

10 tips for getting a good testimonial to corroborate your impact

1. **Get a statement of fact, not of opinion.** REF have previously stated that: “testimonials should draw on statements of fact and relate specifically to the impact(s) claimed. There may be occasions where opinion-based testimonials are appropriate (for example, where the impact is on public understanding of an issue). Where testimony is cited, it should be made clear whether the source is a participant in the process of impact delivery (and the degree to which this is the case), or is a reporter on the process.”
2. **Time it well.** Don't put it off! Ask while it's still fresh in their minds (before they forget about you, or – worse – leave the organisation!). But don't be tempted to ask too soon, when your impact may still be minimal. Try to gauge a time when you've got as far as you expect with them (i.e. you've achieved some impact but it's unlikely to continue to grow / develop).
3. **Be honest about why you're asking.** Most likely they will have heard of REF and its requirements, and may have already written testimonials for other researchers. Rather than framing it in relation to your career / your institution's agendas, you could ask them to reflect on how you've helped them achieve *their* strategic goals.
4. **Reassure any concerns over confidentiality.** All REF2029 panel members and associated personnel are bound by confidentiality agreements. Evidence will be submitted separately to the case study documents, held securely and will not be routinely provided to the reviewers (only on request). [See REF2021 Draft Guidance on Submissions.]
5. **Check whether their testimonial is personal, or given on behalf of their organisation.** Ideally, you want to be able to quote their position (the more senior, the better) in the organisation to underscore the legitimacy of what they have said about your research.
6. **Consider using an interview to generate your testimonial.** Whether by Zoom, phone or in person, interviews can be a great way to engage busy people in this process. You should prepare some questions beforehand, but having a live conversation will also allow you to go *off piste* and probe further if you feel you could get more detail from them. Ensure you have their consent to record the interview, then transcribe it. You can select key quotes to assemble a draft testimonial on their behalf, which they'll then (hopefully) only need to amend and approve.
7. **Get a signed, headed letter if you can.** Although the preferred format (for authenticity), many REF2021 case studies submitted testimonials in email format. If you can't get a letter, an email testimonial is acceptable; but be warned that auditors may follow up emails to verify legitimacy, so you need to be confident that the email address will still be in use by your testimonial's provider, come 2029!
8. **Can you also get a concise, quotable summary?** Although it's worth getting as much details as possible, to maximise the strength of your evidence, it's also useful to have a pithy sentence or two which you can quote effectively in your impact case study. You can either ask for this (if they have time!) or propose your own summary based on their testimonial, and ask them to amend and approve it.
9. **Remember to acknowledge and be appreciative of their time and effort.** They're doing you a favour here (there's nothing in this for them).

10. Last but not least, ask the right (type of) questions!

- a) **Which of my specific research insights or findings** were useful to you?
- b) **What have you / your organisation done differently** as a result of engaging with my research i.e. **what has changed** (this could be e.g. activity, attitude, awareness, behaviour, capacity, opportunity, performance, policy, practice, process or understanding)?
- c) **How have these actions been – or how will they be – beneficial to:**
 - a) You or your organisation
 - b) Those you represent or are responsible for
 - c) Anyone else (please specify)
- d) In what ways **have you measured – or could you measure – the scale and/or extent of these benefits?**
- e) Do you know of **any evidence** (e.g. documents, statistics) we could use to demonstrate and corroborate these benefits?
- f) **Were there other factors** influencing these changes or benefits? If so, **what specific role did my research play** in contributing to these outcomes?
- g) By what **process or means** did you come to use my research (e.g. meeting, policy brief)? Have you drawn on any **specific publications or activities** through which my research was communicated (e.g. report, presentation)?
- h) Has our work together led to you **taking any further action** in this area, e.g. applying for funding, reaching out to political actors or other stakeholders?

Further guidance:

<https://www.fasttrackimpact.com/single-post/2018/02/23/Getting-testimonials-to-corroborate-the-impact-of-your-research>

<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2018/06/08/guidance-on-testimonials-and-statements-to-corroborate-impact/>