HOW TO FORM EVALUATION PARTNERSHIPS

An evaluation partnership guide for non-profit organisations and academic institutions

TERMINOLOGY

Monitoring

Monitoring is the systematic and continuous assessment of progress towards an impact or goal which enables organisations to readily adjust their actions. It is integral to successful daily management.

Evaluation

Evaluations complement non-profit organisations' monitoring activities by providing more in-depth, objective assessments of the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability of programmes at a particular point in time (Oxfam Rough Guide on M&E).

Research

Creative work undertaken on a systematic basis in order to increase the stock of knowledge, including knowledge of humans, culture and society, and the use of this stock of knowledge to devise new applications (OECD (2002) Frascati Manual).

Non-profit Organisation

Non-profit describes a type of organisation that does not earn profits for its owners. All of the money earned by or donated to a non-profit organisation is used in pursuing the organisation's objectives and to keeping it running. Typically, non-profit organisations are charities or other types of public service organisations. *www.investopedia.com/terms/n/not-for-profit.asp*

Academic Institutions

Institutions whose primary function and intent is the endeavour to increase learning (through traditional education) and contribute to knowledge (often through research). In relation to this manual, this term also includes faculty and students from academic institutions.

Sport for Development

Sport for Development (S4D) is defined as the intentional use of sport, physical activity and play to attain specific social development objectives*.

S4D is a particular approach to the **design and delivery of sport** and physical activity programmes that helps leverage the **positive attributes** of sport. It follows a set of core principles that **prioritise and optimise social objectives above any sporting performance outcome**.

If a community and its various assets (e.g. its people, organisations, sports fields, local sporting champions) are analogous to 'computer hardware', then S4D is the 'software' needed for the hardware to render maximum social impact within that community. In this metaphor, S4D represents the basic operating system upon which many other non-sport related interventions can run more effectively to address social sector outcomes.

This guide uses the *Sport for Development* sector to illustrate and exemplify principles and guidelines which are applicable beyond this context.

*We draw the first part of this definition from Right to Play's "Promoting Practical Action and Policy Change"

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INTRODUCTION

Around the world, non-profit organisations run interventions to generate social change and address social problems affecting the communities in which they work.

In conducting this work, it is important for non-profit organisations to monitor the progress of their interventions and evaluate whether they are leading to the intended outcomes and impact. We've represented this with a set of common evaluation or learning questions shown to the right.

This guide provides general advice on forming partnerships between non-profit organisations and academic institutions designed to support with monitoring, evaluation and research.

TOP TIP

It's important to note that the distinction between academic institutions and non-profit organisations is not as clear-cut as we define in this guide. Some non-profit organisations can conduct sophisticated research and there are universities that run development through sports programmes and outreach, *'highlighting the need to combine programme delivery and monitoring, evaluation and research.'*

FIGURE 1: LEARNING QUESTIONS

Identify a social problem in communities/society

To what extent does the problem exist and who is it affecting?

Run activities to address social problems

What are the immediate results of our intervention (e.g. attendance)?

Generate social change

To what extent are the outcomes a result of our interventions?

What are the short-mid term social changes (outcomes) and long-term results (impacts) of our interventions?

CONTRIBUTORS

inFocus Enterprises Ltd is a social enterprise dedicated to contributing and building knowledge in the development sector. To create this guide we convened a focus group of three non-profit organisations that have had success in engaging with academic institutions to support their monitoring, evaluation and/or research. The group also included one academic researcher who is involved in supporting non-profit organisations.

Laureus SPORT FOR GOOD FOUNDATION

inFocus worked with the four organisations and partners from the Laureus Sport for Good Network (www.laureus.com) to explore the question: *how can non-profit organisations effectively engage with academic institutions to support, monitoring, evaluation and research?*

The four organisations contributing to this guide are represented in the icons to the right. We also include a summary of each organisation and the partnerships they have formed in Appendix A. This guide focuses on the S4D approach to generating social change. However, the principles outlined here can be applied to partnerships between non-profit organisations and academic institutions across the development sector as a whole.

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STRUCTURE OF THIS GUIDE

This guide breaks down into the following six sections:

Purpose for Partnership

Reasons that non-profit organisations and academic institutions initiate and develop partnerships

(page 6)

First Steps to Partnership

How to plan and initiate a partnership (for both non-profit organisations and academic institutions)

(page 9)

Forging Effective Partnerships

Suggestions for non-profit organisations and academic institutions in forming effective partnerships

(page 11)

Benefits of Partnerships – Part 1

How non-profit organisations benefit when working with academic institutions on monitoring, evaluation, and/or research

(page 7)

Benefits of Partnerships – Part 2

How students and academics benefit when working with non-profit organisations on monitoring, evaluation, and/or research

(page 8)

Barriers and Challenges with Partnerships

Potential barriers and challenges when forming partnerships between non-profit organisations and academic institutions

(page 10)

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PURPOSE OF THE PARTNERSHIP

Initiating, building and developing partnerships between academic institutions and non-profits can be initiated for a range of different reasons. In this guide, we focus on partnerships that increase the quality of **internal** and **external** monitoring, evaluation and research to increase the knowledge of what works (and, crucially, to learn from what isn't working) in running interventions.

INTERNAL

Monitoring and Evaluation

Academic institutions help to improve the quality and robustness of the monitoring and evaluation conducted by non-profit organisations. This support augments the overall understanding of the extent to which activities are leading to social change. These social changes are referred to as "outcomes" and "impacts".

Increasing knowledge of what works (and doesn't) in running interventions

EXTERNAL

Evaluation and Research

Academic institutions conduct independent evaluations and research into the activities run by the non-profit organisations to understand the extent to which activities are leading to social change (outcomes and impact) and also to answer specific evaluation or learning questions that increase knowledge. The partnership can enable academic institutions to access individuals/communities that could act as subjects for research projects (following ethical guidelines).

> *All of old. Nothing else ever. Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."*
>
> **Samual Beckett, Worstward Ho**

TOP TIP

There are other reasons for academic institutions and non-profit organisations to enter into a partnership, such as general exchanges of knowledge and experience, co-designing activities, and/or to jointly bid for funding.

PARTNERSHIP BENEFITS FOR NON-PROFIT ORGANISATIONS

Validation

Internal and external evaluations and research can provide evidence that the activities of a non-profit organisation are working, ratify programme assumptions, or generating new learning and assumptions.

Legitimacy

Working with academic institutions can help to legitimise the S4D field and highlight common development outcomes and under-considered or overlooked pathways (such as policy and education). The contribution of academic institutions can also provide a sense of legitimacy in a field, which can otherwise be dominated by anecdotal evidence.

Credibility

Partnerships with academic institutions can add significant credibility as they demonstrate that the methodology is likely to be more rigorous, particularly if the partnership is with a well recognised academic institution with a strong reputation.

Fundraising

Partnerships with academic institutions can strengthen the fundraising efforts for the reasons mentioned above (increased validation, legitimacy, credibility).

Human Resources

Partnerships can augment human resources. This is highly beneficial when capacity is limited.

Ethics

Engagement with academic institutions can help to put in place more stringent ethical standards. These standards could endure beyond the partnership, further strengthening the organisation's credibility. See further reading to the right.

Benchmarking

Through increased access to wider research and findings, non-profit organisations gain a broader concept of the field and are able to benchmark themselves against related studies or initiatives. This is vital, in particular, as non-profit organisations in the S4D sector compete with more mainstream development initiatives and need to show value for money and cost-effectiveness.

Research Methods

Non-profit organisations can gain increased understanding and appreciation of different types of research methods (including qualitative approaches) which, if adopted by the organisation, could greatly enrich their data collection processes.

Results-Based Management

Working with academic institutions can help non-profits to institutionalise a culture of monitoring and evaluation, learning and Results-Based Management. You can find out more about Results-Based Management **here**.

FURTHER READING

You can find out more about ethics in evaluation in the short guide **here** by Cheryl Holm-Hansen at Wilder Research.

Data Collection/Management

Organisations can greatly benefit from the experience and expertise of academic institutions in relation to improving data collection practices, resulting in more robust data. For instance, a review of data collection methods can expose unsuitable or problematic measures (such as leading questions) and, subsequently, increase the integrity of the data obtained.

Advocacy

Partnerships could involve or lead to advocacy opportunities through the exposure of the organisation and their target communities to previously 'out of reach' stakeholders via the networks, influence and reputation of academic institutions.

Learning/Access to knowledge

Collaboration with academic institutions can provide access to specialist knowledge, which is highly valuable for planning activities. Non-profit organisations can use this knowledge to deepen their understanding of theories of change and the developmental outcomes in related fields (e.g., conflict resolution, public health) which have extensive and established literature/ studies/theories published.

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BENEFITS FOR AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

Exposure to the Field

Connecting and collaborating with non-profit organisations bridges the gap between theory and the realities of practice, enabling researchers to position academic theory or studies in the "real world," helping to refine academic theory and research knowledge. This also helps to increase learning and knowledge about the organisations, their contexts, the individuals who work within them and the challenges they face.

Understanding Challenges in the Field

As mentioned above, the exposure to non-profit organisations can be a valuable source of knowledge, information and experience, which can deepen the understanding of the goals and aims of conducting monitoring and evaluation, as well as the varying levels of capacity that exist to achieve this (and the associated challenges).

FURTHER READING

This **article** from Catherine Olivier, Matthew R. Hunt and Valéry Ridde for the Development in Practice Journal explores partnerships involving Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and academic researchers through a narrative review of the literature to identify benefits and challenges associated with NGO–R partnerships, as well as approaches that promote successful partnerships.

Work Satisfaction/Professional Development

Supporting non-profit organisations can be fun, enjoyable and refreshing. The partnerships provide the potential to do good, which brings an important personal element to the work being carried out. In some cases, collaborating with non-profit organisations has provided material benefits for students such as tuition credit and professional preparation (field experience) that can count to professional hours.

Connectedness, Networking and Visibility

Collaborative working fosters real connections between academic institutions and non-profit organisations. Such engagement can be beneficial for those within the academic institution, its leadership and stakeholders. Academic institutions can also expose a wider audience to ongoing research, fostering connections with others in similar disciplines. Academic institutions can also connect students with practitioners for potential collaboration and/or employment opportunities.

Catalysing New Research

Collaborations can help to channel research objectives towards topics that are relevant to the field and useful 'on the ground'. This helps to advance the field and provides more potential for joint initiatives.

> *"The role of universities in peace and social development has to be viewed in the context of pressing global problems and the central issue of human survival in an increasingly interdependent world...It is also presumptuous to think that any one institution or group by itself - be it the United Nations, the non-governmental organisations or the universities - could deal with problems that are unprecedented in terms of increases in rate, scale and complexity."*
>
> **Daniel Sanders (1994:51)**

Enhancing Teaching, Course Design and Student Support

Exposure to and engagement with practitioners can help academic institutions to enrich and improve course content, design and delivery by balancing practical and relevant learning activities with theoretical concepts. Through connections with non-profit organisations, academic institutions also gain resources for guest lectures, site visits and are able to connect students with internship and experiential learning opportunities. Finally, academic institutions are further equipped to inform and assist students in their career planning by helping them to understand the potential career tracks.

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FIRST STEPS TO PARTNERSHIP

For Non-Profits

- **Start locally**, speak with your partners and search for academic institutions and researchers that have effectively supported, worked with, and invested in non-profit organisations.
- If there are no viable local options, consider **international** academic institutions working in your immediate area or related disciplines. For example, non-profit S4D organisations might look for academic insitutions working in the field of S4D, but also might find support in related areas of work, such as conflict resolution or HIV and AIDs reduction.
- Promote the **strength of your internal M&E** to potential partners by demonstrating that your organisation uses a 'data-driven' approach. This could be through a variety of platforms including blogs, online learning and/or conference presentations (e.g. sportanddev.org Newsletter or USAID Learning Lab Sport for Development Monitoring and Evaluation Group). Note that some academic journals accept qualitative research and case-studies produced by practitioners (e.g., Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health; Journal of Sport for Development).
- If resources allow, **engage with more than one potential academic partner**. Individual researchers vary their approach and methodologies which can help to ensure that you secure alternative views and opinions.
- **Review academic journals to find academic institutions who are actively engaged in the field** and publishing research in collaboration with S4D programs and/or engaged in S4D research. Connect with these researchers and their S4D partners to determine if they are a good fit for your measurement, evaluation, and research needs and interests.
- If you are seeking a research/evaluation partner and already have secured funding, **utilise online portals** to post an invitation to tender that seeks academic partners. See Appendix B for more details.
- Finally, we recommend that you **review the benefits section** of this guide and **complete background research** into the academic institution you are approaching. Tailor your approach to how your project aligns with their area of interest while maintaining the integrity of your request.

For Academic Institutions

- **Explore sector-specific online platforms** to broaden overall knowledge. For example, the S4D sector has a number of online platforms that highlight and provide contact details for non-profit organisations (e.g., S4D.org, Beyond Sport, International Platform for S4D).
- **Seek recommendations** from peer researchers and academic partners
- **Network and communicate** directly with non-profit organisations in your area of interest both online and in-person at sector-specific conferences or events (e.g. Beyond Sport – **www.beyondsport.org**)
- Once you have identified a potential non-profit organisation partner, **carry out a site visit** to learn more about the organisation and cement the relationship. This can potentially lead to additional opportunities for partnerships such as internships for your students or guest lectures given by non-profit partners.
- When approaching non-profit organisations, we recommend that you **review the benefits section** of this guide and **conduct research into the organisation** to fully understand their work. These initial steps can help to explain how the partnership will be mutually beneficial.

TOP TIP

You can find out more about how to use www.scholar.google.com to find scholars doing research in the S4D field and specific locations in Appendix B.

BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES WITH PARTNERSHIPS

Resourcing the Opportunity

Non-profit organisations and academic institutions can underestimate the resources and time required to manage the collaboration. For instance, both parties need to take the time to understand the other's context and facilitate the partnership. Depending on the complexity of the programme, this can take significant time and resources. The first step for a non-profit organisation that is seeking to build internal monitoring and evaluation capacity with an academic partner is to assess their readiness (e.g., organisational capacity to support this area of work). If it cannot support a robust evaluation, it may not be the right time to work with an academic partner. Similarly, the first step for an academic institution is to assess its readiness to enter into a collaborative partnership with a non-profit organisation.

Maintaining Focus

Both parties can become distracted and lose focus when competing priorities arise. For example, a non-profit organisation may switch its focus if another project starts, or a fundraising opportunity arises. Alternatively, a student working with a non-profit organisation on a pro-bono basis might have competing academic commitments.

Conflicting Priorities and Expectations

Priorities between academic institutions and non-profit organisations can be quite different and expectations need to be carefully managed. For instance, researchers seek to publish work that increases knowledge, not just to advocate whether a programme is working, whereas non-profit organisations may have concerns that external evaluation/research might uncover negative results that will be difficult to share. Timing can be one of the most challenging areas, as the rigour required for academic-led research or evaluation may require more time than the non-profit organisation anticipated, slowing the usefulness of results. Likewise, academic institutions may have unrealistic expectations for the non-profit organisations' data collection capacities.

Negotiating Institutional/Sector Norms, Models, Methods

Monitoring, evaluation and research may be approached differently across non-profit and academic contexts. It can be difficult for a non-profit organisation to understand the methods used by academic researchers. Similarly, academics and institutions may not select the most suitable methods for the non-profit organisation.

Mismatched Deliverables

Disparity in the expected deliverables might arise. For instance, the type of feedback which is expected by the non-profit organisation may differ from the commonplace reporting conventions in the academic field.

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FORGING EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIPS

✓ Preparing for the Partnership

Have a clear idea of the desired outcomes of the collaboration. This may take the form of a mission statement and/or set of objectives. Then, try to get advice from a source within the partner's field in order to sufficiently prepare for the collaboration. Seek to gain insight and advice to ensure that the partnership is a good fit. Finally, ensure that the collaborators are well placed for the initiative. For instance, students who are required to participate (or will benefit from it) are more likely to be reliable/consistent. It is also fundamental to ensure that the collaboration adheres to the agreed ethical standards.

✓ Set Clear Expectations and Ground Rules

Both parties should align expectations and set ground rules at the beginning of a project. Document this agreement in a simple and accessible way (e.g., an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) or letter of agreement). Be aware that this document may need to be revised periodically. Setting realistic expectations about the results of monitoring, evaluation and research is important, particularly by fostering the understanding that that sometimes seemingly 'negative' results can assist learning for the organisation and across the wider sector

✓ Be Realistic

It is important for both sides to be realistic about what is feasible, what is fundamental and what can be compromised during the collaboration. Knowing where there are boundaries and where there is space for flexibility is essential for ensuring that the collaboration is successful, useful and beneficial for both parties.

✓ Seek to Build Joint Capacity and Resources

Once consensus has been established that the collaboration is productive and mutually beneficial, it can be useful to seek additional support (primarily funding), enabling successful continuation and completion of the project through the provision of more resources. Accessing dedicated funding will also enable the prioritisation of the initiative through the introduction of an external timeframe related to potential publication, presentation and other deadlines.

✓ Start small-scale over an extended time period

Find smaller projects to pilot the collaboration and ensure it is a good fit. This provides a strong foundation for building a longer-term partnership. Small-scale projects can sometimes be incorporated into a more extensive collaboration (i.e., using the first year of a longer study to explore whether the partnership will work and to support the non-profit organisation with the collaboration).

✓ Align the Analytical Approach

Approaches to monitoring, evaluation and research can differ between non-profit organisations and academic institutions. It is important to ensure that the agreed approach is useful to both parties, and aligns with their priorities. The rigour of the analysis may spark debate, as using more robust approcahes might make it harder to show positive results. In this situation, a non-profit organisation may have to carefully position the results when using them for marketing and fundraising.

✓ Communicate Regularly

Scheduling periodic check points throughout the process enables both parties to maintain a clear understanding of progress, whilst also ensuring the collaboration continues to be aligned with the expectations and objectives. It is useful to allocate specific times for general check ins, as well as reflect on/evaluate the approach in order to allow for periodic (but infrequent) design adjustments.

✓ Invest in Relationship Building

Relationships, trust and communication are key. It is important to invest time in building strong relationships and figuring out the best approach. In any strong relationship, either side should also be able to push back when needed.

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APPENDIX A: CONTRIBUTORS TO THE GUIDE

Since 2007, inFocus has designed and implemented social impact measurement and grant management solutions for funders, policy makers and frontline agencies in over 37 countries across North and South America, Africa, Europe/Middle East, Asia and Australia. InFocus' mission is to ensure individuals, organisations and communities are empowered to resolve complex social issues. InFocus helps social-change professionals to examine their organisation´s impact goals, and subsequently develop the skills, capacities and tools to increase impact through their initiatives. The goal is to help organisations to change lives and build stronger communities. InFocus was initially conceived with the support of two strategic partners – Laureus Sport for Good Foundation and streetfootballworld, to address the widespread need for organisations within the S4D community and in the wider social development sector to better measure the impact of their work.

Adelphi University provides specialized study in Sport-Based Youth Development as part of its masters degrees in Sport Management and Physical Education, including a tuition-free fellowship. Our partnerships include internship placements, site visits, class speakers, field-based activities/ assignments, and placements for our tuition-free fellowship. Additionally, we are a co-founder and co-host of the New York City Sport for Development Collaborative, which strives to foster a welcoming, innovative platform for those engaged in sport for development to explore relevant issues, improve their practice, and advance the wider field. Faculty also work with organizations on program development and evaluation. Representing Adelphi University in this guide's development was Dr. Meredith Whitley, who is the Sport-Based Youth Development Coordinator. She has collaborated with not-for-profit organizations and practitioners in numerous ways, from program development, implementation, and evaluation to facilitating partnerships between students/classes and organizations/practitioners.

Kicks NOLA is a sports-based youth development soccer program that uses the power of sport to provide safe spaces and opportunities for youth and empower them to live healthy and productive lives in the New Orleans community.

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GRASSROOTSOCCER

Grassroot Soccer (GRS) is an adolescent health organization that leverages the power of soccer to educate, inspire, and mobilize at-risk youth in developing countries to overcome their greatest health challenges, live healthier, more productive lives, and be agents for change in their communities. GRS connects young people with the mentors, information, and health services they need to thrive, and empowers adolescents to make educated choices about pressing health challenges such as HIV/AIDS, sexual health, gender-based violence, and malaria. Our evidence-based programs, led by trained local mentors, incorporate soccer into dynamic lessons about health and wellness that engage young people and break down cultural barriers. With proven results and a constant focus on research and innovation, GRS has reached over 1.9 million young people in nearly 50 countries with adolescent-friendly health education.

Since our founding in 2002, research has been integral to the organisation's growth and development, including curriculum development, monitoring & evaluation processes, and organisational strategy. In collaboration with a variety of research institutions and funders, GRS has participated in 276 research studies since 2005 in over 20 countries, ranging from South Africa to the Dominican Republic. GRS has conducted the largest school-based Randomised Control Trial (RCT) evaluating a sport-based HIV prevention programme, called the GOAL Trial. GRS has worked with many academic partners, including the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, WITS University Reproductive Health Institute, the University of North Carolina, University of the Western Cape, University of California, University of Johannesburg and others. GRS has gained great value from partnering with experts in the field and using academic insights to inform our evidence-based programmes. Furthermore, a number of GRS staff have themselves pursued academic study, including doctoral study, and it is encouraged as a vital contribution to GRS's work.

WAVES FOR CHANGE
#SURFTHERAPY

Founded in 2011, Waves for Change (W4C) is an African Surf Therapy organisation that works with young people from backgrounds of trauma and violence. W4C has adapted the learn-to-surf pathway into an evidence-based approach that helps young people from volatile backgrounds develop skills and techniques to regulate their behaviour, build healing relationships and make positive life-choices.

By collaborating with academic institutions, such as the University of Cape Town (UCT), W4C commits to learning and improvement. Third party evaluations determine the W4C theory of change and curriculum and assist in strengthening coach development and service delivery monitoring. These improved processes enable W4C to make evidenced-based decisions based on real-time feedback, essential when working with high-risk children.

W4C continues to value academic engagement, attending and presenting at local and international conferences, as well as investing in doctoral- and masters-level qualified staff.

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APPENDIX B: USING GOOGLE SCHOLAR

1 Go to Google Scholar

2 Determine keywords that are important to your organisation. If this includes the specific sport (e.g., soccer, basketball, netball, cycling, surfing), make sure to include at least one word in your search with the sport. If this includes measuring specific outcomes (e.g., socio-emotional learning, leadership, civic engagement, academic success), include those words. If it is important to have someone who has experience of conducting research in your geographic area, make sure to include the city, province, state, country, and/or region name in your search.

3 Type those words into the search box. If there is one keyword or a phrase that must be represented, put that in quotation marks, which ensures that search results won't appear that didn't have that word/phrase.

4 As you are reviewing the search results, note which articles seem the most relevant to your needs and open those up. You should at least be able to read the abstract (an overall summary of the article) to get a better sense of the research that was conducted. It is likely that most of the articles will be behind a paywall with the journals, but the abstracts should give you enough information to have a general understanding of the research conducted.

5 If this research seems like a good match, write down the authors' names and institutions, and look them up on www.google.com for more information. It may be helpful to see what other research they have done, as it is likely they have worked with several organisations, used different methodologies, and/or measured different outcomes - all of which may be helpful in determining if they are potentially a good fit. If they have worked with specific organisations, you may want to reach out to those organisations for their feedback on the collaboration.

A few tips to keep in mind!

- ✓ The more keywords you put in the search box, the more restricted the results will be, as Google will try to find results that match all of the keywords. So if you are using a large number of keywords and are not successful, reduce the number of keywords to broaden the search. You should also try to vary the combinations of keywords that you use to see how the results vary.
- ✓ To narrow the search, it is often helpful to specify the dates you are interested in. This option is available after you have the results page, and will allow you to choose which publications should be included based on the year they were published. It is best to start with the most recent (perhaps the last 3 years), but keep in mind that academic articles often take at least a year (if not much longer) to be published. So an article published in 2015 may be based on research from much earlier. That also means that research being conducted in the present or recent past likely isn't yet represented on Google Scholar.
- ✓ If you find an article that perfectly matches what you are looking for, there are two links you should try out right underneath the article's link on the results page. The first is "Cited by", which provides a list of all articles that have cited this article since its publication. The second is "Related articles", which provides a list of articles which should be similar. While these links do not always fit what you are looking for, they are still great resources to help you find articles (and, therefore, the scholars who conducted the research and wrote the articles) that match your needs.

  Here is **further information** from Google that may provide further guidance.

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- **Beyondsport.org**

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