

Effective Interventions Unit

Evaluation Guide 5

Reporting and Dissemination

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS GUIDE?

This is the fifth EIU Evaluation Guide. Previous guides have described the evaluation process from basic principles, through planning, design and implementation. This Guide sets out how to write up and disseminate your evaluation and highlights why the information is important and useful.

WHO SHOULD READ IT?

Anyone involved in planning, developing, delivering and evaluating services for drug users.

WHY IS DISSIMINATION IMPORTANT?

This stage is what it was all for - the purpose of evaluating. There is little point in spending effort and resources evaluating an intervention if that information:

- is not collected for a purpose
- is not communicated, internally and externally.

WHAT WAS IT ALL FOR?

Sometimes an evaluation is conducted just because it is a 'requirement' of funding. In these circumstances, evaluation may feel like just another burden and key stakeholders (such as project staff) may not be convinced of the purpose or value of the exercise. This is a lost opportunity. Funding sources that include a contribution for evaluation can allow an intervention to learn something that could be of lasting value, both to individual staff members and to the overall service. Evaluation provides an opportunity to **reflect** on what you do, to **learn** and to **develop**.

When you have completed an evaluation, or a particular phase of evaluation activity, it is essential to put aside time to go through the results with everyone concerned. **Go back to the questions** (see EIU Evaluation Guide 2: Planning an Evaluation) **that you hoped the evaluation would answer**. These may include:

- **Why and how does the intervention work?**
- **What impact does it have on the client group?**
- **What do service users think about the intervention?**

What answers can you expect? It is unrealistic to expect any single piece of research or evaluation, particularly that which is analysing complex human interventions, to provide definitive and unequivocal answers to all your questions. However, the evaluation should provide **honest, reliable, considered and objective information** about an intervention. It should supply a rich data set that can provide a stronger foundation for decision making or for considering developments to the intervention. For example, evaluation may help you plan services better, make a service more user-friendly or identify unmet needs among your client group.

Pawson & Tilley (1997) argue that programmes are not 'things' that may (or may not) 'work' rather they contain ideas which work for certain people in certain circumstances.

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REPORTING

Guide 4: Implementing an Evaluation set out various approaches to analysing the information collected during an evaluation. Once the analysis is complete, it is useful to draw all the findings together into one document. Set aside time for this stage of the process and try to start writing up as findings emerge rather than leaving it all to the end. Get views on the draft from all those involved. This is a crucial stage because it will help to consolidate and embed everything that has been learnt during the evaluation. This does not always have to be a long formal document. Explore different ways of reporting the information to ensure that it is useable and accessible, for example:

- Identify the key things that have been learnt and create a **video, web site or CD ROM**. Consider involving service users and practitioners in this process. For example, by acting out sessions or representing visually the 'process of change' that should take place during the intervention.
- Compile the main findings into a list of '**Do and Don'ts**' and pin these up around the workplace. This can then act as a checklist or rulebook when delivering or planning developments to the service.
- Use the evaluation findings to identify broad principles of **what works, when and for who** in the particular context of the intervention and write a **recipe for success**. Set out the ingredients (resources, staff, appropriate clients) and process (length of time, programme content) and identify what the finished product should be (client outcomes).
- Case studies of individuals or '**personal histories**' can help bring the results of an evaluation alive. It will depend upon the nature of the evaluation, but these should include both positive and negative client experiences. These can be presented in a number of different ways, for example written case studies or as video 'voxpops'. It will be important to **anonymise** these case studies and often appropriate to ask for the permission of the individual.

Do

- Involve clients in the assessment process.

Don't

- Take on clients that the project isn't designed for.

PUBLISHING

Consider publishing the results of the evaluation more formally, for example, in a practitioner journal or as an academic article. Getting the results into the public domain ensures that others can learn from your work and helps spread good practice. Summarise the major things learnt from the evaluation, such as the key characteristics of strong staff / client relationships or success factors in sustaining partnerships, explain how this information is changing your service and share any useful tips. Write this up in a couple of paragraphs for a practitioner newsletter – such as Scottish Drug Forum Bulletin or Third Force News (SCVO newspaper) - or in local newspapers or community newsletters.

An advantage of academic publication is that the information will be accessible through a wide range of libraries and databases of abstracts, many of which are available internationally. Academic journals often 'peer review' articles before they agree to publish them i.e. the article is sent to a number of experts in the field for them to make comment before the journal will agree to publish. This helps to ensure quality and rigour. However, academic publication tends to be a slow process and it may not be useful or worthwhile for all studies. If someone from a local university has been involved in the evaluation, they may be interested in preparing the evaluation results for academic publication.

USING THE EVALUATION FINDINGS

The main purpose of an evaluation is to help improve and develop the service so the most important audience for the evaluation findings is likely to be **internal** - managers, staff and clients. The evaluation should help to identify which parts of your service are working for what people in what circumstances. When you review the results of the evaluation, go back to the **aims and objectives** of the project and consider how far these have been achieved.

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- The evaluation may show that the current **aims and objectives** are too ambitious or too vague. Do the aims and objectives need to be refined or changed for the next phase of the intervention?
- Has the process of evaluation helped to **clarify exactly what the intervention does and what it should do** in future?
- Were all the **resources** put into the project (inputs) - for example staff time, consulting space, organised activities - used effectively?
- Are the **outcomes** acceptable to all the stakeholders - including those outcomes or consequences that were unintended? How can outcomes be improved?

Get all the key stakeholders together, for example at an 'away day' in a different venue, and consider what changes or developments should be made to the intervention in the light of the evaluation. Use this as an opportunity to support organisational and staff development.

- **Are you meeting the needs of your clients?**
For example, a project has been providing drug information to young people. The evaluation demonstrates that many of the young people attending have significant problems and that they have unmet needs for harm reduction services such as needle exchange.
- **Are extra or different sorts of funding required?**
For example, particular aspects of the intervention need to be developed through targeting additional resources. The focus of the intervention has changed, for example from adults to under 16s, so alternative more appropriate funders need to be found.
- **Do new areas of programme content need to be added?**
For example, relapse prevention or activities to help clients to reintegrate into society, such as taster courses at local colleges.
- **Should existing staff be re-deployed?**
For example, the evaluation demonstrates that clients stay with the project for too long so re-deploy staff as 'link' workers to strengthen partnerships with other agencies and develop pathways to refer clients on.
- **Do staff members have the right skills?**
For example, the evaluation identifies that a high percentage of clients are homeless and that this is a significant barrier to progress. Workers need to be trained to understand housing issues and have the knowledge to help the client work with appropriate agencies.

'MARKETING'

In addition to building on the evaluation findings with staff and clients, there is also an important **external audience** to consider. Dissemination does not just have to mean sending a standard report to everyone known to the intervention. There are many ways to use information from an evaluation to help increase awareness of the work. However, when summarising or selecting key parts for 'marketing' purposes it is important that the information is not used in a way that could distort or misrepresent the findings of the evaluation. The strength of an evaluation is the **honest appraisal** that it can give of what is being achieved. Any possible bias or shortcomings in the research methods should be made clear so that others can be sure that they are getting the full picture.

For example, the percentage of successful outcomes for a project are impressively high but the evaluation only studied those former clients that are still in touch with the service after 6 months. This does not invalidate the results but any material should state clearly that the figures refer to a particular group of clients. This group may be said to be 'self selecting' because they choose to keep in touch with the project.

Also, it will be important to be clear about the number of clients that took part in a particular evaluation (sometimes referred to as the 'response rate'). For example, it may be that only two-thirds of clients in contact with the service at 6 months actually took part in the evaluation. It will be important to set out whether there are any differences between those who participated and those who did not.

Tackling
drugs in
Scotland

Effective Interventions Unit

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Marketing to commissioners and potential funders Increasingly, funding bodies need a range of information from applicants to help them to decide how to award money. Information from an evaluation can be of enormous benefit in constructing bids. Evaluation is about working out the **value** of an intervention and so it provides an useful way of demonstrating to others the importance and benefits of a particular approach.

For example:

- The evaluation demonstrated identified significant unmet need within your client group. This information provides a strong rationale for bidding for funding to develop a new dimension to your service.
- The evaluation demonstrated very successful outcomes for your service. This information strengthens your case for core funding from the local DAT partners.

Marketing to potential clients and other agencies To keep motivated, clients need to understand why an intervention is likely to help them. Examples from an evaluation can demonstrate how a particular approach has worked for particular types of people and problems. Working in partnership is often the only way to ensure that an appropriate, effective and efficient service is provided to the client, particularly for those with multiple problems and needs. The reliable information that the evaluation provides will help to build up credibility with other agencies and increase the likelihood of referrals.

Marketing to the wider community The community often has little understanding of the work of drug services and this may lead to hostility towards local projects. Findings from an evaluation could provide useful evidence about the role of drug services in rehabilitating individuals and decreasing the impact of drug use on the community, such as by reducing criminal activity. This can be particularly effective if the press, local politicians and community leaders can be engaged. Consider inviting journalists from the local paper or radio to your project so they can hear the individual stories of clients.

DOING IT AGAIN!

An evaluation should not be a one-off affair. A process of continuous improvement and learning can help a service remain fresh and relevant, making it more satisfying for staff and more successful for clients. If you are conducting another formal evaluation - because, for example, a new project element or development has started - then look back and build on previous findings. This helps to build up knowledge about an area of work. Comparing and analysing the results of a number of evaluations can allow general principles and theories to be established, which could then be applied to similar services and programmes working in other contexts.

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES

- Ray Pawson & Nick Tilley, **Realistic Evaluation**, (1997)
- Alan Barr & Stuart Hashagen, **ABCD Handbook: A framework for evaluating community development**, Community Development Foundation Publications (2000)
- 'Measure for Measure' **A Guide to Monitoring and Evaluation of Crime Prevention Initiatives**, John Palmer Research, HMSO Scotland, 1996.