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A Framework for Research Impact: Insights, Pathways, and Calls to Action

MAY 2026

AACSB GLOBAL RESEARCH IMPACT TASK FORCE

CONTENTS

FOREWORD

Business schools face a defining test of purpose—one that challenges not just what they do but why they exist. They are being reshaped by a rapidly shifting ecosystem that is redefining their identity and future role. Expectations from students, employers, policymakers, and society at large are converging around a single demand: demonstrable value, relevance, and impact. At the heart of this reckoning is research, foundational to the business school mission yet too often disconnected from the broader contributions it makes beyond academia.

This problem is not unique to business schools. It reflects a deeper rupture in the social contract for science and signals the need for research institutions to not only generate knowledge but also demonstrate how that knowledge informs practice and contributes to society.

Part of the challenge lies in the nature of research impact itself. Some contributions shape practice and policy immediately; others take years, even decades, to reveal their significance. We see this in many fields beyond academia. The recent rise of mainstream AI is the result of cumulative work stretching back to the 1950s, ideas that only now resonate at scale. Impact, in other words, is often only recognized in retrospect.

This reality places a responsibility on all of us to ensure that the environment in which research is conducted truly enables impact. If we expect research to deliver meaningful contributions to wider society, we must ensure that our systems, incentives, and cultures are designed to support it. This is not simply an institutional challenge; it is a systemic one that requires alignment across schools, accrediting bodies, policymakers, scholarly organizations, and all their partners.

The Global Research Impact Task Force represents an important step in this journey. This report is not intended to add to the conversation—it is intended to change it.

Our ambition is to catalyze a shared effort across the ecosystem: to rethink how research impact is defined, supported, and communicated, and to take meaningful steps toward a more intentional and impactful future.

I invite you to be part of this collective effort, to help shape a future where research not only advances knowledge but meaningfully improves the world around us.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report calls for a broader and more intentional approach to research impact in business education—one that recognizes not only scholarly contributions within academia but also influence on practice, policy, education, and society. Developed by the **Global Research Impact Task Force**, the report presents a framework for how business schools and ecosystem stakeholders can better define, support, assess, and communicate research impact in a rapidly evolving environment.

The framework aligns with the **AACSB Global Standards for Business Education™**, which were developed in parallel with the Global Research Impact Task Force. Insights and recommendations from the task force helped inform the standards' emphasis on teaching, scholarship, and societal engagement as interconnected dimensions of a broader impact ecosystem.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- **Research impact needs to be understood more broadly** than traditional publication and citation metrics and should include demonstrable contributions to business, policy, education, and society.
- **Impact is nonlinear and iterative**, often emerging through ongoing engagement, collaboration, dissemination, and translational activities throughout the knowledge production process.
- **Business schools should adopt institution-level, portfolio-based research impact strategies** aligned with their missions, strategic priorities, and stakeholder needs, recognizing that impact is created through three interconnected channels: scholarly discovery, teaching, and external engagement.
- **Current incentive and evaluation systems remain overly concentrated on quantitative and journal-based metrics**, limiting broader forms of impactful and externally engaged scholarship. Business schools should incorporate a balanced mix of quantitative and qualitative indicators to assess research impact.
- **Advancing research impact requires intentional school ecosystems**, including alignment across strategy, governance, incentives, infrastructure, dissemination, engagement, and assessment.
- **Systemwide progress will require collective action** across accrediting bodies, scholarly associations, journals, publishers, ranking organizations, funding agencies, practitioners, policymakers, and business schools themselves.

To support implementation, the report introduces strategic frameworks and practical resources that schools can adapt to their own contexts, including an initial version of a **Research Impact Assessment Tool** and a **Research Impact Ecosystem Guide**. These resources are intended to help schools strengthen strategic planning, assessment, communication, and alignment around research impact.

This report represents the first phase of a larger initiative. Future phases will focus on refining and operationalizing these tools and frameworks for wider institutional adoption while also fostering greater coordination and participation across the global research impact ecosystem.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The Time for a Paradigm Shift Is Now

The current system for recognizing research impact has served business education well, but it is increasingly being tested by evolving societal needs. The research landscape is shifting, bringing new audiences, higher expectations, and more complex demands. From advancing the transition to net zero and addressing inequality to navigating digital disruption and strengthening trust in institutions, today's challenges call for more engaged, interdisciplinary, and outward-facing research. Business school scholars are well-positioned to contribute, but doing so requires rethinking how impact is defined, demonstrated, and valued.

This initiative is part of a wider global movement to expand how research impact is understood and demonstrated across business education. The Global Research Impact Task Force builds on important contributions from associations, scholarly academies, journal editors, business schools, and individual researchers who have advanced ideas, frameworks, and practices in this space.[1] These collective efforts highlight both meaningful progress and the need for renewed, coordinated action—an effort AACSB is uniquely positioned to advance through its ability to convene stakeholders across the global business education ecosystem.

Quality research has always been a defining characteristic of business education.[2] It distinguishes AACSB-accredited schools and signals a commitment to academic excellence with global relevance. AACSB, along with the nine scholarly societies represented on the task force, is committed to guiding the ecosystem toward a broader, more inclusive understanding of research impact.

Yet, current global dynamics and the mounting pressures that will only increase in the near future demand urgent attention.

Three developments stand out:

1 **Intensifying existential pressures on higher education**—what Boston Consulting Group has described as a "make-or-break moment" driven by converging forces including enrollments, financial strain, and shifting societal expectations—means that business schools must more clearly articulate how they create value for students, industry, and society through their research, education, and outreach.[3]

2 **Growing societal skepticism toward science and scientific evidence**, as reflected in an analysis showing a decline in strong public trust (at just 8 percent for U.S. adults) comes at a time when trust is critical for designing effective policies and addressing global challenges.[4] As the use of AI in research expands, it raises further questions about trust in scientific outputs, as reflected in a European Union study: Only 38 percent of respondents reported trusting research created with AI, while 25 percent expressed distrust.[5] Concerns around transparency, integrity, and the spread of misinformation emphasize the need for higher education institutions to rebuild confidence in the credibility and value of scholarship.

3 **The rapid rise of AI and emerging technologies** is reshaping how knowledge is created, evaluated, disseminated, and used, ushering in what Ethan Mollick describes as "singularities" in the research process, where AI enables step-change shifts in the speed, scale, and nature of research, challenging schools to adapt their research models.[6]

Our Objectives and Vision

The task force convened in January 2025 around four objectives:

- Expand the definition of research impact beyond traditional scholarly metrics.
- Identify principles for assessment that reflect meaningful theoretical, empirical, and practical contributions.
- Provide business schools and their disciplines with flexibility to determine incentives that encourage and reward evidence-based impact.
- Ensure that research impact reflects the perspectives of multiple stakeholders, including academia, industry, policymakers, regulators, and society.

The framework that follows is a forward-looking catalyst for systemic change, connecting how research impact is defined, assessed, supported, and communicated across the ecosystem. It is not a prescriptive rubric but a set of guiding principles, resources, and pathways to help institutions strengthen their research impact ecosystems in ways that reflect their unique missions and contexts.

It affirms that rigor and quality remain essential while calling for a reexamination of entrenched reward systems, a shift in prevailing mindsets, and an expanded recognition of what constitutes meaningful research. The goal is not only scholarly excellence but relevance to business, policy, and society at large. **(See Appendix A for methodology and process.)**

Global Research Impact Task Force Vision:

Through collective action, AACSB, the Global Research Impact Task Force, business schools, and ecosystem leaders can drive the shared evolution needed to ensure that business school research both advances knowledge and is actively recognized, understood, and applied in business and societal decision-making.

Deans and Faculty Share: Overemphasized and Overlooked Indicators of Research Impact

In the task force's Research Impact survey, which received participation from over 960 faculty and deans, respondents were asked to rank a series of research impact indicators based on their perceived importance in institutional evaluation processes, as well as those they viewed as most overemphasized and most overlooked. An examination of the average rankings across these three dimensions showed that both faculty and deans ranked the indicators similarly.

Most Important Indicators	Most Overemphasized Indicators	Most Overlooked Indicators
1. Publication in elite journals in UTD 24, FT 50, or similar list compiled by school or university	1. Publication in elite journals in UTD 24, FT 50, or similar list compiled by school or university	1. Business/industry influence
2. Journal impact factors	2. Journal impact factors	2. Teaching curriculum integration
3. Academic citation count	3. Academic citation count	3. Community engagement/ social outcomes/policy influence (among deans)

See Standard 8.1 of the 2026 Global Standards, which notes that AACSB does not require any particular journal list to assess quality; rather, schools define and safeguard quality in ways that align with their mission.

The Business School as the Unit of Analysis

While scholars are often expected to be motivated to generate research that reaches beyond academic publication and engages broader audiences, this framework places primary emphasis on impact at the school level. Achieving meaningful, systemwide change in how business education defines and values impact begins with institutions and the ecosystems and mindsets they cultivate.

Throughout its work, the task force heard a consistent and important perspective: Many faculty provide deep expertise as scholars and methodologists who specialize in the design, measurement, and analytical rigor that underpin high-quality research—contributions that remain essential to advancing knowledge. This framework does not seek to diminish or redefine that function, nor does it suggest that all faculty should engage in impact in the same way.

Impact cannot rest on the shoulders of any single faculty member. It is neither realistic nor desirable to expect individuals to excel across all dimensions, from rigorous scholarship to practice engagement and dissemination. Instead, impact is best achieved through a collective, portfolio-based approach in which diverse faculty contributions, ranging from foundational research to applied and translational work, are intentionally aligned and supported to advance a broader impact agenda.

Impact cannot rest on the shoulders of any single faculty member. It is neither realistic nor desirable to expect individuals to excel across all dimensions, from rigorous scholarship to practice engagement and dissemination.

This approach requires schools to adopt a more strategic perspective, anchored in a clear research strategy aligned with their missions and reflected in faculty composition, recruitment, evaluation, and incentives. Such a strategy should go beyond consideration to intentionally aligning faculty structures with their overarching goals for institutional impact. By positioning the school as the primary unit of analysis, the framework enables institutions to innovate in how they define, pursue, and realize impact.

BROADENING THE LENS OF RESEARCH IMPACT

Defining Research in a Broader Context

As AACSB emphasized in earlier work, the term *research* is often used too narrowly, limited to publications in peer-reviewed, discipline-based academic journals. Under this revised framework, we use *research* more broadly to describe the scholarly inquiry and systematic, methodologically grounded investigation that produces intellectual contributions in a variety of forms and advances new knowledge.

Expanding this definition creates space for a more comprehensive understanding of how research generates value. It allows business schools to better articulate the pathways through which scholarly work impacts not only the body of academic knowledge but also teaching, practice, policy, and society.

What Is High-Quality Research?

The term *high-quality research* is widely used across AACSB standards and in this report. However, it is often implicitly recognized by its methodological rigor and contribution to the disciplinary body of knowledge. While rigor remains foundational, this narrow interpretation can limit how research value is understood and assessed.

This report advances a more expansive view: High-quality research is defined not solely by its rigor but also by its relevance, resonance, intellectual contribution, and capacity to generate meaningful impact. These dimensions are complementary rather than competing.[7]

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A Wider View of Research Impact

Calls to rethink research impact increasingly emphasize the need for scholarly work to influence spaces beyond academia, particularly business practice, public policy, and society. Yet, in practice, research impact continues to be assessed primarily through traditional academic metrics such as publication volume and citation counts.

Consistent with these tensions, task force survey participants largely agree that business schools should broaden their definition of impactful research to include influence on society, practice, and policy, not just academia (87 percent of deans and 82 percent of faculty).[8] At the same time, a subset of respondents raised important concerns about expanding the definition too far, noting potential risks such as diluting academic rigor or shifting focus away from core scholarly contributions.

87%
of Deans

82%
of Faculty

believe business schools should broaden definitions of research impact

Deans and Faculty Share: An Evolved Impact Definition

As academic institutions, impact should be predominantly based on academic impact … other factors (e.g., policy implications, attracting external funding, industry engagements) are BONUSES and natural outcomes when the academic research is academically sound, well recognized by peers, and published in well-recognized (highly ranked) journals … Extending the definition of 'impact' too broadly indeed requests academics to move away from their competitive edge and do something that their expertise and intelligence are not best used, and at the same time attract 'business-like' academics to fill the places, racing the discipline to the bottom in the long run.

Despite the high criticism around publications in top journals, they still provide the best impartial assessment of academic performance. Other issues such as grants and social impact are relevant and should be considered, but if we are not producing quality research and developing knowledge, it is hard to see how knowledge dissemination, social impact, and policy influence will happen.

Practical impact is completely neglected. While this is also the consequence of how articles are expected to be written (e.g., usually, papers do not include a 'practical impact' section), universities could (and should) take the impact of our research on multiple stakeholders more seriously.

Academic research 'on a shelf,' or published in a journal, but not communicated to and consumed by the general public, [is] 'useless.' Real change comes from when the community is informed and empowered to ask for change.

The work in elite journals is good, but it tends to be narrow (by design) and replicates existing views. New ideas face a wall of resistance. Equally troublesome is the length of the peer review process and the extent to which peer review tends to push scholarship toward micro extensions of what we already know.

These perspectives highlight a productive tension. Expanding the definition of impact is not about diminishing academic excellence; it is about recognizing that research can create value across multiple domains. Business schools must be able to not only define and demonstrate impact in alignment with their missions, strategies, and stakeholder contexts but also critically examine whether their research strategies are adequately aligned to achieve those ambitions.

In task force discussions, participants consistently noted that current definitions of scholarly impact emphasize its reach within academia, typically evidenced through publications and citations. Looking ahead, they expressed a desire for a more balanced approach, one that continues to value academic contributions while also recognizing evidence of influence beyond academia.

See the Pathways to Impact section of the Global Standards, which calls for a broader understanding of impact, and Standard 8, which recognizes that both applied and pedagogical intellectual contributions can be considered high-quality and impactful.

Baseline Definition of Research Impact

To support this shift, the task force proposes the following baseline definition:

The demonstrable influence, effect, or change generated by scholarly activity and evidence-based research for academic and non-academic audiences and stakeholders.

This definition reflects a desired future state while remaining sufficiently flexible to accommodate different institutional contexts.

Research Impact as an Umbrella Concept

Because of the difficulty (or impossibility) of agreeing on a single optimal set of definitions, the task force advocates bypassing these debates while still acknowledging the importance of different meanings by using the notion of an "umbrella concept."[9]

Applied to research impact, this approach enables the following:

- A holistic view that captures the full range of scholarly outputs, outcomes, and longer-term effects
- More focused definitions that assess impact within specific domains or stakeholder groups

Rather than viewing rigor and relevance as competing priorities, this framing reinforces their interdependence. Research that is rigorous can also be highly relevant, and its impact may unfold across different audiences and time horizons. This integrated perspective allows schools to recognize diverse forms of contribution while maintaining coherence in how impact is understood.

Research Impact Is Nonlinear

A key insight from the task force is that research impact does not follow a simple, linear path. Traditional models often position impact as a final outcome, something that occurs only after research has been produced and disseminated. This perspective implies that impact exists largely outside the researcher's influence.

In reality, impact is often iterative, emergent, and shaped throughout the knowledge production process. It can be intentionally designed from the outset by grounding research questions in real-world challenges, engaging stakeholders early, and considering pathways to application. Nevertheless, observable impact may only emerge years later, for example, after a theory or intuition is empirically tested and supported, and/or results are translated to facilitate application in the field.

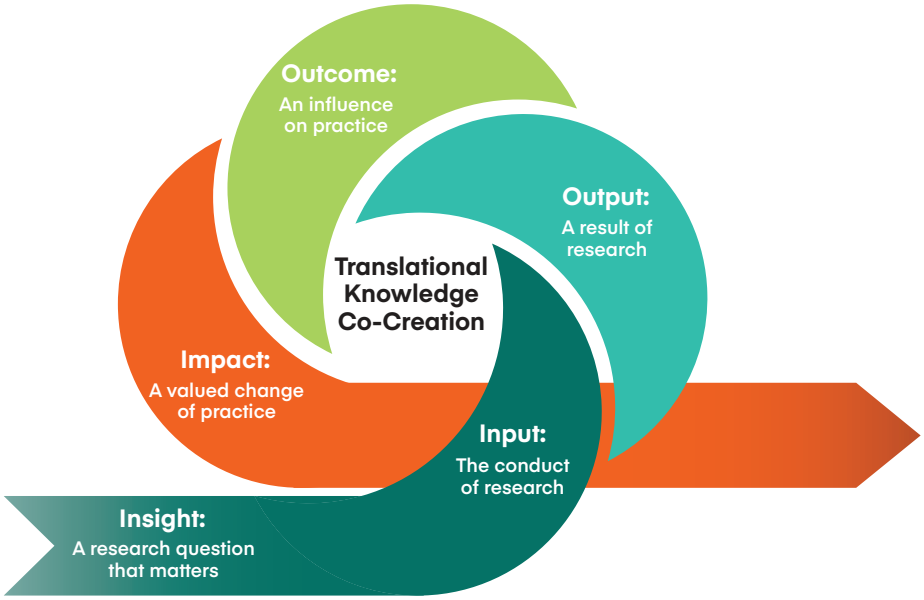
In reality, impact is often iterative, emergent, and shaped throughout the knowledge production process.

This perspective also highlights the distinction between realized impact and potential impact. Research may demonstrate strong potential to create meaningful change even if measurable outcomes have not yet fully materialized. Recognizing this potential is essential, particularly given the long time spans over which impact often develops.

From Linear to Spiral Impact

To better capture these dynamics, the Association for Information Systems (AIS) proposes a Spiral Model of Research Impact.[10] Widely discussed by the task force, this model offers a compelling way to illustrate the nonlinearity of research impact, distinguishing among inputs, outputs, outcomes, and impact while emphasizing the interconnected and iterative nature of these elements.

Figure 1. Spiral Model of Impact



Source: Association for Information Systems[11]

This model conceptualizes impact as an umbrella construct rather than a single linear endpoint, with "impact" representing one component of a broader, interconnected system. The spiral illustrates how research evolves through iterative cycles of inquiry, application, and refinement, where early outputs and outcomes inform subsequent work. Throughout this process, collaboration with stakeholders, referred to as translational knowledge co-creation, plays a central and continuous role. **(See Appendix B for a complementary table.)**

This archetype further suggests that impact can be actively shaped rather than simply observed after the fact. It also illustrates the importance of recognizing activities that contribute to impact early in the research lifecycle, such as:

- Identifying practice-relevant research questions
- Engaging external stakeholders
- Designing outputs for usability and application

These themes are reinforced in other emerging frameworks explored by the task force. For example, the Australian Business Deans Council (ABDC), in collaboration with its Business Academic Research Directors Network, emphasizes that societal impact should be embedded from the outset of the research process rather than treated as a downstream outcome.[12] Its recent white paper, *The Societal Impact of Business School Research*, highlights the importance of "productive interactions," in which researchers and stakeholders co-produce knowledge that is both scientifically rigorous and socially relevant.[13] Similar to the AIS Spiral Model, the ABDC framework underscores the iterative, collaborative, and multidirectional nature of impact creation.

Together, these insights support a more holistic approach to evaluating research—one that values not only final outcomes but also the processes and conditions that enable impact to emerge.

See the Pathways to Impact section of the Global Standards, which highlights the continuum of the knowledge creation process, including outputs, outcomes, and impact.

Impact Channels and Their Intersections

As illustrated by AIS and ABDC models, impact is not produced in isolation; it emerges through interaction across a broad ecosystem of diverse stakeholders. The task force, in line with AACSB's Global Standards for Business Education™, identifies three primary channels through which business school research can drive change: scholarly discovery, teaching, and external engagement.

See Pathways to Impact in the Global Standards, an integrated impact framework across Standards 7, 8, and 9 that views teaching, scholarship, and societal engagement as complementary dimensions of an interconnected impact ecosystem.

Scholarly Discovery

Scholarly discovery is the intellectual bedrock of business education. Through rigorous, peer-reviewed research, business schools contribute to the cumulative development of theory and knowledge—work that underpins the field's credibility and its claim to a place among serious academic disciplines.

This tradition has deep roots: the landmark Ford and Carnegie reports established theory-driven, methodologically rigorous research as the standard, a foundation that continues to shape expectations today. Yet, the challenges facing the world have outgrown disciplinary boundaries. Depth and rigor remain essential, but they are no longer sufficient on their own.

Increasingly, the most consequential discoveries emerge at the intersections of disciplines, where economics meets psychology, where organizational theory meets data science, and where ethics meets strategy. Addressing the world's complexity demands not just deeper inquiry within fields but richer conversation across them.

External Engagement

Research creates impact beyond academia when it informs how organizations operate, how policy is made, and how society's most pressing challenges are understood and addressed. But that impact rarely happens on its own.

Translation, dissemination, and engagement should not be afterthoughts; they should be part of the research process itself. Similarly, practitioners, policymakers, and communities should also be involved from the beginning rather than consulted after the fact. When stakeholders help shape the questions, the resulting knowledge is more likely to be relevant, actionable, and used.

The barriers are real. Faculty often lack the time, networks, and training to sustain meaningful engagement with external partners, and too few institutional channels exist to support it. But these are solvable problems, and business schools that build intentional structures for collaboration across academics, practitioners, and policymakers are better positioned to produce research that not only advances the field but changes practice.

Teaching

Teaching is one of the most immediate and consequential ways business schools create impact; it is a strategic conduit through which research shapes practice, mindsets, and careers.

Integrating research into teaching does more than transmit current knowledge; it builds the critical thinking and decision-making skills students need to apply evidence-based insights throughout their careers. This applies to undergraduate, graduate, and executive education, each offering distinct opportunities for research to inform and elevate the learning experience.

Other disciplines, such as medicine and engineering, have long integrated research and applied inquiry into their educational models, exposing students not only to established knowledge but to the very processes through which new knowledge is generated: inquiry, experimentation, and iteration.[14] Where appropriate, business schools have the opportunity to do the same.

At the graduate level in particular, research integration can mean direct participation in knowledge production: collecting and analyzing data, contributing to publications, and engaging with live scholarly debates. Positioning new research within the broader body of knowledge helps students see how ideas evolve, how consensus forms, and how insights translate into changes in practice.

See Standard 4.5, which calls for curricula to be informed by current research, evidence, and practice, including the incorporation of faculty research and research activities into the classroom to support evidence-based learning and application.

While intersections across these channels naturally occur, business schools can do more to intentionally cultivate them. Advancing meaningful impact requires not only knowledge generation but strengthened connections among scholars, students, practitioners, and other stakeholders.

For example, scholarly discovery may inform new pedagogy and curricular content; those insights can extend into the workplace, and practitioner experience, in turn, can generate new questions and opportunities for co-creation around pressing business challenges.

Advancing meaningful impact requires not only knowledge generation but strengthened connections among scholars, students, practitioners, and other stakeholders.

Productive interactions also emerge within channels. Faculty from different disciplines may collaborate to advance theory from a multidisciplinary perspective; students may contribute to research through inquiry-based projects; and practice-oriented faculty can work alongside research-focused colleagues to shape questions that enhance real-world relevance. In each case, impact is amplified through connection and exchange. **(See Appendix C for a proposed integrated business school enterprise model.)**

See Standard 8.2, which calls for schools to have systems in place that facilitate collaboration among diverse faculty types, external stakeholders, and scholars from other disciplines.

ASSESSING RESEARCH IMPACT

Toward a More Meaningful Assessment of Research Impact

Measuring research impact is one of the most complex and debated issues facing business schools, consistently emerging as a central challenge across task force discussions, surveys, and stakeholder conversations. Impact is inherently temporal, often unfolding over long periods, and cannot be fully captured by any single metric. At the same time, concerns about the gamification and misuse of metrics are significant. When measures become targets for evaluation and reward, they risk being distorted, encouraging behaviors that aim to improve the metric rather than the underlying quality or real-world impact of research.[15]

Equally important, what schools choose to assess signifies what they value and informs faculty behavior. Metrics do not simply measure; they create incentives that influence research priorities and engagement with practice. For these reasons, schools should adopt a balanced approach that combines quantitative indicators with qualitative judgment, recognizes diverse pathways to impact, and prioritizes meaningful evidence over proxy measures.

Equally important, what schools choose to assess signifies what they value and informs faculty behavior.

In line with AACSB's Global Standards for Business Education™, three principles should guide this approach:

- **Mission-driven:** aligned with the school's purpose and strategic priorities
- **Context-specific:** reflective of regional, institutional, and disciplinary differences
- **Evidence-informed:** grounded in both quantitative and qualitative data

Together, these principles support a more holistic and credible approach, one that moves beyond publication counts and journal-based metrics to reflect rigor, relevance, and real-world impact across practice, policy, education, and society. **(See Appendix D for Examples of Impact Indicators by Domain.)**

See Standard 3.2 point F, the Pathways to Impact, and Standard 9.3 in the Global Standards, which together promote a mission-driven and holistic approach to scholarship and impact. This guidance encourages schools to align research with their strategies and goals while recognizing multiple forms of high-quality impact across basic, applied, and pedagogical scholarship.

Research Impact Assessment Tool

Phase 1 of an Iterative, Multiphase Development Model

This phase 1 tool is designed as part of an iterative, multiphase development model to help schools define and communicate their research impact strategy. Rather than functioning as a classification or reporting exercise, it enables schools to articulate a coherent narrative that demonstrates intentionality, alignment with mission, and credible evidence of impact.

As a foundational framework, the tool supports schools in visualizing their overall research impact portfolio, highlighting areas of strength, identifying opportunities for diversification, and assessing balance across different types and dimensions of impact. In doing so, the tool aligns with the task force's recommendation for a more holistic, balanced scorecard approach, encouraging schools to move beyond narrow, output-driven metrics and toward a more comprehensive and forward-looking strategy.

The phased and iterative nature of the initiative is intended to allow for continued refinement, expanded functionality, and incorporation of emerging practices and stakeholder feedback over time. This approach reflects the evolving nature of research impact assessment itself and AACSB's commitment to shaping and advancing practices in this area.

The tool may also serve as a complementary resource to accreditation and other reporting processes, helping schools more effectively conceptualize, organize, and communicate their research impact strategies while identifying areas for strategic development and diversification.

This tool is intended to guide reflection, assessment, prioritization, and strategic alignment rather than prescribe a single model of research impact.

Research Impact Assessment Tool

Phase 1 of an Iterative, Multiphase Development Model

How to Use the Planning Tool:

- ☐ Begin by articulating your school's mission and identifying scholarly priority areas, as reported in AACSB's annual Business School Questionnaire.
- ☐ Complete the worksheet for each impact channel, starting with one or more research focus areas that reflect your institution's strategic priorities.
- ☐ The number of focus areas identified may depend on the size and scale of your institution; however, schools are encouraged to prioritize and limit selections to those that best reflect their signature research themes or areas of focus and that strategically represent the breadth and distinctiveness of their research portfolios.
- ☐ Use the guiding descriptions below to ensure consistency and clarity across entries.

The following are descriptions and expectations for each field:

- **Focus Area:** Indicate the school's strategic research priority area aligned with its mission and broader institutional goals.
- **Industry/Sector:** Identify the primary industry or sector this research focus area aims to inform or influence (if applicable).
- **Locality:** Indicate the intended geographic scope of impact (e.g., local, regional, national, global).
- **Domain/Functional Area:** Specify the business functions, domains, or societal challenges addressed (e.g., marketing, operations, HR, sustainability, U.N. SDGs).
- **Insights:** Describe the key research questions, problems, or challenges this focus area seeks to address.
- **Inputs:** Outline the resources committed (e.g., faculty expertise, funding, partnerships, infrastructure).
- **Activities:** Describe the primary activities undertaken (e.g., research projects, collaborations, industry engagement, curriculum integration).
- **Research Type:** Identify the type(s) of research contributions represented (select all that apply):
  - ☐ Conceptual/theoretical
  - ☐ Inductive (discovery-oriented empirical)
  - ☐ Deductive (theory-testing)
  - ☐ Intervention/proof-of-concept
  - ☐ Translation/practitioner-oriented
  - ☐ Teaching-related (e.g., cases, textbooks, simulations)
- **Outputs:** List the immediate deliverables (e.g., publications, reports, tools, cases, datasets).
- **Outcomes (narrative):** Describe the short-to medium-term effects (e.g., organizational adoption, policy influence, curriculum changes).
- **Dissemination:** Describe how and where research outputs are shared, communicated, and made accessible to intended audiences (e.g., academic, practitioner, policy, or public stakeholders).
- **Impact (narrative):** Provide a narrative describing the longer-term change or influence achieved (e.g., economic, societal, environmental impact). If impact is emerging, describe the intended impact trajectory.
- **Emphasis:** Indicate the level of strategic emphasis (e.g., high, medium, low, or percentage allocation).

Research Impact Assessment Tool

Phase 1 of an Iterative, Multiphase Development Model

School's Mission:

[enter your school's mission statement]

School's Research Priorities:

Indicate the current and desired distribution of emphases across these scholarly categories.

	Present Emphasis Level	Desired Emphasis Level
Teaching and Learning Scholarship Research that develops and advances new understandings, insights, and teaching content and methods that impact learning behavior. Intellectual contributions in this category are normally intended to impact the teaching and/or pedagogy of business.	☐ High ☐ Med ☐ Low	☐ High ☐ Med ☐ Low
Applied or Integration/Application Scholarship Research that synthesizes new understandings or interpretations of knowledge or technology; develops new technologies, processes, tools, or uses; and/or refines, develops, or advances new methods based on existing knowledge. Intellectual contributions in this category are normally intended to contribute to and impact the practice of business.	☐ High ☐ Med ☐ Low	☐ High ☐ Med ☐ Low
Basic or Discovery Scholarship Often referred to as discipline-based scholarship, research that generates and communicates new knowledge and understanding and/or development of new methods. Intellectual contributions in this category are normally intended to impact the theory or knowledge of business.	☐ High ☐ Med ☐ Low	☐ High ☐ Med ☐ Low

Note: Terminology in the table above aligns with the AACSB Business School Questionnaire.

Research Impact Assessment Tool

Phase 1 of an Iterative, Multiphase Development Model

	Teaching: *Research that informs pedagogy, curriculum, and learning innovation.*											
Focus Area	Industry/ Sector	Locality	Domain/ Functional Area	Insights	Inputs	Activities	Research Type	Outputs	Outcomes	Dissemination	Impact	Emphasis (H/M/L)
1.												
2.												
3.												
	Scholarly Discovery: *Research that advances theory, knowledge, and academic disciplines.*											
Focus Area	Industry/ Sector	Locality	Domain/ Functional Area	Insights	Inputs	Activities	Research Type	Outputs	Outcomes	Dissemination	Impact	Emphasis (H/M/L)
1.												
2.												
3.												
	External Engagement: *Research that directly engages external stakeholders and contributes to practice, policy, or society.*											
Focus Area	Industry/ Sector	Locality	Domain/ Functional Area	Insights	Inputs	Activities	Research Type	Outputs	Outcomes	Dissemination	Impact	Emphasis (H/M/L)
1.												
2.												
3.												

Aligning Incentives With Impact

The metrics a school emphasizes signal what it values. In most business schools today, those signals point in a familiar direction.

Across our surveys, focus groups, and discussions, one theme emerged consistently: Reward structures, whether at the faculty or institutional level, continue to prioritize traditional academic metrics. Promotion and tenure decisions, as well as rankings, often center on journal-based indicators—such as publications in high-impact journals on lists like the UTD 24, FT 50, or ABDC—and citation counts.

While these metrics serve a purpose, their dominance has created unintended consequences.[16] Faculty behavior is often shaped more by what "counts" in evaluation systems than by what generates the types of impact shared in this report. This dynamic is especially pronounced for early-career researchers, who face strong incentives from this system to publish in top-tier journals as a key to career progression. Supporting early-career researchers will require schools to create clearer pathways and incentives that allow newer scholars to pursue impactful work without compromising career progression.

Supporting early-career researchers will require schools to create clearer pathways and incentives that allow newer scholars to pursue impactful work without compromising career progression.

Throughout its engagement with the community, the task force heard numerous examples of faculty conducting work that meaningfully advanced teaching or addressed real-world business challenges yet did not result in publication in highly ranked journals and, consequently, received less recognition in performance evaluations. Whether and how such contributions are recognized depends on a school's research strategy and priorities. For institutions that emphasize impact on practice or policy, these efforts are directly aligned with mission and goals.

Rethinking reward systems is a systemic challenge—one that cuts across ranking methodologies, promotion and tenure criteria, and journal expectations. But it is also a necessary step in broadening how impact is defined. Progress will require schools to normalize and reinforce practices that recognize diverse forms of impact, encouraging more meaningful and mission-aligned contributions across schools, disciplines, and the broader research ecosystem that ultimately determines what "counts."

Examples in Practice

Supporting Faculty Connections With Industry

Eller College of Management, University of Arizona

Eller College demonstrates a structured and scalable approach to co-creation of applied research, experiential learning, and solutions to real-world challenges through its Partnerships Office, which connects faculty expertise with industry, public-sector, and community partners.[17]

Core to the school's approach are Immersion Learning Projects, in which faculty guide student teams as they address partner-defined business and societal issues. Collaborations with local organizations, such as Tucson Water and Banner Health, have resulted in data-driven solutions for utility planning and healthcare insights.

Eller also strengthens research relevance and visibility through strategic partner engagement, including executive-in-residence programs and industry dialogues, creating pathways for faculty to co-design research with practitioners and enhance translational impact.

At a larger scale, the Consortium for Environmentally Resilient Business brings together researchers, industry, and policymakers to address complex challenges such as climate change.[18] Faculty lead the research agenda while partners contribute practical perspectives, data, and implementation contexts.

Key enablers of this approach include a centralized partnership infrastructure, flexible engagement models, and the integration of students as contributors to research translation. The result is a mutually reinforcing system:

- **Faculty** expand research relevance, networks, and funding opportunities.
- **Partners** gain evidence-based insights and implementable solutions.
- **Students** develop skills in evidence-based decision-making, strengthening both their practical capabilities and career readiness.

Eller's model highlights how intentional partnerships, supported by the right infrastructure, enable business schools to effectively bridge research and practice.

Examples in Practice

Fostering Faculty Intersections Across Disciplines and Practice

Rotterdam School of Management, Erasmus University

Rotterdam School of Management (RSM) has developed a comprehensive institutional infrastructure to support faculty research and advance the school's mission of being "a force for positive change in the world." This infrastructure spans dedicated research centers, interdisciplinary departments, practitioner-facing knowledge platforms, and specialized technical services, each designed to strengthen research quality, broaden societal reach, and translate scholarly work into real-world impact.[19]

Central to RSM's approach are its research centers, which serve as nexuses for knowledge exchange, cross-sector collaboration, and societal engagement. The Centre for Corporate Eco-Transformation and the Corporate Communication Centre bridge academia and practice by fostering structured partnerships with businesses, NGOs, governments, and civil society organizations, ensuring that scholarly inquiry remains both rigorous and relevant.[20]

The Business-Society Management Department exemplifies RSM's multidisciplinary approach to addressing complex societal and organizational challenges.[21] Faculty work across areas of expertise—such as sustainability and climate change, social enterprise, stakeholder communication, cross-sector partnerships, philanthropy, ethics, and corporate governance—with a strong theoretical grounding that enables critical analysis alongside actionable responses to pressing issues.

Research impact is further extended through collaborative networks and partnerships with companies, European governmental bodies, and competitive grant-funded initiatives.

Supporting this work operationally, the Research Software Engineering & Consulting team provides tailored assistance with data collection, custom software development, and research automation, reducing the technical barriers that can impede complex research and enabling faculty to focus on generating knowledge with impact.[22]

Further, the RSM Discovery platform translates faculty research into free, accessible thought leadership for practitioners through articles, videos, interviews, and expert commentary, strengthening connections between academic scholarship and practice.[23]

Examples in Practice

Integrating Talent Development and Infrastructure

Monash Business School, Monash University

Talent Enhancement Framework and Impact Labs

As part of its Impact 2030 strategic plan, Monash University has established a comprehensive Talent Enhancement Framework to strengthen research capability, professional development, and collaboration across the institution.[24] The framework includes programs that support researchers at different career stages while enhancing the university's global research impact.

One example is the Research Talent Accelerators program, which helps mid-career researchers build skills in research leadership, such as communicating impact to diverse audiences and leading interdisciplinary teams. The cohort-based model also fosters cross-disciplinary collaboration across the university.[25]

Additional initiatives include Research Professionals at Monash, which supports professional staff engaged in research activities, and the Vice-Chancellor's Research and Enterprise Excellence Awards for Research Excellence, which recognize impactful research and collaborations with industry and government.[26,27] Together, these initiatives promote a broader definition of research success that extends beyond publications to include impact, collaboration, and engagement.

Impact Integration and Infrastructure

Monash Business School has also developed Impact Labs, a central interdisciplinary platform for external engagement and research impact. Through seven specialized labs and expert networks, including Digital, Green, and FinTech, these initiatives connect government agencies, industry, nonprofit organizations, and multinational corporations to foster innovative research and co-design evidence-based solutions to economic, environmental, and social challenges.[28]

Engagements are tailored to specific needs and may include co-designed research projects, executive education programs, workshops and seminars, PhD internships, and development of new tools and indices.

The integration of Impact Labs into Monash Business School's research impact strategy, which supports the broader Impact 2030 plan, creates a cohesive, impact-driven ecosystem with clearly defined goals focused on addressing global challenges and systematically assessing research impact.[29]

CULTIVATING A RESEARCH IMPACT ECOSYSTEM

From Principles to Practice: The Roadmap and the Engine

Clear and widely shared principles provide an important foundation for advancing research impact. Across the sector, there is growing momentum among various entities to define these guiding commitments and align research with broader societal needs.

The Responsible Research in Business and Management (RRBM) network offers a strong foundation for how business schools can pursue research that is both scientifically credible and societally useful. Its seven principles articulate the values and commitments that underpin responsible scholarship—research that is rigorous, multidisciplinary, stakeholder-engaged, and inclusive of diverse forms of dissemination.[30]

In many ways, these principles serve as a roadmap, clarifying direction and reinforcing that the purpose of business research is not only to publish but to serve society.

Yet principles alone do not generate motion.

To move from aspiration to sustained institutional capability, schools need an operational system that embeds these commitments into strategy, incentives, infrastructure, and day-to-day practice. If the RRBM Principles provide the roadmap, the following **Research Impact Ecosystem Guide** serves as the engine, enabling schools to translate research impact commitments into concrete actions and aligned strategic priorities. Together, they provide a practical foundation for articulating and advancing research impact strategies.

Starting Where We Have Agency: The Business School Ecosystem

The task force believes that the most effective place for business schools to begin driving systemic change is within their own ecosystem—the sphere in which deans, associate deans, research directors, and faculty have the greatest direct influence.

Within the school, leaders can shape:

- Strategy and research priorities
- Promotion and tenure criteria
- Incentive systems and resource allocation
- Faculty development and hiring decisions
- Partnership structures and engagement platforms
- Impact measurement and reporting

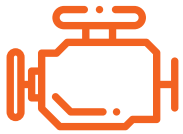
The Ecosystem Guide comprises seven interdependent components, each representing a strategic lever that can be strengthened over time.

When aligned intentionally, these levers create the conditions for research impact to become systematic rather than incidental. By focusing on what schools can directly design, govern, and sustain, institutions can build the capability and credibility needed to influence the broader systems in which they operate.

See Standard 8.1, which includes the school's responsibility to support faculty and cultivate a research impact ecosystem through appropriate resources, infrastructure, dissemination channels, and processes.

Research Impact Ecosystem Guide

Research Impact Ecosystem Guide



Strategic Intent (Ignition)

Impact begins with intentionality.

Schools strengthen research impact when they clearly define the contributions they aim to make and align research priorities and activities with institutional identity and mission.

This includes:

- Aligning research activities with mission, vision, and values
- Identifying priority themes connected to local, global, or stakeholder challenges
- Clarifying intended stakeholders and what meaningful impact looks like for each

Strategic intent is the ignition point: it establishes direction, focus, and coherence.

Governance and Guardrails (Steering Mechanism)

Research impact depends on credibility and trust.

Schools must establish governance structures that preserve scholarly integrity while enabling innovation and engagement. These structures ensure clarity, consistency, and transparency in how impact is defined, supported, and evaluated.

This includes:

- Defining what constitutes impact
- Establishing clear and consistent evaluation standards aligned with the school's mission, vision, and values
- Ensuring ethical integrity, independence, and inclusivity
- Periodically reviewing impact progress and refining priorities and metrics to ensure they reflect the school's mission and the dimensions of excellence it values

Governance provides the guardrails that keep impact efforts aligned with institutional values.

Capacity and Incentives (Fuel System)

Even the strongest aspirations stall without sustained support and resources.

Impact requires investment in the systems and incentives that enable faculty to pursue high-quality research while engaging broader audiences and stakeholders.

This includes:

- Research funding and strategic partnerships
- Professional staff and knowledge-transfer support
- Faculty development across career stages
- Reward systems that recognize diverse contributions
- Structures that encourage collaboration across disciplines and roles

Incentives matter because what institutions reward ultimately shapes what faculty prioritize.

Impact Portfolio (Power Transmission)

Impact is multidimensional.

Schools generate greater value when they recognize that research can contribute across multiple domains and that the most innovative outcomes often occur at the intersections of disciplines, stakeholders, and faculty types.

Domains of impact may include:

- Scholarly impact
- Educational impact
- Organizational impact
- Policy impact
- Societal impact

A diversified impact portfolio legitimizes multiple forms of excellence and expands the school's ability to contribute.

Research Impact Ecosystem Guide

Activation Pathways (Acceleration Pedal)

Research creates value when it moves beyond publication and enters environments where it can be used.

Schools strengthen their impact when they intentionally design pathways that connect research to real-world influence.

These pathways include:

- Dissemination through diverse channels
- Engagement and collaboration with external partners
- Translation into actionable insights, tools, frameworks, and training resources
- Prototype development and real-world testing or piloting of concepts with practice partners
- Integration into teaching and executive learning development
- Grant activity focused on societally salient problems

While impact may occur organically, intentional activation strategies make it more consistent, repeatable, and scalable.

Measurement and Feedback (Dashboard and Diagnostics)

What gets measured shapes behavior.

Schools need balanced assessment approaches that capture both tangible outputs and meaningful long-term outcomes while acknowledging the limitations of any single metric.

Effective assessment includes:

- Quantitative indicators (e.g., publications, practitioner-oriented speaking engagements, citations, downloads, media mentions, adoption)
- Qualitative evidence (e.g., case studies, testimonials, narratives of change)
- Balanced scorecard approaches that reduce distortion and discourage gaming or misuse

No single measure is sufficient; meaningful assessment requires a mix of quantitative and qualitative metrics.

Amplification and Influence (Signal System)

Impact must be visible to be valued.

Schools increase the reach and legitimacy of their research by investing in strategic communication and storytelling, ensuring that research contributions are accessible, compelling, and meaningful to diverse audiences.

This includes:

- Developing case studies that illustrate change in practice, policy, education, and communities
- Translating findings into accessible, digital, and shareable formats
- Balancing local relevance with global resonance
- Connecting research narratives to broader societal conversations

Amplification strengthens the school's ability to communicate its value and influence.

A CALL FOR COLLECTIVE ACTION

From Institutional Capability to Systemic Influence

Business schools are the starting point, but they are not the endpoint.

Each school exists within a broader ecosystem shaped by accreditation standards, rankings, journal norms, funding decisions, policy frameworks, and demands from practice. These external forces influence behavior that can either reinforce or constrain the kind of research and practices that generate real impact.

Changing that ecosystem requires coordinated action—through advocacy, collaboration, and collective will—to shift the norms and structures that govern academic research and its evaluation. Business schools that align their strategies, incentives, and assessment systems accordingly are not just improving their own performance; they are helping to transform the broader system. That means working toward more balanced evaluation criteria, broader definitions of research excellence, and stronger cross-institutional collaboration—advancing a shared narrative about why business research matters.

No institution can do this alone. Meaningful change depends on the collective efforts of the entities identified below. Each has a role. Each has leverage.

The following strategic imperatives are intended to help each stakeholder group better understand its role within the research impact ecosystem and act on it.

The task force calls on each stakeholder group to embed these imperatives into their strategies and operations. This report is a foundation, not a conclusion. The next phase of work focuses on implementation: deeper collaboration, sharper commitments, and coordinated action to drive sectorwide change.

Strategic Imperatives for Stakeholder Groups

Accrediting and Oversight Bodies

- **Standards and Guidance:** Ensure that evolving frameworks and standards uphold high-quality research while giving schools flexibility to align impact strategies with their missions and contexts. This includes enabling schools to determine the right mix of faculty qualifications to support both scholarly excellence and broader forms of research impact. Standards should reinforce that the responsibility for advancing and upholding this broader definition of research impact sits at the institutional level, not solely with individual faculty. Institutions should support faculty through development opportunities, infrastructure, and dissemination channels that help extend the accessibility and application of research. In addition, standards should encourage schools to develop students with research literacy and inquiry skills to support evidence-based decision-making as future leaders.
- **Best Practices and Thought Leadership:** Develop, curate, and share case studies, frameworks, toolkits, and examples that illustrate how different types of schools are successfully advancing and communicating research impact.
- **Learning and Development:** Create workshops, conferences, peer-learning opportunities, and cross-sector convenings that bring together stakeholders across the research ecosystem and at different career stages to exchange ideas and co-develop approaches for advancing research impact.
- **Outreach and Engagement:** Strengthen collaboration with policymakers, funding agencies, ranking bodies, publishers, business leaders, and other external stakeholders to encourage more aligned approaches to research impact across the broader ecosystem.
- **Product and Service Innovation:** Partner with organizations and subject-matter experts specializing in research assessment and impact evaluation to develop tools, services, resources, and collaborative initiatives that help schools support broader forms of research impact, including new approaches to journal evaluation, publication pathways, and recognition systems.

Business School Leaders and Faculty

- **Institutional Strategies:** Align school strategies with a broader definition of research impact that balances scholarly rigor with societal relevance. Embed this perspective into doctoral training to build a pipeline of faculty equipped and motivated to pursue diverse forms of impact from the start of their careers.
- **Culture and Support:** Foster a culture that values diverse forms of scholarship, interdisciplinary collaboration, and long-term contributions alongside traditional research outputs. Provide the infrastructure, resources, and dissemination channels needed to support the production and broader visibility of impactful research.
- **Faculty Engagement:** Empower faculty to pursue appropriate pathways for impact within their disciplines while encouraging collaboration across disciplines and with external stakeholders. Support faculty in integrating research into teaching and learning and translating research for broader, real-world application.
- **Recognition and Incentives:** Expand evaluation, promotion, recognition, and award systems to recognize broader forms of research impact, including contributions to practice, policy, teaching, interdisciplinary collaboration, and societal engagement, alongside traditional scholarly outputs.
- **Faculty Leadership and Advocacy:** Serve as champions for change within their institutions and disciplines, modeling diverse forms of impactful scholarship, advocating for more inclusive evaluation and incentive systems, mentoring emerging scholars and peers, building cross-sector and cross-disciplinary collaborations, and contributing to a culture that values research relevance alongside scholarly rigor.

Strategic Imperatives for Stakeholder Groups

Practitioners and Policymakers

- **Communication and Feedback Channels:** Establish ongoing dialogue with business schools through advisory boards, guest lectures, executive education, professional doctorate programs, and student projects to articulate pressing challenges and help shape research priorities.
- **Research Co-Creation:** Engage as active partners in designing and conducting research, ensuring that key questions are relevant and outcomes are applicable in real-world contexts.
- **Funding Opportunities:** Support projects and partnerships that incentivize impact-driven research, with funding tied to addressing societal, community, and business needs.

Academies and Scholarly Associations

- **Norm-Setting and Advocacy:** Champion a broader definition of research excellence that includes impact, influence, and engagement alongside traditional scholarly outputs.
- **Community-Building:** Create platforms (e.g., special interest groups, conferences, networks) that connect scholars interested in impact-oriented research and interdisciplinary collaboration.
- **Recognition and Incentives:** Introduce awards, grants, and recognition programs that elevate impactful research and signal its importance within the academic community.
- **Promotional Platforms:** Develop partnerships with media, consultancies, and practitioner-focused organizations to promote member research and facilitate broader engagement with research insights and applications.
- **Capacity-Building:** Provide training and resources to help scholars translate research into practice, engage external audiences, and navigate nontraditional dissemination channels.

Journals and Editorial Boards

- **Publication Models:** Encourage formats that support impact, such as practitioner-oriented summaries, translational research pieces, prototype and proof-of-concept testing, or interdisciplinary submissions.
- **Time to Publication:** Evaluate revise-and-resubmit practices that may unnecessarily extend publication timelines, limiting research's ability to address rapidly evolving organizational and societal challenges. Consider whether current review processes place disproportionate emphasis on refinement at the expense of timeliness, relevance, and broader contribution.
- **Evaluation Criteria:** Broaden review criteria to recognize relevance, applicability, and potential for impact alongside methodological rigor and theoretical contribution.
- **Accessibility and Dissemination:** Promote open-access options, plain-language summaries, and digital formats that make research more accessible to non-academic audiences.
- **Editorial Leadership:** Communicate the importance of research impact through editorials, special issues, and calls for papers focused on real-world challenges.

Media and Ranking Bodies

- **Narrative-Shaping:** Highlight and amplify research that demonstrates clear societal, business, or policy impact, helping to shift perceptions of what "valuable" research looks like.
- **Metrics Evolution:** Incorporate measures of societal relevance, engagement, and impact of research into rankings and evaluations, moving beyond traditional publication-based metrics in limited journal listings.
- **School Partnerships:** Collaborate with business schools to identify and communicate impactful research stories in compelling, accessible ways.

Strategic Imperatives for Stakeholder Groups

Publishers

- **Dissemination Models:** Expand publishing formats beyond traditional journal articles (e.g., briefs, policy summaries, multimedia content, interactive platforms, AI-enabled discovery tools) to increase the accessibility, timeliness, and real-world application of research insights.
- **Accessibility and Reach:** Advance open-access models, inclusive pricing structures, and global dissemination strategies that broaden the reach of research across geographies, sectors, and stakeholder groups, particularly for practitioners, policymakers, and institutions with limited resources.
- **Author Support:** Provide researchers with tools, training, editorial support, and dissemination guidance that help translate scholarly findings into accessible, actionable insights for broader audiences beyond academia.
- **Data, Metrics, and Impact Insights:** Leverage analytics, altmetrics, policy citation tracking, and other impact indicators to help authors and institutions better understand how research is accessed, discussed, and applied, and how it influences policy, practice, teaching, and society over time.

Funding Bodies

- **Impact-Oriented Criteria:** Prioritize and incentivize research proposals that demonstrate clear pathways to impact, including stakeholder engagement and real-world application.
- **Flexible Funding Models:** Support longer-term, interdisciplinary, and collaborative projects that may not fit traditional funding timelines but are critical for meaningful impact.
- **Accountability and Measurement:** Encourage frameworks for tracking and evaluating research impact over time, beyond academic outputs.
- **Cross-Sector Partnerships:** Facilitate collaborations between academia, industry, and government to co-fund and co-develop research that addresses complex societal challenges.

Building Momentum

The various stakeholder groups outlined above are already contributing in meaningful and complementary ways to advancing a broader and more inclusive view of research impact. These efforts and initiatives should be recognized and further supported as important drivers of systemwide progress. Examples include, but are not limited to the following:

AACSB

The 2026 AACSB Global Standards reinforce three pathways to impact as interconnected dimensions of an integrated impact ecosystem. They encourage schools to adopt a broader view of research impact—one that recognizes not only scholarly rigor and peer review but also measurable influence on practice, learners, and communities. Standard 8 further emphasizes the importance of supporting faculty through appropriate resources, infrastructure, incentives, and environments that facilitate impactful research, as well as fostering collaboration and engagement with external stakeholders.

The standards also call for more holistic approaches to assessing impact, ones that balance qualitative and quantitative measures. The Interpretive Guidance offers direction and examples—many informed by the task force—on how schools can apply these themes through the standards. Research impact will remain a central component of the standards, and AACSB will continue to evolve the Interpretive Guidance in alignment with the work of the Research Impact Task Force, including its assessment guide.

Complementing the standards, AACSB continues to invest in capacity-building through the AACSB Academy, which provides targeted learning and development opportunities for faculty and administrators seeking to strengthen research impact capabilities.

AACSB is also creating spaces for collective dialogue and collaboration through initiatives such as the inaugural Research Impact Conference, launched in partnership with the Academy of Management, which convenes stakeholders across the research ecosystem to explore innovative approaches for advancing impact.

Recognition programs, including a dedicated research impact category within the AACSB Global Impact Awards, further elevate institutions that are demonstrating meaningful contributions beyond academia. At the same time, AACSB's thought leadership partnerships and multimedia platforms help amplify emerging practices, innovations, and success stories from business schools around the world.

Business School and Faculty Leaders

Business schools and faculty leaders are increasingly advancing a broader and more externally connected approach to research impact. Across the AACSB network, schools are embedding research impact into their strategic priorities, investing in faculty development at all career stages, and creating incentives for engagement with external stakeholders and communities.

Faculty and institutions are also exploring innovative dissemination channels to extend the reach and accessibility of research through podcasts such as *INSEAD Knowledge* and Villanova School of Business *Inspiring Minds*, multimedia platforms like *Research@SMU*, and policy-focused institutes such as the Wheeler Institute for Business and Development at London Business School or the MIT Initiative on the Digital Economy, all of which help connect scholarship to audiences beyond academia. Winners of the 2026 AACSB Global Impact Awards, under the category of Research Impact: Beyond Citations, demonstrate real-world contributions through research that transcends traditional publication pathways.

Complementing these institutional efforts are prominent faculty thought leaders such as Andrew Van de Ven, Herman Aguinis, Anne Tsui, and Andrew Hoffman, to name a few, whose work challenges conventional definitions of scholarly success by encouraging more engaged, responsible, and impactful research, while also helping faculty operationalize these ideas through publications, workshops, and collaborative initiatives.[31]

Scholarly Associations, Publishers, and Journals

Scholarly associations represented on the task force are actively working to address longstanding challenges around publication timelines and relevance. The American Accounting Association (AAA) is actively working to reduce the time from submission to publication and is joining others in revisiting revise-and-resubmit policies and editorial criteria to better balance rigor, relevance, and timeliness. Associations are also developing repositories and platforms, such as the AAA Impact Hub and *AOM Today*, to make actionable research more accessible to practitioners and policymakers, and the AIS Impact Award to elevate research with demonstrable societal value.

AOM and Elsevier are also exploring open-access publication models designed to accelerate the dissemination of time-sensitive, evidence-based findings, such as proof-of-concept and intervention studies, to practitioners in real time. In parallel, AAA has adopted a hybrid open-access model across most of its journals to increase the accessibility and reach of published research.

The Academy of International Business (AIB) has taken a multichannel approach to expanding the reach of its journals, with the *Journal of International Business Studies (JIBS)*, the *Journal of International Business Policy (JIBP)*, and *AIB Insights*. Initiatives include journal webinars and podcasts that make published research more accessible, a Societal Impact Advisory Committee that works with authors to reveal broader implications of their work, and a Policy Advisory Committee within *JIBP* focused on strengthening policy relevance. *AIB Insights* complements these efforts by publishing shorter, timelier pieces aimed at practitioner engagement.

Newer journals are also emerging to bridge scholarship and practice. The *Journal of Social Impact in Business Research* (Emerald Publishing), for example, prioritizes open-access, interdisciplinary work that engages scholars, practitioners, policymakers, and communities on pressing societal challenges, gaining traction among faculty as an alternative outlet for impactful scholarship.

Publishers are similarly investing in tools and initiatives that support research translation. Elsevier's AI-powered researcher solution, LeapSpace, aims to streamline the research workflow by helping scholars identify emerging questions, uncover knowledge gaps, synthesize literature, and connect with collaborators while maintaining standards of integrity and transparency.

Emerald Publishing's Real Impact Manifesto calls on publishers and institutions to move beyond narrow metrics and foster a more equitable environment for impactful research, including through alternative approaches to assessment and recognition.

Sage has similarly advanced broader approaches to research assessment through initiatives such as Sage Policy Profiles, its 10-Year Impact Awards, and its commitment to the Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA), all aimed at recognizing policy, societal, and long-term research impact beyond citation counts.

Communitywide Efforts and the Path Forward

Other initiatives, such as the RRBM network, the U.K.'s Research Excellence Framework, DORA, the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment, EFMD's Business School Impact System, the *Financial Times'* Research Insights ranking, and alternative impact-tracking providers, like Overton, reflect real momentum across the ecosystem. Despite all this activity, the landscape remains highly fragmented—significant in scope but limited in alignment.

What is missing is a more coordinated approach: shared frameworks for defining impact, greater consistency in its assessment, and collective commitment to advancing it across institutional, disciplinary, and geographic boundaries.

AACSB is committed to playing a convening role in this next phase. Working in closer collaboration with stakeholders across the global business education community, it aims to support more aligned, collective, and actionable approaches to measuring and advancing research impact, building on the momentum already underway while helping to bring greater coherence to a field that needs it.

APPENDIX

A. Research Impact Task Force Methodology Overview

The findings and recommendations presented in this report were informed through a multiphase, multistakeholder engagement process. In addition to reviewing prior scholarship, reports, and commentary related to research impact, the task force convened a series of roundtables, discussions, focus groups, and a dedicated Research Impact Advisory Group to gather perspectives from across academic and nonacademic communities.

Task force members also engaged their respective boards of directors and broader professional networks, including researchers, publishers, journal editors, ranking and funding bodies, and business leaders. Input was further gathered through a global survey that reached nearly 1,000 deans, faculty members, and industry representatives.

In October 2025, the task force released an exposure draft of its preliminary findings and recommendations. Feedback on the draft was solicited through AACSB convenings and through distribution across participating organizations and stakeholder networks. This outreach invited broad input on the relevance, feasibility, and potential impact of the proposed ideas and recommendations.

The feedback received through these engagements was carefully reviewed and incorporated into the development of this report. The resulting document serves as a foundation for the next phase of the initiative, focused on advancing implementation, continued collaboration, and collective action across the research ecosystem.

APPENDIX

B. A Spiral Approach to Impact

Dimension	Definition	Typical Indicators	Advantages	Limitations
Insight (research question or challenge)	Stakeholder-grounded research question or challenge oriented toward potential impact	• Industry/practitioner engagement • Environmental scanning • Co-created research questions • Alignment with grand challenges or mission priorities	Encourages impact-by-design and improves research relevance and translation potential.	Promising insights may not lead to eventual impact, and relevance or value may not be evident at the outset.
Input (how research is done)	Impact-oriented motivation/ approach	• Cross-sector or cross-disciplinary collaborations • Proxies for research orientation and targeted quality/rigor (e.g., novel theory or innovative study design) • Grants secured	Helps to capture the expectation of rigorous work intentionally targeting impact.	Collaboration extent and quality proxies are imperfect.
Outputs (what is produced)	Tangible products of research activity	• Journal articles, books, book chapters • Patents filed • Research datasets created • Conference papers delivered	Easy to document, standardized in academia, comparable across schools.	Do not demonstrate uptake or influence on their own, nor do they reliably indicate high-quality research.
Outcomes (uptake and use)	Early signs that research is being cited, applied, or influencing stakeholders	• h-index; citations in journals, policy documents, and other academic or practitioner outlets • Curriculum adoption • Invitations for expert testimony or advisory roles • Media coverage and public engagement • Alternative metric attention scores (tools: Overton, PlumX, Altmetric)	Show pathways of influence, connect outputs to broader audiences, demonstrate mix of qualitative and quantitative signals.	Less standardized, context-specific, often require narrative explanation.
Impact (longer-term influence)	Demonstrable, sustained influence of research on scholarly knowledge and/or on practice, policy, organizations, or society.	• Policy or regulatory changes • Industry/organizational practice improvements • Community or societal benefits (e.g., sustainability, equity, health outcomes) • Innovation adoption and scaling • Evidence of measurable change linked to research	Demonstrate value and relevance, resonate with external stakeholders, align with mission.	Complex and multidimensional, attribution is challenging, often take years to emerge.

APPENDIX

C. An Integrated and Collaborative Business School Enterprise Model

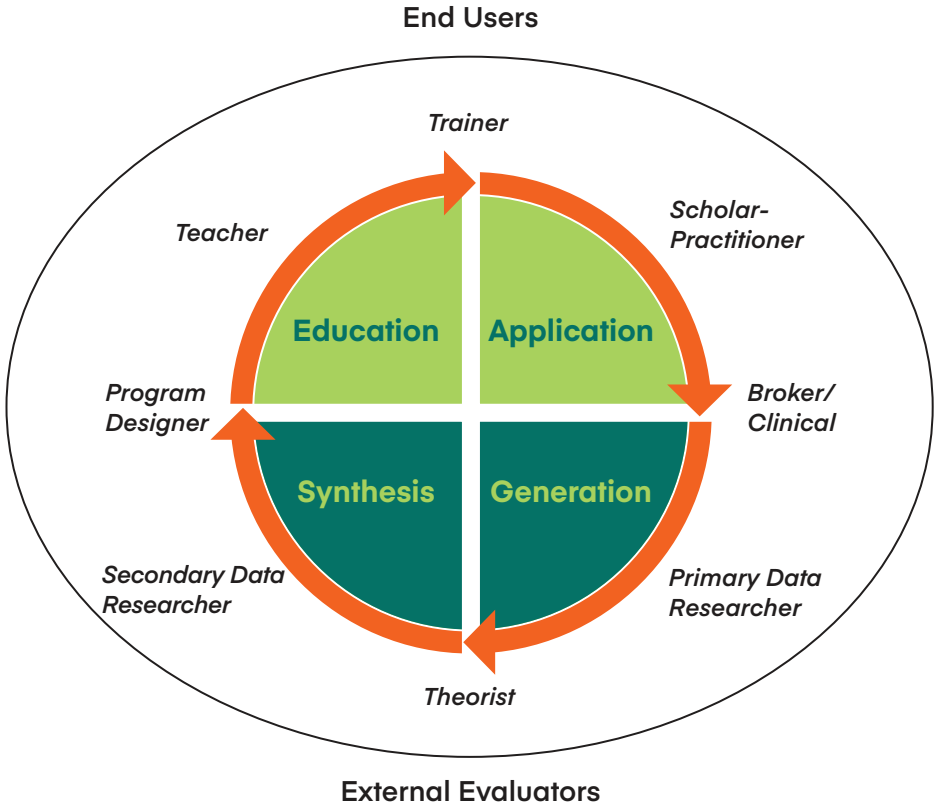
Professor of management Matthew Cronin proposes an enterprise model to encourage greater collaboration across faculty expertise by shifting faculty from operating as independent "entrepreneurs in a marketplace of ideas" to contributors within a coordinated and specialized knowledge enterprise.[32]

At the center of this model is the recognition that impactful business schools participate in a continuous knowledge production cycle: generating new insights, synthesizing and translating knowledge, educating learners, applying knowledge in practice, and using those applications to inform future inquiry. These activities form interconnected value chains in which the outputs of one function become the inputs of another. Research, teaching, and engagement are therefore not separate activities but interrelated stages through which knowledge is transformed and impact is amplified.

Transitioning to Specialized Roles

Rather than expecting every faculty member to master every stage of the knowledge value chain, the enterprise model encourages specialization as scholars find their passion. Faculty are recognized for developing deeper expertise in distinct yet interdependent roles, such as:

- **Theorists and Discovery Researchers:** Advancing foundational knowledge through original inquiry.
- **Synthesizers and Program Designers:** Translating and integrating knowledge into usable frameworks, curricula, and learning experiences.
- **Teachers and Trainers:** Developing capabilities in students and professionals.
- **Brokers and Scholar-Practitioners:** Applying and adapting knowledge to organizational and societal challenges.



APPENDIX

Coordination as a Faculty Responsibility

A core tenet of this model is that impact emerges and grows when the stages of the knowledge production cycle are coordinated and interdependent. Faculty relationships are therefore built on the understanding that:

- Individuals will be far more skilled and effective if they can specialize and coordinate; it is ineffective for a single individual to be responsible for optimizing every stage of the cycle.
- Linking the ways in which generation, synthesis, education, and application inform each other requires deliberate coordination in order to magnify impact. A profound finding will be unused or misused if little consideration is given to how to teach such a finding, and when it does or does not apply.
- Practice should inform research just as research informs practice. Practice is not just for discovery; it stress-tests what scholars put forth as credible knowledge.
- Success depends on maintaining a healthy ecosystem where diverse activities are equally valued. Developing new tools for research, teaching, or practice will all matter.

New Metrics for Faculty Collaboration

To support this relationship, the model proposes a shift in how faculty are assessed, moving away from simple rankings toward valid and reliable tools for assessing coordination. These metrics focus on:

- **Specialization:** Excellence within distinct functions of the knowledge production cycle.
- **Coordination:** The ability to connect one's work to the work of others.
- **Translation and Reach:** The movement of knowledge into education, practice, and societal impact while using real-world experience to inform new research and learning.
- **Trust and Mutual Value:** Recognition that theoretical, pedagogical, and applied contributions are all essential to the school's long-term relevance and impact. People must believe that the functions within the system are working together and that the production process is valued as a whole.

APPENDIX

D. Examples of Impact Indicators by Domain

Impact Domain	Indicators of Impact
Scholarly Impact	Citations in journals or books, h-index, conference presentations, research awards, collaborations with other scholars, competitive research grants
Organizational Impact	Adoption of frameworks or tools in firms, inclusion in professional guidelines, executive education materials, practitioner journal articles, consulting engagements referencing research
Policy Impact	References in government or regulatory reports, contributions to white papers, expert testimony, advisory board participation, influence on standards or regulations
Societal Impact	Media coverage (news, podcasts, blogs), alternative metrics (social media, Wikipedia mentions), partnerships with NGOs or community organizations, alignment with SDGs, open-access downloads
Educational Impact	Integration into curricula and case studies, student projects or theses based on research, faculty development use, graduate employability outcomes, impact on lifelong learning programs

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