

Knowledge Translation Guide

Sir Roland Wilson Foundation

Delivering better outcomes for Australians through research-informed public policy and practice.



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University

Acknowledgement of Country

The Sir Roland Wilson Foundation acknowledges and celebrates the First Australians on whose traditional lands we meet. We pay our respect to the elders past and present.



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Context



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The Sir Roland Wilson Foundation builds research and leadership capability in the Australian Public Service, and embeds connections between policy and academia through postgraduate scholarships.

See the Foundation's website for more information:

<https://srwfoundation.anu.edu.au/about/foundation>

This Knowledge Translation Guide aims to support Sir Roland Wilson and Pat Turner scholars and alumni translate their knowledge gained on scholarship into practice, build bridges between academia and the public service, and transition back to regular roles within the Australian Public Service (APS) after their studies.

The creation of this guide was initiated by the Alumni Advisory Group and Foundation Board in 2025. Survey results indicated that alumni were keen for more support in this area.

This first version of the guide was created through a brainstorming workshop with alumni and final year scholars, and liaison with key informants from ANU, Charles Darwin University, the APS, the SRW Foundation, and its Board.

The guide will be updated periodically as subsequent scholars test these ideas and create new ones.



Top tips from alumni

when translating knowledge to practice and boundary spanning....

It will likely be a slow, nonlinear process. It will take time to find your feet and you may need to experiment with different approaches.

Your first role post-studies does not need to be your dream job.

You have been gifted an extraordinary network and permission to talk to anyone. Get on with it!

Create partnership projects, communities, etc. Make connections between people and between ideas. Stay connected with alumni.

It doesn't solely have to be about you and your research. Think about how you can give back and support others.

This can be less intense than purely focusing on translating your own research.

Knowledge translation starts on scholarship! Be ready to grasp all the parallel opportunities as they arise.

Maybe try being a nomadic public servant for a while (e.g. via secondments).

Be patient

Find sponsors

Find SES sponsors; people who get what you are trying to do.

Use what you know to help them achieve their goals.

Network

Be kind to yourself

A PhD and postgraduate studies are a huge undertaking and not everyone is going to love your new ideas. Even when it goes great, it can be an emotional rollercoaster.

Cut yourself some slack, get support, and look after yourself.

It's not all about you

Find your voice

You have grown as a leader in your absence.

Use professional development opportunities to work out how to tell your story.

Be opportunistic

Share your skills

Share the general skills you have picked up with your team and colleagues (not just your research findings).

People will seek you out for these skills, including wanting to work with you.



Building on Pat Turner Scholarships

Return to Service for Pat Turner Scholars may also include –

- 1. Connecting with the Sir Roland Wilson and Pat Turner scholar and alumni community.** Sir Roland Wilson and Pat Turner alumni are working across the service in various agencies and are a wealth of knowledge for PhD and coursework scholars returning to the APS. Their unique experiences following their scholarship journeys are invaluable for cohorts that follow. Other scholars returning to service at a similar time can provide peer support and guidance.
- 2. Connecting with APS-wide First Nations networks when approaching and upon returning to service.** This includes reaching out to the *APS Indigenous SES Network*, *APS Indigenous Champions Network*, or the APSC First Nations team for resources and supports.
- 3. Seeking advice from Learning & Development or First Nations support teams in your agency or portfolio.** Many organisations (or relevant portfolio departments) have resources supporting First Nations APS employees.
- 4. Connecting with other university and community supports.** Pat Turner scholars and alumni have access to the PTS Advisory Group, the ANU Tjabal Indigenous Higher Education Centre and the CDU First Nations Leadership portfolio.



Publishing for an APS audience

There are several avenues to publish your research to reach a public service audience....

The Mandarin

An online magazine dedicated to Australia's public sector, with a reach of 1.5 million public servants.

The Conversation

A world-leading collaboration between academics and journalists turning academic insights into news. Receives on average 13.3 million monthly page views (including republication).

Example: Tristram Sainsbury (2022) What happened when we gave unemployed Australians early access to their super? We've just found out. The Conversation

ANU Policy Brief

An ANU-based digital platform synthesising research evidence for time-poor policy makers.

Example: Lisa Conway (2024) Cultural Safety can't build itself, and the Australian Public Service is no exception. ANU Policy Brief

Other outlets

University schools and institutes websites, journals aimed at practitioners, think tanks (e.g. the Lowry Institute), intermediary organisation's newsletters such as ANZSOG, ACOLA, and the Australian Public Policy Institute.

Training

ANU Communications and Engagement: Runs regular free media skills workshops. Their workshops will give you an insight into how the media works, what journalists want from you, and how you can tell rich research stories.

The Conversation Pitching and Writing Masterclass: A great way to hone your message and build confidence.

Consider these hot tips:

- Check-in with your managers, and your agency's and the university's media team. They're likely to appreciate a heads-up. Also, review the APSC guidance on making public comments.
- When publishing in academic journals, a good domestic journal can have more of an impact than a slightly higher rated international one. The broader policy community here in Australia may pay more attention to it!
- You can also publish your research intent at the start of your research. It's a great way to find research partners and potential participants, e.g. interviewees.

Example: See the callout for interviewees at the end of this article by Assel Mussagulova and Collette Einfeld (2024) Moving into the future of public service, with empathy. The Mandarin.



Presenting to public servants

There are plenty of existing forums to present to public servants, or start your own

- Reach out to the teams supporting the [Heads of the APS Professions](#). They're usually looking for people to present to their networks
- The **APS Academy** regularly runs **Masterclasses** on topics of interest to APS staff. These are often in the form of panel discussions. The Academy are always on the look out for expert panel members and emerging themes.
- The **APS Academy** aims for its **courses** to be practitioner-led. You could become one of their training presenters or help develop curricula.
- Contribute an article to the [APS Academy newsletter](#)
- A range of public and private groups host conferences targeted at public servants., e.g. the Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA), The Mandarin, and a range of privately run conference organisers. Keep an eye out for upcoming themes in your field. Offer to present or chair a session.
- Many **government departments and university schools** host their own **seminar series** or **podcasts**, or you could start one. The Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA) runs a seminar in Parliament House. Put your hand up to present, invite academics to speak, or curate and chair a panel session.

Hot tip: The 3-Minute Thesis training and competition is a great way to learn to hone your message for non-academic audiences.

One alumna's snowballing presentation journey

1. Published a series of articles in *The Mandarin*
2. As a result, was invited to sit on a panel at *The Mandarin's* annual conference
3. This led to an invitation to sit on a panel for a session with the APS
4. And an invitation to present at a conference hosted by The Hatchery
5. And a second invitation to sit on a panel at a Hatchery conference the following year



Using academic knowledge and skills on the job

Many scholars and alumni are using what they learnt in their postgraduate degrees to inform policy. Below are some examples.

- One scholar used their research to inform evidence given at a parliamentary inquiry
- Another identified policy and program areas in the policy design phase and reached out to them to help with program design.
- Using the analysis techniques they learnt in their PhD, one scholar was able to undertake a benefits analysis as part of a review of a flagship government program. Their work was published in the final review report and presented at an APS economics data conference.
- One scholar contributed to law reform submissions at the state and Commonwealth levels in collaboration with other academics, directly using their research to influence legislative change.
- One scholar noted the importance of staying connected throughout their research. They held 'brown bag' lunch seminars within their agency on their research findings. They cross-checked their research focus against current policy challenges. They refined the policy implications of their research by connecting with policy areas facing similar challenges.



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Image credit: Paul Hubbard

Case study: The Masked Economist

In the midst of the Covid pandemic, alumnus Paul Hubbard established an economic seminar series for his department to help his colleagues stay connected while uplifting economics capability.

His *Masked Economist* series has now evolved into a weekly livestream to more than 40 APS agencies. He interviews economists, senior executives, Sir Roland Wilson and Pat Turner scholars, and other thought leaders on the intersections of policy and economics.

Rather than promoting his research, Paul uses his expertise to ask interesting questions and shares the joy of economics across the public sector.

Giving back

It can be stressful and sometimes demoralising to purely focus on getting traction for your research. It's not always wonderful for your mental health. However, you can also leverage your experience and networks to help others share their knowledge and research. It can feel good to support others.

Some ideas for helping others:

- host a seminar series
- help academics connect with public servants, e.g. present to your school on how to collaborate with public servants (you could use this pack for some tips), help academics find interviewees for their research or better understand the data available for researchers
- teach others both formally and informally, e.g. on the job. Share not just your research insights but the skills and methods you have learnt
- present to your agency on how they can partner with academics (see next slide for ideas)
- write articles boosting others' work or broader issues such as on academic and public service partnerships for the APS Academy. Example: Cathy Fussell (2024) *How to... find an academic*. APS Academy Newsletter.
- re-post and boost great work from academics on social media
- mentor scholarship applicants.



Helping the APS partner with academia

A range of existing mechanisms exists for the APS to partner with academia. You could help your colleagues tap into these.

1. **Help public servants find academics:** Through your networks, intermediary bodies (e.g. ANZSOG, ACOLA), institutes and schools, Google Scholar, the Australian Research Data Commons' Research Link online database.
2. **Secondments:** Much like secondments between agencies, public servants can also be seconded to academia or academics to the public service. See the Tax and Transfer Policy Institute's secondment program for inspiration (an online search will take you to a PDF outline).
3. **Interns:** The Australian National Internships Program is for undergraduate and postgraduate internships in the APS, diplomatic missions, the ACT legislative assembly, non-government organisations, and think tanks.
4. **APS Fellows:** The Chief Scientist's science policy fellowships provide placements of up to 12 months in an APS policy area for early to mid-career academics in STEM. They also provide training and mentoring.
5. **Australian Research Council grants and fellowships:** The ARC and NHMRC provide grants schemes that enable research partnerships between academia and the public sector. Grants fund project costs and can support staff involvement, including salary in some cases. [Proposed changes to the National Competitive Grants Program](#) call for more early career research fellowships embedded in projects and an Indigenous stream.
6. **Memoranda of Understanding:** Several departments have MOUs with university schools that outline how they will collaborate. You can find the Department of Finance and ANU's College of Asia and the Pacific's MOU on the internet.
7. **Procurement panels:** Existing procurement panels can also be utilised to purchase goods and services from universities.



Staying involved in academia

It can be tough finding opportunities to maintain both an academic and public service career concurrently. Here are some ideas you could try.

Visiting fellow positions

Most university schools have visiting fellow programs to host people from other universities or sectors who can contribute to the school's endeavours, e.g. through publications, teaching, and research. These enable you to remain an active school contributor, retain full library access, associate your publications with a school, and apply for some research grants. Where permitted, formal part-time academic employment may provide additional benefits, including pay. Contact your school for details.

Teaching

Teaching individual university lectures or courses is a great way to share what you know and stay connected with academia (you can also teach within the APS via the APS Academy). Within schools that focus on public administration, you are likely to be teaching other public servants, so its also a good way to build your networks amongst peers with the same interests. See next slide for examples.

Research papers and collaborations

Some alumni have continued to create research papers in partnership with academic colleagues, e.g. on data analysis methodologies. They have presented these to their public service peers and at conferences.

Australian Research Council grants and research collaboration opportunities

Some grants target applied researchers and government practitioners - see previous slide

Secondments

See previous slide



Case studies

Staying involved in academia

Visiting fellow



To maximise research impact, one scholar retained a visiting fellow position after returning to service so they could publish the PhD papers under a university affiliation. They then took up a 1-2 day a week academic appointment to stay in touch with academia and maintain a research pipeline.

Masters workshop



One scholar supported a 3-day workshop for Master's students on pandemic planning and preparedness. Alongside foundational knowledge teachings, this provided an opportunity to share experiences from an APS perspective and current research findings. This allowed students to gain a deeper understanding of knowledge translation to real-world situations.

Guest lecturing



Another scholar guest lectured in APS, ANZSOG, and Master's courses to promote their research via existing curriculum. This was supported by their department and built their trust in dealing with sensitive topics. It was not very resource-intensive as lecture material could be reused. The scholar built new networks with public servants from different portfolios.



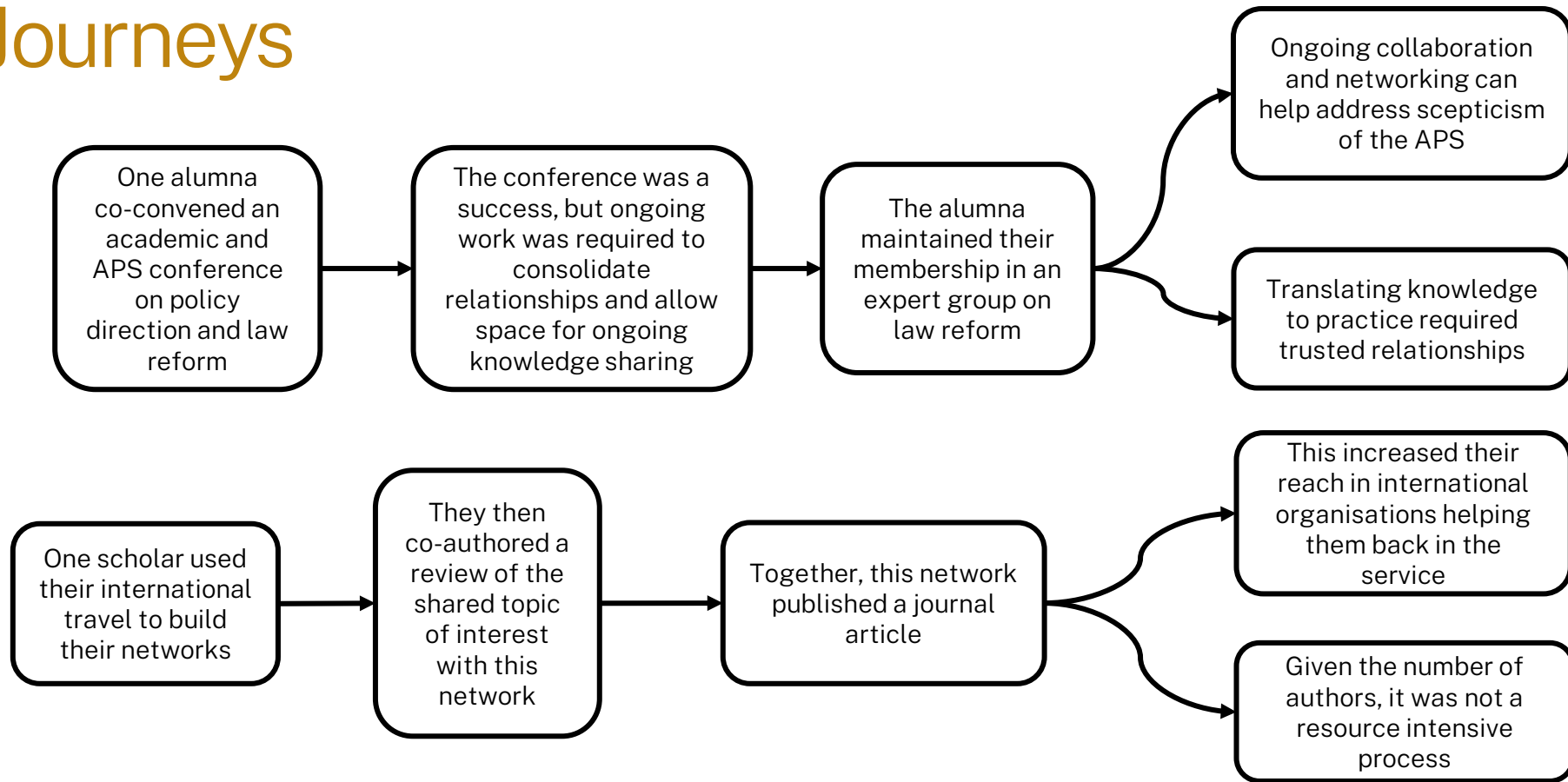


It's a journey

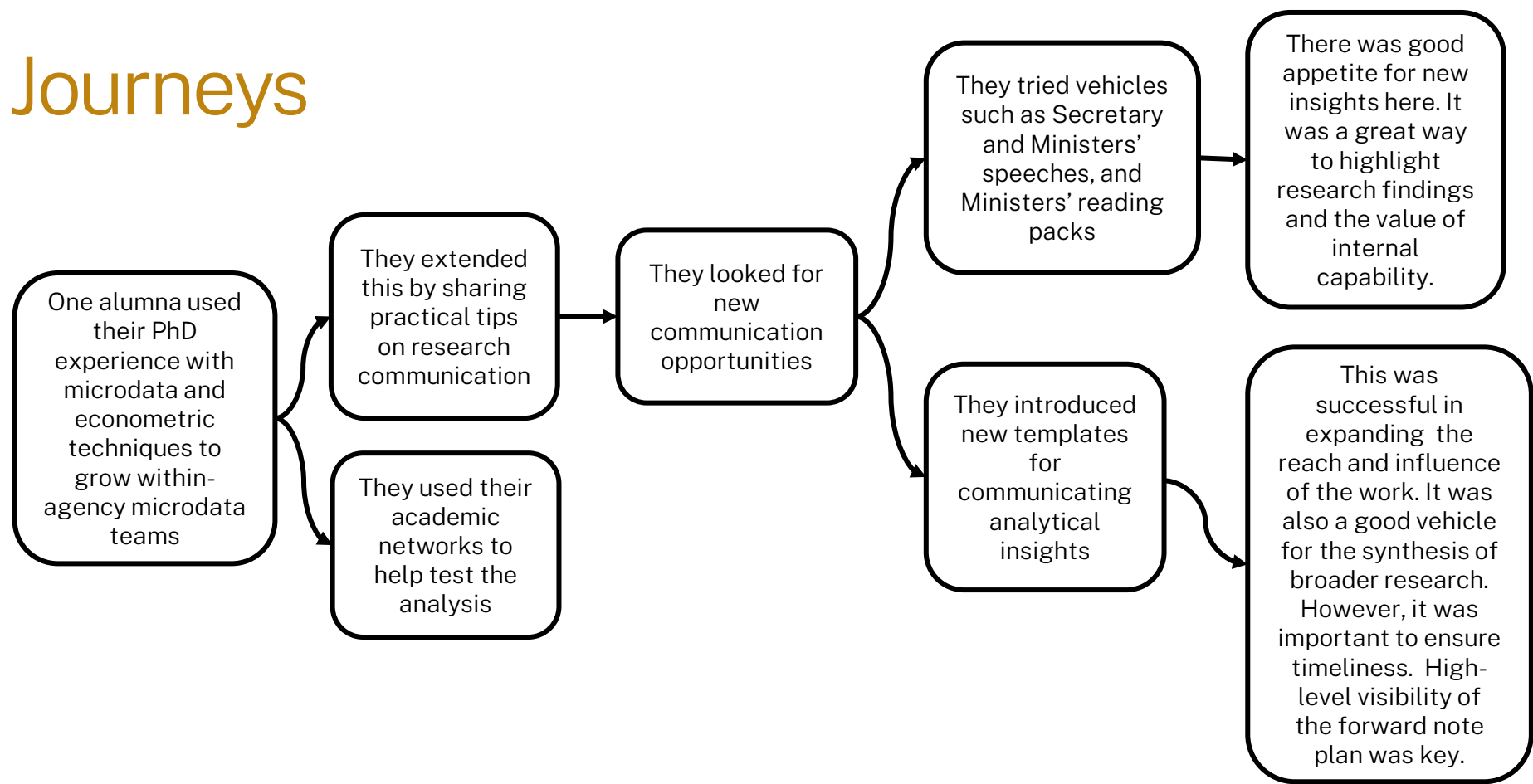
Some of the paths scholars and alumni have travelled



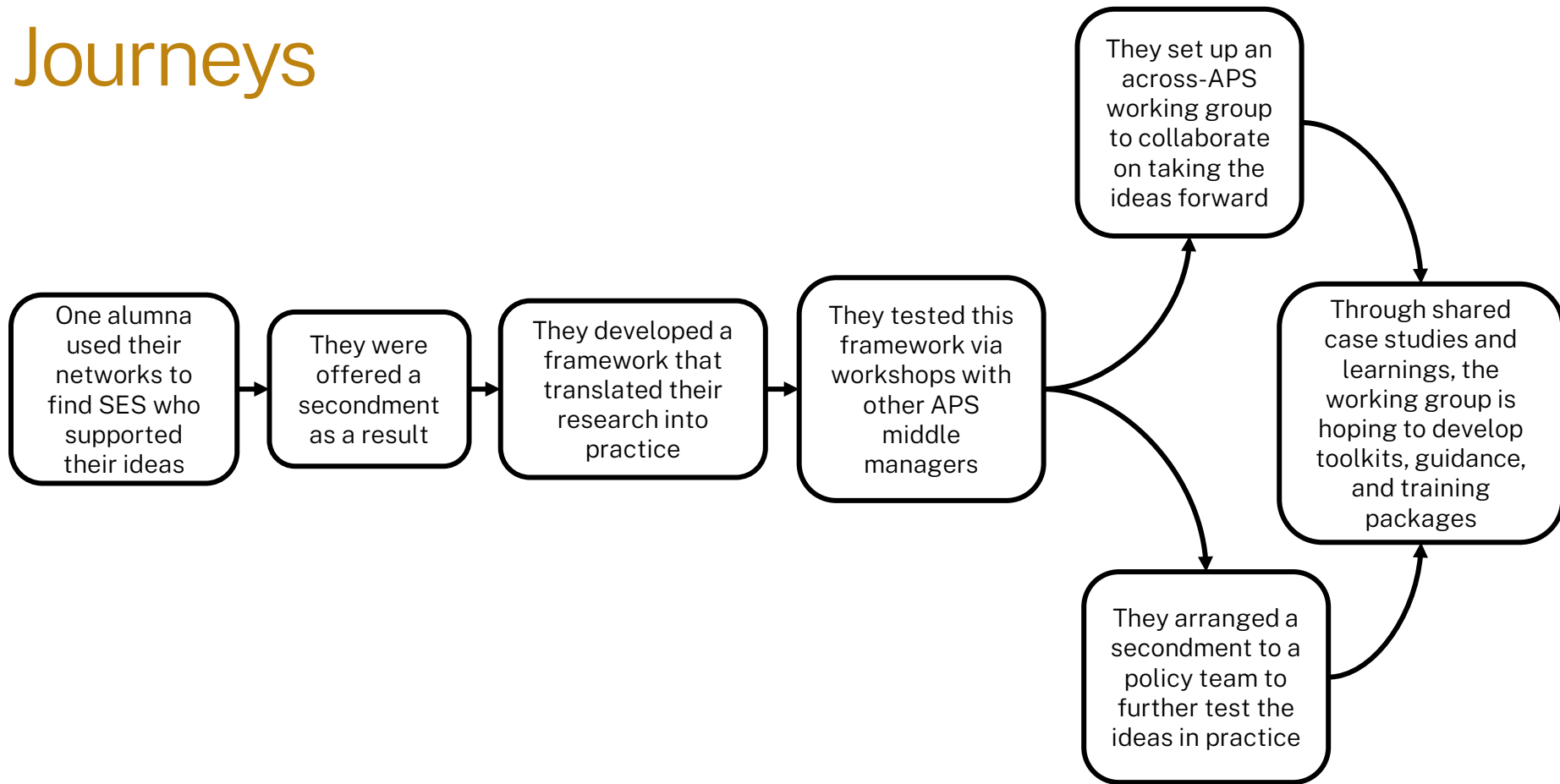
Journeys



Journeys

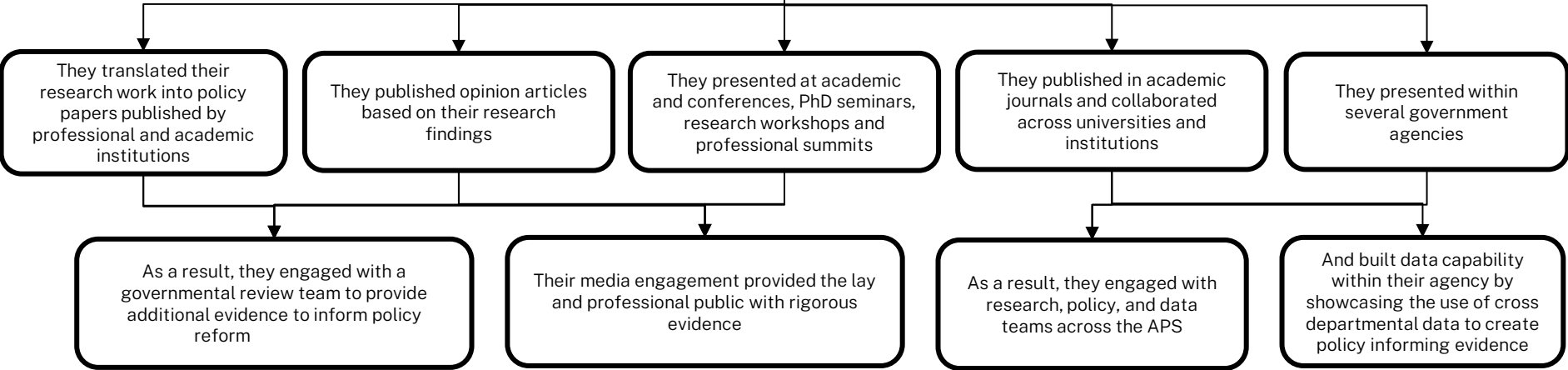


Journeys



Journeys

One scholar tested a range of approaches to share their research and engage with the public service during their PhD





Further resources on research translation and knowledge brokerage

You can use Foundation Professional Development funding to progress your knowledge translation initiative. See the [Scholar Handbook](#) for more information.

The [ANU Researcher Development](#) team runs a range of bootcamps and workshop series, including the 'Career doctor' and 'PR for Academics' series.

Check out the Maridulu Budyari Gumal [Knowledge Translation Resources Collection](#) for more insights.





Adam McGrath/hCreations

Thank you

To all those who contributed their experiences and insights to the creation of this guide.

<https://srwfoundation.anu.edu.au/>

E: srw.foundation@anu.edu.au

P: 02 6125 2220

