

# Engineering a Winning Strategic Pitch

**A grant is an argument, not an essay.**



**Jekoniya** — Live in Dublin



**João** — Live on Zoom

# Workshop Outline

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**01** Welcome, Alignment & Funding Landscape

**02** Grant Writing Strategy Phase & Reviewer's Reality Check

**03** Costing, Budget and Feasibility

**04** Practical Session – Pitching the Anchor Call

**05** Summary

# Welcome & Introductions

## LET'S GET STARTED!

Welcome to our collaborative grant-writing community.

Today is all about building strong connections and turning ideas into winning proposals.

## OUR SHARED GOALS FOR TODAY

- 1 Connect with fellow early-career researchers
- 2 Maintain an open, highly collaborative environment
- 3 Support each other through constructive, positive peer review
- 4 Transform raw ideas into robust, fundable research arguments



*"We are glad you are here with us!"*



# Reality of the current funding landscape for ECRs in development studies

 **Highly competitive**



 **Reduced funding and tight budgets**  
e.g. ODA



 **Shifting priorities**



**“Precarity” gap –**  
Securing the first grant during and after a PhD – hardest hurdle



**All is not gloom**  
there is a silver lining on how ECRs can strategically position for available funding opportunities



## The silver lining: How ECRs can strategically position for funding opportunities



**1. KNOW THE LANDSCAPE**  
Stay informed on funders, calls, trends and priorities.



**2. BUILD STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS**  
Network, collaborate and co-create with purpose.



**3. STRENGTHEN YOUR FUNDING EDGE**  
Develop grant writing, evidence and impact storytelling skills.



**4. ALIGN & DIFFERENTIATE**  
Align your ideas with funder priorities and show what makes your work unique.



**5. START SMALL, THINK BIG**  
Leverage small grants, fellowships and awards as stepping stones.



**Positioned, prepared and persistent – turning challenges into opportunities.**

# Funding Opportunities



## 1. Travel & Small Grants

Explore database options and smaller funding tracks (e.g., UKRI, professional/academic societies, trusts, charities).

**Research Professional** ↗

CAT. 01



## 2. ECR Fellowships

Personal postdoctoral grants covering salary and research. May include equipment or student costs.

**Duration: 1–5 years**

*Evaluated primarily on future potential.*

CAT. 02



## 3. Research Grants

Substantial funding typically for permanent academic positions.

Collaborate with your PI/mentor to contribute to group proposals—excellent experience that can write you in as a named post-doc.

CAT. 03



## Recommended Resources

Podcasts: [YouTube: ERC Fellowship Podcasts \(Cambridge\)](#) | Alternative Funding: [postgraduate-funding.com](https://postgraduate-funding.com)

# Funding Opportunities: Key Schemes

acc



## Research Councils

**UKRI** ↗ – AHRC fellowships (ECR route, £50–250K) & ESRC New Investigator Grants.

**The British Academy** ↗ – ECRs in humanities & social sciences.



## European & International

**European Research Council** ↗ – Starting (2-7 yrs PhD), Consolidator, Advanced, & ERC Plus.

**Marie Curie & Newton** – Postdoctoral fellowships & Newton International awards.



## Charities & Trusts

**Leverhulme ECR Fellowships** – Provides 50% funding for research costs and salary support.

**Wellcome Trust** – Early Career Awards with a specific focus on health and wellbeing research.



## Institutes & Programmes

**Max Weber Programme (EUI)** – Open within 5 years of PhD completion.

Focuses on Historical, Political, and Social Sciences, plus the Young African Leaders programme.

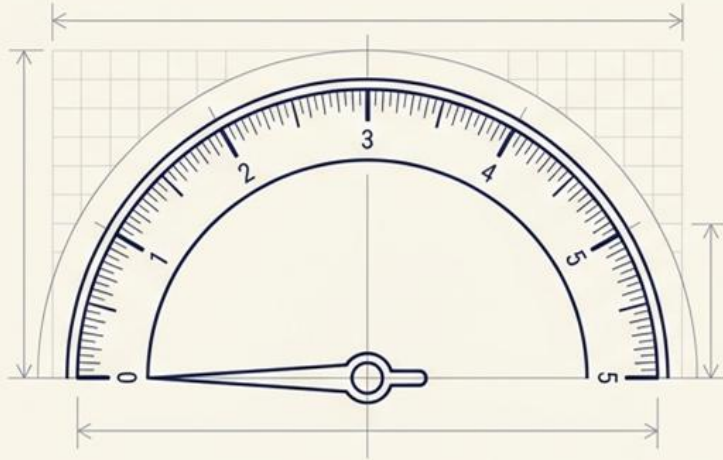
# Where does the architecture break down?



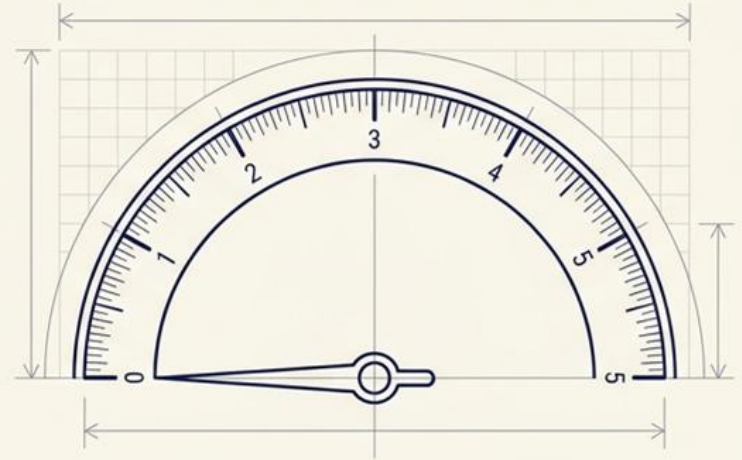
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Rate your confidence (1-5) via the link in the Zoom chat or by scanning the room code.

## Structuring a strong narrative



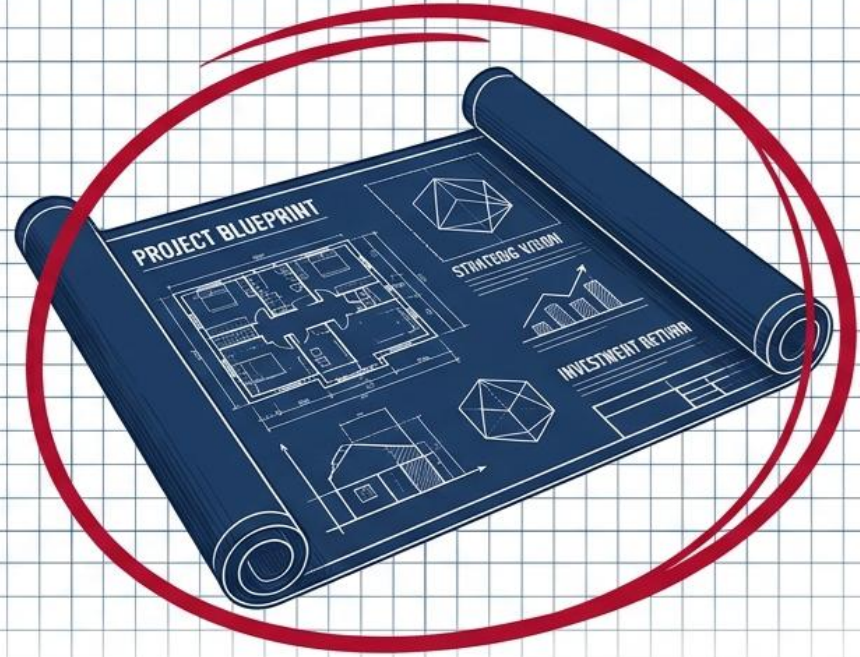
## Preparing a realistic budget



# A GRANT IS A STRATEGIC ARGUMENT, NOT AN ACADEMIC ESSAY



Reviewers are not looking  
for a literature review



You are pitching your team as  
the best possible investment for the  
donor's money right now



# The Mindset Matrix

| The Academic Essay                            | The Strategic Pitch                                 |
|-----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Focus:</b> Past/Present Analysis           | <b>Focus:</b> Future Implementation                 |
| <b>Core Goal:</b> Academic Discovery          | <b>Core Goal:</b> Return on Investment (ROI)        |
| <b>Primary Audience:</b> Subject Matter Peers | <b>Primary Audience:</b> An Exhausted Funding Panel |
| <b>Success Metric:</b> Theoretical Depth      | <b>Success Metric:</b> Actionable Impact            |

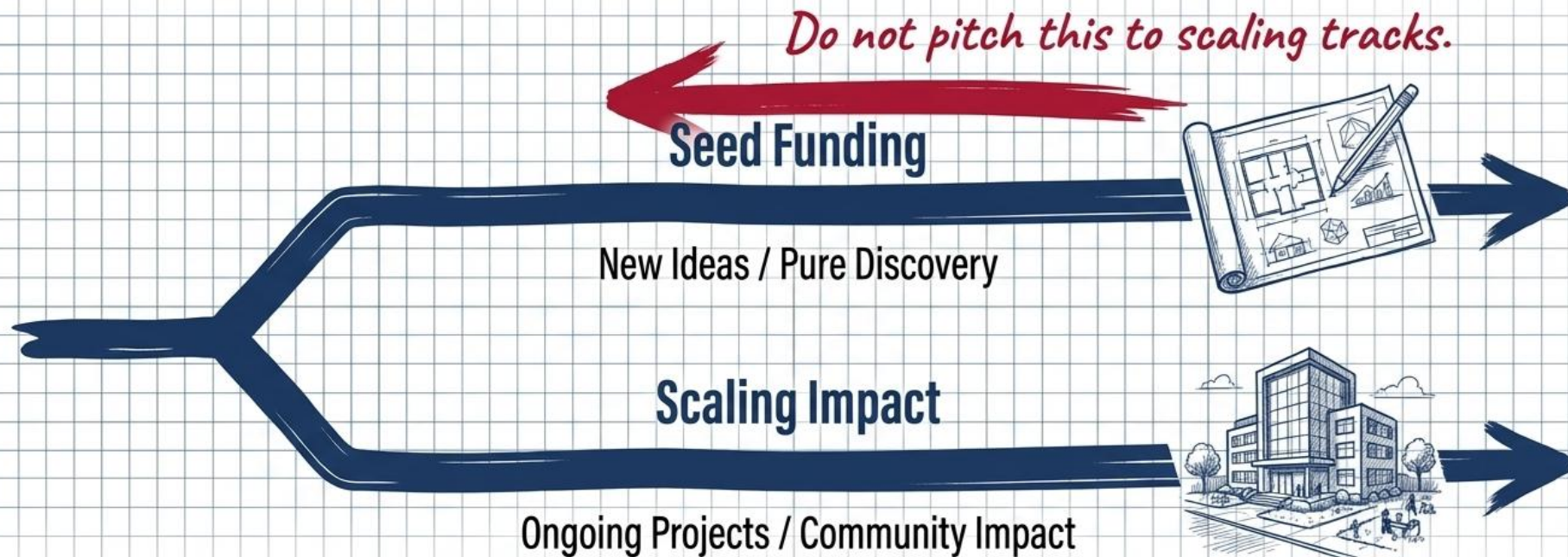
# Rule #1: Do not disqualify yourself on Day One.



A shocking number of applications are rejected before the narrative is even read.

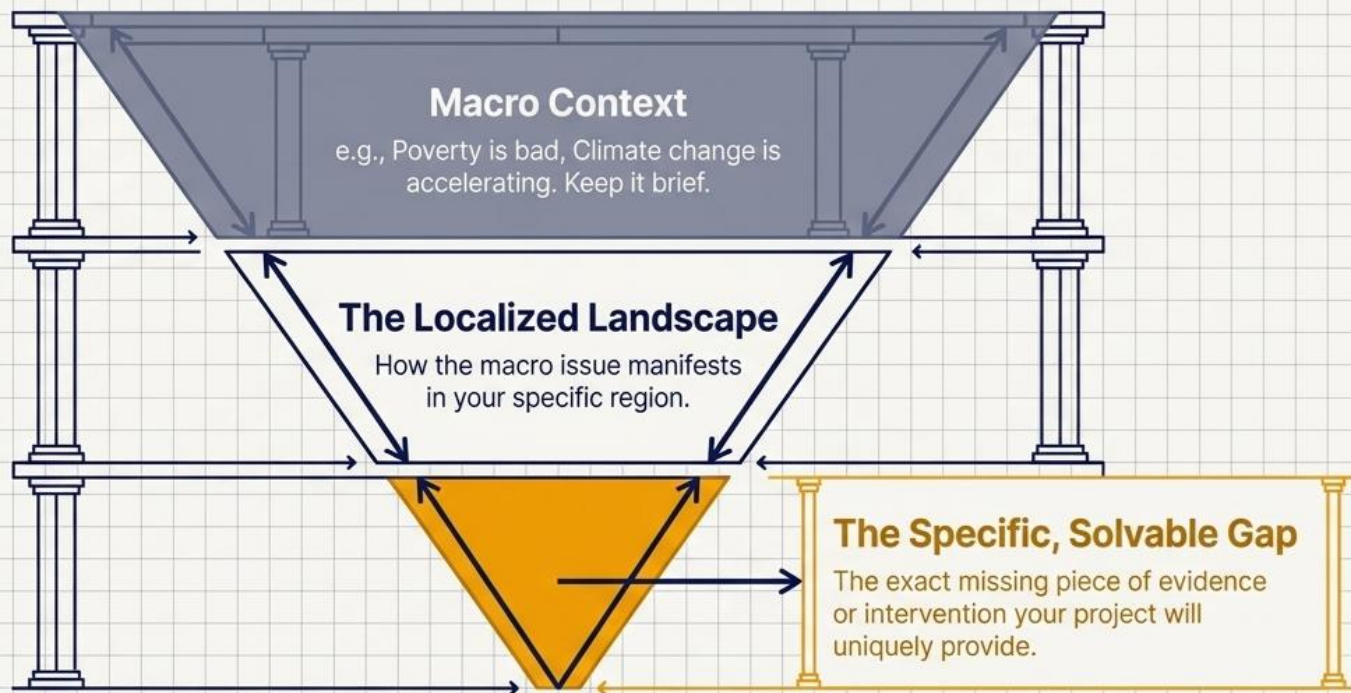
**Example:** The Japanese Award (ORD) track has a strict age limit of 45. Teams routinely apply with older members and are instantly disqualified.

# Align your proposal's maturity with the funder's "Why".

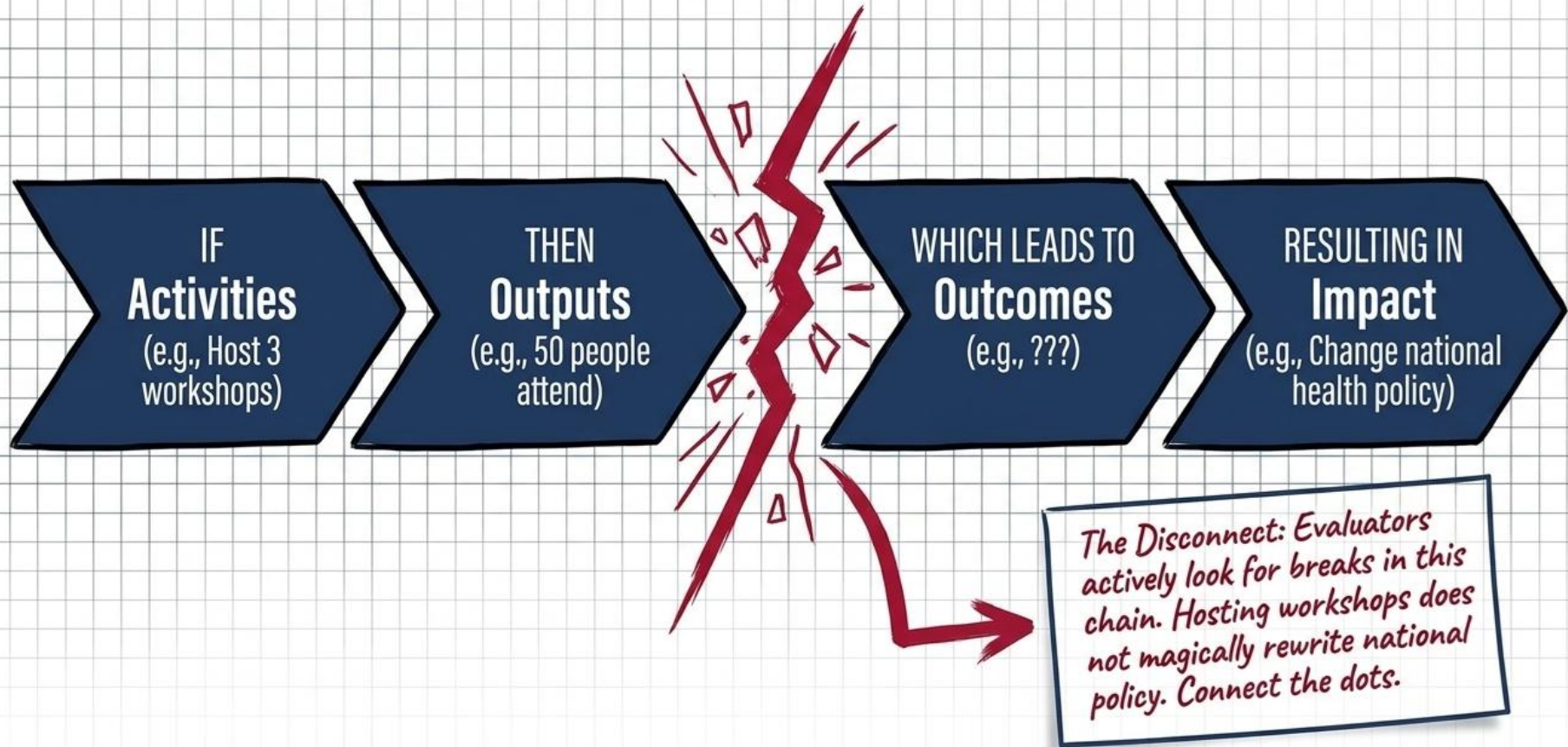


**GDAC Example:** The MIDP track specifically funds ongoing initiatives ready to scale. Yet, applicants constantly pitch untested, brand-new ideas and fail. Know what stage the donor is buying into.

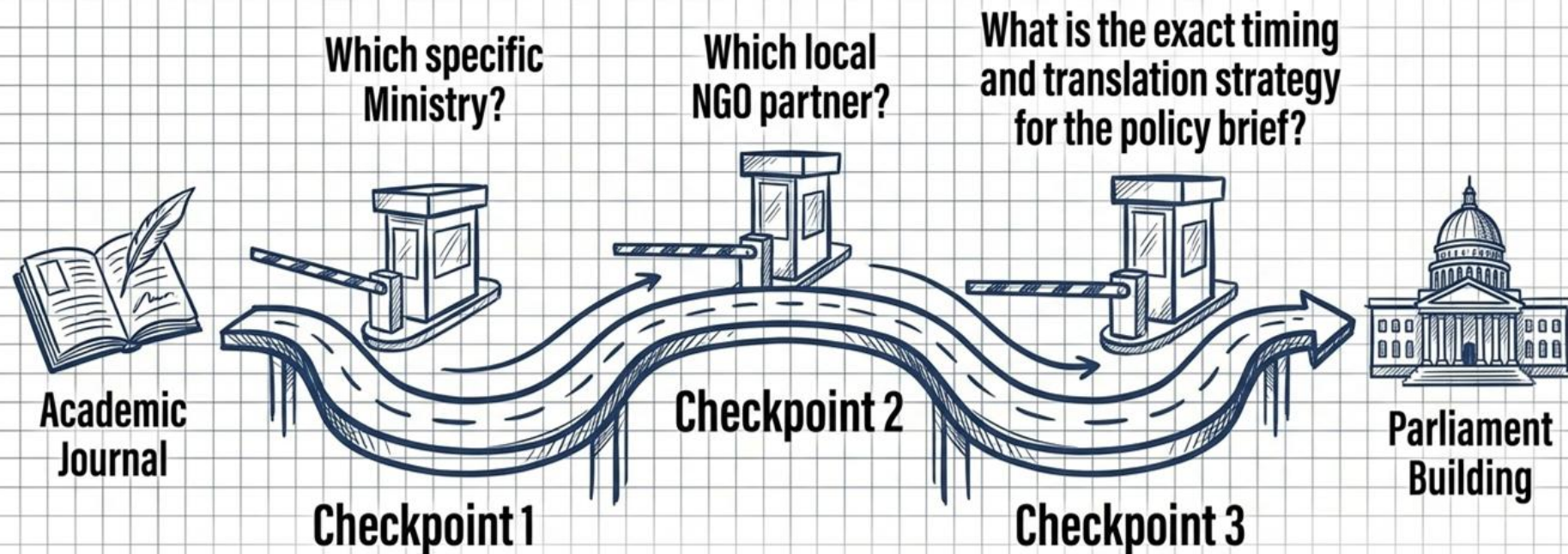
# The Problem Statement: Macro to Micro



# The Theory of Change is an unbroken logical architecture.



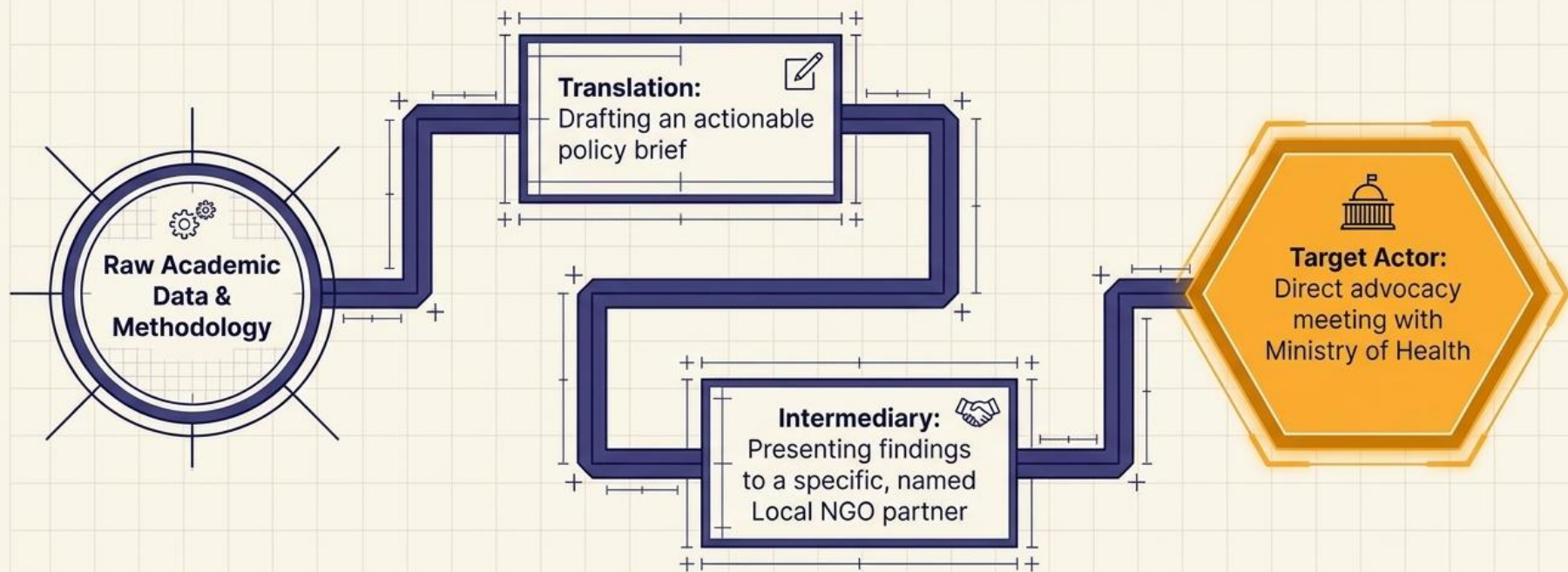
# The Policy Pathway requires exact actors, not vague hopes.



~~Polymakers will read our publication.~~

# Engineering the Policy Pathway

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Never assume the data speaks for itself. Name the actors. Map the timing. Define the translation.

# The MEL Trap: Confusing the 'What' with the 'So What'

## OUTPUTS (The Heartbeat)



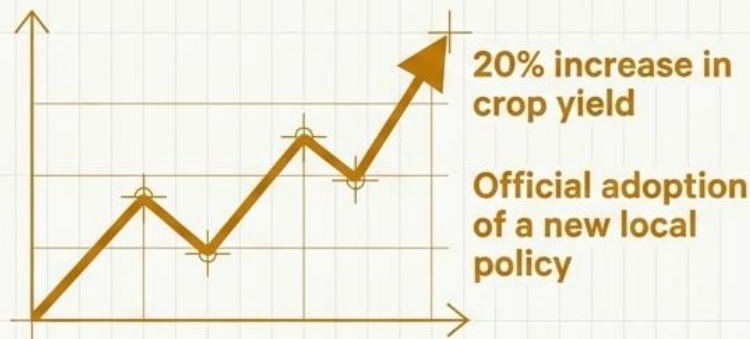
3 reports published



50 people trained

What you produce.  
Necessary, but not sufficient.

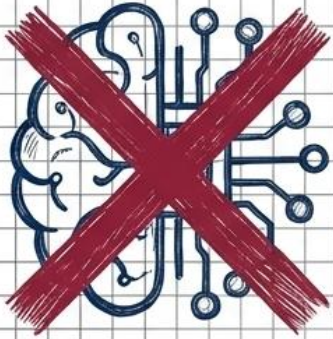
## OUTCOMES (The Brain)



What actually changes.

**Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) is the strategic heartbeat of the project, not an administrative chore.**

# Avoid the AI formula and the methodology disconnect.



**The AI Trap:** Generative AI proposals lack deep localized context, sound highly formulaic, and rely on repetitive buzzwords. It reads as shallow. AI is for brainstorming, not writing methodology.



**Methodology Disconnect:** Don't just list methods (e.g., 'we will conduct surveys and focus groups'). You must explain why that specific qualitative method is the only way to answer your specific research question.

# System Pause: 10-Minute Intermission



## Dublin Room

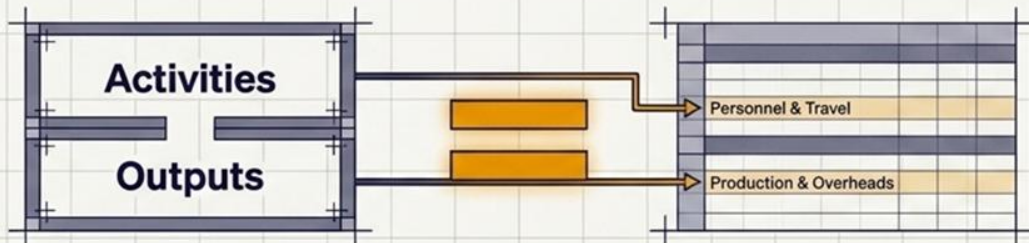
Refreshments are located at the back of the hall. Jekoniya is available for micro-questions.

## Zoom Room

Please stretch, hydrate, and return when the dial hits zero. João will monitor the chat.

# Synthesis: The Budget is the Blueprint Translated

If the logic chain is broken, the budget is fiction.



## Mechanics of Budgeting

A strong budget tells the funder and reviewers that your project is realistic, deliverable, and offers value for money. **Translation of your research plan into a cost.**

- Budget must be consistent with the activities in the work plan and within the rules/guidelines of the funder (eligible and ineligible costs)

## Typical Costs Categories

| Direct Costs                                                                                                                    | Indirect Costs/ Overheads                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| costs that can be attributed directly to the project (e.g. personnel, travel, equipment, consumables, dissemination and impact) | costs incurred by the institution that cannot be attributed specifically or exclusively to the project (e.g. office space, lighting, heating, maintenance, library services, IT, and administrative support) |

# The "Superman" Syndrome: Overpromising, Under-delivering



Reviewers prioritize **feasibility** over **ambition**. A tightly scoped, **highly realistic** project designed to achieve **one solid outcome** will always defeat an overly ambitious project **guaranteed to face delays**.

# Your Deliverables: The 13-Minute Blueprint

## Deliverable 1: The Micro-Problem Statement

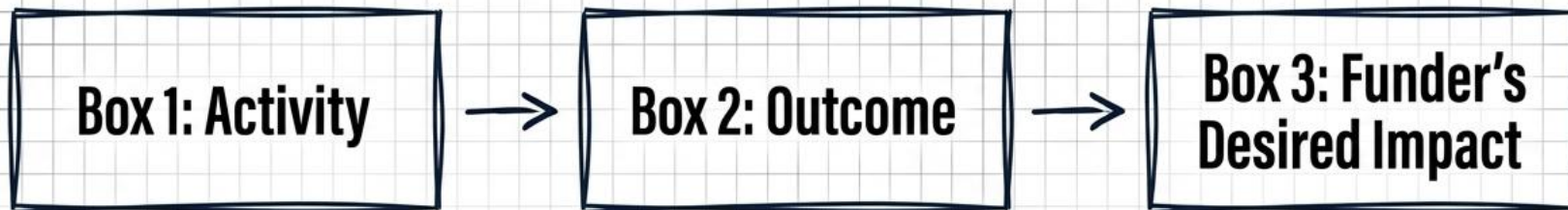
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*Write a single, one-sentence statement defining the specific, solvable gap (Not the macro context).*

## Deliverable 2: The 3-Step Theory of Change



*Map your specific activity directly to the funder's desired impact. Do not break the logic chain.*

# The 'Funding Panel' Live Review Rubric



**Alignment: Does this actually align with the funder's specific 'Why'?**



**The MEL Trap: Did you confuse an output (a report) with an outcome (a change in reality)?**



**The Superman Test: Is the proposed scope actually feasible within the budget and timeline constraints?**

**Note: One Dublin table and one Zoom group will be selected to pitch their deliverables for live, uncompromising feedback.**

# The Grant Manager's Mindset

## Argument, Not Essay

You are proving your team is the highest ROI investment for the donor right now.

## Rejection is a Metric

Use reviewer rubrics as free consultancy. Extract the feedback, refine the blueprint, and reapply.

## Beyond the Award

A great researcher is not automatically a great grant manager. Winning the funds is merely Step One.



**Scan to submit the  
session feedback survey.**