

Effective Interventions Unit

Evaluation Guide 4: Implementing an Evaluation

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE? This is the fourth Evaluation Guide in the EIU Evaluation series. This Guide outlines the main things to think about when conducting an evaluation. These include recruiting and training research staff, ethical considerations, paying incentives and expenses and piloting research tools. The Guide also looks at coding, inputting, storing and analysing evaluation data.

WHO SHOULD READ IT?: Anyone involved in evaluating services for drug users.

WHY IS IMPLEMENTATION IMPORTANT?: The implementation phase in the evaluation process is when all the plans for the evaluation are put into action. This part of the process requires careful consideration and management.

KEY ISSUES

Evaluation involves collecting information about an intervention and analysing it **systematically** to allow you to answer key questions, such as 'to what extent has the intervention achieved its aims and objectives?' The evaluation can analyse information that you already collect, such as:

- assessment data
- client records
- minutes of meetings

In addition, you may want to collect new information using, for example, focus groups, interviews or questionnaires with current or ex-clients. For information on designing an evaluation please see Evaluation Guide 3 at www.drugmisuse.isdscotland.org/goodpractice/EIU_evaluation3.pdf

This Guide outlines a number of key issues to address at the implementation phase of evaluation. This is the stage where evaluation plans turn into action. Data collection must be organised and co-ordinated. As information is collected, it will be important to start coding, storing and analysing it. This will help you make sense of the information that you have collected.

Recruiting and training research staff

The evaluation may require additional staff for data collection and analysis. At the planning stage you should have decided whether the evaluation can be conducted internally or whether expertise needs to be drawn in from elsewhere (including perhaps other stakeholder organisations). Existing staff or external researchers may need training and briefing before the evaluation starts. It will be worth spending time looking over the aims and objectives of the evaluation, the evaluation design and the plans for analysis and dissemination. It may also be sensible to conduct some 'role play' exercises so that research staff have an opportunity to practice using the questionnaire(s) or other research tools chosen for the evaluation (for example, by interviewing other staff members). This will help identify any potential problems.

Obtaining consent

It is good practice to ask for consent from respondents when conducting fieldwork (i.e. interviewing, distributing questionnaires, collecting data). This will be particularly important for those aged under 16 years. Depending upon the focus of the evaluation and the methods used, it may also be important to ask for the consent of the parents. A consent form (for the respondent to sign) would usually include information on the purposes of the evaluation, who the evaluation is for, and an indication of how the results of the evaluation will be used. In general, results should be aggregated (presenting the data as totals) and individual responses should be made anonymous. The consent form should also make clear that respondents do not have to answer questions that they are uncomfortable with, and are free to stop the interview / focus group at any point. Depending upon the type of intervention, it may be easier to ask respondents for their consent when they sign up with a project, e.g. by including the consent form in the registration process.

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Data Protection Act

This Act ensures that data collected for an evaluation is not used improperly. In general, if you are asking someone to fill in a questionnaire or to take part in an interview or focus group, you should reassure them that the process is confidential and confirm that their responses will not be traceable to them personally. They should also be told who the research is for (e.g. the DAT, the Health Board etc). The consent form should make this clear. The Act also states that the data should only be used for the purpose that it was designed for (e.g. to evaluate a drug treatment service) and not for any other purpose. For more information on the Data Protection Act you can contact the Data Protection Commissioner, see www.dataprotection.gov.uk

Ethical Approval

Depending upon the focus of the evaluation and the proposed data collection methods and venue, it may be necessary to get ethical approval from your Local Research Ethics Committee (LREC). For example, if you are undertaking research on NHS patients, (i.e. subjects recruited because of their past or present treatment by the NHS), accessing records of past or present NHS patients or conducting research on NHS premises or facilities. For further advice you should contact your local committee. Contact details for these committees are listed at www.dundee.ac.uk/taysidehsr/. If you are involved in research or evaluation across a number of areas in Scotland there is also a Multi-site Research Ethics Committee (MREC). Details can be found on the same website or at www.corec.org.uk/

Special needs

Consideration will need to be given to the levels of literacy among the people that you are interviewing or asking to complete questionnaires or surveys. If there are likely to be literacy difficulties, it may be sensible to interview the person rather than distribute a self-completion questionnaire. You will need to work out if there is a need to make the evaluation materials available in languages other than English and whether people with disabilities will need assistance to allow them to participate. Examples include ensuring disabled access to the research venue and providing tools such as hearing loops.

Incentives

It is common practice to provide a small incentive to participants in the research if they are being asked to give up a substantial amount of their time (out-with what would normally be required in attending a service). In addition to reimbursing people for their time and effort, the payment of incentives is also likely to increase the rate of participation (and thus helps the evaluation achieve its objectives). One criticism of providing incentives is that it may influence what respondents tell researchers. However, there is little evidence to support this claim. A discussion of some of the issues is available in Neil McKeganey's editorial in the journal *Addiction*: 'To pay or not to pay: respondents' motivation for participating in research' (Sept. 2001). A broad rule of thumb is a payment of vouchers or goods worth between £10-20 for each hour of participation. Those working directly with clients will probably have a good feel for what is most appropriate in each situation. You may also want to think about providing refreshments for participants if the session lasts more than an hour.

Travel and childcare expenses

If respondents are being asked to travel to an interview or focus group, or to give up a substantial length of time for the evaluation, it will be important to consider whether travel and/or childcare expenses should be provided. This may help to ensure that parents have a fair opportunity to contribute. This can make research in rural areas more expensive, and you may need to weigh up the pros and cons of drawing people together or sending out a researcher to individuals.

Piloting research tools

It is often useful to pilot the questionnaire or other research tool you wish to use in an evaluation before the evaluation begins, particularly if the tools have not been used and been shown to be appropriate elsewhere. This means trying out the questionnaire before the full study begins. You could do this by selecting a small number of clients / research respondents to try out the questionnaire. This would usually mean that they should not be involved in the larger study because they will already know the questions and may have had an opportunity to think further about the issues raised. This process can be useful in identifying questions that are difficult to answer, unclear or indeed uncomfortable for respondents to answer.

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Recording non-responses

Some people may decide not to take part in the evaluation and it is important to record some details about this group. This is to ensure that those who do participate are broadly representative of the client group or target population as a whole. For example, if women were less likely to participate in the evaluation than men, the results of the evaluation may not reflect the views and experiences of female clients. This can easily be achieved by recording basic characteristics of those that decline to participate (e.g. age and sex).

CODING AND ANALYSIS OF EVALUATION DATA

At this stage you will draw together the information that you have collected and try to make sense of it. You will want to ensure that the conclusions you draw are reached in a way that is consistent, systematic and rigorous, to ensure that the findings of your evaluation are reliable. There are commonly used techniques that can be used to standardise the process, including methods for 'coding' and analysing data.

Coding data

Before data from completed questionnaires or interviews can be computerised, it is important to 'code' the responses to each question. By coding we mean assigning a value (usually a number) to a response. This makes it easy to count and to analyse responses. For example, the answer to the question 'are you registered with a GP?' can be 'yes' or 'no'. We could code these responses as follows; yes=1, no=2.

These 'codes' should also include 'don't know', 'no response' and 'not applicable' responses. It is useful to consistently code don't know, no response and not applicable throughout a questionnaire. By coding 'no response' as a large number (for example, 99) this avoids any duplication with other responses. Piloting research tools can help identify whether the questionnaire covers all possible responses to each question.

The most straightforward questions are those with only one possible answer (see Example 1). This means that only one column is needed in a spreadsheet to accommodate all responses. However, questions are sometimes more complex. There may be multiple responses to a question (see Example 2). In this example, several columns on a spreadsheet would be required to accommodate all responses. Note that this question also needs a 'don't know / can't remember' option that should also be coded as a large number (e.g. 98).

Example 1 Respondent Gender

This question is fairly straightforward because there is only one possible response for each respondent.

You could code as:

1. Male
2. Female
99. No response*

Example 2 Service use in the last 3 months

This question is more complex because the respondent may have attended more than one service in the last 3 months. Thus, multi-responses are possible (options 1-4 are yes/no responses).

You could code as:

1. General Practitioner
2. Local drug project
3. Needle exchange
4. None of the above
98. Don't know / can't remember
99. No response

Inputing and Storing data

There are a number of software packages that can be used to input data from evaluations. Minitab and SPSS are commonly used to store and analyse quantitative data. These are capable of performing quite complex statistical analyses. There are also specialist packages for storing and analysing qualitative data including Ethnograph and NUD*IST. However, these are very specialist. Most quantitative data can be easily stored on Access, and Excel and most qualitative data can be easily stored on Word files.

Analysing data

Analysing your data means organising your data and making sense of what it tells you. The two types of data (qualitative and quantitative) are analysed differently. For further explanation of these two types of data, see Evaluation Guide 3 at www.drugmisuse.isdscotland.org/goodpractice/EIU_evaluation3.pdf

In general, analysing **quantitative** data involves looking for patterns and trends in your data. For example;

Frequencies – to establish how many of something there are.

For example, how many male drug users and how many female drug users contacted your service?

Proportions – to look at what percentage of the total is in each category.

For example, what percentage of drug users that use your service are registered with a GP?

Cross-tabulation – to establish whether two things are associated.

For example, are females more likely to share injecting equipment than men, or vice versa?

Trend - to examine the change over time in numbers, proportions or rates.

For example, what is the trend in reported injecting amongst new clients over a period of 1 year?

Rates – how many incidents there are per so many people in the population

For example, how many heroin users are there per 1000 population in Scotland?

For further guidance on analysing quantitative data please see:

- Douglas G. Altman and colleagues. **Statistics with confidence** (second edition). BMJ Publishing, 2000.
- K.A. Yeomans. **Statistics for social sciences: Vol 1 Introducing Statistics**. Penguin Education 1970.
- D.B Wright **Understanding Statistics: An Introduction for the Social Sciences** London, Sage, 1997

In general, analysing **qualitative** data is not about counting, it is about identifying themes and underlying factors and exploring how and why things happen. For example, by:

Defining ideas - establishing what people mean by a term or phrase

For example, how do respondents define 'problem drug use'? Does this include non-injectors?

Generating types or categories – creating categories for respondents' perceptions/ attitudes / experiences.

For example, what are respondents' views on methadone maintenance (positive / negative / mixed views)?

Examining 'processes' – looking at how and why things are done in one way and exploring the alternatives.

For example, examining the way in which staff at a drug service manage a consultation with a client and exploring the alternatives or tracing through minutes of meetings to examine the contributions of agencies in a partnership.

Generating explanations – using the data to help explain why or how something happens.

For example, why relapse may occur.

For further guidance on analysing qualitative data please see:

- D Silverman **Interpreting Qualitative Data**. London: Sage, 1993.
- N Denzin & Y Lincoln **Handbook of Qualitative Research**. London: Sage, 1994.