

What does an audience want from a research organisation/project?

Any research organisation aims to work for an audience, hence are required to ensure that their research caters to the need of an audience/s. So who could be the audience- past, existing or potential, in some cases it could be a combination of all the 3 options?

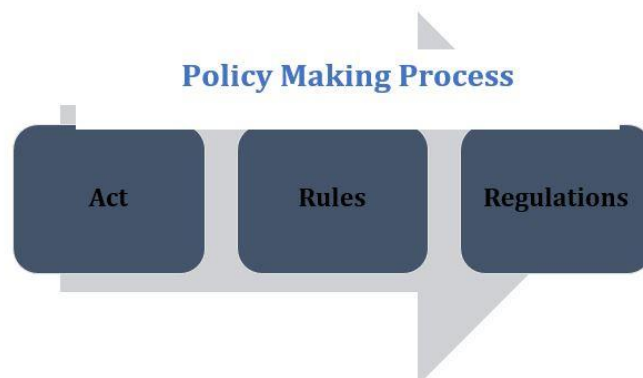


This article attempts to understand what audience want from a research project, rather than what a research project wants to do. While there is always a wide spectrum of audience who are important some visible/prominent, there are some invisible (though important). A comprehensive list of audience could ideally include policy makers, community, corporate (CSR), media (human interest aspects), academics to name a few.

To start with what is a research project? Ideally a research project tries to answer/investigates scientifically, using a systematic and appropriate methodology to achieve defined objectives. Keeping this in mind how does an audience relate to a research project? What is it that they want through evidence-based research?

In the context of India, the set of audience mentioned above more or less have the same roles that their counterparts play in the other parts of the world. However, to further explain:

Policy makers are decision makers who make determine important aspects with reference to introducing policies in the country. The process involves in introducing an Act which is considered as a policy instrument or framework. It includes how the Government will address an issue and prescribe how it will be done. To ensure this a Rule is introduced to define the why and what of the Act. This gives an idea of the importance and need for an Act. This is followed by introducing Regulations. This identifies the who aspect of the policy making process. For example, a Chief Health Officer is responsible for health related aspects in a given geographic area.



Community-Since most policies are aimed at a community (mostly at the grass root level), it is important to involve them. So what does it entail? A community ideally likes to know what is it that they are going to benefit from a research project done in their geographical area. From their perspective they just don't want to be people who want to

respond to questionnaires and surveys. In contrast, they often like to be a part of such endeavours to perhaps bring in ownership. Often community engagement does not stop with just asking people what they want, but perhaps arouses them to look into issues with new ideas and do things in a new way. Thus the functional capabilities of the community can be developed to enable their participation in a complete manner. For example, several schools in the rural areas in India have [Mid-day Meal Schemes](#) (once in a day) supported by the respective governments. This is anchored by the Department of School Education and Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource and Development, Government of India. While the scheme is a good initiative, but if a family is encouraged to give small amount of vegetables from their gardens/field then the nutrient element can be increased, or children can be given meals twice a day.

Most corporate in India are bound to support activities/contribute to the well-being of the society under the Corporate Social Responsibility Act ([CSR](#)). This was introduced by the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, Government of India. In many cases in order to fulfil the obligations of the CSR duties several corporate have supported in the broad areas of education, health, sustainable initiatives to name a few. Conducting health check-ups of children/community, enhancing infrastructure in school by painting walls, providing furniture, supporting sport initiatives have become passé. Today several CSR initiatives want to go beyond this and are looking towards research organisations to improve their contributions, raise the bar in their philanthropic approach, conduct impact assessments to know the impact of their initiatives. As a first step some CSR initiatives are looking at research organisations to look at data, analyse them and provide recommendations on what went well and what could have gone better.

Academia-several learning institutions believe that conducting research on local issues, and developing interesting solutions is needed and important in an academic curriculum. They believe that this type of experiential education stimulates the minds of the students due to the exposure to practicality and immediate application of knowledge. Students get an opportunity to understand deeply what are the prevailing challenges faced by a community, apart from what is working out well. In this endeavour many academic institutions have made it a requirement for students to do their internships in research organisations. Several research organisations have a well-defined structure to engage with interns, they broadly include a process for application, including researchers in projects to conduct base line studies, desk research, participate in field visits, conferences/workshops. Some even have the opportunity of being in meetings where key stakeholders like senior government officials are present. This brief [video](#) provides some glimpses of an interns experience.

Media-become an important player since as a stakeholder they become the voice to engage with audience who are perhaps not immediately visible to research organisations. Often media relies on research organisations to provide data/analysis intense knowledge when they are representing/sharing information to the general public, on topical issues. Their views sometimes influence the thought process/minds of the general masses. In other words, many a time they play a vital role in informing the general public on issues that are there, but the general public do not have any complete knowledge. Print, electronic and web media serve their purposes and for a research organisation this is useful. Media becomes important stakeholders since their dissemination power and platform is very huge and wide.

Conclusion

Involving or engaging with stakeholders and audience helps research project in making informed decision making effective, bring in increased satisfaction and have a common understanding of a complexed situation, in some cases, encourage good governance and transparency which in turn will encourage good practices and most important ownership is inculcated automatically.

*Dr. Annapoorna Ravichander
Executive Director
Public Affairs Foundation
And South Asian Editor at Large, On Think Tanks*