Evaluation Working Group Webinar

Evaluation Challenges in local authorities

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11:00 – 12:00

East of England Population Health Research Hub
EoE PHResH
Introduction

• Understanding the political environment
• Look at specific issues you may encounter when carrying out an evaluation in a local authority
• Consider how these issues can be managed
Political environment

• Council is run by democratically elected members
• Council officers to provide unbiased information to members
• Final decisions made by elected members
• Elected members will be influenced by their voters
  • Contact with residents may be biased
Elected members

• Directly elected to represent a particular ward in the county
  • Will have contact with resident groups in this area

• Some members responsible for a portfolio area in the council;
  • Public Health & Community Safety
  • Adult Care, Health & Wellbeing
  • Children, Young People & Families
  • Highways and Transport
  • The Environment
  • Growth, Infrastructure and Planning
Understanding of evaluation

• Risk of evaluation being seen a trend
• Client needs to know why they want an evaluation
• Expectation management
• Remit of what can be evaluated
• More than just data analysis
• There is a cost to evaluation
Timescales

• LA’s work in financial years
  • Spend it or lose it

• Evaluation planning time often not considered
  • Lack of understanding by commissioners
  • Ask for evaluation too late into the programme
Understanding the project/service

• Does the client really know everything about their project?
• What does success look like?
• Is everyone in agreement?
• Need to understand the project in order to evaluate
Useful tools

• The following can be useful to the project team
  • Logic model workshop
  • Theory of change workshop

• It helps them agree how their service intervention works
Project objectives

• Many people struggle with writing objectives
  • The ‘To do’ list
  • Output focused rather than outcome focused

• Key question to ask:
  • What does success look like?
Data challenges

• Understanding the concept of baseline data
• Identifying suitable outcome measures
• Collecting data at different points in time
• Buy-in from staff on the ground
• Data quality
• Data sharing agreements
Qualitative data

• Value of qualitative data in local authorities

• Lack of understanding in how to:
  • collect it
  • analyse it

• Used in a biased way by inexperienced officers

• When used properly can help to explain ‘why’ and give service user a voice
Ethics & research governance

• Will you be working with or collecting data from vulnerable service users?
• Data protection
• Has the local authority got a research and governance process?
Cost of an evaluation

- May be left out of a business case
- Budgeting for planning and design
- Risk of under estimating the cost
- A need to value the work involved
- May get push back on the evaluation resource required
Doing evaluation “themselves”

- Decision maker doesn’t appreciate time required for good evaluation
- Core project team unlikely to have capacity to do evaluation
- ‘Evaluation’ not in their job description – will not be a priority
- Risk of appropriate data not be collected
- Data may not be analysed correctly
- Biased results
Fear of negative outcomes

• What are the clients expectations of the evaluation?
• What do negative outcomes mean to a client?
  • Criticism of their work
  • Risk of service being de-commissioned
  • Loss of funding
  • Loss of jobs
• Need to help the client see how the results are useful to:
  • Improve the service
  • Make changes to the service
Commissioned services

- Many services are not local authority run by commissioned to other organisations
- Need to make sure that evaluation is in the commissioning contract otherwise:
  - You will have not control over data collection
  - The appropriate evaluation data is unlikely to be collected
  - You risk only getting aggregated data or incorrectly analysed data
Who is your audience?

• Who will read the evaluation report?
• What will they do with the findings?
• Would they prefer an alternative format to a written report?
On completion of the evaluation

• The findings from an evaluation need to link into the commissioning cycle
  • This doesn’t always happen so need to find ways to ensure it does
How to manage the challenges

• Important to promote the usefulness of evaluation to commissioners
• Be clear about the process involved
• Explain how evaluation can benefit them
  • Value for money
  • More efficient services
• Need to keep explaining the benefits as staff leave and join the organisation
Discussion - Questions

Your experiences

How you may have overcome evaluation issues

We are learning all the time
Evaluation ‘Drop-In’ Clinics

Are you thinking about carrying out and planning an evaluation at work? Do you have a question or challenge you like to discuss with an expert and get some advice on?

Book a place at our evaluation ‘drop-in’ clinic where you can meet online with Professor Andy Jones, Public Health Expert Advisor, Norfolk County Council on a one-on-one session for advice and guidance on the next steps for your evaluation.

Book your spot for the upcoming one on the 29th of November at 13.00pm
https://adph.org.uk/networks/eastofengland/phresh-events/#drop-in-clinics

All are welcome – no question too big or small!