25. For What and for Whom?

The purpose of this first question—'*What is the integrative applied research aiming to achieve and who is intended to benefit?*'—is to help teams think specifically about their objectives and beneficiaries, so that they direct their efforts most effectively. Asking the related question of each domain helps ensure that no aspect of integrative applied research is ignored or downplayed and enables separate assessment of the success of the research undertaken in each domain. Hence, this question sets out to provide clarity about

1. the purpose of the knowledge synthesis

2. the importance of thinking expansively about unknowns and how they might be dealt with; this in turn raises the inevitability of imperfection in the response to the problem and encourages the integrative applied research team to consider how best to manage it

3. the specific aspects of policy or practice being supported.

For beneficiaries, this question aims to spell out

1. which disciplinary and stakeholder perspectives are included in the knowledge synthesis

2. which perspectives on unknowns and approaches to them are taken into account

3. which arenas (one or more of government, business and civil society) as well as which particular parts of an arena and individuals are targeted for support by the integrated research effort.

Well-formulated goals help the integrative applied research team choose the most appropriate options in terms of I2S concepts, methods and case examples, as well as guides to relevant knowledge from outside the discipline.

Considering these individual domain purposes together helps identify possible inconsistencies or clashes between them. These could occur, for example, if the knowledge synthesis drew together perspectives useful for business action, but was actually aimed at the government arena, or if the examination of unknowns involved disciplines that were not included in the knowledge synthesis. Another set of considerations involves examining the evenness of research quality across the whole project and the implications of discrepancies for the provision of integrated research support. If, for example, some aspects of the knowledge

synthesis were methodologically weak or methods for dealing with some unknowns were poorly developed, greater caution would be necessary in the interpretation of those parts of the research and their implications for action.

Looking at congruence at the team level is also useful. Having individual team members think about the specifics of what they are setting out to achieve assists in identifying the degree of unity among team members in desired aims and beneficiaries. Identifying and discussing differences can be useful for making tacit thinking in the team explicit and for uncovering other areas of divergence, such as dissimilar value positions. If there are conflicts in the team, they will need to be resolved or managed. Further, the identification of inconsistencies at either the domain level or the team level is a useful aid to clarifying the purposes of the integrative applied research. For example, lack of correspondence may mean that there are additional project aims that have not been made explicit.

Let me hasten to add that I do not advocate stipulating rigid aims and beneficiaries that are totally consistent across the three domains and with which everyone in a team has to agree. A degree of vagueness, flexibility and even contradiction is essential for any research to proceed. There is a creative tension between precise specification for choosing the most appropriate concepts and methods versus encompassing the messy realities of the research process. Further, it can be useful to revisit the aims and beneficiaries throughout the investigation, as they may become clearer over time or may change as the research progresses. Rather than considering variability only as a problem to be overcome, it can also be regarded as a way of enriching the research by highlighting new angles and possibilities. Overall, the point of this question is to aid teams in developing and progressing their research.

Task for the I2S Development Drive
Compile case examples illustrating different ways in which integrative applied research teams approached aims for addressing the problem as a whole. Particularly valuable will be information on how they identified and dealt with inconsistencies in aims and beneficiaries across the domains and within the team.