# ANNEX A: Impact Plan Approach

The guiding elements (see Call Announcement section 2) will be part of the proposal evaluation and should be described in corresponding sections of the proposal and especially in the Impact Plan towards Food system Transformation (menu point “project description” of the proposal).

The guiding elements are
**A. Transformative perspective**
**B. Inter- and transdisciplinarity**
**C. Multi-stakeholder engagement**
**D. Sustainability**

FutureFoodS ambition is to utilize Research and Innovation (R&I) for transforming food systems to become sustainable and future-proof. To do so, knowledge, actors and resources need to be mobilized through an impact-driven Food Systems Approach. Therefore, and in line with the aim of the European Commission and Horizon Europe, projects should address societal challenges, and should have potential for societal impact. Societal impact is never solely a result of knowledge and insights from research, and moreover, it is often only realised in the years after a project has been concluded. Innovation and experimenting new solutions need scaling for larger impact. In summary, in order for impact to be made more likely, it needs to be planned. Consortia applying for this call should therefore consider how relevant stakeholders can be involved in, and / or benefit from, the design and realisation of the proposed R&I project from the very beginning.

To further enhance the potential for impact of the proposed research, the application should state how approaches for achieving impact are integrated in the project design. Further engagement of end users, such as practitioners, policymakers, and industry should be clear and integrated in the project. To this end, applicants are asked to describe their project following an Impact Plan approach, which is reflected in the proposal outline (see Annex C, D) and which will be considered in the evaluation.

The Impact Plan should build upon a **Theory of Change**. A Theory of Change is a process-oriented and logical framework that can be used as a tool to write a good proposal aiming at societal impact. Below you can find summarized background information. In addition, there is more information freely accessible and developed by the Dutch Research Council (NWO):

Free online workshop for applicants: https://impact.nwo.nl/en/working-with-an-impact-plan
More info: https://www.nwo.nl/en/impact-plan-approach

## Requirements for applicants of FutureFoodS:

In the pre-proposal, applicants are asked to perform a problem analysis - as explained below. Based on this problem analysis, the proposal should clearly identify potential solutions and interventions. In the full proposal, applicants will need to provide a complete Impact Plan, including impact pathways, effective outreach and application-driven interactions and strategic planning of scientific and innovation activities. The budget should take into account activities necessary to complete the Impact Plan.

Funded projects are asked to follow-up on their Impact Plan throughout their runtime and especially during mid- and end-term reporting. Support measures, such as trainings and practice exchanges will be offered.

Co-funded by the European Union

Co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Research Executive Agency (REA). Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

## Background info about the Impact Plan approach and Theory of Change:

***Theory of Change*** describes how the R&I process can contribute to societal/ economic/ environmental change, taking into account the context, the actors involved and describing the sequence of logically linked consequential relations (see Figure 1*).

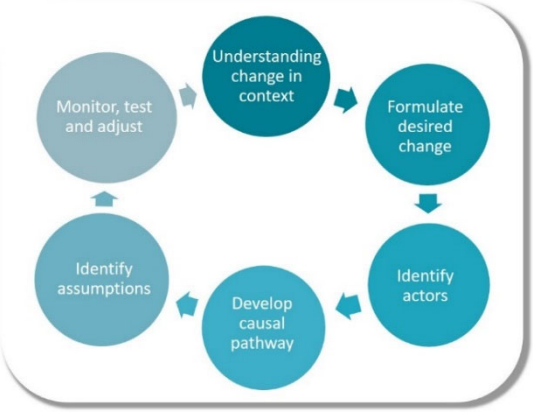


*Figure 1: Cycle of reflection behind the Impact Plan Approach*

There are two parts (see Figure 2*):

• Within the **Problem Analysis** project partners as well as stakeholders are asked to jointly explore which (and whose) problem is being tackled and how the desired change is perceived to happen through R&I efforts. The Problem Analysis starts by clearly defining the societal problem and the desired impact. Next, the causes for this problem are discussed and the knowledge gaps identified. This part should form a logical chain to the project, hypotheses, methodology and work plan.

• The **Impact Pathway** is the visualisation of the change process as described in the Theory of Change following from project execution. It makes explicit how the R&I activities will lead to results or insights **(output)**, and how exchange of knowledge and the uptake of research output and innovations will contribute to desired changes in behaviour, relationships, actions and activities of partners and stakeholders **(outcome)** that are considered essential to achieving the desired impact.

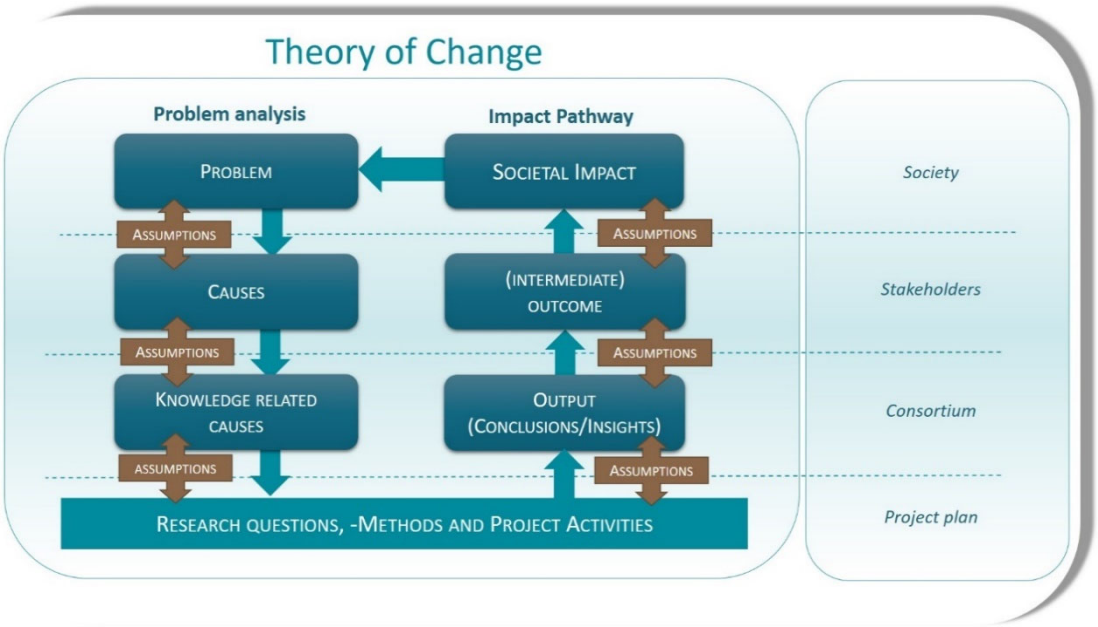


*Figure 2: Schematic representation of the Theory of Change*

* Source of Figures: NWO website: https://impact.nwo.nl/en/working-with-an-impact-plan/theory-societal-impact-and-the-route-to-it

***R&I outputs*** relate to the direct and immediate insights obtained by a project or programme.

***R&I outcomes*** relate to the changes in behaviour, relationships, actions, or activities of stakeholders as a result of sharing and uptake of research and innovation. This starts during the project but continues after the end of the project.

***R&I impact*** is defined as changes in economic, environmental and social conditions that a project or programme is aiming at. The actual impact is often appearing long after the project ends.

Any projections on expected change will be based on multiple assumptions; these assumptions will differ from project to project and between persons as well as over time. Documenting these assumptions already in the proposal helps to create shared vision and allows for reflection on whether and how expected pathways to impact remain adequate or need adjustment. This is why a Theory of Change is not fixed, but set to evolve along the project lifetime, and to be reflected upon continuously throughout the R&I process and beyond. For this reason, it is also used as part of the monitoring, evaluation and learning trajectory.

Moving from output to outcome does not happen automatically. Important points are the **productive interactions**: exchanges between researchers and stakeholders in which knowledge is produced and valued that is both scientifically robust and socially relevant. No change can be made without exchanging information and people acting on that information! Interactions can be direct / personal, indirect or financial. The quantity as well as quality of the productive interactions form an indicator for the potential for societal impact. Examples of productive interactions are:

• Co-design: formulation of R&I questions and approaches jointly with researchers, stakeholders and potential end-users (i.e. practitioners, policy makers, industry etc.).

• Co-creation: joint execution of R&I projects and interactive dialogue on project results.

A **Strategic Activity Planning** spells out how the proposed productive interactions contribute to achieving outcomes. Strategies are needed to plan and monitor how the consortium's efforts will enhance the potential for outcomes. These activities should be given with a timeline covering the phases after the completion of the project as well, demonstrating how the project results will/can be put into practice. Qualitative and quantitative information should also be provided in order to be able to monitor these activities. This planning should include specific activities for:

• Stakeholder engagement: who are the relevant stakeholders to engage with according to context analysis, how are the productive interactions organised and when?

• Communication strategy: how are engagement dialogues organised and results exchanged and translated, and whose responsibility is it?

• Uptake and upscaling of project results: how to enable the application, uptake and potentially upscaling of project results in society and/or food sector?

• Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning: how are results of activities monitored and evaluated, such that assumptions can be tested and activities adjusted accordingly, and whose responsibility is it?

• Capacity strengthening: how are required capacities (of consortium partners and stakeholders) strengthened in order to achieve the outcomes, how is this organised and whose responsibility is it?

• Assessment of co-benefits and trade-offs: what are potential positive as well as negative consequences of the project´s activities? What are the benefits and trade-offs for project partners, stakeholders and other actors? Who might be left out? Are there unexpected effects?