to you to decide what research methods will best answer your research question. Some of the main types of research and methods are described below.

DATA
This means any information you gather as part of your research.

Primary	Secondary
Primary research involves collection of data that does not already exist. Data can be collected by: • **Questionnaires** • **Interviews** • **Focus Groups** • **Observation**	Secondary research involves analysing existing data i.e. information that exists already, such as that collected by the national census office.
For example, if you were assessing the transport needs of older people in your area:	
Conducting primary research could involve interviewing members of the active retirement group in your local community to find out how many times a week they go into town and what mode of transport they use.	Conducting secondary research could involve summarising a report that the local council produced on the transport needs of older people living in rural communities.

Quantitative	Qualitative
Quantitative research is used to **measure** how **many** people feel, think or act in a particular way. • It answers questions that begin with "how many" or "how much". • It allows the researcher to gather the views of a large number of people (aim for at least 20). • Common methods include telephone interviews and closed-question surveys.	Qualitative research is used to provide the researcher with **in-depth understanding** of an issue and the reasons behind it. • It answers questions that begin with "why" or "how" something happens. • It involves a small number of people (minimum three). • Common methods include face-to-face interviews, group discussions (focus groups) and open-question surveys.
For example, if you were doing research on the local youth club?	
Carrying out quantitative research using a questionnaire could help you to establish that: • There are 15 females and 7 males attending the club. • 12 are transition year students. • 18 thought that the facilities at the club are excellent.	Carrying out qualitative research may involve conducting in-depth interviews with the young people in the club to understand: • The reasons they joined the club. • Why they thought the facilities at the club were excellent. • What the club could do to attract more young people.

Using questions that have a limited number of answers for people to select from (closed questions) can make it easier to compare results.

Using open questions means that people can answer however they choose. This may make it harder to compare results, but allows for more freedom and variety in the answers. These types of questions are better for interviews.

Closed Questions (best for questionnaires)

Do you exercise regularly? (Select one)

☐ Yes   ☐ Sometimes   ☐ No

What qualities do you think are important for leadership? (Tick all that apply)

☐ A good listener

☐ Patient

☐ A loud voice

☐ Bossy

☐ Good communicator

Open Questions (best for interviews)

What exercise do you do?

What qualities do you think are important for leadership?

Adapted from the Foróige (2013) Leadership for Life Programme Workbook Module 2.

Do	Don't
Give plenty of **notice** when requesting an interview with someone. Be as **flexible** as possible.	**Don't limit your research to only one source**. While the internet might be the easiest option, make sure to look for newspaper articles, official reports, and books as well. You can also gather some of your own information through interviews or questionnaires.

EXAMPLE:

In order to answer their research question, Alice and her research team have decided to conduct different types of research.

They will:

- Gather information from a report produced by the Irish Refugee Council and the Government Working Group on Direct Provision (Literature Review).
- Conduct an interview with a staff member from the local youth club (Qualitative).
- Invite young asylum seekers to answer an anonymous closed questionnaire about their involvement in community activities (Quantitative).

(6) RESEARCH ETHICS

How will I ensure the research won't cause any harm to other people?

RESEARCH ETHICS:

These are the correct rules of conduct to follow when carrying out your research. Following these guidelines ensures that we uphold our moral responsibility to protect research participants.

In order to ensure your research has no adverse effects (causes any harm) to those who participate, you must consider the ethical issues involved.

Avoid situations such as these:

- A research topic that is particularly sensitive or personal, such as interviewing someone about bullying who may have been bullied in the past. This could cause them to get upset

- Collecting data from research participants who may be vulnerable or 'at risk', for example people who are homeless or suffer from addiction or mental health issues. You as the researcher may not be equipped to deal with issues that arise during your interactions with such research participants. For example, a young person might disclose that they are self-harming, and you as the interviewer do not know what to say or do.

Framework for ethical research

Think about how your project might affect those involved.

Know how to keep yourself and others safe.

Provide clear and honest information about the research to all participants.

Get permission from participants.

Respect other people's privacy.

Keep things confidential. You may need to use made-up names in your report.

Protect your data.

EXAMPLE:

Alice and her research team are aware that they are dealing with a topic that is potentially sensitive. In order to ensure that their research follows the correct ethical codes of conduct they spend time talking about how the project might affect those involved. They agree to ensure that:

•   All the research participants are fully informed about what the research team are researching, why they are undertaking the research, what is involved in partaking in the research, what they will do with the findings and how they will protect individuals' anonymity etc.
•   They are discreet with the data collected and keep it in a safe place where only those in the research group can access it.
•   They do not share the identity of the youth club staff member in the write-up of their report.
•   They won't ask personal questions that are not necessary for their research.

(7) REPORT YOUR RESEARCH FINDINGS

How will I report the research?

Analysing your Results

When analysing data (from questionnaires, interviews, focus groups etc.), you must look back at your research question i.e., the reason you undertook the research in the first place. This will help you to organise and categorise your data and it will help you to focus on answering the question.

Basic analysis of quantitative information

(Responses to closed-question questionnaires)

1. Organise the information, i.e., add up the number of 'yes' responses, 'no' responses for each question etc.
2. Once you have completed your calculations you can create a table in excel to show the responses.

Basic analysis of qualitative information

(Responses in interviews, focus groups or open-questions in a questionnaire)

1. Read through all the data.
2. Organise similar answers or comments into themes, e.g., concerns, strengths, weaknesses, similar experiences, suggestions for change etc.
3. Label the themes and write up the findings under each theme.
4. Identify any patterns in the themes, e.g., most people were aware of..., some of the people had concerns about...etc.

Interpreting the data you have collected

1. Put the information in perspective, e.g., compare what you found to what you expected or to previous research in the area.
2. Consider recommendations to help improve the situation.
3. Record conclusions and recommendations.

Writing up your research

Include the Following:

Aim: What you hoped to achieve (research question).

Introduction: Background to the project.

Methods: How you went about looking into the issue e.g. interviews, internet search, focus group etc.

Results/Findings: What you found out.

Conclusion: What conclusions you came to.

Recommendations: Key recommendations to solve the problem. These should be creative and practical.

To write-up your findings in an interesting way, think about using:

*   pictures or images
*   diagrams or bar charts
*   and quotations
    "there isn't enough to do in the evening" (Girl, 16)

picture gallery

EXAMPLE

Alice and her research team gather all their information. From the responses they received during the interview and the completed questionnaires, they identify three major barriers to the involvement of young asylum seekers in the community. They organise all the data under each barrier identified. They write up their findings and produce a report. In their recommendation, they include five recommendations that the Government, the local community and organisations can take to overcome these barriers. Having no transport was identified as a major barrier for the young asylum seekers to become involved in community activities. One of the recommendations was to develop a carpool system to provide a mode of transport for the young asylum seekers to travel to the local youth club.

Do	Don't
Organise your research in a clear and concise way. Use photographs, images or diagrams to present your findings in an interesting way and if you carried out primary research include some quotations. Use bullet points to make your recommendations clear.	**Don't forget your research question.** The write up should be directed towards answering this question.

(8) DISSEMINATION

How will I share the research?

Now that all the work is done it's time to put your energy into getting the message out. Telling the right people about your research means that it may be used as evidence as part of a larger campaign to implement change.

> ### DISSEMINATION:
> Developing the key messages from your research and ensuring that it is shared with people who can bring about change.

BE CLEAR ABOUT THE MAIN MESSAGE OF YOUR RESEARCH.

HAVE A LIST OF PEOPLE WHO YOU WANT TO 'TARGET' TO SHARE YOUR RESEARCH WITH.

Ideas for dissemination

- Send your research report to local members of government, county councils, charities, schools or anyone who might be interested. Make sure to include a personalised letter highlighting the key message of your research to ensure that they read it.
- Put it on a website.
- Hold a public launch event.
- Contact the local press.
- Share information on the research in existing newsletters.

Do	Don't
Pay attention to dissemination. This is the most important step in ensuring that your research impacts the issue it is addressing.	**Don't simply send copies of your research to a lot of different sources.** Make sure to think about ways to make it **accessible** to the person who is reading it. This could be with an accompanying letter, a YouTube video or a colourful leaflet.

EXAMPLE:

After they have completed their research project, Alice and her team hold a launch night. They invite key people such as a local Government representative, representatives from community groups and members of the community. At the event they present the key message of their research and encourage everyone in the community to join in the carpool system in order to ensure that the young asylum seekers can attend community activities.